

CANADIAN MENNONITE

November 9, 2020 Volume 24 Number 23

VOICES
Together

New hymnal will
be 'part of the
fabric of our lives'

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EDITORIAL

Good conversations

VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



A flurry of online comments on a recent sexual misconduct story, an email from a reader

despairing of having meaningful dialogue through letters to the magazine, and my congregation's first online business meeting—these got me pondering how we, in the church community, struggle to have good conversations.

Part of *Canadian Mennonite's* mission statement reads: “foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada as it shares the good news of Jesus Christ from an Anabaptist perspective.” The *CM* team strives toward that goal in a variety of ways through our print pages, website content and social media posts.

Yet, there are times when it feels like a good conversation is hard to find. A reader misunderstands what the writer intended. Someone reacts in anger to the tone of a Facebook post. In web comments, people talk past each other and hurl unkind remarks at those they disagree with. We're tempted to focus on winning arguments or even on silencing each other.

Things are complicated when most of us can't share the same space for face-to-face conversation. Living in a time of pandemic upheaval, we may be extra sensitive to criticism or, as a pastor recently remarked, “It's like we've all lost a layer of skin.”

Many of us are finding that the computer screen doesn't really cut it for in-depth sharing. And some of us don't even have the technology for that kind

of conversation.

As we at *CM* try to foster dialogue, we don't always get things right. Sometimes we miss bringing potential partners into the conversation, or we allow the discourse to get off track. For that, we apologize and we resolve to do better.

What does good conversation look like? Think of a time you've spent chatting with friends, maybe sipping a hot drink together at a table, lounging in lawn chairs around a campfire, or walking together outdoors. You gave each other the gift of your attention, sharing in the give-and-take of facts, opinions and feelings. You asked thoughtful questions; you listened. You each tried not to make assumptions, but if you did misunderstand each other, you worked to get the conversation back on track. An unspoken rule was that you would not attack or shame each other. Sometimes you and your companions agreed to disagree, with your relationship still intact.

Can these practices work in our communication within the church, even with people we don't know personally or who live at great geographical and ideological distances?

There's plenty for us to talk about. *CM's* articles and reflections offer glimpses of Mennonite disciples seeking to be faithful in their own neighbourhoods. In this issue alone you'll find articles on the nature of the church, the creativity of writers and song compilers, and about meaningful relationships. There are stories of people facing personal challenges and a report of pain caused by misused power. Recent

articles have addressed personal spirituality, peace, justice, service, Mennonite identity, pastoral ministry, the Bible and more.

This magazine takes inspiration from Hebrews 10 for building up the church: “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds . . . encouraging one another . . .” (Hebrews 10:23-25). Our guiding values include seeking and speaking the truth in love; opening hearts and minds to discern God's will; and maintaining strong relationships and mutual accountability.

A recent guest in the podcast, “On Being,” was Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of the acclaimed book, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. As a sociologist of emotion, Hochschild seeks to listen to and understand attitudes of people quite different from hers. She stresses the importance of “emotional intelligence,” the ability to look beyond the issues being debated to the feelings and stories behind them. (To listen to the interview, visit onbeing.org/programs/arlie-hochschild-the-deep-stories-of-our-time/.)

Hochschild says that, when we get curious about a person who thinks differently, and we make ourselves available for conversation, we can gain insight into their deeper story and into their present reality. Then together we can look for common ground and possible ways to move forward.

Maybe we in the church need to imagine ourselves as old friends sitting around the campfire holding a cup of hot chocolate. We could call on the best practices of in-person real-life friends engaging in life-giving dialogue. Can we have that kind of conversation? ❧



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PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNOMEDIA

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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES FEATURE

New hymnal will be 'part of the fabric of our lives'

Voices Together committee members reflect on the fruit of their labour

By Aaron Epp

Online Media Manager

It's the result of an idea proposed over a decade ago and the culmination of more than four years of intense work. It includes close to a thousand hymns and worship resources that were chosen from a body of work more than 10 times that number. It represents the efforts of hundreds of Mennonites from across Canada and the United States.

It's the new *Voices Together* hymnal—the successor to 1992's *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and its two supplements, *Sing the Journey* (2005), and *Sing the Story* (2007)—and it arrives this month, containing hymns and worship resources in more than 40 languages that will serve congregations throughout Mennonite Church Canada and MC U.S.A. for decades to come.

"In a lot of Mennonite congregations, especially in Canada and the United States, hymnals are our primary theological document. . . . It's the theology that we memorize, that we internalize, that comes back to us when we need it," says Sarah Kathleen Johnson, who served on the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee, the 13-member binational group responsible for curating the hymnal. "In addition to forming individuals, it's also shaping the larger Mennonite sense of community and identity."

To learn about the work that went into producing the new hymnal, *Canadian Mennonite* spoke with five of the six Canadian members of the committee, as well as Bradley Kauffman of Elkhart, Ind., who was hired by MennoMedia to serve as general editor.

"Making a hymnal is a bigger project than probably any of us could ever have imagined," says Darryl Neustaedter Barg, a committee member from Winnipeg. "I didn't really know what I was getting into, as most of us

on the committee would probably attest."

'It was a no-brainer'

Anneli Loepp Thiessen recalls the excitement she felt when MennoMedia started advertising that it was looking for committee members. The 25-year-old, who grew up in southern Ontario, was a fourth-year music student at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg when she submitted her application. A song leader, classical musician and music educator, Loepp Thiessen has been interested in church music and worship for much of her life.

"You would have been hard-pressed to convince me not to apply," says Loepp Thiessen, who is now working on a doctorate in interdisciplinary music research at the University of Ottawa. "Honestly, it was a no-brainer."

Paul Dueck of Cartier, Man., had a similar experience. A retired high-school and college music teacher who has led singing and worship throughout North and South America, Dueck has a deep love for the church and its music.

Melissa Miller, a MennoMedia board member and Dueck's pastor at the time, encouraged him to apply. "I didn't hesitate too long," says Dueck, 64. "I thought, hey, might as well give it a try."

Neustaedter Barg, who works in communications and media at MC Manitoba and CMU, applied after receiving encouragement from a handful of people. The 51-year-old has a long history of involvement with church music, from leading worship with MC Manitoba's Camps With Meaning ministry to leading singing at a number of Canadian and binational Mennonite gatherings.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MENNOMEDIA

The Mennonite Worship and Song Committee, pictured in Winnipeg in July 2019, from left to right, front row (kneeling): Adam Tice and Anneli Loepp Thiessen; middle row: Mike Erb, Paul Dueck, Darryl Neustaedter Barg, Saejin Lee, Tom Harder, Allan Rudy-Froese, Katie Graber, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Bradley Kauffman and Cynthia Neufeld Smith; and back row: Benjamin Bergey.

He loves church music of all sorts but is keenly aware that churches throughout MC Canada and MC U.S.A. are singing more than just hymns. “I have been pretty vocal about needing to pay attention to a broader musical palette, so I guess I came in with that agenda,” he says. “I didn’t assume my personal agenda could sway a whole hymnal committee . . . but it sounded like there was some openness to considering things that hadn’t been in the collection before.”

Johnson also received encouragement to apply. In her case, it came from Rebecca Slough, who served as managing editor for *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. Johnson, who is originally from Waterloo, Ont., lives in Toronto, where she is completing a doctorate in theology from

the University of Notre Dame, Ind. She served as the hymnal’s worship resources editor, which included one year of full-time paid work.

“It’s such a multifaceted project. I find it draws on all aspects of my background and skills—sometimes in ways I wouldn’t expect,” says Johnson, 34. “It’s really hard to imagine my life without *Voices Together* at this point.”

Allan Rudy-Froese, who divides his time between Kitchener, Ont., and Elkhart, was the last person to join the committee. Formerly a pastor, he is now a homiletics professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). He joined the committee after it had already met twice, and committee members realized it could use another person focused on worship resources.

“It was kind of a no-brainer whether to join or not,” the 56-year-old recalls. “I had sat in a circle with committee members a few months earlier when they were at AMBS, and I was just in awe of the experience in the room and also how they were talking about hymns and worship. I just thought I could make a contribution to that.”

The hymnal formation process

One of the first things the committee did, Kauffman recounted in an article for *Anabaptist World* this past summer, was make plans for how it “would be the church together.”

“We resolved not to avoid conflict. We would trust each other enough to disagree—valuing relationships above particular decisions,” he wrote in the

article. “We called on the Holy Spirit to journey with us in the hard, holy work of hymnal formation along a path we could only dimly see.”

The committee reviewed material from *Hymnal: A Worship Book, Sing the Journey* and *Sing the Story*. Along the way, it reached out to individuals and congregations across MC Canada and MC U.S.A., to identify “heart songs”—those songs that have been especially meaningful in the life of a person or church.

To ensure that the hymnal reflects the entirety of the Mennonite church, the committee even consulted Mennonites who won’t adopt *Voices Together* for a variety of reasons: because they worship in languages other than English, they primarily use contemporary music, or they are recent adopters of *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

“One of the challenges was certainly that the committee is not as diverse as the church is,” Kauffman, 46, tells *CM*. “We had good representation of women and men, we had balance that way, [and] it’s an intergenerational committee, but overwhelmingly white and middle-class.”

To that end, the committee convened about 20 consulting groups and invited them to help curate material. One of those groups was made up of Black Mennonites, who helped the committee understand how they could best represent Black people and their experiences in the new hymnal.

In December 2016, the committee launched a web portal soliciting submissions of new and original tunes, texts, songs, written worship resources and artwork. It received roughly 2,300 submissions, half of which were from Anabaptist contributors.

Committee members screened more than 10,000 songs to identify roughly 6,000 songs that were reviewed by the entire committee.

In July 2019, the editorial team met in person to whittle a 900-song shortlist down to 775 songs. That October, the committee held its 10th and final in-person meeting at Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo. Over the course of five days, the group sang 780

songs and experienced more than 300 worship resources together. It then spent two days discussing the selections.

Forming deep relationships

Ask committee members what some of the highlights of the last four years have been and they will invariably mention the time spent together during in-person meetings. They gathered in person three times a year, ultimately spending 50 days together. Along the way, they formed deep, meaningful relationships.

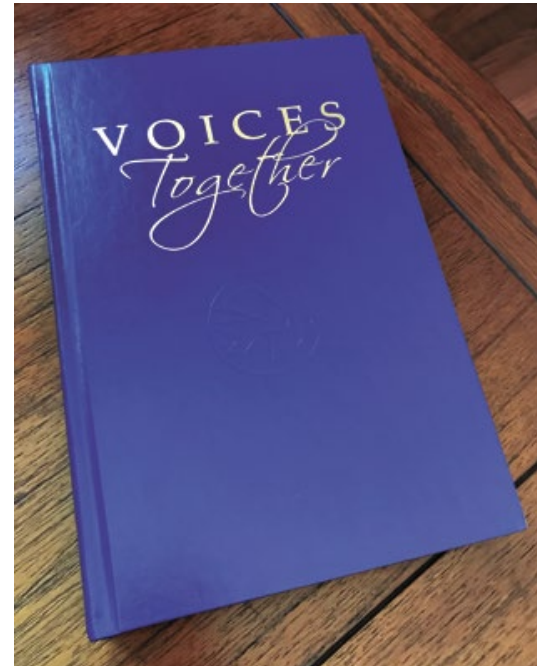
“I would party with anyone on this committee. They’re just really great people,” Neustaedter Barg says. “People really respected what other people brought to the table. That’s a highlight. That doesn’t always happen, even in the church.”

Other highlights for Neustaedter Barg included visiting 12 congregations across MC Canada and MC U.S.A. with a few other committee members to study how non-European Mennonite congregations worship, as well as testing material at the annual Laurelville Music and Worship Leaders retreat in western Pennsylvania.

“I have often said that I am very fortunate because I have relationships in MC U.S.A., which most Canadian Mennonites do not have, and that started years ago already in the ‘90s, leading worship singing at big youth conventions,” he says. “This project continued that relationship-building across what has become a really odd national boundary.”

Increasing the number of hymns and resources written by women was a highlight for Loepp Thiessen. “For change to happen in terms of numbers around gender, there just needs to be intentional work,” she says. “The *Voices Together* committee was really up for doing the work, and that was really exciting.”

Along those lines, Rudy-Froese points to No. 376, “O Holy Spirit, Root of Life,” as a piece that stands out for him. Poet Jean Janzen wrote the text in the early 1990s based on the writings of 12th-century Christian mystic



The new hymnal is the successor to 1992’s *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and its two supplements, *Sing the Journey* and *Sing the Story*.

Hildegard of Bingen, with Loepp Thiessen setting it to music in 2019. “I’m really moved by that song, and that’s in part because it’s this combination of eras and women coming together to make that song,” he says. “That happens in other parts of the hymnal as well.”

When Dueck reflects on his time on the committee, changes in language over the past three decades stick out for him. “The way we speak today often came up with songs [that use] very archaic language,” he says. “Inclusiveness, the gender of God—a lot of these things were always part of the discussion as we approached songs and new submissions.”

For Johnson, working through material during in-person meetings was meaningful. Sometimes, the committee would sing from 8:30 a.m. until 9:30 p.m., for four or five days in a row, having powerful conversations about each song’s strengths, drawbacks and revisions that might be needed. “[It required] all of my intellectual and emotional and physical and pastoral

capacities to be able to do that,” she says. “That’s a highlight of the process for me and something that really sticks out.”

Kauffman is grateful to the committee members and their families for their “extraordinary outpouring of time and talent toward this project.” He notes that MennoMedia raised close to \$800,000 to fund the new hymnal, and that if one were to put a monetary value on the volunteer work that was put into it, it would easily double that amount. “I have a lot of gratitude for all the members of the committee,” he says. “This kind of coming together of theological minds and artistic minds . . . is sort of a once-in-a-generation thing, and it’s an extraordinary gift to be a part of.”

Hopes for the hymnal

In addition to the pew version, which most people will become familiar with in their congregations, *Voices Together* is available in a number of additional formats: a large-print edition, an accompaniment edition, a worship-leader edition, a project edition and an app edition. A collection of audio recordings of selections from the hymnal will also be available.

MennoMedia made most of the digital *Voices Together* products available in October, and print products will ship this month. A virtual celebration is planned for Dec. 13, from 5 to 7 p.m. ET. It will be a time to worship with new songs and resources, hear stories and offer blessings. There will also be a time for questions with committee members.

The event, which will take place via Zoom, replaces in-person launch events that had been planned for Winnipeg and Elkhart prior to COVID-19. The irony of launching a hymnal in the middle of a pandemic, when large gatherings and group singing are prohibited, is not lost on committee members.

“It’s horrible, really,” Neustaedter Barg says. “For many of us, music is the peak expression of worship—not for everybody, but for many of us. And to not be able to do this together is super odd and sad.”

‘In a lot of Mennonite congregations, especially in Canada and the United States, hymnals are our primary theological document. . . .’ (Sarah Kathleen Johnson)

Johnson says that, although she is disappointed that in-person launch events that would have included group singing won’t be possible, she sees the pandemic as a chance for people to explore the hymnal’s many aspects. “Even setting aside worship resources, it’s a book about Scripture, and it’s a book of prayers, it’s a book of history and theology, it’s a book of poetry,” she says. “It can be used for pastoral care. It’s just so multi-dimensional. I hope that there’s an opportunity in this pandemic to explore some of those facets of the book.”

Kauffman hopes that people find something in *Voices Together* that helps them feel known, loved and seen. “My fundamental hope is that everyone will

find something that feels familiar and comfortable, and from that comfort and familiarity, they can then be challenged. . . . That’s what a hymnal needs to do well; it needs to somehow balance bringing comfort and familiarity with things that are challenging and help us grow.”

Johnson hopes the hymnal unites Mennonites across time and culture. “There’s two thousand years of great music and worship resources,” she says. “I hope that it brings people together at times of challenge and celebration, as well as ordinary, week-to-week [times]. This is something that will be there at funerals and at baptisms and marriages. It will be part of the fabric of our lives.”

For discussion

1. What are your “heart” songs—the songs that are especially meaningful and that you know “by heart”? How much does the idea of a new hymnal replacing the old one fill you with excitement, and how much with dismay? Do you expect to see *Voices Together* in your church? Will you get a personal copy?
2. Aaron Epp quotes Sarah Kathleen Johnson as saying “hymnals are our primary theological document,” and that we memorize and internalize hymns and worship resources. Do you agree? How many songs can you sing from memory? How much do we borrow other theology when we use songs from other sources?
3. The hymnal committee reviewed roughly 6,000 songs and shortlisted about 775. What criteria would you use to choose the best songs for the church? How important is inclusivity? How much would you scrutinize a song’s theology? How important is it to avoid archaic language?
4. Johnson says she hopes the pandemic will provide an opportunity for people to “explore the hymnal’s many aspects.” How might a hymnal be used in worship other than singing? How does a common hymnal help to unite the church?

—By Barb Draper

For more information about *Voices Together* resources, visit voicestogetherhymnal.org.

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OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ Columnist has 'a gift'

Re: "Two stories clamour to be shared" column by Ed Olfert, Oct. 12, page 10.

Ed is the current pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert, Sask.

During the strict coronavirus lockdown here in Nashville Tenn., during March to July, I would spend Sunday mornings viewing online services from my local Lutheran church in Mount Juliet and Grace Chapel in Franklin, and then my mom would forward the Sunday message from Ed Olfert, who pastors Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert Sask.

Somehow, amidst the excellent sermons and messages of faith, hope, and love of these southern churches, Ed had a way of sharing a message through a story or childhood memory of someone that had moved him, and he shared it in a way that moved everyone reading it. The message was the story and the story was the message. To me, it was amazing.

Thanks, Ed. I offer the words of Robert De Niro to Billy Crystal in the movie *Analyze This*: "You've got a gift, my friend."

ROD W JANZEN (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ Copyright compensation must be 'reasonable and fair' for users

Re: "Copyright matters" feature, Sept. 28, page 4.

This article does an excellent job of examining various perspectives around copyright and religious organizations. I particularly appreciate the careful attention that is given to providing fair and equitable financial and social compensation for creators and artists.

However, I would also recommend that religious organizations pay equal attention to what is reasonable and fair for users of copyright materials. Balance is an important part of the Copyright Act. The Supreme Court emphasizes that "dissemination of works is also one of the Act's purposes, which means that dissemination, too, with or without creativity, is in the public interest."

Religious organizations receive very few mentions in the Canadian Copyright Act, and the sections where religious organizations are mentioned have not been updated to reflect the current digital era. This is unsurprising, as the financial interests surrounding copyright and religious institutions are limited in comparison to other sectors (for example, education).

Rather than interpret these omissions in a way that is fearful and unreasonably deferential to copyright

holders and copyright collectives, I would encourage churches to think critically about the fairness and unfairness of particular use cases. I would also encourage churches to think through the costs and benefits of adopting copyright policies that entail unreasonable administrative burdens.

Canadian court decisions regarding the interpretation of copyright law are rightly attentive to the public interest and common practice. For example, many of the educational uses that are permitted in the current Canadian Copyright Act were not defined or delineated in previous copyright legislation. I would encourage churches to interpret current copyright legislation thoughtfully, and with equal attention to the rights of copyright holders and the users of copyright materials.

MICHELLE SWAB (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ *Voices Together* creates online resource for dealing with controversial hymns

Re: "Accusations should not keep hymns out of *Voices Together*" letter, Sept. 28, page 7.

We grieve the loss of David Haas's songs. We recognize ways that God's Spirit has worked through this composer's gifts at the same time that Haas stands credibly accused of having done harm to many people. We urge individuals and communities to continue conversations about these complicated issues, including how the Psalms influence our faith and how we can support survivors of abuse.

We have created an online resource, "Show strength: How to respond when worship materials are implicated in abuse" (bit.ly/31p4ffa), to begin to address some of these questions and to encourage communities to continue these discussions.

BRADLEY KAUFFMAN, ELKHART, IND.

*The writer is the general editor of the new *Voices Together* hymnal published by MennoMedia.*

✉ Age plays a part in determining who's responsible for sexual sins

One aspect of disagreement in attempts to redress historic injustices—bringing charges of abuse against a now dead pastor, for example—lies in divergent views on personal and social responsibility. Older Mennonites tend to see sin as an individual matter between or among individuals and God, and sometimes the community. Younger people, under 55 or so, are more likely to view sexual misconduct as a social or systemic issue.

Since the 1960s, Marxist-inspired analyses of sexual relations have become ubiquitous, such that they are frequently assumed subconsciously. Thus, social problems are seen as by-products of the capitalist economy and the resulting social inequalities, such as patriarchy. Formerly, the focus was on the individual, the family or the church to address or redress sexual sins. Now it is on social structures and power centres.

Hence, there is an increased impetus to target “old dead white men” as perpetrators. And with this comes an imperative to change power structures and to redistribute power and influence.

These divergent views do not, in themselves, determine the rights and wrongs of specific cases, but, as assumptions, they are likely to influence opinion and action. They may help to explain why older Mennonites are likely to differ from younger ones on this and similar issues.

KEVIN MCCABE, ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

The writer attends Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines.

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

Pavilonis—Natasha Lynn (b. Oct. 12, 2020), to Andrew and Jessica Pavilonis, Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

Toporchak—Dean Aiden (b. Sept. 29, 2020), to Kyle and Vicky Toporchak, North Star Mennonite, Drake, Sask.

Deaths

Bergen—Heinrich, 93 (b. April 6, 1927; d. Sept. 22, 2020), Grace Mennonite, Regina.

Bueckert—Herman, 95 (b. Oct. 3, 1924; d. July 12, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Dick—Karin, 71 (b. March 30, 1949; d. Sept. 13, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Dyck—Jack, 94 (b. Jan. 21, 1926; d. Aug. 5, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Dyck—Tina (nee Loewen), 96 (b. April 15, 1924; d. Sept. 27, 2020), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Epp—Irma (nee Neufeld), 88 (b. Dec. 12, 1931; d. Sept. 25, 2020), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Fast—Jacob, 91 (b. Feb. 27, 1929; d. Oct. 5, 2020), Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Friesen—Peter, 91 (b. July 11, 1929; d. Sept. 23, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Funk—Curtis, 76 (b. May 4, 1944; d. Sept. 17, 2020), Point Grey Inter-Mennonite, Vancouver.

Funk—Sadie (nee Stoesz), 77 (b. May 3, 1943; d. Sept. 13, 2020), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Gau—Reinhard, 79 (b. July 2, 1941; d. Sept. 13, 2020), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Hoffman—Albert, 91 (b. Oct. 27, 1928; d. Sept. 11, 2020) Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Janssen—Rudolph Willi, 96 (b. Nov. 18, 1923; d. Sept. 24, 2020), First Mennonite, Calgary, Alta.

Lamarre—Gerald, 83 (b. Aug. 13, 1937; d. Sept. 14, 2020), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Lehman—Margaret, 90 (b. April 16, 1930; d. Sept. 9, 2020), Rockway Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Loewen—Heidi, 87 (b. Sept. 23, 1932; d. April 15, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Murchison—Shirley (nee Schellenberg), 64 (b. March 17, 1956; d. April 14, 2020) First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Neufeld—Fred, 90 (b. May 24, 1930; d. Sept. 27, 2020), Breslau Mennonite, Ont.

Neufeld—Margaret (nee Neufeld), 90 (b. April 10, 1930; d. Sept. 18, 2020), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Neufeld—Mary G. (Epp), 85 (b. July 30, 1935; d. Oct. 6, 2020), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Peters—Annelies (nee Neumann), 99 (b. March 29, 1921; d. Aug. 28, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Rempel—John, 97 (b. Nov. 19, 1922; d. Aug. 8, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Riediger—Margaret (nee Rempel), 91 (b. Sept. 19, 1928; d. Aug. 10, 2020), Harrow Mennonite, Ont.

Sawatzky—Dave, 87 (b. May 29, 1933; d. Sept. 6, 2020), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Sterna—Gertrude (nee Wiebe), 89 (b. Aug. 31, 1932; d. Oct. 1, 2020), Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Thiessen—Frank, 88 (b. Aug. 26, 1932; d. Sept. 26, 2020) Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Voth—Mary (nee Doerksen), 97 (b. Sept. 4, 1923; d. Oct. 7, 2020), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

Wall—Anne, 94 (b. Oct. 15, 1925; d. Sept. 17, 2020), Rockway Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Warkentin—John, 77 (b. Dec. 21, 1942; d. Sept. 13, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Welsh—Patricia, 77 (b. Jan. 15, 1943; d. July 30, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Wiebe—Anna (nee Warkentin), 96 (b. March 3, 1924; d. April 22, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Winter—David, 85 (b. Sept. 1, 1932; d. Sept. 22, 2020), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Expert, doubt thyself

William Loewen

Ever since the arrival of the coronavirus, there have been segments of the church that have been criticized for not taking the pandemic seriously. Christian sceptics and those who criticize them are well-represented on my social media feed.

Large religious gatherings, as well as individual congregations, have recently made the news for meeting in defiance of government decrees and scientifically researched protocols. Some have even asked if there is something inherent about faith that makes Christians question scientific research and thus further the spread of the disease.

Historically, Christians in general, and Mennonites in particular, have often ignored hysteria around diseases, not because it violated their personal freedoms, but because staying to help was the more compassionate response. They weren't denying the science; they were denying themselves.

Within Anabaptist communities, it went deeper. The medical establishment was understood to be deeply connected to centres of higher learning, which were closely tied to the government,

which directed the military. All of these institutions opposed the social and religious values of our traditional communities and some were actively involved in their persecution.

As a student of history, I can see that these suspicions were rooted in valid critiques. Plus, it is the role of the church to offer a prophetic critique to the state and to stand up to principalities and powers.

Fast forward to now, and the church is again being critiqued for feeding anti-expert sentiments in society. But is the critique warranted?

I have many experts in my life, including some who have reached the pinnacle of expertise: a PhD. But before you are granted a PhD, you have to defend a dissertation to a group of other experts who will determine if you are, in fact, an expert.

Often, to do that, you will have to take the work of a previous expert and demonstrate how it is either wrong or inadequate. Your work may enter a scholarly journal to be devoured by other experts.

But when the scholarly work enters

public consumption, it will prefaced on the news with something like this: "You know how your parents told you not to eat too much chocolate? New science says a little bit might actually be good for you."

I love my expert friends. I love how they have poured their lives into their field to make the world around them a better place. Generally I trust them, too. I trust the experts who designed the planes I fly in. I trust the infectious-disease experts who tell us to wear masks and wash our hands.

I question the experts sometimes, too. The problem isn't when we doubt the experts. The experts doubt each other, and it makes them stronger. The question is what we are prepared to replace their expertise with, and whether we are willing to doubt ourselves.

Hospitals, universities and airplane cockpits function better when the people who work are able to question each other, so they all become stronger.

The Kingdom of Heaven works the same way. Jesus said that we should take up our cross and follow him. Our churches should be places of self-denial, too, not just expertise. ❧



William Loewen is pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church, Calgary.

A moment from yesterday



Participants in a Festival of Peace at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., embrace during a small group session. On Peace Sunday 1993, the congregation abandoned its typical Sunday morning routine to follow the Mennonite Central Committee Ontario Peace Sunday Packet workshop, "A commitment to Christ's way of peace." When a photograph such as this presents itself, what more needs to be said?

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing

Photo: Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



IN THE IMAGE

Two 'rough' men and a gravel hauler

Ed Olfert

It can probably be said, with a reasonable helping of truthfulness, that the family that I was born into didn't put big energy into teaching social niceties. Certainly we were taught respect, but "No, no, you take the biggest piece," didn't figure prominently. Interestingly, the family influence did model to us that people considered by the community as "rough," perhaps "uncouth," were especially deserving of respect and even delight. It was a fine place to be nurtured.

There was a time in my life, in the years between pastoral burnout and pastoral reengagement, that I found myself behind the wheel of a tractor-trailer unit. At one point, my job required me to haul about 700 loads of earthen fill onto a site where a huge warehouse was planned.

Some of the loads involved hauling gravel out of a pit, where municipal employees would load me, then follow me to the scale shack and print a weight ticket. In many two-minute conversations I became acquainted with a few interesting and possibly "rough" men.

"Hank" was in his 70s. My family culture, besides perhaps being a little short on "nicety" training, taught that operating heavy equipment well is a virtue somewhat aligned with godliness. Hank had that gift. When Hank loaded my trailer, the loader

never hurried or travelled very far. It didn't smoke, or bounce up and down impatiently, as when others operated it. Yet Hank loaded me faster than anyone else. A cigarette drooped from his lip, and he often appeared to be mostly asleep, yet work was done smoothly, efficiently and with minimal drama.

During the short wait in the shack for the scale ticket, I got incremental glimpses of Hank's life. When I asked him if he was close to retirement, I sensed fear. With an angry oath, he shouted, "What would I do if I wasn't working?" I heard, "Who would I be if I wasn't working?"

When my end gate wouldn't close because of a pebble in the hinge, Hank gently squeezed it closed with the loader without leaving a mark.

Jim was also a member of the municipal crew. From his visage, twisted into a scowl, I immediately concluded he had depression. This seemed to be confirmed when I asked for a piece of rope to tie up a broken fender, and he shouted angrily at me. But over weeks of those tiny conversations, I was offered glimpses of Jim's life. He was a musician who sang and played a 12-string guitar. He referred to an industrial accident that had crushed him, and at once I glimpsed something asymmetrical about his face. "Brain injury" flashed through my

mind. Our family knows something about brain injuries, of uncontrolled bursts of frustration.

Jim told me that, following his accident, he lost his memory of hundreds of songs that he could play, as well as the ability to read music well. One day, I told him that I would be shutting down a little early as I had a ticket to a Leonard Cohen concert in Saskatoon. He bounced in his chair. More colourful epithets, then Jim shouted that he loved Cohen's music. "I had a song at my house called 'The Secret Chord,' and I loved it, but it's lost, I don't know where it is!" Jim was vibrating, emotional, close to tears.

That evening, I phoned my eldest. She quickly identified "The Secret Chord" as Cohen's hit, "Hallelujah." Shortly after, the words, music and a guitar score rolled from my printer.

Jim's morose and crooked face broke into a huge grin when I handed him the sheets. "Yes," he promised, whatever it would take, he would learn to play "The Secret Chord" again.

God's presence is offered through the stories and trust of two "rough" men. ❧



Ed Olfert (p2ptheo@sasktel.net) finds delight in loud and passionate stories.

Et cetera

Justice after the pandemic

We can't go back to business-as-usual after the COVID-19 pandemic. That principle guides a coalition of Canadian organizations calling for a recovery that puts people first. Just Recovery for All calls for changes that address social inequities, colonialism, ecological degradation, human rights abuses and more. Hundreds of organizations endorse the coalition's principles, including the Anglican Church of Canada, Canadian Jesuits International, Canadian Friends Service Committee, Citizens for Public Justice, Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, Green Churches Network and the United Church of Canada. To learn more, visit justrecoveryforall.ca/.

Source: Just Recovery for All

just
recovery

MIND AND SOUL

See all of me

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

We don't talk about mental health much in the church. When we do, we tend to see it as deviation from a presumably healthy "normal." This is deficit thinking. Maybe our standards of "normal" are a problem. Maybe we could see the diverse ways that minds and bodies function as gifts.

As I wrote this column, Edmonton Oilers legend Joey Moss died. How do I describe him? Do I start with "A member of Alberta's Hall of Fame"? Or "Born with Down syndrome"? Either way positions him, labelling him in particular ways. In fact, it was the characteristics associated with his personality, work ethic and Down syndrome that made him such a crucial member of Oilers teams.

Let me say again—being "different" can be a gift. In Christian theology, gifts are not always desired, nor easy to handle, but they are good. God doesn't make junk, right?

I struggle with periodic depression, and I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Even after finishing one of these columns, I can be hit with crippling self-doubt, worried that I have sent gutter junk out into the world for you to

read. That opinion has no supporting evidence (so far). But that's part of the problem of mental health: the operating of one's mind doesn't always follow the lines of common forms of logic.

Brains simply function differently. I just went downstairs for a Bible and came back with a cup of coffee. "What colour is the sky in your world?" a consternated co-worker once exclaimed.

Is this a gift? Doesn't usually feel that way. There has always been a lot of criticism for the way I am—that is, the way I act. My ADHD was diagnosed in my 40s; it explained a lot, especially relationship struggles. While I have had levels of success, the ADHD leads to disorganization, impulsivity, unthinkingness, and difficulties following through—or merely getting started on—projects. (Ask my long-suffering *Canadian Mennonite* editor!)

Researchers say that a child with ADHD receives 20,000 more criticisms by the age of 12 than other children. Imagine why I have depression at times! But many Christian mystics would probably have been so diagnosed, yet are deeply insightful to contemplate.

Talking about mental health normalizes the lived experience. One Sunday in our church, a long-time member shared

her own struggles with depression, later written up as an article in *CM*. Doing so led many people to speak with her about their own struggles, she told me.

Sharing has risks. I taught sociology for many years. Once, I was explaining that any topic could be viewed sociologically, even ones that we usually see as medical or psychological. Impulsively, I brought up my own experiences. Some end-of-term student evaluations criticized the teaching as "being too personal," which became a major negative focus in my annual review that year. But several students came to my office with a grateful "thank you," and long discussions ensued. Some did papers on the sociology of their own mental-health diagnoses. "The first time in my whole school career that I felt I could be all of me," commented one. Thanks be to God!

Physical health is easier to assess, and workplaces make better accommodations for physical functioning than for less-visible mental-health functioning. These pandemic times have shown that we can make far-reaching adjustments. Let's rework how we look at the many ways of being human, and find ways to magnify the diverse gifts of God. ☿



Randolph Haluza-DeLay attends First Mennonite Church in Edmonton. At several times in his life he was nicknamed "Ricochet Randy" for the way he bounced off walls (seriously).

Et cetera



Indonesian part of MCC IVEP program

Rany Putri, left, an architect from Indonesia trained in landscape design and a 2011-12 participant in MCC's International Volunteer Exchange Program, assisted staff at Aodbt, an architecture and interior design firm in Saskatoon, to develop drawings of the green space around MCC Saskatchewan's office. Putri said she learned a lot about sustainable development and planned to integrate the training and experience into her work in Indonesia.

Source: MCC / Photo by Chai Boupaphanh



TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

God as our inheritance

Joshua Penfold

In late August, my wife and I became first-time homeowners. There had been many times we wondered if we would ever be able to afford a house, ever save up enough for a down payment, or if we even wanted to do the traditional homeownership thing. But, after 16 years of marriage, we bought a house. And just the other day, as I was walking a trail, I was reminded of a reflection I wrote while walking the same path a couple years earlier:

“One of my favourite parts of my support work is walking on trails, in town, all over. Conversation is limited with those I support, so we often enjoy walking quietly and appreciating nature or checking out the houses as we walk about.

“Just yesterday we were walking a trail that cuts through a subdivision full of large beautiful homes. I became aware again, but with a more keen sense, of just how much I struggle with coveting. Although I know stuff and status are largely unimportant in life, and in God’s eyes, I still struggle with the fact that I am 34 years old, have two growing-up-way-too-fast kids, and don’t own a home. Not only do we not own a house, we currently can’t even afford a

traditional renting arrangement and, instead, are living with my in-laws.

“Please don’t be mistaken, this isn’t a pity party. I’m not looking for encouragement or alternative ways to look at my life, because I already know them. I know owning a home isn’t for everyone, and it doesn’t mean anything in the end.

“I know that we’ve intentionally moved into this situation so Rebecca can pursue her dream of teachers college. I know we are doing our best to live lives that follow where we feel God is leading us, but sometimes I get caught up in the pretty things that other people have. Sometimes I feel like I’m doing everything backwards. Sometimes I love that I’m doing it backwards, but other times I covet everyone else’s path and stuff.

“And today I read from Numbers 18 a little piece that was written to the Levites, the people God chose to serve as priests in the temple. They were a tribe that was chosen to be ministers without receiving any land, as the other tribes were promised. Land is a huge deal in the Bible, so it’s significant that the Levites weren’t given any land. I wonder if they, too, had times when they coveted the land and life of others

compared to their backwards life.

“But God had a word for them: *“You shall, however, have no territorial share among them or own any portion in their midst; I am your portion and your share among the Israelites”* (Numbers 18:20, JPS Tanakh translation).

“The Levites had no portion, no land, no inheritance. God was their inheritance. I don’t want to parallel myself to the Levites too closely, but this verse was an encouragement to me, that it’s not always about land or houses. Maybe if we all saw God as our home, we would stop comparing, stop pursuing, stop coveting, stop building up storehouses of stuff, and start investing in a different inheritance, one with a completely different kind of value.”

Since writing that, so much has changed, yet so much remains the same. Now I find myself a homeowner and still tempted, as I walk past the beautiful houses, to covet what I don’t have. Perhaps it is more important than ever that I recognize my home is in God. ☿



Joshua Penfold
(penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) enjoys walks through the wilderness more than walks through town.

Et cetera

‘Resist the wall’

A week-long series of spiritual gatherings began on Sept. 14 outside Sasabe, Arizona/Sonora, Mexico. The event, “Resist the wall: Strengthen the spirit resisting border violence through interfaith action,” was organized by residents of the area and took place daily within 30 metres of the 10-metre wall going up, doubling the size of the original wall in the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. Christian Peacemaker Team member John Heid prefaced a Quaker meeting for worship with Mahatma Gandhi’s words: “Mute prayer is my most powerful weapon,” while two dozen people circled in folded chairs with a cacophony of heavy machinery roaring behind them. Services throughout the rest of the week were conducted by members of the Buddhist, Unitarian Universalist and Jewish communities.

Source: Christian Peacemaker Teams



NEWS

Feast of metaphors served at 'Table talk' conference

MC Canada online event addresses nature of nationwide church in the midst of pandemic

Story and Screenshots by Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent

A feast of metaphors was on the menu for Mennonite Church Canada's inaugural study conference on the character and mission of the church and the role of worship. "Table talk: Does the church still have legs?" was originally planned as an in-person gathering, but the Oct. 25 event was moved online because of pandemic gathering restrictions.

Sara Wenger Shenk, president emeritus of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and plenary speaker for "Table talk," served up a main course of extended metaphors for some 200 participants to chew on. Other academics brought more images and stories to the table. To whet appetites, organizers provided participants with access to two of the main addresses several days before the start of the online event.

Kim Penner, adjunct professor at Conrad Grebel University College, hosted the four-and-a-half-hour video conference that included more presentations, original music from singer-songwriter Bryan Moyer Suderman, opportunities to ask questions, and time for conversations in small groups.

Using 1 Peter 2:9-10, Wenger Shenk explored three metaphors in answer to the question, "Why church?"



Sara Wenger Shenk, plenary speaker for MC Canada's virtual 'Table talk' study conference, on Oct. 25, addresses the question 'Why church?' in one of two talks she gave.

North Star

Like migrants, Mennonites are disoriented by competing voices, culture wars and alternative universes (fake news). Fatigued, hopeful, at risk and vulnerable, the church is needed to "keep us oriented Godward," she said, adding that, as "custodians of God's story," the church needs to keep listening for how to interpret that story for today.

A body

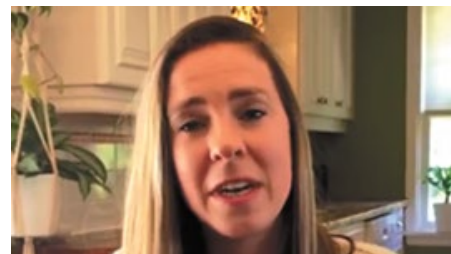
The church is about relationships. People are hungry for hope, love, sanctuary, rest and friendship. In the church, every part serves, cares for and connects to the whole, especially in hard times. This takes practice in prayer, listening, discernment, confession, worship, forgiveness and truth telling. "Practising how to be like Jesus is why we need the church," she said

A river

The church can be a "river of healing" flowing from the centre of its worship, "contributing to the flourishing" of communities by focusing on neighbourhood ministry, as well as global awareness, care for the earth and racial justice, she said, adding that, by trying to "preserve the purity of the church" through an emphasis on boundaries, certainty and dogmatism, creates an "us versus them" posture that is dismissive of others, and cultivates a sense of "moral superiority. . . . We will not flourish as an exclusive, tribal church."

Throughout the conference, speakers drew on Scripture and experience to wrestle with how the identity of the church is lived out in practice.

Bryan Born, president of Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, B.C., added more food for thought with his presentation on what



Kim Penner hosted and helped plan the inaugural MC Canada virtual 'Table talk' study conference on Oct. 25.

it means for the church to be missional. He cautioned against emphasizing worship at the expense of mission. He called on the church to join God, who "is already at work," suggesting that the way of Jesus is to serve those who are most in need.

He said the tension between evangelism and social action is a "fruitless divide." Instead, he called for holistic biblical discipleship that cares for physical, spiritual, personal and social needs.

He said the church has "tremendous opportunity" to minister in at least two areas of its "highly polarized" and "isolated" context. In response to Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) calls for justice, and those struggling with mental illness, the church can sensitively navigate by listening well and communicating how to live in hope.

Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, associate professor at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), led a Bible study on the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14, exploring how Jesus engaged in "table talk." Noting that "eating is never just about food" in the Bible, Klassen-Wiebe suggested that in this parable Jesus unsettles the assumptions of those with privilege and power by emphasizing the "radical hospitality and generosity" of the host who invites even those who are "not enough" to the table.

Gerald Gerbrandt, president emeritus of CMU, highlighted the Jewish festival practices described in the Old Testament as helpful biblical resources for understanding worship. As important times in community life, festivals celebrated what God had done, welcomed strangers as friends, and encouraged generosity to those in need.

Jesse Nickel, a Columbia professor,

explored worship in the New Testament through the lens of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. In retelling the story of who God is, the hymn equips the church by presenting a “strikingly distinct world-view” on which to build community, he said.

Irma Fast Dueck, associate professor at CMU, used stories from her experience to remind listeners that worship is a spiritual practice that “asks something of us.” She cautioned that Christians “domesticate worship and God” if they make worship in their image, to meet their needs.

Jeremy Bergen, associate professor at Grebel, suggested that worship can transform worshippers despite their cynicism, criticism, fear and uncertainty. In spite of themselves, they can be surprised when Jesus shows up.

Bergen’s use of the metaphor of a “push-me/pull-you,” that fictional two-headed creature of Dr. Doolittle stories, served to highlight some creative tensions around the character and mission of the church:

- **Testimony with conviction** versus deep listening.
- **Decentralized versus** centralized organization and leadership.
- **Loyalty to God** versus working with governments.
- **Boundedness versus** universality.
- **Service versus** self care.
- **Continuity versus** change.

The elephant at the table was COVID-19 and its oversized impact on the church. Speakers and participants acknowledged

the fear, uncertainty, limits and disruption of the pandemic, and how much it has unsettled people’s sense of normal. In response, many suggested a focus on neighbourhood ministry, small groups and being real with each other. They also drew on the deep promise that God is with them. Wenger Shenk, using the metaphor of the church as a “womb of joy,” suggested that joy is “an act of resistance against despair.”

Doug Klassen, executive minister of MC Canada, opened and closed the conference with prayer and reflection, and offered thanks for the rich feast. ☘

Presentation recordings are available through CommonWord.ca.



VIEWPOINT

Does the church have varicose veins?

Will Braun
Senior Writer

The Oct. 24 Mennonite Church Canada study conference asked the question: “Does the church have legs?”

The consensus of conference presenters, based on mini-interviews posted prior to the event, was “yes.” I’m trying to tame my cynicism, but that answer seemed too easy. I know people who would say “no.”

I don’t usually participate in broader church events. Life’s full. I limit travel. My kids like to have me around. I can’t sit still inside for long. I justify my non-participation by saying I’m relating to others in our denomination—the majority—who do not attend such events.

But I am also deeply interested in the broader church. At least part of me is. I see phenomenal potential. Our world needs grace, compassion, upside-down living. That’s our bailiwick.

Another part of me has learned to dull my expectations, to expect ever-so-slightly new twists on that which I have

heard since I was a kid numbly counting knots in the sanctuary’s roof boards. One of the first things I learned in church was to be bored.

I participated in the October study conference, at least much of it, because Zoom made it easy—I didn’t even need to change out of my work clothes—and I needed something to write about for my next magazine deadline. Of course, any journalist knows that conferences are not news per se, but I hoped for something reportable. I hoped for something truly invigorating.

At some point in life I lost the ability to conjure a sense of meaningfulness out of ordinary theological statements. It just doesn’t do anything for me to hear that “Jesus is God,” or “Church is a body.” Tell me what that looks like on a Tuesday afternoon.

Share your burning questions. Show some fire in the belly. Share your pain. Be personal. Be candid. Go off script (like that Mennonite Brethren guy).

I’m being too harsh. I mean this as

more of a plea than a critique. I commend the organizers climbing the steep COVID-19 hill.

As for legs, the numbers are clear. All the folks who have left, or barely show up anymore, have rendered their verdict. Can we say that?

We gotta dig deeper. And we’re not going to exegete our way to renewal. We’re not going to think and theologize our way to a thriving church.

I have a few unsolicited suggestions, things that would get me to an event:

- **Anabaptists in the Global South.** I believe that’s where our salvation lies. What message do they have for us?
- **Non-Euro-Canadian churches within MC Canada.** They did not tune in to the conference. What gifts do they offer? Can we connect with them on their terms?
- **More circles.** Perhaps the essential wisdom is in the circle, not at the front

of the room. (Admittedly, Zoom is ill-suited to the priesthood of all believers.)

- **I feel church** should be a place for people's pains and passions. Let's learn to create space for those.
- **I'd love to** hear us wrestle with what good news we have to share with Indigenous people. I speak regularly

with Indigenous leaders who fight desperately, urgently, at the edge of despair to overcome immense injustice perpetrated for the benefit of the rest of society. Would they say we have legs?

- **I'd love it** if the church could offer my kids some support through their climate angst. While working in the garden a year ago, my son, who was 12 at the time, said something like: "If people

care about climate change, why don't they do anything about it?" His comment was directed, in part, at church folks.

I told him that people do lots of other good things, and then acknowledged that there was no answer to his question. Nothing I could say would change the reality that he sees precious few making significant sacrifices.


My kids are no Greta Thunbergs, but their climate angst is real. It's a loneliness. What support can the faith community offer them? What legs do they see?

It made me mad and sad—mostly mad—to hear a presenter address the climate crisis by talking about "reinterpreting our theologies to be more sensitive and aware of creation." Seriously?

- **And I'd love** a support forum for those of us struggling to maintain a grip on faith, having gone through the wringer of postmodernity. We need more than theological intricacies.

I shared this list with a pastor. He said it made him feel tired. He sounded exhausted. The demands on leaders are great. I had not thought of that. I can't expect all of this from one event. I'd like to expect some of it, though. ✎

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Friendships that go 'a little deeper'

Small group provides support for people facing the challenges of aging

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

Baby Boomers Plus, as its name implies, is a small group for people of a certain age. But it's a small group with a difference.

Three years ago, Claire Ewert Fisher was serving as Mount Royal Mennonite Church's health minister. She knew that some older congregants were facing significant health challenges, so she invited them to be part of a group that could share their struggles and care for each other.

Eric and Verna Olfert have been part of the group from the beginning.

Eric sees it as "a place where spouses of people who are struggling with illness can get support."

"I'm in a power chair, and Verna is my supporting spouse," he says. "There are at least two or three other couples who are in that general boat." He is quick to add, though, that "some people don't have those kinds of problems but still find [the group] helpful as they go through transitions."

The group meets each Thursday morning.

"We go around the circle and share what our week has been like," says Verna. "Sometimes it's a problem we've dealt with, sometimes it's a funny story, and sometimes a person will say, 'I don't have much to share.'"

After each person shares, other participants can offer support or practical advice. "Someone may ask, 'How can I get a ramp on my house?' Well, we've done that already," Verna says, noting that the experience of others can be a resource to those encountering a new situation.

While most meetings focus on personal sharing, the group has also invited guests to make presentations on relevant topics such as self-care while aging, wills and funeral planning.

Before the pandemic began, the group



PHOTO BY RON WIEBE

Members of Mount Royal Mennonite Church's Baby Boomers Plus group celebrate Christmas together in 2019 at Eric and Verna Olfert's home.

had a monthly potluck lunch. They occasionally met in each other's homes, but some homes aren't accessible for some members, so they usually meet at church.

"Last Christmas, there were a bunch of us without kids coming home, so we all crowded into our place and celebrated Christmas together," says Verna.

Initially, Ewert Fisher invited people she thought would benefit from participating. But once the core group was established, Eric says they thought together about whom to invite to their group. In addition to regular Mount Royal Mennonite participants, the group has welcomed two couples from outside the congregation.

Several members have died in the intervening years, and the group has supported their spouses as they transitioned to widowhood.

Eric recalls a member telling the group he was suffering from dementia. "He said he had been diagnosed and was still figuring out what that meant," Eric says. "He shared with us and allowed us to pray over it."

For Verna, downsizing and moving to

a smaller home was challenging. "Each week, we would regale them with what we had to do [that] week, we'd laugh and groan with all stuff we had to do," she says. And, as Eric reminds her, often there were tears. But, she adds, "The group just carried us through that time."

Tears are not uncommon in a group such as this. But, for Verna, the conversation and tears are often cathartic, enabling her to carry on with a lighter heart.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the group met using Zoom. The online platform allowed members to continue being a community, and Verna says she and Eric really looked forward to those Thursday Zoom gatherings.

But, she adds, "On Zoom we had to be so quiet to listen to everyone else. We couldn't be spontaneous as easily as we can in person."

After a summer break, the group resumed in-person meetings in September.

The Olferts also belong to another small group in their church that focuses more on book studies and topical discussions.

"The people in [that] small group are also good friends, and have become better friends as part of discussing different topics," says Eric, "but it isn't about personal stuff."

Verna agrees. "We have gotten to know people we wouldn't have otherwise," she says of the Baby Boomers Plus group, describing these friendships as ones that "go a little deeper than with just another church member."

Because he is one of only two males in the group, Eric says his participation is somewhat limited. "It's not as much about building peer friendships with other guys as I would like," he says. "But they're a good bunch of people, and I learn from them as well."

The Olferts credit Ewert Fisher with the group's success, describing how she modelled the trust she hoped to foster in the group. "I think she did very well," says Verna. "She has a gift for that kind of thing."

Ewert Fisher, on the other hand, attributes the sense of trust to the group dynamic. "They have discovered that this is a safe place," she says. ❧

Credentials terminated for theologian-academic-pastor

Canadian Mennonite

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada recently terminated the ministerial credentials of John D. Rempel of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., following an investigation into complaints of ministerial sexual misconduct. The complaints were brought to the regional church by Marcus Shantz, president of Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., after former students brought allegations of sexual misconduct by Rempel to his attention earlier this year.

Rempel served as chaplain, residence director and adjunct professor at Grebel from 1973 to 1989. The complainants were undergraduate resident students at the college when they said they experienced sexual misconduct by Rempel. With the consent of the alumni involved, Shantz made a formal report to MC Eastern Canada and asked for an investigation. The regional church has oversight over the conduct and credentialing of its ministers. Rempel was ordained in 1982.

In response, MC Eastern Canada appointed an independent investigation team to examine the allegations, following a process outlined in the denominational Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure manual. After the investigation team reported to the regional church's Leadership Council, a hearing process took place and the accusations were found to be credible. The council determined that Rempel was guilty of "ministerial sexual misconduct and ministerial misconduct," and it terminated his ministerial credentials.

In an email to *Canadian Mennonite*, Rempel said he "unreservedly accepted my wrongdoing," but he lamented "the absence of empathy for me through the process, and in how the judgment against me has been presented in news releases is a failure of justice and mercy. The rejection of any provision for restorative



John D. Rempel

justice is a failure of justice and mercy." He added that "the process was set up with only one purpose, that is, passing judgment on the accused, without room for forgiveness, making amends and working toward reconciliation."

Marilyn Rudy-Froese, MC Eastern Canada's Church leadership minister, responded: "Leadership Council, made up of ordained ministers and lay leaders, prayerfully receives investigation findings, hears the perspective of the accused minister, and discerns a way forward, providing concrete steps that the minister can take toward accountability and reconciliation." She added: "This is one stage of the journey toward wholeness and healing, but it is not the end of the journey. There is much left to be written. We trust that God is always at work, making a way in the wilderness and moving toward shalom for all."

In its Oct. 20 news release, MC Eastern Canada acknowledged that "John D. Rempel was, and is, for many people, a beloved pastor, professor and theologian. His ministry was wide-ranging and we will have to reconcile the tension that human beings have the capacity to cause much harm and pain even while they have also done much good for the church."

From 2012 to 2015, Rempel continued his affiliation with Grebel as director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, a program administered by the college. Later, he became a senior fellow at the centre, a role Grebel has now asked him to step down from.

In a joint news release, MC Canada, MC U.S.A. and Mennonite World Conference (MWC) responded to the news, saying, "As church bodies with which Rempel has worked closely over his career . . . we grieve for the victim-survivors harmed by Rempel's actions and honour their courage in coming forward." The

statement continues, "We uphold [MC Eastern Canada's] decision to take decisive and public action in this situation and to walk alongside victim-survivors on the path of healing and wholeness."

Throughout the 1990s, Rempel served as Mennonite Central Committee's liaison to the United Nations in New York City and served as pastor of the Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship there.

From 2003 to 2012, he served as a professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, teaching theology and Anabaptist studies. Representing MWC from 2012 to 2017, Rempel participated in an ecumenical dialogue on baptism with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.

Rempel wrote on theological topics for academic and church publications. He was on the editorial committee for *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and was editor of the Minister's Manual used by MC Canada and MC U.S.A. Rempel was also among the editors of *Take Our Moments and Our Days*, an Anabaptist prayer and worship resource.

Because he was involved in writing and editing materials published by MennoMedia, executive director Amy Gingerich acknowledged that this revocation of credentials raises complicated questions: The church has serious concerns about using material written by someone who has perpetrated sexual violence, like disgraced Catholic songwriter David Haas. But how is that concern expressed, given that Rempel only worked within a collaborative team in some of those publications? MennoMedia acknowledged that he had "no direct role in making any final decisions about the contents" of the new *Voices Together* hymnal.

All the church bodies responding to this news expressed grief and concern for the victim-survivors and for the wider church. MC Eastern Canada stated: "We,

as a faith community, must support paths that lead to healing and wholeness for all. As a regional church, we will do our best to walk alongside all those who are impacted.” ❧

Both Grebel and MC Eastern Canada encourage any persons who have experienced misconduct by a credentialed leader to contact Marilyn Rudy-Froese, the regional church's church leadership minister at mrudyfroese@mcec.ca, or Carizon Counselling Services, an agency appointed to receive confidential disclosures related to this matter, at 519-743-6333 or intaketeam@carizon.ca. The MC Eastern Canada website (mcec.ca) also offers resources on reporting sexual misconduct.



❧ News brief

MCC Alberta celebrates 2019 with virtual annual meeting

At the annual general meeting of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta, held virtually this year on Sept. 26, 50 participants learned that, despite across-the-board cuts to the organization's international budget, including in Alberta, "Thrift stores . . . have come roaring back to life after the province-wide closure in the spring," according to Dale Taylor, MCC Alberta's executive director. "Thrift store staff have developed and follow strict safety protocols, and our Alberta volunteers have come back to the shops in force. MCC is extremely grateful for their dedication," he said, adding, "At this point, we are cautiously optimistic that we are on track to meet our reduced budget." Generally, donations are strongest in November and December. The meeting was for the fiscal year ending March 2020. Highlights from the previous year were the 2019 Coaldale Relief Sale, which raised more than \$200,000; golf tournaments in La Crete and Tofield; and the Great Winter Warm-Up in January. Special speakers Vurayayi Pugenji and Thelma Sadzamari, a couple who share the work of MCC area directors for Southern Africa, spoke about MCC's response to food security during the pandemic. MCC's focus is now on the poorest countries, including projects that address needs for water, sanitation and hygiene, Taylor said.

—BY JOANNE DE JONG



MCC PHOTO BY AMANDA TALSTRA
Vurayayi Pugenji, pictured in Malawi in 2019, spoke at MCC Alberta's virtual annual general meeting on Sept. 26.

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BOOK REVIEW

Social media is distracting and can be harmful

Reconnect: Spiritual Restoration from Digital Distraction.
Ed Cyzewski. Herald Press, 2020, 221 pages.

Reviewed by Barb Draper
BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

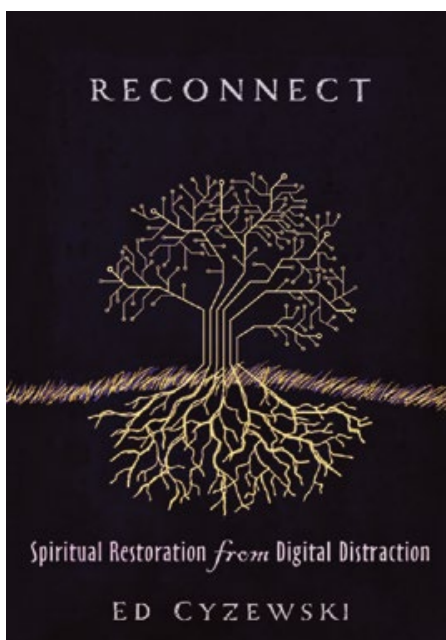
Indiscriminate use of social media is bad for us, warns Ed Cyzewski. While technology is convenient and promises to make us more efficient and keep us in touch with more people, it actually harms our mental health and does little to foster true relationships. Smartphones and other devices also hinder our spirituality, mostly by consuming our time.

The answer is not to avoid social media, says Cyzewski, but to learn to live better with it. This means learning good habits of limiting time with social media, working at real relationships and nurturing our spirituality.

The author of *Reconnect* found himself constantly checking his smartphone and began to notice that his spiritual practices, as well as time with his family and other meaningful projects, were suffering. Cyzewski decided to pay closer attention to what was happening in his life. He began researching the effects of all this online time and found that modern technology is having a negative impact on society.

“Technology is intentionally designed to be addictive and immersive,” he writes, pointing out that some of the most insightful comments are coming from former executives at large tech companies like Google and Facebook. He quotes one former executive as saying that a smartphone with social media apps is “like a slot machine in your pocket.” These digital devices have created an expectation of constant stimulation.

The more people log on to social media, the more they feel isolated and in-



adequate, according to surveys of social media use. Cyzewski refers to a 2018 study that found “students who limited their use of Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat to 30 minutes a day for three weeks had significant reductions in loneliness and depression.” Social media is an easy place to turn for connections, but it is shallow and does not provide a satisfactory community.

Another danger of social media is disinformation. Many people find this a convenient way to access news, but the news feeds are influenced by bots designed to bring attention to stories that trigger emotions rather than stories that are balanced and accurate. Cyzewski mentions a Massachusetts Institute of Technology study that showed “false

stories spread about six times faster than the true stories.” As well, the content that “gets the most engagement is often related to some kind of emotional reaction or conflict.”

As well as learning to limit digital distraction, Cyzewski encourages Christians to nurture their spiritual formation. He advocates for prayer, silence and meditating on Scripture. “By sitting in silence, releasing our thoughts gently and creating space for God, we can gain greater clarity through simple contemplative practices,” he writes.

Rather than “liking” a social post, Cyzewski promotes in-person interactions. He finds in his own life that a direct and personal text message, email or voice mail has more meaning than a Facebook response.

Most of all, he argues for the need to be aware of how much time can get sucked into apps, and he suggests detoxing if necessary. He also includes a “Starter guide for digital boundaries” and a “Starter guide for spiritual practices,” providing simple and practical steps to following his advice.

Although Cyzewski warns of the dangers of social media, he writes from a position of sympathy. He encourages readers to be aware of the pitfalls of digital distraction and to develop healthy spiritual habits, but he never assumes that tech devices should be avoided entirely. This book should appeal to readers interested in knowing how modern technology is shaping our society, or in learning practical ways to connect with God through contemplative prayer. ❧

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

COVID clean-up leads to inspiring discovery

By Joanne De Jong
Alberta Correspondent

When COVID-19 hit in March, Doris Daley of Trinity Mennonite Church in De Winton, Alta., decided to clean the house. Many families, stuck at home, have taken this “unprecedented time” to throw out expired food, wash the windows and clean out junk drawers. She chose to do a deep dive into old boxes that had been packed away in her storage closet for years.

To her surprise, she found an old book she had written and forgotten about. More than 20 years ago, Trinity Mennonite held a unique fundraiser. One Sunday the ushers handed out \$100 bills to congregants as they left the building. They were challenged to go home, make it grow and report back.

One congregant used the money to build

This time all the proceeds will go to one of her favourite charities: Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS).

Daley and her singer-songwriter husband Al, recently came back from a two-week MDS assignment rebuilding homes in Ukiah, Calif., destroyed by wildfires. “We know the work they do, and we know the integrity, thrift, competence and care that goes into each project,” she says. “None of us knows when a disaster might strike. When it does, the Mennonites show up. . . . While it isn’t an exact parallel, it seems a fitting cause for the times.”

Daley decided she would use some of the same questions as in the first volume, but then expand the list. Having worked most of her life as a cowboy poet and entertainer, she now has a wide range of “interesting” connections, stretching from the Yukon to Texas, to draw from. Contributors included Australian bush poets, farm wives, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) members, professional Santa Clauses, polo horse trainers, opera singers, truck drivers and lawyers, ranging in age from 6 to 90.

Her writing career began when she started writing poetry as a child for family events, often inspired by life on their ranch in Granum, Alta., population 300. After serving as a young person for four years with MCC in Pennsylvania, and then two years in Ontario with Ten Thousand Villages, she returned home to Alberta.

Shortly after that, her brother pushed her to present one of her poems at a cowboy poetry event in Pincher Creek, Alta. Everyone who entered received \$25. “I loved listening to the oldtimers, ranch women and teenagers. I was hooked!” she says.

Now it’s been a lifetime of booking gigs across North America, reciting her western poetry around campfires, at Christmas parties and corporate events, while emceeding, holding workshops, and

even performing with the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and the Saskatchewan Opera Company. She has even done a TED Talk.

Even though she is not tall and handsome, with a big moustache, she has been warmly received into the mainly male-dominated profession. She gets joy from writing and, as a person of faith, she



PHOTO BY BILL PATTERSON

Doris Daley, a western humorist and poet living in Black Diamond, Alta., is a member of Trinity Mennonite Church in DeWinton, Alberta.

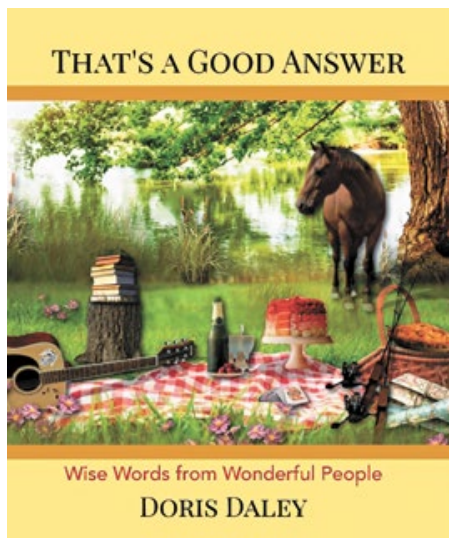
writes through a lens of gratitude and appreciation for God’s creation. “God wants us to see joy and wholesomeness in our world, and I love getting to be a purveyor of it.”

Her new book is entitled *That’s a Good Answer: Wise Words from Wonderful People*. One person answered the question, “How did your parents save money?” this way: “By convincing the kids that a trip to the dentist was a vacation!”

According to Daley, “the book is full of answers that are funny, reflective, thought-provoking and, above all, entertaining.”

Daley has already sent one cheque to MDS and expects to send another one once the rest of the books from the third printing are sold. ❧

Books can be purchased online at dorisdaley.com. (She expects to have a third edition out in 2040!)



and sell doll furniture. Daley decided to write a book. She made up a series of questions and sent them out to church members, friends, colleagues and family, and then she compiled the answers. Her little book raised \$600 for the church.

“By golly, I’m going to do that again!” she exclaimed, when she discovered the decades-old book at the bottom of a box.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

From internet fame to new novelist

'The Daily Bonnet' creator publishes first book

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

Andrew Unger shot to fame after creating the Mennonite satire website, “The Daily Bonnet.” Now he is branching out, adding to his repertoire a longer feat: his first novel.

Once Removed was published by Turnstone Press in September. The story follows Timothy Heppner and his life in Edenfeld, a small Mennonite town. He is a frustrated ghostwriter, haunted by the threat of going broke, and caught between being a member of the community’s Preservation Society and working for the mayor’s Parks and “Wreck” department, which is determined to chuck out the old and bring in the new. Heppner’s struggles increase when he is hired to write an updated version of Edenfeld’s history and he must figure out how to tell this life-changing story.

Unger lives in Steinbach, Man., where he attends Grace Mennonite Church and teaches English at Steinbach Regional Secondary School. His writing has appeared in *Geez*, *Rhubarb*, the *Winnipeg Free Press* and CBC.ca, to name a few.

He has written more than 1,800 satirical news articles poking fun at Mennonite life for “The Daily Bonnet.” The online publication has had more than 10 million visitors since its launch in 2016 and its headlines were read in the House of Commons last year in support of a motion to establish a Mennonite Heritage Week.

Unger drew inspiration for the novel from his increasing interest in Mennonite history. “Writing ‘The Daily Bonnet’ over the past few years, I’ve gotten more interested in Mennonite history and even theology and the history of, in particular, southern Manitoba and my own family,” he says.

Learning about villages founded by Mennonites in southern Manitoba that no longer exist, save for an occasional crumbling cemetery, sparked his reflections

on the battle between preservation and progress, one of the book’s key themes. “But I don’t think it’s just a simple dichotomy there. I think the book explores nuanced definitions of those things,” he says.

The name *Once Removed* references this idea, alluding to the removal of buildings. Yet the title can be interpreted in numerous ways; the author has thought of at least four or five. Its connection to genealogy is one. Unger laughs as he describes a scene in the book in which a married couple discover they are distant cousins and pin the database printout above their bed. He emphasizes that the book deals with serious issues but is ultimately a comedy.

This debut has been long anticipated—Unger started working on the first draft about six or seven years ago, before he started “The Daily Bonnet.” He worked for two years with his editor at Turnstone Press, Sarah Ens, and the end result is remarkably different than when he began.

“The Daily Bonnet” shaped the book’s transformation, too. Unger showed a comedic aptitude at a young age, drawing Brian Mulrone political cartoons at 12, and developing a reputation for clever jokes in high school. “Writing ‘The Daily Bonnet’ also reaffirmed that humorous tone that I had as a kid; it brought that back into my writing,” he says.

The novel balances comedy and gravity,



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW UNGER

Andrew Unger is the creator of the Mennonite satire website, The Daily Bonnet, and author of the new novel, Once Removed.

a skill he honed writing satirical articles. “In some ways, [the book] is similar to satire, in that, in proper satire anyways, there’s humour but there’s also some sort of point that’s being made. So I think the book shares that with the better articles on ‘The Daily Bonnet,’” he says.

And for those wondering if there is anything funny left to say about Mennonites after the prolific publications of his famous website, Unger says, The vast majority of the material is fresh . . . so there was at least a whole novel’s worth of stuff that had been unexplored.”

Once Removed is available online at CommonWord.ca.



FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

BOOK REVIEW

Reimagining God's table

This is God's Table: Finding Church Beyond the Walls.
Anna Woofenden. Herald Press, 2020, 272 pages.

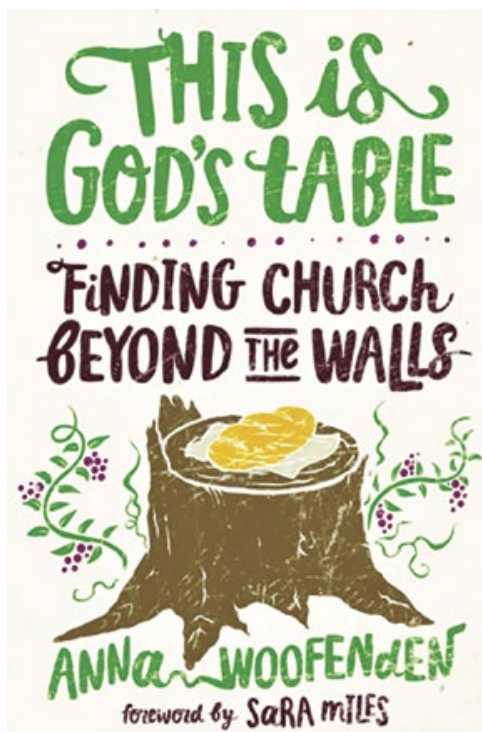
Reviewed by Leah Cressman

In *This is God's Table: Finding Church Beyond the Walls*, Anna Woofenden invites readers to join with the Garden Church in experiencing the divine presence beyond church walls. As a rookie church planter, Woofenden reimagined church and saw God's goodness grow. She shares authentically about the fears, trials, joy, challenges, sweat, tears, grace and love that went into planting the Garden Church and how an empty lot in a rough part of San Pedro, Calif., became a welcoming, colourful and faithful congregation adored by its diverse neighbourhood.

The question Woofenden ponders frequently is, "Can a garden be a church and a church be a garden?" She stretches the boundaries of the traditional church far beyond walls, hymnals and denominations. Although there are no explicit Anabaptist connections, the heart of this book pulses with social justice, service, hard work, community, working the land and the enjoyment of potlucks!

This is God's Table begins by exploring Woofenden's theological upbringing as part of the Swedenborgian Church. Because she was a woman called to leadership within denominational constraints, it took significant courage to step out in faith in her calling, as well as into the complexities of church planting. The Garden Church started with a handful of faithful people with willing hearts, following God's call to create something new. They worked the soil, planted seeds and invited outcasts and drug addicts to water plants, share food and experience God's love.

The Garden Church didn't just operate on Sundays. The gates were open on weekdays for people to come



in, tend the community garden, build relationships, experience belonging and share in the harvest. On Sundays, they offered a worship service where all were welcome, no dress code or social norm-following required. Sharing the bread and cup was always a part of the service before a community meal with produce from the church's garden. Even those who skipped church, but showed up for the meal, were accepted and embraced at the Garden Church.

It is very unlikely that many of us will plant a church, yet Woofenden's musings are relevant to all Christ-followers. She wrestles with foundational issues such as what it means to belong; everyone's innate desire to be seen, respected and loved; and demonstrating what it means to make room at God's

table for everyone.

Woofenden shows her humanity when exploring spiritual burnout. She faced financial stresses, frustration with the man who consistently interrupted her sermons, and the instability of never knowing who was a one-time attendee and who would actually return. She names systemic injustices in the community and recounts her struggle with power and privilege. She understands brokenness and the complexity of people's journeys, and at the same time doesn't neglect to proclaim the gospel of freedom and new life in Christ. She shares stories of liberation, hope and beauty amid the realities of systemic oppression, poverty, racism, pain and injustice.

She also invites readers into her own love story as well as the discernment process of eventually leaving the beloved church she planted, humbly acknowledging that God is the one true planter.

In a spiritual landscape that often criticizes and resists the traditional church, Woofenden offers a fresh perspective that may ignite excitement for the disenchanting and acceptance for those who wonder, "Is there room at God's table for even me?" The answer is yes! Anyone interested in expanding their view of the church, church planters, creative souls, and even gardeners, will be inspired by this thought-provoking book and eclectic stories of ways to feed and be fed at God's table. ❧

Leah Cressman is a registered psychologist in Waterloo Region and attends Floradale (Ont.) Mennonite Church.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

Living at 'home together'

Book tells the story of Christian student residence in Vancouver

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent

Using the metaphor of home, a new book relates the history of the Menno Simons Centre, a residence community for university students in Vancouver for more than 30 years. *Home Together: Student Ministry at the Menno Simons Centre* by Thomas Bergen was introduced at a virtual book launch on Oct. 24, with some former residents participating by Zoom.

In his book, Bergen describes six aspects of the centre as home: spiritual, supportive, sabbatical, safe, spurring and sending. He earned a master of theological studies degree from Regent College in Vancouver and was a student there from 2011 to 2013 and residence coordinator at the centre from 2014 to 2019.



STUDENT MINISTRY AT THE
MENNO SIMONS CENTRE

In opening remarks during the book launch, Evan Kreider recalled a conversation with the late Paul Boschman, in which

and Regent College, with 24 individual rooms, two kitchens, a laundry and a chapel. The residence was named the Menno Simons Centre.

Through the years, many students called the centre home, a place to be together in Christian community. They took turns cleaning the facility and shared a weekly community meal together. They learned to live together, develop relationships and deal with conflict in a community of discipleship and belonging.

"Home is never something we own, but that we're invited into," said Bergen. He noted that the ages from 18 to 30 are a time when young adults seek a deeper sense of home and ask, "Where do I belong?" and, "Where is home?"

Several residence alumni participated by Zoom, expressing fondness for their home away from home during their university years.

The Menno Simons Centre was sold earlier this year to raise capital for a new residence near the campus of UBC.

Through the years, many students called the centre home, a place to be together in Christian community. They took turns cleaning the facility and shared a weekly community meal together.

Boschman asked, "We have Native and urban ministries; why not a student ministry?" The idea grew from there and, after fundraising, the Pacific Centre for Discipleship, an inter-Mennonite non-profit society, was formed in 1986. Its goal was to provide a supportive Christian community and a home away from home for university and college students.

The society obtained a former convent in the Point Grey area of Vancouver, near the University of British Columbia (UBC)

Home Together is published by FriesenPress in Victoria, B.C. ❧

For more information, or to purchase the book, visit the Pacific Centre for Discipleship's website at pcda.bc.ca.



FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

Pastor channels love of stories into children's books

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent

When Kevin Drudge needed a children's story for his church's Sunday morning worship service, he decided to write one himself. But what began as a one-time occasion has become more than two dozen stories and a deal with a publisher.

Drudge is the pastor of Covenant Mennonite Church in Winkler, Man. He published his first two children's books in August with Word Alive Press in Winnipeg.

Michael's Ice Cream Surprise and *Imagine, Michael!* are two of the many stories Drudge has written, all of which involve the character Michael, an adventurous and inquisitive young boy. In the first book, Michael loves to be first at everything. Yet he gets a surprise at the end of the story that turns the idea of being first on its head. In the second, Michael is bored on summer holidays, so his parents tell him to use his imagination. What unfolds is the boy's creative vision of a biblical story and how he can experience Jesus with him in his imagination.

Drudge's fellow church members were enthusiastic about the Michael series and encouraged him to get them published. "I think the kids just enjoyed a fun adventure story, but also the adults said that was a really meaningful connection with that verse or that idea," he says. "That was sort of the goal, to present a biblical concept in story form that children could relate to."

He did this by weaving tales of children's ordinary experiences with simple yet meaningful messages from the Bible, like love one another and the last shall be first, which the stories ultimately lead to Michael discovering.

"Sometimes the adults have said, 'Well we could have just finished right after the Michael story, that would have been enough!'" Drudge says. "People of all ages enjoy a story, and sometimes, just like

Jesus' parables, it can be a fairly simple story but it captures the message in a very pointed and unique way."

Telling stories is one of Drudge's passions. He has written many puppet plays and, when his children were young, he would tell them improvised stories about a young boy named Johnny, who was not unlike Michael. Over the years, they went on a myriad of escapades with Johnny and his family through the stories.

So Drudge was well practised when he began writing down his oral stories. Equipped with 8.5"x11" paper stapled together, and illustrations drawn by his eight-year-old daughter, he began the journey that would eventually lead to publication.

Drudge hopes these stories will be a useful resource not only for church and Sunday school, but also for bedtime reading at home. ☘



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN DRUDGE

Kevin Drudge's children's books are fun, relatable stories with a simple yet meaningful biblical message.

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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/TRAVIS_SIMON

2020 Fall list of
Books & Resources**Theology, Spirituality**

Born Again and Again: Jesus' Call to Radical Transformation. Megan K. Westra. Herald Press, 2020, 226 pages.

Westra examines the meaning of salvation, calling for radical transformation of life rather than praying the sinner's prayer. She discusses the Christian approach to such things as race and gender, politics, finances and attitudes toward creation.



lost. He says we should pay more attention to the eastern church fathers.

Liberating the Politics of Jesus: Renewing Peace Theology Through the Wisdom of Women. Elizabeth Soto Albrecht and Darryl W. Stephens, eds. T&T Clark and Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2020, 288 pages.

This collection of essays explores Mennonite theology and practice from a woman's perspective, considering racial and gender justice. The writers want to move beyond the theology of John Howard Yoder, especially in light of his sexual misconduct.



Faith Talk: A Spiritual Memoir Inviting Reflection and Dialogue. Ruth Naylor. Self-published with WestBow Press, 2019, 216 pages.



Naylor was raised in the Quaker tradition, married a Mennonite, and later became one of the early female pastors in Mennonite Church U.S.A. Writing in an engaging style, she reflects on her life and how she was guided through the Holy Spirit and her prayers. Questions at the end of each chapter encourage the reader to engage in personal reflection.

Jesus of the East: Reclaiming the Gospel for the Wounded. Phuc Luu. Herald Press, 2020, 256 pages.



Born in Vietnam but raised in the United States, this author critiques western Christianity. He argues that for centuries the western church has been a tool of government, oppressing the poor and spiritualizing faith, so that Jesus' message of peace and justice has been

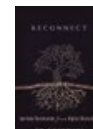
Might From the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice. Dennis R. Edwards. Herald Press, 2020, 224 pages.

Edwards writes with passion about his experiences in the church and analyzes systemic injustice, racism and power. He believes the gospel can give power to the marginalized.



Reconnect: Spiritual Restoration from Digital Distraction. Ed Cyzewski. Herald Press, 2020, 256 pages.

Finding himself virtually addicted to his social-media feed, the author researched the influence of digital technology and found these platforms are designed to keep us hooked. He provides suggestions for setting digital boundaries



and deepening our spirituality. A helpful four-session discussion guide is available as a free download from Herald Press.

Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method.

Laura Schmidt Roberts, Paul Martens, Myron A. Penner, eds. T&T Clark and Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2020, 189 pages.

For many decades there was a prominent school of Anabaptist theology—the Anabaptist Vision of Harold Bender and John Howard Yoder. Today's theologians are offering an alternative Anabaptist identity. Several of the theologians in this collection are Canadians.



Suffering the Truth: Occasional Sermons and Reflections. Chris K. Huebner. CMU Press, 2020, 111 pages.

The sermons in this collection are structured around the Christian liturgical calendar. Huebner is associate professor of philosophy and theology at Canadian Mennonite University.



This is God's Table: Finding Church Beyond the Walls. Anna Woofenden. Herald Press, 2020, 272 pages.

Looking for a new way to do church, the author began the Garden Church in an empty lot in Los Angeles. This church plant connects faith and food, worshipping outdoors, growing food and eating together regularly. Woofenden grew up in the Swedenborgian denomination but believes in the importance of ecumenical Christianity.



Wandering the Wilderness: A Guide for Weary Wanderers and Searching Skeptics. Ray R. Friesen. Self-published with FriesenPress, 2020, 332 pages.

Using a storytelling approach, this semi-retired Mennonite pastor examines the hard questions of life with honesty and integrity. With a 21st century spirituality, he reflects on how his understanding of



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Christianity is different from the conservative fundamentalism of his childhood and how his journey with cancer influenced his perspective.

The Widow and the Judge—Memory, Resistance and Hope: Intercultural Reading of Luke 18:1-8 in Latin American Contexts of Impunity. Hans de Wit and Edgar Antonio Lopez, eds. Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2020.

This is the fifth and final volume of the Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics series of the Institute of Mennonite Studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. This book looks at how groups in Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia understand the parable of the persistent widow.

Who Will Be a Witness?: Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love and Deliverance. Drew G.I. Hart. Herald Press, 2020, 276 pages.



Using Scripture and personal stories, Hart calls the church to bring justice to their neighbourhoods. The author teaches at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. He also wrote, *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*.

History

Makhno and Memory: Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine's Civil War, 1917-1921. Sean Patterson. University of Manitoba Press, 2020, 216 pages.



Mennonites remember Nestor Makhno as a vicious terrorist who perpetrated unspeakable violence, while to some Ukrainians he is a hero who liberated peasants from capitalist exploitation. Patterson looks at the literature from both sides to find a human figure who fits neither description. The book also includes a close look at the Eichenfeld massacre.

Mennonite Village Photography: Views from Manitoba 1890-1940. Susie Fisher, ed. Mennonite Historic Arts



Committee, 2020, 92 pages.

This book of historic photographs shows Mennonite life in southern Manitoba 100 years ago. It features photos by Peter G. Hamm, Peter H. Klippenstein, Johann E. Funk and Heinrich D. Fast.

Täufer: Von der Reformation ins 21. Jahrhundert. Astrid von Schlachta. Available at www.narr.de, 2020, 432 pages.



The director of the Mennonite Research Centre at Weierhof, Germany, has put together this overview of Mennonite history from the Reformation to the 21st century. The book considers what this history means for the church today. It is available in paperback and ebook but is only available in the German language.

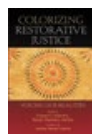
Where the People Go: Community, Generosity and the Story of Everence. John D. Roth. Herald Press, 2020, 288 pages.



John D. Roth, professor of history at Goshen College, writes about Mennonite Mutual Aid, now known as Everence. Roth tells the story of its growth from a small aid plan to a large institution that provides health and other insurance, as well as adding a charitable foundation and credit union. Changes in how mutual aid is offered mirror changes in the church.

Other books

Colorizing Restorative Justice: Voicing Our Realities. Edward C. Valandra, Wanbli Wapháha Hokšila, eds. Living Justice Press, 2020, 440 pages.



Johonna Turner, professor of restorative justice and peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, is one of the contributors to this collection of essays calling for racial justice.

I Am Not Your Enemy: Stories to Transform a Divided World. Michael T. McRay. Herald Press, 2020, 256 pages.



McRay travelled to places of conflict around the world, including Palestine, South Africa and Northern Ireland, to

collect personal stories from peacebuilders and former combatants. These stories of justice and reconciliation have something to say to our divided world.

Making Believe: Questions About Mennonites and Art. Magdalene Redekop. University of Manitoba Press, 2020, 425 pages.



Redekop, a retired professor of English at the University of Toronto, examines what she calls the renaissance of Mennonite art since the 1980s, especially in southern Manitoba. She frames these discussions in light of her own upbringing in southern Manitoba in a Mennonite culture steeped in Low German.

Making Waves: Fifty Stories about Sharing Love and Changing the World. Judy Clemens. Herald Press, 2020, 276 pages.



These 50 true stories about peacemaking from the past and present are designed for children aged 9-12.

The Millennial Mosaic: How Pluralism and Choice are Shaping Canadian Youth and the Future of Canada. Reginald Bibby, Joel Thiessen and Monetta Bailey. Dundurn Press, Toronto, 2019, 348 pages.



Using national surveys done in 2015 and 2016, three Canadian sociologists take a close look at the Millennial generation, those born between 1985 and 2005, and compare them to Pre-Boomers, Baby Boomers and Generation X. In examining Millennial attitudes toward religion and spirituality, they find this generation embracing choice rather than simply following the teachings of their parents.

The Minister's Wife: A Memoir of Faith, Doubt, Friendship, Loneliness, Forgiveness and More. Karen Stiller. Tyndale House Publishers, 2020,

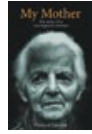


This spiritual memoir gives a wry and humorous look at the experiences of a minister's wife in today's world. Karen

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

Stiller is a writer and editor for *Faith Today*.

My Mother: The Story of a Courageous Woman. Helmut Lemke. Privately published, 2020, 120 pages.



Helmut Lemke's mother grew up in West Prussia, where she survived two horrible wars and Hitler's dictatorship. She later joined her children in Canada. The book is part biography, part Mennonite history. It is available from hblemke@shaw.ca.

Once Removed. Andrew Unger. Turnstone Press, 2020, 275 pages.



Using wit and humour, this novel, set in a small town in Mennonite country in southern Manitoba, explores themes of progress and preserving the past. Unger is also the author of the "The Daily Bonnet," a satirical website that pokes fun at Mennonite foibles.

Only say the Word: Poems and Paintings. Daryl Culp. Privately published, 2020, 48 pages.



This collection of illustrated poems explores spiritual themes relating to travel, Christian holidays and other experiences. The longest poem reflects on the author's Mennonite heritage. The book is available from Amazon.

Sustainable Kitchen: Recipes and Inspiration for Plant-Based, Planet-conscious Meals. Jaynie McCloskey and Heather Wolfe. Herald Press, 2020, 226 pages.



This cookbook, with many colourful photos, has a variety of vegetarian recipes with vegan options, as well as tips for meal planning, preserving, decreasing waste and conserving energy.

When the Center Does Not Hold: Leading in an Age of Polarization. David R. Brubaker. Fortress Press, 2019, 175 pages.



David Brubaker of Eastern Mennonite University, together with three colleagues, examines the role of polarization in conflict. The book is designed to help leaders in congregations and other settings deal with conflict.

Resources

The Jesus Way: Small Books of Radical Faith series.

These small books of approximately 120 pages, published by Herald Press in 2020, are designed for five or six sessions and come with questions for reflection and discussion. Individuals and study groups in the church should find them to be helpful theological resources.

- **What Does Justice Look Like and Why Does God Care about It?** By Judith and Colin McCartney.
- **What Is God's Mission in the World and How Do We Join It?** By Juan F. Martinez.
- **What Is the Church and Why Does It Exist?** By David Fitch.
- **What Is the Trinity and Why Does It**

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Matter? By Steve Dancause.

- *Who Are Our Enemies and How Do We Love Them?* By Hyung Jin Kim Sun.
- *Why Do We Suffer and Where is God When We Do?* By Valerie G. Rempel.

“Mental Health Resource for Congregations” from the Anabaptist Disabilities Network, 2020, 9 pages (anabaptistdisabilitiesnetwork.org).

This document provides suggestions for understanding mental illness and how congregations can include and support those who are struggling. It provides practical tips of when to refer someone to a professional and suggests further resources.

Racism/Anti-racism resources for congregations:

- **From MC Canada/CommonWord:** Racism/Anti-racism commonword.ca/go/2054
- **Indigenous-Settler Relations** commonword.ca/go/1479
- **MC Canada-produced** “Indigenous-Settler Relations” commonword.ca/go/1561
- **From MC USA:** mennoniteusa.org/ministry/peacebuilding/undoing-racism

Podcast: “-ingPodcast: Leading, Growing, Being.”
(bit.ly/-ingPodcast)

This new podcast explores how people of faith are leading, growing, and being as people of God. It is produced by Ben Wideman for MennoMedia and is available on various podcast platforms. ☘

—COMPILED BY BARB DRAPER,
BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

Many of the featured titles on the book list are available for purchase or to borrow from CommonWord Book Store and Resource Centre in Winnipeg.

For more information, visit commonword.ca or call 204-594-0527 or 1-877-846-1593.



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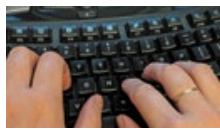
Artist ‘aims to empower’ with logo

B.C. artist Dona Park talks about the logo she created for Mennonite Church U.S.A.’s Women Doing Theology webinar series. canadianmennonite.org/parklogo



‘A public witness to God’s love’

Mennonite World Conference regional reps recently shared the burdens and creative resilience they see in response to COVID-19. canadianmennonite.org/mwcreps



Pandemic offers new opportunities

The pandemic has turned the graduate-level teaching model at Conrad Grebel University College on its head. canadianmennonite.org/mtspandemic



Knowledge for everyone

Get to know what the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online is all about and how it can help you. canadianmennonite.org/gameofaq



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Calendar

Nationwide

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. 14: Fall MC Eastern Canada gathering, on Zoom, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Event includes a time of listening, sharing and encouragement; and the installations of executive minister Leah Reesor-Keller, executive minister, and mission minister Fanosie Legesse. To register, visit bit.ly/2IMyHcH.

Nov. 20-21: "Becoming peacemakers," MCC's virtual peace conference: (20) In conversation with Bruxy Cavey and Denley McIntosh of the Meeting House and MCC's Ken Ogasawara, at 7 to 8:30 p.m.; (21) Main sessions and breakout sessions with Paul Fast, MCC's health coordinator; Dina Gonzalez Pina, MCC's ethnicity and gender equity specialist; and members of MCC's Indigenous Neighbours, restorative justice and refugee sponsorship teams. To learn more, or to register, visit mcco.ca/peace-conference.

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



Classifieds

Employment Opportunities



Employment Opportunity
0.5 FTE Pastor

St. Jacobs Mennonite Church in semi-rural St. Jacobs, Ontario, seeks a 0.5 FTE pastor to join their three-member pastoral team in the spring of 2021.

Ministry areas in this vibrant, multigenerational congregation include preaching, worship, pastoral care and youth ministry in a collaborative team model of ministry. To learn more go to:
<https://mcec.ca/get-involved/leadership>
or email pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca



Employment Opportunity
Acquisitions Editor

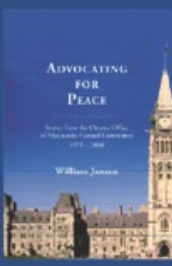
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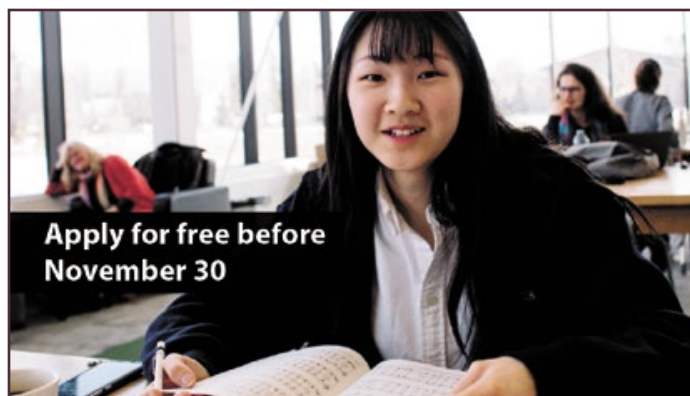
This Christmas,
Share a gift for peace



Bill Janzen was the first director of Mennonite Central Committee's Ottawa Office. In this book, he shares a rich collection of stories from 33 years of advocating for peace.

Ray Funk, Member of Parliament, (1988-1993) said, "I stayed in close contact with Bill Janzen... coming to value his wisdom and experience, and considering him the single most influential person in shaping my work." *Canadian Mennonite*, November 10, 2014

Book available through www.CommonWord.ca/go/1954



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PHOTOS BY LEANNE LOBE

PHOTOS TOP and RIGHT: Grade 10 music students at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., take to drumming outside on the back field of their school in order to explore music in a different way while pandemic protocols prohibit them from singing or playing wind instruments inside the classroom.

‘How can I keep from singing?’

Rockway music class takes to drumming instead

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

Eric Dettweiler’s Grade 10 music class at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener began the school year drumming every day for the first few weeks, often outdoors. Now the 11 students drum a couple of times a week. It is a safe way to conduct a music class while maintaining physical distance in the reality of pandemic protocols.

According to Dettweiler, besides being fun, drumming “helps



Eric Dettweiler, standing left, a music teacher at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont., leads his Grade 10 music class in an outdoor drumming exercise.

to develop a strong sense of rhythm and ensemble,” skills that are “foundational to all music making.” And beyond that, “drumming is a great way to explore improvisation and composition.”

Dettweiler, who also teaches Grade 7 and 8 music, was forced to find creative ways to offer music classes without singing or playing wind instruments together. He says his students have also been playing music on boomwhackers (pitched percussion tubes), and “exploring electronic composition using a digital music production software called Soundtrap.”

He reports, “We have been having lots of fun in this class,” exploring music in a “different way than we normally would be able to in a traditional band or choir course.”

Drums and boomwhackers are sanitized before and after every use, according to COVID-19 protocols. ☘