

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

January 24, 2022 Volume 26 Number 2

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to Cubans in crisis, pg. 14



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## EDITORIAL

# Thanks to you

BY TOBI THIESSEN  
Publisher



**T**hanks to you, this magazine has entered its 25th year of publishing under the name *Canadian Mennonite*. We picked up the mantle in September 1997 from *The Mennonite Reporter*, a bi-weekly newspaper for the 26 years before that.

Former staff turned the newspaper into a magazine, and the leaders at what was then the Conference of Mennonites in Canada gave it important financial stability through an Every Home Plan (EHP). Under the EHP, church members were encouraged to read the magazine. Subscription fees would be paid collectively through the church. The EHP alone did not cover expenses, so the magazine was to sell personal subscriptions and advertising, and to carry out a twice-yearly fundraising campaign.

Through the years, you have generously contributed to the magazine, and 2021 was no exception. In our last editorial, Virginia Hostetler thanked correspondents, columnists and other writers who help fill *CM*'s pages with meaningful content. She also thanked readers for sharing story ideas and opinions. These help *CM* to be a venue in which many voices are heard, and a wide range of topics discussed.

You also support this magazine financially. We gratefully report that *CM* received \$150,000 in donations from readers like you in 2021. Your gifts, combined with revenue from the EHP, other subscriptions, advertising and the Canada Periodical Fund, are vital. With your support, we keep people informed, connected and engaged in conversations

about faith. The magazine reaches almost 10,000 households bi-weekly. Plus, articles go out to the wider world through the website. Last year, approximately 200,000 people read *CM* articles online.

We also thank the twelve people who serve on the board of directors for Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS). These volunteers come from across Canada and provide *CM* with deeply valuable insight in at least three ways. Coming from a range of backgrounds, they bring to board conversations their workplace knowledge and life experience. Coming from different congregations, they speak to issues out of their understanding of the local church and community. As well, they provide twelve local points of contact for readers who give counsel or ask questions about this magazine's mission. Board members bring your feedback to discuss at meetings.

Nine directors are appointed by Mennonite Church Canada and its regional church bodies. Three members are elected at the CMPS annual meeting. The page "About Us" on our website lists their names. I name them here and give thanks for their service:

- **Mennonite Church Canada:** Henry Krause (British Columbia), Annika Krause (Quebec), Rod Wiens (Saskatchewan), Aaron Penner (Manitoba)
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To learn more about CMPS ownership and governance, please visit [www.canadianmennonite.org](http://www.canadianmennonite.org). Go to the menu item "More" and click on "About us."

Ideally, the board is a microcosm of the diversity within Mennonite Church Canada itself, because the magazine aims to reach all kinds of people across the church. If you would like to recommend someone for the board of directors, contact the nominations committee of your regional church. Or send a suggestion to [publisher@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:publisher@canadianmennonite.org) and I will pass it on.

We thank MC Canada and the regional churches for continuing to partner with CMPS in this publishing ministry—both financially through the EHP and by supporting the practice of editorial freedom. Few faith-based journals can say the same. *CM* is accountable to the church through the board.

This funding and accountability model has been in place for 25 years. *Canadian Mennonite* was born from an ambitious vision from the get-go and has stood up well over time. Its success relies on the continued support of readers like you. That is to say: this magazine exists and flourishes—thanks to you.

## Print and digital issues will continue

In 2022, *Canadian Mennonite* will again publish 22 regular issues plus four digital-only ones. As a subscriber, you can have a print issue mailed and a digital copy emailed to you. To add digital delivery to your subscription, email Graham Aberdein at [office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org). ☘



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Clara Rodríguez holds two cans of MCC canned meat that she received through the Brethren In Christ Church of Cuba. These came from a shipment of relief kits and canned food sent by Mennonite Central Committee in response to the crisis in Cuba.

BICCC PHOTO BY RAMON GUIZA

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## FEATURE

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARVIN HAMM

*Annie Janzen as a young girl.*

# Simple wonder, peculiar generosity

A tribute to Annie Janzen  
(March 13, 1930 – Dec. 14, 2021)

By Will Braun  
Senior Writer

**A**nnie Janzen earned no degrees and was never elected chair of a church council. She did not start a church, write a best-seller or perform for large audiences.

She did cook at Canadian Mennonite

Bible College in Winnipeg for 27 years, travel the globe and make an unlikely diversity of friends. She lived a good, simple life. It was also a decidedly unconventional life.

Annie died in Winnipeg on Dec. 14 at the age of 91,

after a brief stay in hospital following a stroke.

Earlier in the year, with the help of friends, she completed a modest, spiral-bound book about her life. *In Gratitude* consists of a timeline and some “signature” recipes, as well as brief homilies, letters and reflections she wrote for the writing group at Bethel Place, the seniors residence connected to Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, where she lived.

Her life was certainly worth chronicling, not as a litany of lofty achievements, but as a unique expression of generosity, delight, curiosity, community and faith.

Annie was born in Pincher Creek, Alta., on March 13, 1930. She and her two brothers grew up on the family homestead in Springridge, east of Pincher Creek. Annie wrote about “memorizing Bible verses while herding cattle as they grazed along the roadsides.”

After she completed Grade 9, her schooling was interrupted to care for her ailing mother. At 16, she was baptized at Springridge (Alta.) Mennonite Church. Later, she attended Menno Bible Institute in Didsbury, Alta. Annie then cooked at the school for three winters before taking on kitchen duties at CMBC (now Canadian Mennonite University, CMU) in Winnipeg.

During the summers, Annie cooked at various camps and church events, including the Mennonite Central Committee Native gardening orientations.

She was part of three Winnipeg congregations: Bethel Mennonite Church; then Charleswood Mennonite Church, which grew out of Bethel; and, since 1983, Grain of Wheat Church-Community, where she was very involved.

“I usually sit in the front row,” she wrote in a homily included in her book, “where I experience the ray of light from the Christ candle moving toward me and returning from me to the flame.”

Annie’s story is one of openness—to new experiences, simple blessings and

the deepest acceptance of God.

She took uncommon delight in the mallard duck that nested under the rhubarb plant in her riverside garden plot. In goslings at Betty Kehler’s farm. A grouse drumming in the woods. The Nutcracker ballet enjoyed with a friend she made on a flight into Winnipeg. A ring of bees fast asleep around the centre of a cosmos flower in her garden. A simple homegrown, home-cooked meal with friends. And the beloved cockatiel she gave herself for her 90th birthday.

According to Marvin Hamm, a longtime member of Grain of Wheat, Annie had “an amazing capacity to be amazed.”

Tanya Hoover, whose family gardened alongside Annie for many years, recalls a visit to the Hoover home during which Annie cuddled and doted over the family’s kittens, her heart captured by the little animals. Upon leaving Annie said, “I will remember this for the rest of my life.” Tanya realized that Annie truly meant what she said, and that the sentiment was not unusual. Annie was semi-regularly enthralled, often by plants and animals. And water.

Although she grew up on the dry prairie, Annie loved water, especially natural hot springs, extra especially if there was opportunity to roll in snow or jump into a cold lake in between hot soakings.

Somewhat out of character with her sometimes rigid commitment to simplicity—she did not own a TV, cell phone or microwave for most of her life—Annie’s curiosity and connections took her around the world. In addition to domestic excursions, Annie travelled to 66 countries, often visiting friends. From the fjords of Iceland (a blizzard preempted a Greenland side-trip), and a village in India, to a Mennonite heritage cruise through Ukraine, Annie was on the move (and on the lookout for hot springs).

She attended four Mennonite World Conference assemblies, in the Netherlands, Kansas, France and Winnipeg.

While she never married, and lived alone most of her life, she had a wide



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARVIN HAMM

**Annie Janzen served as cook at Canadian Mennonite Bible College for 27 years.**

and diverse network of friends, created through hospitality, generosity and, to some extent, force of will. I was recalling with my wife a lunch invitation Annie issued when we visited her church many years ago. My wife said fondly, “It was more a command than an invitation.”

Annie could be insistent. And particular. “Things had to be done a certain way,” Hamm said.

“She followed fiercely her sense of who she was called to be in the world,” recalled longtime friend Kate Geiger.

Annie was quick to offer hospitality and she was free to request the help of others, whether transportation to pick rosehips out of town, a place to stay in another country or a helping hand in the garden. Generosity flowed through her life.

Geiger noted Annie’s gift of forming diverse friendships. She took an interest in kids, people of different cultures, people within the church, people who left the church—all were welcome at her table.

Annie was one-of-a-kind. Quirky. Not inhibited by convention. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she took to exchanging items with guests by means of a bucket on a rope let down from her balcony at Bethel Place. She wanted to share a giant parsnip with the Hoover kids, so she let it down from her balcony.

On a visit to the Hoover home for supper in her final months, she insisted on bringing a box of wood scraps from

the shop at Bethel Place to use in the backyard campfire she had requested.

When Geiger gathered an evergreen Christmas bouquet for Annie, she hoisted it up to her balcony and then divvied up the carefully arranged bouquet to parcel out to neighbours.

Geiger feels that Annie's experience of



PHOTO COURTESY OF TANYA HOOVER

*Annie Janzen lowers a prize parsnip to socially distanced friends at Bethel Place.*

being different likely made her more open to others who did not entirely fit in. Geiger said Annie had “a genuine concern that others should not be othered.”

Annie gardened, cooked and hosted as long as she could. The evening before her stroke, she hosted friends for supper. She gardened last summer, although much of the work was done by others. Chris Hoover helped her plant onions and garlic last fall, which now await the spring and whichever person from her large network will receive yet more of her generosity.

In a 2015 homily, Annie shared about a prayer experience that marked her life. Her mother had seen two daughters die—one of whooping cough, another of a ruptured appendix—before Annie came along. When her mother became pregnant with Annie, she was not ready for another child. “I carried the burden of being born of an unwanted pregnancy,” Annie wrote.

Then she recounted praying through the related feelings with others: “I received healing, with Jesus saying to

me, ‘It is I who gave you life at the moment of your conception. Lift up your countenance and be radiant. My presence is within you. You are my child.’ This healing experience has transformed my life. I don’t have to prove myself anymore and I can be gentler in my dealings with other people.”

In a tribute to her brother Peter, who died in 2017, Annie wrote about travelling to Pincher Creek to be with him in his final days. Near the end, he told a visitor: “I’ve given up.” To which the visitor reportedly responded: “Oh but you don’t want to do that.” Annie gently noted that she did not consider the response appropriate. Peter said the same thing to a subsequent visitor, who responded: “Yes, Peter, this is your time of letting go.” This Annie appreciated.

And now she too has let go. ❧

*Annie Janzen established an endowment fund for international students attending CMU. To contribute, visit [abundance.ca](http://abundance.ca).*



### /// For discussion

1. Can you think of people you have known who are not particularly famous, but whose lives are expressions of generosity, love for others and deep faith? In what ways are these people pillars of the church? How important is it to publicly honour their contributions?
2. Will Braun describes Annie Janzen as an unconventional person. What do you find intriguing about her life? Does she remind you of anyone you have known? In what ways was she a good role model for children? What do you think Braun admires most about her?
3. Kate Geiger said about Annie that, “She followed fiercely her sense of who she was called to be in the world.” What are some obstacles that hinder us from following our calling “fiercely”? Do you think we tend to describe fervent followers of Jesus as quirky or unconventional?
4. Annie described her brother’s death as a time of letting go. Under what conditions is this the appropriate way to view the end of life? What are the attitudes and spiritual disciplines that might have helped Annie accept death with awe and gratitude?

—By Barb Draper

See related Biography/  
Autobiography resources at  
[www.commonword.ca/go/2743](http://www.commonword.ca/go/2743)

**CommonWord**  
Bookstore and Resource Centre

## /// Readers write

### ✉ Talking will hopefully lead to learning

Re: “We might learn something” letter, Dec. 6, 2021, page 8.

I definitely agree with Henry Bergen’s comments concerning our need to talk about vaccinations.

I am also “fully vaccinated” and have friends and family members who are not.

I do not see blaming and shunning the unvaccinated as a very positive approach since I see more infections lately being among the vaccinated.

I am challenged by the arguments of the unvaccinated and often must agree. I can certainly understand the scepticism that is present when we are told we should get two vaccinations to protect us from the virus, and then we are told that we need a third, and Israel is now suggesting a fourth vaccination.

I also find it interesting that the approach to the virus is often described as being a war. Treating it as a war means using military-like tactics, like bombing the enemy, rather than looking at other options to resolve the problem.

I see this approach also as a beekeeper and in other agriculture. When a problem occurs, such as a virus, a weed or some other unwanted agent, the approach that is often recommended is to apply a chemical—bomb—solution, rather than look at the underlying problems or use an integrated management approach.

Perhaps we are missing some other underlying problems in society that are contributing to this pandemic, such as environmental and social issues that need to be changed. Perhaps the virus is challenging us to reconsider some of what we consider to be “normal” in our present society.

Maybe we need to talk about this more, and hopefully we will learn something.

JOHN COFFMAN, BEAMSVILLE, ONT.

### ✉ Spreading the love of God with our hands

In mid-November, the Fraser Valley was transformed by floodwater from Mount Baker and by massive amounts of rain. The amount of rain we saw caused lasting fear and disorientation in B.C. that was beyond my imagination.

But neighbours all over British Columbia and the world have responded with generosity. I’ve seen and heard prayers, encouragement and hands-on work from local friends and neighbours to stop floodwaters by sandbagging, and to cook meals and deliver

them to families rebuilding their lives.

Now we continue the multi-year rebuilding efforts as community organizers and volunteers who serve and support our neighbours by rebuilding side-by-side. Churches and community organizations in Yarrow continue to look for the most vulnerable people with the greatest needs, to connect them with available resources.

In the last month, many individuals and congregations have reached out to me and to Yarrow United Mennonite Church, since I’ve been part of organizing and mobilizing volunteers, churches and community stakeholders to serve people most affected by the flood.

Yarrow churches and stakeholder organizations have established a partnership with the Chilliwack Community Service Flood Response Fund to ensure that all donated money goes to the people in need as directly as possible, with the least overhead costs. We continue to be neighbours helping neighbours through the same organizing efforts that catalyzed help at the beginning of the flood. Now we are transitioning into a sustained rehabilitation and rebuilding with larger organizations and volunteers from all over B.C.

My prayer is that all people in the Fraser Valley

*(Continued on page 8)*



**We Declare**  
*what we have seen & heard*

**Gathering 2022** Edmonton, Alberta  
July 29 – August 1, 2022

Join us on Treaty 6 territory as we re-examine what it means to tell the Good News and bear witness to the Gospel of peace.

[mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022](http://mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022)

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*(Continued from page 7)*

will hear stories from every cultural group, church group and neighbour that we learned to know through serving together. The love of God in Christ will spread in this, and I hope you get to celebrate that with us.

DARNELL BARKMAN, YARROW, B.C.

*The writer is pastor of Yarrow United Mennonite Church.*

### ✉ Reader lauds 'a great issue'

**Re: Dec. 6, 2021 issue.**

My compliments on the layout of the Dec. 6 edition. The idea of using a wrap-around photo that flows from the front cover to the back is an excellent one.

Overall, this was a great issue.

PAUL THIESSEN, VANCOUVER

*The writer attends Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship in Vancouver.*

*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](mailto:letters@canadianmennonite.org) and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.*

## /// Milestones

### Wedding

**Hohl/Witmer**—Tristan Hohl and Lauren Witmer (East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.), in Cambridge, Ont., Nov. 19, 2021.

### Deaths

**Berg**—James, 53 (b. May 5, 1968; d. Dec. 23, 2021), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

**Brubacher**—Elizabeth Margaret, 90 (b. Oct. 26, 1931; d. Dec. 24, 2021), Wideman Mennonite, Markham, Ont.

**Edgar**—Bill (William) Roy Stanley, 70 (b. June 17, 1951; d. Oct. 28, 2021), Listowel Mennonite, Ont.

**Gingrich**—Ian M., 85 (b. Dec. 22, 1935; d. Dec. 15, 2021), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

**Hansford**—Muriel Doreen (nee Burkholder), 89 (b. Oct. 30, 1932; d. Dec. 5, 2021), Wideman Mennonite, Markham, Ont.

**Jantzi**—Lloyd Albert, 95 (b. June 30, 1926; d. Dec. 25, 2021), Wellesley Mennonite, Ont.

**Martin**—Abner, 97 (b. Nov. 18, 1924; d. Dec. 24, 2021), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

**Martin**—Elinor, 77 (b. Dec. 31, 1943; d. Nov. 29, 2021), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Martin**—Katie, 36 (b. May 28, 1985; d. Dec. 15, 2021), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Ramseyer**—Mary, 78 (b. April 22, 1943; d. Dec. 7, 2021), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

**Sauder**—Hannah (Lichty), 102 (b. Sept. 30, 1919; d. Dec. 7, 2021), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

**Schlegel**—Florence, 94 (b. June 24, 1927; d. Oct. 20, 2021), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

**Shantz**—Dorothy, 84 (b. June 16, 1937; d. Nov. 24, 2021), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

**Snyder**—Myrtle, 88 (b. April 5, 1933; d. Nov. 23, 2021), Shantz Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

**Thomson**—Leona, 99 (b. April 17, 1922; d. Dec. 21, 2021), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Uttley**—Rod, 74 (b. Dec. 21, 1946; d. Nov. 22, 2021), Elmira Mennonite, Ont.

**Zehr**—Melvin, 89 (b. Aug. 23, 1932; d. Dec. 8, 2021), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.



July 31 – August 4, 2022  
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# Amplify!


Youth Gathering 2022  
*giving voice to what we've seen & heard*



## A Nationwide Youth Gathering!

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**Mennonite Church Canada**  
Our nationwide community of faith



## FROM OUR LEADERS

## ‘What is it that endures?’

Garry Janzen

In this beginning time of 2022, while we are coming out of the dark of winter, and hopefully out of the dark of this pandemic, what is it that endures? Also, what is it that gives us hope?

Jesus has said that the church will endure (Matthew 16:18), and, while we are often seeing that there are fewer people in the pews in our gathered community, our mission to love as Jesus loves endures. It is in our longing to be a part of what God is doing in the world that we find hope, and this longing compels us to be lifelong learners of what we can do and who we can be.

This coming summer, at the Mennonite Church Canada Gathering 2022 in Edmonton, our theme will be: “We declare: What we have seen and heard.”

It will be an opportunity for people in our nationwide church to re-examine what it means to tell the good news, and to share and hear stories of bearing witness to the gospel of peace.

We will learn about what it means to be witnesses to the love of Jesus in the context of this land of both Indigenous and settler peoples. Being educated

about the residential school tragedy and about climate change will empower the church for a better future.

I have been learning about how our messing with nature has led to this past

**Our Creator, who loves the world and the people of the world, endures. God’s love and faithfulness endure and, in this confidence, we find our hope.**

year’s phenomena of a heat dome and atmospheric rivers that led to massive destruction and loss in British Columbia, where I live.

I have been learning about the COVID-19 pandemic and how viruses work, as well as the human capacity for greed amid a global need for vaccine.

In a few days I will be invited to get my third dose of the vaccine, while I also know there are many in other parts of the world who are waiting for their first.

All these educational opportunities empower us with tools to be God’s witnesses in a broken world in a better way.

So, what is it that endures?

Our Creator, who loves the world and the people of the world, endures. God’s love and faithfulness endure and, in this confidence, we find our hope.

The church will endure, even though it may look very different, as we anticipate what our reality and opportunities will be like beyond this pandemic, and as we become a truly intercultural church.

May we hold tightly to this hope, and may we know God’s peace amidst the loss of some of our ways that may not endure. ☸



*Garry Janzen is the executive minister of Mennonite Church B.C.*

## A moment from yesterday



The banner at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada gathering in Vancouver in August 1971 read, “That the world may believe,” based on John 17:21. Palmer Becker, executive secretary of the Commission on Home Ministries of the General Conference, reported on plans for two new initiatives: “Probe ’72,” a Mennonite consultation on evangelism in Minneapolis, Minn.; and “Key ’73,” a trans-denominational effort to share Christ with every person in North America. Becker said that ministers need to equip and mobilize their congregations, and that the purpose of the church is to share God’s love. The problem, said Becker, is that people don’t know how to show God’s love, and people are not sure, “What is the gospel? Where and when should [people] share it?” (From the 1971 conference yearbook, page 32.)

Text: Conrad Stoesz  
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Archives /  
Conference of Mennonites in Canada



archives.mhsc.ca

## IN THE IMAGE

# The 'chicken whisperer'

Ed Olfert

Genesis 1 describes God's creation activity as, among other things, blessing the male/female that God had created, and commanding them to rule over every living creature that moves on the ground. Meanwhile, Indigenous spirituality offers stories of hunters extending thanks to the fallen creature that gave up its life so the hunter's community might have food, shelter, warmth, tools.

A 10-year-old grandson offered a glimpse of what those bits of faith might look like on the ground.

I gathered together our son, his three sons, a granddaughter, and a son-in-law, to butcher chickens. This family hadn't engaged in this activity for 35 years, when a different set of three generations came together. Our three children were pre-teens then, and all have memories of hovering over their grandfather as he dissected gizzards, looking for interesting and shiny bits, while their grandmother demanded he get back to work.

This time, without my mom in charge, there was a lot of figuring it out as we went. My son accessed a YouTube video. Our granddaughter wasn't about to actually get her hands into the process, but she gamely attended to better understand where her food comes from.

Ten-year-old Josh had shown a keen ability as a "chicken-whisperer" last summer, when these hens kept him and his brothers in egg money. Josh would walk to his hens, who gathered around his feet, he would reach down and touch their backs, and they would squat on the ground, whereupon he would pick them up and pet them. There was a calmness to him, a calmness that was strikingly at odds with some of his other personas, such as driving his older or younger brother insane with his teasing.

As the day began, Josh quietly brought his hens to the chopping block. He was there when the de-feathering happened, he watched his dad closely when evisceration began, and was soon managing that operation on his own. He trimmed up hearts and gizzards, again quietly, determinedly.

In every story that I am part of, there is always energy set aside to recognize lessons that sparkle, that offer a bit of truth, a bit of hope. That day, I was drawn to the earnest presence of our Josh.

I realized that the lesson being offered was a lesson of respect, a lesson of offering dignity to these chickens, to every aspect of their reality. While he might have limited language to phrase it, there was an awareness that these

beasts came into his life as a gift, and that sense of giftedness remains as long as they are part of his story. Josh is one of the few in our family who is extroverted, who loves friends and sports and loud storytelling around the table, complete with arms waving and exaggerated facial expressions.

Yet this day was for serious work, respectful work, work that did not lose sight of dignity.

We have possibly heard sermons and theories of what is meant in Genesis by the charge to "rule over every living creature." Do we claim holy permission to run roughshod over the creation around us? I think here about the slaughter of buffalo herds that is a sad part of our history. What is our responsibility?

On the other hand, perhaps we see as hopelessly simplistic and irrelevant that Indigenous peoples posit that every created thing is a gift to us, and is worthy of being thanked, honoured, should we choose to harvest it. That sense of thankfulness also implies responsibility. Perhaps that feels too heavy.

Josh shows a way through. Josh, who exhibits a keen sense of justice, knows something, instinctively, of what God intends, of what the Great Spirit intends, of how to live hopefully. Josh offers respect, simply because he is created in the image of the Holy One. ✎



*Ed Olfert (p2peho@gmail.com) gives thanks for unexpected joy.*

## Et cetera

### 'VBS' a hit with critics

Vacation Bible School is the setting for one of last year's most acclaimed songs. In "VBS," American singer-songwriter Lucy Dacus pays tribute to a summertime romance that took place at a Bible camp when she was a teen. *Time* placed it at No. 4 on its list of the 10 Best Songs of 2021, and it took the No. 5 spot on *Rolling Stone's* list of the 50 Best Songs of the Year. *Time* described Dacus's lyrics as beautifully poetic, writing that they conjure "a whole universe" for listeners, and noting the restlessness and nihilism that course throughout the song. "VBS" appears on Dacus's third full-length recording, *Home Video*, which multiple music publications have named one of the best albums of 2021.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCY DACUS  
Lucy Dacus

## MIND AND SOUL

# On evangelization

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

I am in favour of talking about faith in Jesus. I especially like to do so with those who do not hold to that faith. Some call that “evangelism” and use it as a dirty word. We all know great abuses have occurred doing evangelism. Still, I am in favour of it. I even want to talk about conversion.

Actually, I prefer evangelization to evangelism. (Nit-picking over words. Insert eye-rolling here.) Most words that end in “-ism” are an ideology, an exclusive idea seen as superior to other understandings. A word that ends in “-ation” is a process of bringing forth an increase in the root word. Think of militarism and militarization, urbanism and urbanization, or capitalism and capitalization.

My faith is a product of the simplest of evangelistic practices: Being “born again” by praying the “sinner’s prayer” in the back of the little yellow “Four Spiritual Laws” booklet popularized a few decades ago. Fortunately, I soon learned that to “give my life to Jesus” would be an ongoing process, born anew each day I committed myself to God.

The theme of the Mennonite Church Canada gathering, to be held in Edmonton in July, is “We declare.” At first glance, that seems to focus on

verbally proclaiming. “Declaring” sounds like one-way speaking. But people are multifaceted beings. None are simply ears attached to minds.

The word “evangel” began as “the good news,” transforming from the Greek through Latin into English. to mean “proclaim well the good news.” So evangelism is an ideology of proclamation of the good news, while evangelization is a process of proclaiming it. “Process” implies something that is ongoing and still needing to be completed.

The good news—what is the news that is supposedly good?—needs to be heard and watched, felt, and experienced by whole beings in their bodies, souls, minds and social relations. Any process of evangelization is to act out the gospel in the entirety of human lives—the social, economic, psychological, ecological and spiritual facets.

Mennonites have sought to show the gospel through charitable and other works. We must somehow also explain the reason for our doing. That means using words, but I hope dialogue will be the most active principle of evangelization.

Conversion means to change from one thing to another, like a plain cargo

van converted to something for family camping. Becoming more like Jesus takes time. Conversion is a process. Also, there are many types of conversion.

In the most important Christian document on the environment ever written, Pope Francis refers to “ecological conversion.” He writes in “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” that the result of hearing “the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth” would be an “ecological conversion,” whereby the effects of [Christians’] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.”

Mennonites who wrote the “7 Calls for Climate Action” are doing evangelization with ecological conversion at its core. As one person said, it means more than “Hey Mennos: ‘Eat more lentils!’” Creation’s dire situation summons all of us associated with Mennonite Church Canada to be good news for the poor and for the earth.

Evangelization remains important also because there are many competing ideologies or worldviews with different visions for society. None are pure, and neither are Christian worldviews, but Jesus-followers should keep trying. We evangelize ourselves, as we seek to be transformed like Jesus. ❧

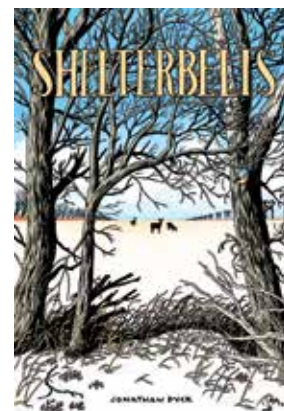


Randolph Haluza-DeLay lives in Toronto.

## Et cetera

### Graphic novel by Mennonite creator set for publication in May

Nova Scotia-based Conundrum Press has announced a new title from creator Jonathan Dyck. *Shelterbelts*, a graphic novel, will arrive in bookstores in May. “Through a series of linked stories, Dyck, who was raised in Winkler, Man., and is based in Winnipeg, weaves a rich tapestry that depicts a close-knit Mennonite community in the midst of defining its future as it reckons with its past,” Conundrum said on social media last month. Dyck’s award-winning illustrations and cartoons have appeared in *Broadview*, *Geez*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Walrus* and the *Globe and Mail*. He designed two books published by Mennonite Church Canada: *Lifting Hearts Off the Ground* and *Unsettling the Word*. *Shelterbelts* is available for pre-order at [conundrumpress.com](http://conundrumpress.com).



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 TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY
 

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# Prayer and lasting

Joshua Penfold

**F**or a few years now, I have felt good about my slow but steady pace of reading reflectively through Scripture. It is a spiritual discipline I've moulded in a way that works for me. Prayer, however, is one that, although certainly not absent from my life, could use some work. I am not uncomfortable praying aloud in a group setting, but it is my private prayer that feels stunted, although not for lack of resources, knowledge or even practice. Perhaps more for lack of discipline, prioritizing and routine.

Reading Nehemiah encourages me regarding prayer. When Nehemiah receives word from his brother about the disrepair of Jerusalem, he despairs. He freely mourns, fasts and prays, and his prayer is recorded in Scripture.

Later, Nehemiah is downcast before the king and, when the king asks what he might do to help, the scriptures say that Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven," then proceeded to continue speaking with the king. Unlike his previous lengthy multi-day fasting and praying, here Nehemiah appears to offer a quick, silent secret prayer, not interrupting the conversation with the king. And even later, Nehemiah will continue to pray for help against their adversaries while both

keeping guard and rebuilding the city walls.

Perhaps it's not that much different from other places, but I noticed the variety of situations in which Nehemiah's prayers were present and how each differed in kind. All this encouraged me and spurred me on a bit. I am reminded how helpful journalling is for me, how often it weaves in and out of prayer.

I'm also reminded of the importance of having a healthy sleep schedule, so I can be up before my girls to get a few minutes to read and pray and reflect before the day's demands. Nehemiah reminds me to offer quick, short, secret prayers throughout my day, recognizing God's presence in all manner of things.

Although I have admired and appreciated Nehemiah's passion and enthusiasm in prayer, I'm a bit disheartened by this book as well. Apparently, it doesn't matter when in history one looks, biblical or church, if there isn't a strong leader continually guiding and coaching the people toward faithfulness, the people tend to fall away.

Nehemiah gets everyone set up in Jerusalem and then goes back to Babylon for a while. Later, upon returning to Jerusalem, he finds things falling apart. It takes Nehemiah's leadership to keep

them on track. This is a reminder of the importance of good leadership, but what does it say about the masses? Why can't the people follow faithfully without a convicting leader?

It reminds me of my youth group days. I had a wonderful, passionate and godly youth pastor. During his time, the youth group grew wildly, and his passion for God was contagious. It certainly had a huge impact on my faith development.

Then, in my last year of youth group, the youth pastor was called elsewhere to another ministry position, not uncommon for youth pastors. But in his absence, despite other youth leaders' attempts, the youth group dwindled. Within a year, a youth group of nearly a hundred dwindled to a dozen. He had been the glue holding us together, and when he left we fell apart, just like the Israelites and Nehemiah.

For a long time, I've wished, wanted and believed that truly healthy communities of faith shouldn't be dependent on a strong leader or leadership team, that a community of believers should be able to communally lead and perpetuate faithfulness. Perhaps that isn't the case, or at least it's not the norm.

Prayer and lasting: two lessons from Nehemiah. ❧



*Joshua Penfold (penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) loves the bewildering, bizarre but beautiful Bible.*

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## Et cetera

### Food Banks Canada releases Hunger Count 2021

- One-in-four food banks in Canada, located in larger, urban centres, saw usage more than double compared to two years earlier.
- One-third of clients are children, even though they only represent 19 percent of the general population.
- 27 percent of Canadians accessing food banks are on fixed incomes such as pensions or disability benefits.
- Food-bank demand in larger, urban centres was more likely to be attributed to job loss. Urban food banks were also more likely to be accessed by racialized populations than food banks in other regions.

Source: Food Banks Canada



## VIEWPOINT

# Climate-change vision must develop and strengthen

Andre Wiederkehr

**M**any of us in the Mennonite church have become deeply disturbed and moved by the crisis of climate change. How can we turn our fear into acts of love?

The “7 Calls to Climate Action for Mennonite Church Canada” represents the vision of a grassroots committee of nine, now affirmed by several hundred signatories. I signed, but I didn’t agree with everything. Somehow the vision needs to keep developing and strengthening until it is shared by the whole church. That means we need your voice! Come, join the conversation at the “7 Calls Town Hall” (<https://bit.ly/3t6xq56>), where you can find a fuller version of my thoughts.

Fossil fuels are unsustainable “from both ends”: the supply will run out and leave us stranded, while the wastes produced are also catastrophically destabilizing the climate. Is climate change really the problem? I would say it’s a symptom of a larger problem: Unsustainability, or living based on short-term solutions.

A deadly part of our society’s paradigm is a linear approach to resource use. We extract raw materials, make useful things, use them up and dispose of the wastes. We interact in the linear mode with many resources, both short-cycle/renewable and practically non-renewable ones. If we see climate change as the problem, and only try to solve that, the cascading shortages and damages that accompany linear resource use will continue in other forms.

If we have love for the diversity and health of creation, including future humans, we must learn and practise a way of life that won’t run out and won’t

poison a way that can be sustained for the long term. This will, by its nature, be restrained and in balance with the rest of the earth.

We must not produce waste products as we currently understand them, but only materials which, while no longer useful to us, are useful to some other system or organism, and thus cycle back to being the material resources we need at, or above, the rate we use them.

The practical limitations of transport require this cycling to happen very locally, and this directs us to a grassroots, rather than top-down, approach. Working cyclically usually means working in biological systems—ecosystems—rather than geological or mining-based systems.

Our work and our travel must be powered by the sun in non-industrial ways: simple mechanisms, biomass and food. From where we are now, a transition to this way of life will seem inconvenient, involve a significant relinquishing of autonomy, and require most of us to work much harder than we are used to. It will be unfamiliar and mean dramatic material cutbacks, and that will hurt.

A core tension I see in environmental movements, including the “7 Calls,” is between political action and individual action. Political action is appealing because of the potential to mandate large-scale changes. Yet we cannot assume that democratic politics is aligned with the holistic love God calls us to, and, in this case, I believe it is not.

I think that, as a Christian, my response to the ecological crisis must be to act as an individual on a local scale, to do the concrete work I feel must be done, rather than waiting for others to

do it or lead me through it. There is so much we need to rethink, unlearn, discover and learn. If we work in isolation, the task is overwhelming.

I believe humans are made for community and relationship, and working together could be more effective, joyful and comprehensive. Still, the only person I can change is myself.

We cannot rationally expect all of society to choose the way I am describing. For all the beauty it could bring, it will, as I said, hurt. Yet to avert the specific catastrophe of climate change, we need action from all of society.

Does this mean that faithfulness is futile? Maybe. When Jesus gets arrested and crucified, and shows no sign of calling in legions of angels or coming down from the cross, is his revelatory movement over? Maybe; you tell me.

Maybe the impractical, lonely, sacrificial way is the only road to God’s kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven. God’s kingdom is other, not modelled on our kingdoms. We are ultimately called to fidelity, not pragmatism.

So let us—and I mean all of us, from MC Canada to regional churches to congregations to individual believers—live out fidelity, and wait to see what God might do. ☸



*Andre Wiederkehr (andre.c.wiederkehr@gmail.com) would love to discuss with others how to live with faith. He attends Hanover (Ont.) Mennonite Church.*

## NEWS

# ‘We see that we are in the hands of God’

*MCC sends food and relief to Cubans in crisis*

By Jason Dueck  
Mennonite Central Committee

The situation in Cuba was incredibly dire when a shipment of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) relief kits and canned food arrived.

“People have told me they haven’t had an egg or any kind of meat for six months,” says Bonnie Klassen, MCC area director for South America and Mexico. “They’re out of toothpaste, so they’re brushing their teeth with soap. And not even commercial soap, mind you, but soap they’ve made themselves.”

So, when the Brethren in Christ Church of Cuba (BICCC) distributed some 20,000 kilograms of MCC relief kits, hygiene kits and canned chicken, it was cause for celebration and thanksgiving.

“We are grateful because today we see the answer to our prayers, what we have been praying for over a long time,” says José Gonzalez, pastor of the BICCC church in Santa Clara. “We see that what we thought was impossible is possible. We see that we are in the hands of God. Thank you for this help.”

Cuba’s desperate position is the result of a combination of factors. The island continues to feel the effects of the U.S. embargo, which has banned most trade between the U.S. and Cuba for 60 years. In 2020, new restrictions made it harder for Cubans abroad to send money back home. And the last two years have seen pandemic travel restrictions deprive Cubans of one of their most important sources of income: tourism.

Without a steady stream of beachgoers coming in and out of the country, Cuba’s



BICCC PHOTO BY RAMON GUIZA

**Rafaela Fuentes Duarte with the items from the MCC hygiene kit and canned meat she received through the Brethren in Christ Church of Cuba.**

already hampered economy is barely hanging on. The country hasn’t seen scarcity like this since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

“When I asked what would be most useful to send,” says Klassen, “the answer I’d always get was, send anything and it will be useful because almost everything is lacking.”

MCC doesn’t have a formal presence in Cuba but has sent relief there in the past. Over the last few years, MCC has sent relief funds that partners like BICCC could use to buy and distribute food and supplies locally. However, Cuba’s reality now is that all the money in the world can’t buy food from empty store shelves.

Shipping anything to Cuba from North America is complicated, to say the least. It’s entirely legal to ship humanitarian relief there, but difficult to find companies willing to do it because of the perceived risk of operating under the U.S.’s far-reaching embargo. But through the hard work of MCC’s material resource coordinators, more than 17,000 cans of canned chicken, 800 hygiene kits that included toothpaste, and 840 relief kits arrived in Cuba in September 2021.

Even knowing the grim state things are in, the response from the Cubans who received these items was almost overwhelming, says Klassen.

“In the first couple of days, one of the people in the church sent me a WhatsApp voice message, and he was literally in tears because of the feminine-hygiene products,” she says. “Women had not seen feminine-hygiene products for a very long time. And that was just very meaningful. I mention that because it’s just, I think, highly unusual for men to start crying about that. And later they just went on and on about all the things that they’re making with canned chicken.” ❧

# 'The right thing to do'

*Hay donated through MDS Hay West by Ontario farmer arrives in Saskatchewan*

By John Longhurst  
Mennonite Disaster Service

It was a bright, clear day as Chris Freur and his father Ralph watched bales of hay being loaded into a trailer on their farm in Smithville, Ont. The donated hay, all 50 bales of it, was destined for Saskatchewan through MDS Hay West, headed to the farm of Curtis Mattson in Meacham, Sask.

"When I heard about the drought out west, I wanted to help out," said Freur, 46.

Freur, who runs a small dairy and poultry operation in that Niagara Peninsula location, watched the hay coming off his fields and thought of the farmers in Saskatchewan struggling with one of their worst droughts in years. He also remembered back to 2012, when farmers in that province helped farmers in Ontario by sending hay east when they were struggling with their own drought conditions.

"They helped farmers here when we needed it," said Freur. Giving back, he said, "was the right thing to do."



PHOTO BY GRANT UNRAU

**Curtis Mattson watches the sunrise before unloading donated hay in Saskatchewan.**

In Meacham, Mattson was grateful for the donated hay from the Freur farm. "It looked really good," said Mattson, 67, who has been raising cattle for 50 years.

Mattson normally can get two bales an acre on his farm to feed his cattle during the winter months. "This year I



PHOTO BY NICHOLAS HAMM

**Jake Peliero, left, who also donated hay earlier, Chris and Ralph Freur, and John the driver who took the load to Saskatchewan.**

got one-quarter bale," he said.

The summer had been tough, with so little rain.

"We got some rain in June, but after that there was nothing," he said. "It's one of the most moisture-challenged years I've ever seen."

Some hay is available in the province, "but it's very expensive now," he said.

Mattson is planning to sell some of his herd to cope. "I can't keep them all," he said.

A couple days after the hay arrived in Saskatchewan, Mattson and Freur talked over the phone.

"I want to thank you very much," Mattson told Freur. "I'm really up against it."

"I'm just glad we could help," Freur replied. "I'm glad we could help keep you going."

"You didn't have to do it, but really glad you did," Mattson said. "It gives me some optimism to know there are people out there who are trying to help us."

MDS Hay West was created by the Mennonite Disaster Service Saskatchewan and Ontario units to respond to the weather-disaster-affected farmers in Saskatchewan.

To date, 31 transport-trailer loads of hay have been donated by Ontario farmers to MDS Hay West. Twenty-six have been shipped; 24 more farmers in Saskatchewan are awaiting hay. ❧

*Farmers in Ontario who want to donate hay can call Lester Weber (519-584-4171) or Delmer Erb (519-897-4330). Farmers in Saskatchewan who need hay can call Daryl Bueckert (306-717-3987) or Ike Epp (306-342-7921). An application form for hay can be found at <https://mds.mennonite.net/mds-canada-launches-hay-west-to-deliver-hay/>. People who want to donate towards the cost of transporting the hay west can do so at [www.mds.org](http://www.mds.org).*



# Thriving at Thrift on Mill

Story and Photos by Charleen Jongejan Harder

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

LEAMINGTON, ONT.

It may be a pandemic, but Thrift on Mill in Leamington, a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Thrift store, had its highest grossing month of all time in November 2021.

General manager Cindy Epp says that, after the lockdowns of last winter lifted, there was an initial flood of donations. At first, staff expected that it was going to settle down, but donations are up and have stayed up.

Epp attributes some of that support to a national social media campaign that helps connect thrift to a demographic that doesn't connect to radio or paper media, where Thrift advertises strongly. Customers are loyal, she says, and some are buying more than ever.

The wider community recognizes the value of Thrift to Leamington, honouring it

with a Heritage Award for over 35 years of dedicated service. The store first operated in Leamington under the name of the Et Cetera Shoppe on Erie Street in 1982 and, in 2016, moved to a new building on Mill Street, and took on its new name: Thrift on Mill. It will celebrate 40 years in the community this year.

Creation care is one value that Thrift on Mill is proud to engage in. When it can “next-cycle, up-cycle, or recycle” items, it does, according to Epp. This value shows up in most places in the organization. It has stopped buying plastic bags for customers and encourages them to bring their own reusable bags. The book section has secured a partnership with correctional facilities to receive appropriate soft-cover books. Through a battery-recycling program, metals are separated

for scrap and recycling. As well, surplus clothing is redirected from the landfill.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of Thrift on Mill. They give of their time for two primary reasons: mission and community. Many of the senior volunteers are grateful for the support of MCC either for themselves or for their close family members. Their own family experiences in Russia led them to want to contribute to those less fortunate. And while Thrift on Mill is not yet able to resume some of the community traditions they enjoyed pre-pandemic, like coffee breaks, community connection remains a strong gift for volunteers.

“We’ve become nostalgic for the little things we had: 35 people gathered in the kitchen for snacks,” Epp says.

Herb and Mary Lou Enns have been



Cindy Epp, general manager of Thrift on Mill in Leamington, Ont., assumed her role three weeks before the pandemic hit in early 2020.





**Alfred Driedger, 87, refurbishes the sewing machines at Thrift on Mill.**

volunteering for Thrift on Mill for 15 years. Mary Lou started in the book department with her sister-in-law, and she ensures that the books are in top condition. Herb started working in furniture and hardware, and transitioned to the electrical department. He doesn't have set hours at this point, he just goes in, sees what there is to do and gets it done.

John Wiens is known as "the clock guy," with over 35 years of experience. He has the skills and parts at home to repair and refurbish all sorts of clocks.

Alfred Driedger does the same for the sewing machines. At 87, he continues to take home donated sewing machines to test, oil and ensure they are in perfect working order. He will work on everything from a 100-year-old machine to last year's model. He also spends some time on the floor providing ambient music with his harmonica and accordion. He has even designed a specialty mask that allows him to continue with the harmonica while complying with masking guidelines.

Cheryl Willms and "the linen ladies" set the standard for how fabric is folded. They recently lost a rag-cutting volunteer; as people age out, sometimes that shifts what the store can do.

"There's an ownership over the work the volunteers do," says Epp. "Every volunteer gives 100 percent of themselves. . . . It helps to have a sense of humour; we joke or we go crazy."

COVID-19 brought a lot of challenges into the setting, from reducing shifts to less than a quarter and not gathering with large groups of friends, to dealing with anti-maskers in the store and navigating different opinions on the team.

"Change is tough," she says, "so we find things to celebrate while we wait for things to normalize. For some time, we have stressed that this is a 'COVID-free' zone; we try to keep comments about COVID to outside the building. All things end at some point, and we will come to an end of COVID-19."

Epp, who began her position three weeks before the pandemic was declared in 2020, adds: "It has caused me to have more grace, and grow my ability to have grace when someone is not behaving at their best. Everyone is carrying a lot right now. We will come through this stronger, I believe. What matters is that we are all children of God in Christ." ❧

## ❧ MC U.S.A. responds to National Defense Authorization Act



**Sue Park-Hur**

ELKHART, IND.—Mennonite Church U.S.A. has released a statement on the value and morality of the 2022 U.S. defence budget in response to the National Defense

Authorization Act, approved by the U.S. Senate on Dec. 15, 2021, and signed into law by President Joe Biden on Dec. 27. "Budgets are moral documents, reflecting what we value and prioritize collectively as a nation," says the statement, which calls for congregations and members to weigh the financial and moral cost of the US\$770 billion defence budget in comparison to national and global needs for COVID-19 vaccinations, health care, safe drinking water and humanitarian aid. The statement recommends ways MC U.S.A. congregations can take action against the budget decision. The statement was written with the Mennonites Against Militarism (MAM) reference council, a collaborative resourcing initiative that seeks to reinvigorate the collective voice against the destructive powers of militarism. MAM includes MC U.S.A.'s mission agency, Mennonite Mission Network, and Mennonite Central Committee U.S. "As Anabaptists, we follow the way of Jesus who resisted violence, even to his death on a cross," said Sue Park-Hur, MC U.S.A. denominational minister for transformative peacemaking. "We have a long tradition of being active peace witnesses and working for justice. Knowing how our national treasure is being spent, we cannot stay silent."

—MENNONITE CHURCH U.S.A.



# 'There is still hope'

*Korea Anabaptist Center celebrates 20 years of resourcing, networking and service*

By Katie Doke Sawatzky  
Mennonite Church Canada

On Dec. 11, 2021, the Korea Anabaptist Center (KAC) in Chuncheon, South Korea, celebrated its 20th anniversary.

While a fourth wave of COVID-19 in South Korea moved celebrations online, around 30 people came together over Zoom to mark the special anniversary.

"It was very meaningful," says Bock Ki Kim, a Witness worker with Mennonite Church Canada.

live into communities that reflect and promote God's ministry of reconciliation," says Tim Froese, one of KAC's founding co-directors, and a former Witness worker in South Korea with MC Canada.

Froese and his family moved to South Korea in 1998 in response to an invitation from Jesus Village Church (JVC), to help create a more formal institute to introduce Koreans to Anabaptism.

There was growing enrolment by Korean students in North American seminaries in the 1990s. In South Korea, alumni of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship and Campus Crusade for Christ, inspired by William Estep's *The Anabaptist Story*, formed JVC, a community-oriented congregation in Chuncheon, in the 1990s. Numerous other independent churches formed as well, he says.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOCK KI KIM

*Celebrations for the Korea Anabaptist Center's 20th anniversary were online this year.*

Among the group were the founding directors of the centre, other former directors and board chairs.

The centre, established on Nov. 2, 2001, grew out of what still continues to be a burgeoning interest in Anabaptism in South Korea.

"Although there were many challenges and unknowns in the beginning, God has been faithful in providing people, places and resources, and empowering KAC staff, volunteers and friends to courageously

JVC's invitation was the result of decades of relationship building between Korean Christians and the former Commission on Overseas Mission, Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). MCC had formed the Mennonite Vocational School and worked in South Korea for several decades leading up to the 1970s.

Froese says that before KAC was established, Korean Christians were looking for "alternative visions of being church."

In its first decade, KAC worked with other Mennonite organizations to offer opportunities for international students to come to learn, such as through MCC's youth service programs and the Connexus English Program.

Some of the longest serving workers from MC Canada were Erwin and Marian Wiens (2002-05, 2010-12), Cheryl Woelk (2002-08), and Bock Ki Kim and Sook Kyoung Park (2013 to the present). Over the past two decades, 25 people have

travelled from Canada to serve with KAC.

KAC has supported the formation of multiple organizations and initiatives over the years, some of which have begun their own robust forms of Anabaptist education in South Korea:

- **Korean Anabaptist Fellowship** (2010).
- **Korean Peacebuilding Institute** (2011). Now led by former KAC co-director Jae-Young Lee.
- **Northeast Asia Regional Peace Institute** (2011).
- **Northwest Christian Forum for Peace**, which is an annual gathering by Christians from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Korea and Japan (2014).
- **Mennonite Church South Korea** (2016).
- **Korean Anabaptist Journal** (2012) and **Peace Journal** (2020)

Kim served as director of KAC from 2015 to 2018, translating Anabaptist resources into Korean and editing the Korean Anabaptist Journal, a semi-annual

publication connecting Korean Anabaptists across the globe.

While the KAC steering committee continues to discuss the centre's vision for the future, its present director, SunJu Moon, emphasizes three current roles: education, service and resource development.

KAC recruits church members to teach Korean to international students and to show them hospitality, Moon says. It also supports restorative justice work with local schools, to aid in conflict resolution.

"I believe that one of KAC's roles is to console Korean Christians who are so deeply disappointed by churches and pastors," says Moon. "Many Christians leave the church . . . since they can't see any hope from the churches. KAC communicates there is still hope and encourages people to follow Jesus."

The centre, located in Chuncheon since 2012, has held two conferences a year since 2016, on topics related to Anabaptism, such as discipleship, peace

and community.

Moon says the centre focuses on "bringing peace to Korean churches and society" by networking with other organizations and providing them with the many materials KAC has published over the last two decades.

"We are building up the brotherhood and sisterhood to support each other," Moon says.

As KAC embarks on its 21st year, its friends celebrate not only the centre's journey, but the involvement and commitment of organizations and people around the world to the centre's vision.

"KAC would not exist without the searching, study, courage, dedication, collaboration and gifts of many Korean brothers and sisters in South Korea, Canada, U.S.A. and beyond," says Froese. ❧



## ❧ News brief

### Mennonite siblings win big on *The Voice*

Last year was a big one for Girl Named Tom, a sibling band composed of Mennonites from Pettisville, Ohio. On Dec. 14, Caleb, Joshua and Bekah Liechty became the first group to win the NBC singing competition *The Voice*. Competing on the show's 21st season resulted in international exposure, US\$100,000 and a recording contract for the siblings, who are members of Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, Ohio. Formed in 2019, Girl Named Tom toured the United States—which included visiting Mennonite churches, camps and colleges—prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. "We love to make harmonies together, and a lot of that is thanks to the Mennonite church and the a capella singing tradition—and our parents," Caleb said during a performance recorded for the 2021 Mennonite Church U.S.A. convention. *The Voice*'s celebrity judges, Kelly Clarkson, John Legend, Ariana Grande and Blake Shelton, each wanted to work with Girl Named Tom following the group's "blind audition"

in September. The siblings chose Clarkson as their coach. Now that the competition is over, the group is working on an album. "We've got some great music and we can't wait to share it," Caleb said on *The Ellen Show*. "It'll be out next year and we'll hopefully tour the country. . . . We've got big dreams."

—BY AARON EPP



Joshua, Bekah and Caleb Liechty.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIRL NAMED TOM

# Hands-on learning

*Pandemic creates opportunities to learn in new ways*

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent

Throughout COVID-19, schools and universities across the country have moved between learning in the classroom and online remotely. But what about education happening outside of traditional academic settings?

Many people have taken the different rhythm of life the pandemic has created as an opportunity to start learning and teaching in new ways.

When asked on Twitter and Facebook whether any Mennonites have been learning new skills during COVID-19, more than 30 people responded. Mennonites ranging from 20-year-olds to those in their 90s, from across Manitoba and even as far as Oregon and South Carolina, shared about their ventures.

Many crocheted, knitted, weaved and sewed, while others learned to compose music and play instruments like the guitar, bass and stick dulcimer. Some made cheese, *portzelky* (new year's cookies) or beef rouladen for the first time. One person even built a canoe in his garage.

As our dependency on screens skyrocketed, more people began to reclaim the tactile knowledge that some are forgetting in this digital age:

• **Jess Klassen** of Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, has been sewing most of her own clothes for a while. When the pandemic began, she created an Instagram account (@storiesoftextiles) to share her projects and engage in the online sewing and slow-fashion community.

"The act of creating during the pandemic has been life-giving for me," she says. "Amidst the various waves, periods of isolation, uncertainty and relentless parenting, I have prioritized making time to create with my hands. In addition to sewing, I've picked up crocheting and punch needle during the pandemic. I learn new stitches and techniques on YouTube

and get continual advice and inspiration from the making community on Instagram. . . .

"[It] adds new beauty and connection to my daily life. It not only connects me to new friends, but it connects me to generations past, particularly my grandmothers, who were avid seamstresses, makers and rug hookers.

"My parents share new stories with me about their memories of their mothers' making during their childhoods, and I can only hope that my kids also have fond memories of new creations in the house and yarn on the bottom of their socks."

• **Emily Stobbe-Wiebe** of Carman (Man.) Mennonite Church, meant to start quilting five years ago but put it off when life got busy. Then pandemic lockdowns hit.

"Just before Christmas I thought to myself, 'This is silly. It will never be less busy than this. I might as well get started,'" she says. "So, I went to Fabricland and bought supplies and borrowed a sewing machine. I reached out to a woman at church, whom I knew did quilting, and she has been answering my questions. I greatly appreciate having someone to guide me through the process of learning a new skill. . . .

"I miss learning new things, not being in school at the moment. I get a lot of joy from creating useful things, and repetitive, methodical work helps me de-stress. . . .

"I am at the beginning of this practice, so it can still be very frustrating, and I have a lot to learn. But in many ways, I am thankful for the way the pandemic has allowed me the space to be solitary, to think and reflect, to understand myself and what is really important to me, what helps me be a healthy person."

• **Nadya Langelotz** of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, started taking a pottery class during COVID-19.



COURTESY OF NADYA LANGELOTZ

*Nadya Langelotz displays one of the pottery pieces she created.*

"I'm learning to let myself explore with the base knowledge I now have; with shapes when I'm throwing on the wheel, with designs in the clay, with different glazes. Sometimes I feel myself playing it safe, and then I get this urge to do something wildly different and . . . I'm able to give in to that feeling of wildness, or exploration, and that feels really good. . . .

"I love that I can hold each of the pieces I make and remember the process of it. Also, that I can give them away. As an aspiring poet, so many of my 'homemade' gifts are words, which, while important, don't always feel like what needs to be received. You can't hold words in the same way you can hold a mug and drink coffee from it."

• **Matthew Froese**, who attends First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, learned to make *paska* (Easter bread) when the pandemic prevented him from gathering with family and church friends who always provided it.

"I did some yeast baking with my grandma many years ago, and memories of her *paska* were my benchmark. I found that making *paska* helped me feel a little more like Easter was still happening. It still smelled and tasted like Easter, and when we had a virtual family gathering

on Zoom, a number of us showed the *paska* we'd made! . . .

"I think the tactile and sensory piece is valuable because it can help root us in our traditions when things have changed so much during the pandemic.

"You can't talk about these things without sharing about the people who you learned these traditions from. For me, all *paska* is compared to the way Grandma made it: loaf pan, glazed with rainbow sprinkles and cheese spread!"

• **Tara Epp**, Anna Goertzen Loepky and Katrina Woelk Balzer, all alumna of Canadian Mennonite University, participated in a One Year One Outfit project in 2021. They worked together to create clothing using only fibres and dyes from within the Pembina Fibreshed, the region within a 200-mile radius of Manitoba's Pembina River.

"I planted coreopsis seeds in the spring and harvested the bright yellow and deep red flowers throughout the summer and dried them for dying later," Goertzen Loepky says. "Much of my life in the past year has been on Zoom calls, so being able to grow flowers and attempt to make slippers with wool from a sheep named Magni has been joyful and life giving."

Epp adds, "I have been learning to spin yarn from raw wool . . . I have learned a lot about how much time and work it takes to source the materials locally and make the items for our outfit . . . Also, because these projects are so hands-on and use a lot of repetitive movements, it is soothing and peaceful and has certainly contributed to my mental health throughout the pandemic." ❧



**Tara Epp, left, Anna Goertzen Loepky and Katrina Woelk Balzer worked together to create clothing using only local fibres and dyes.**

# Christian Aid Ministries hostages released

By Barb Draper  
Editorial Assistant

**A**fter a two-month ordeal in Haiti, the last 12 kidnapped staff members of Christian Aid Ministries made their way to freedom on Dec. 16, 2021.

Seventeen people were taken hostage by the "400 Mawozo" gang in October. Christian Aid Ministries (CAM), which is supported by Amish and Conservative Mennonite churches across Canada and the U.S., confirmed the safe return of its staff members in a press release on Dec. 20.

"Everyone, including the 10-month-old baby, the three-year-old boy and the six-year-old boy, seem to be doing reasonably well," David Troyer, CAM's general director, said in the release. "We thank Almighty God, who so wonderfully answered our prayers!"

The hostages were not hurt or abused during their captivity. They were provided with food and water, though it was barely adequate. Hygiene supplies and sleeping mattresses were also provided but they were limited. The hostages were pleased that they were not separated and were able to sing and pray together. They were also thankful that they had the opportunity to be allowed outdoors in the daytime and that the children were well provided for.

Two hostages were released on Nov. 20 and another three on Dec. 5. No reason was given for these releases and CAM did not comment on whether any ransom had been paid.

The last 12 hostages believe that it was God who led them to escape. In the middle of the night on Dec. 15, they were able to quietly make their way out of the house where they were confined. They walked about 15 km. to freedom. They had planned the direction of their escape because in daylight, in the distance, they could see a mountain landmark that they recognized.



**David Troyer, general director of Christian Aid Ministries, addressed the public in a video message on Dec. 20.**

Throughout the difficult journey they felt that God was leading them to safety and at dawn they found someone who helped them make a phone call for assistance. Later that day they all flew to Florida, where they were reunited with the other hostages who had been freed earlier.

Troyer credits the staff members' safe return to many prayers, not only by the hostages, but also by their friends, families and churches. His Dec. 20 statement included a message to the gang responsible for the kidnapping.

"We do not know all of the challenges you face," Troyer said. "You caused our hostages and their families a lot of suffering. However, Jesus taught us by word and by His own example that the power of forgiving love is stronger than the hate of violent force. Therefore, we extend forgiveness to you."

The headquarters for Christian Aid Ministries is in Berlin, Ohio, with Canadian headquarters in Moorefield, Ont. The organization was founded in 1981, and it has been working in Haiti for 30 years. ❧

# Building connections in Japan

*Couple seeks to strengthen relationships between Japanese and Canadian churches*

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell  
B.C. Correspondent

**F**inding ways to help Japanese and Canadian churches connect with each other is one goal of a pastoral couple serving in Japan after years of ministry in British Columbia.

When Gerald Neufeld, pastor of Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship in Surrey, B.C., and his wife Rie felt a call to return to Japan, their family moved there last year.

Neufeld continues as pastor of the B.C. congregation, giving online messages once a month. He is on sabbatical until the end of March, and is using the time to upgrade his Japanese language skills and reflect on his personal calling.

“Most Japanese churches in North America and in Japan are very small, but if we can build connections online, we can function as a larger family, sharing resources,” Gerald says.

The Neufelds’ goal is to help build connections between people and churches in Japan and Canada.

“One challenge that we face is that it’s tempting for people to slip into doing things according to an old model where the powerful churches send money and resources overseas to the ‘needy’ people,” Gerald says. “Our hope is to somehow build relationships that are more reciprocal, where sharing happens both ways. An exchange program can be developed. Right now, we’re waiting for the renovations with the Anabaptist Centre to be started and completed, so

that we can move in.”

He says the centre needs to be upgraded to withstand earthquakes.

The Neufelds arrived in Tokyo just before the borders were closed to foreigners due to COVID-19. They have been visiting churches in Yayoidai, Honancho and Minuma, and living in the Yayoidai Brethren in Christ church house in Kodaira City until the Anabaptist Centre renovations are complete.

They are spending time getting to know



*Gerald and Rie Neufeld, pictured at his ordination celebration at Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship in 2019, are seeking to build reciprocal relationships with churches in Japan and Canada.*

the people of the Tokyo Area Fellowship of Mennonite Churches, finding out what their vision is for the future and learning from them.

The Neufelds hope to clarify their role by April.

“One style of leadership is to have a catalyst/ambassador-style role rather than standing out as a full-time missionary, yet we need more clarity as to how,” says Gerald. “We are in conversation with representatives of Mennonite Church British Columbia and MC Canada Witness. With their help, we hope to be able to clarify our role, which would be different than that of traditional mission workers. We’d then have a new title, which is important in Japan especially. The Tokyo people need to know that we’re not just coming on our own, but that we also represent others and have a formal role.”

## Staff change

### Pastoral transition in Saskatchewan



**Paul Matheson** was installed as pastor of First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon on Jan. 9. He has been involved in pastoral ministry since 1984, most recently

serving as pastor of First Baptist Church in Saskatoon from 2000 to 2018. He earned a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Guelph, Ont.; a master of divinity degree from McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ont.; and a doctor of ministry degree from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Ill. “I’ve always appreciated the broader vision for church life that is seen across different traditions,” Matheson says. “I hope to provide good pastoral care as I get to know the congregation better.” Matheson is the father of three adult children. Matheson and his wife Lindsay reside in Saskatoon. Matheson replaces Rod Suderman, who pastored First Mennonite since 2016.

—BY EMILY SUMMACH

# 'A tremendous honour'

*Outgoing MC Saskatchewan executive minister reflects on his tenure*

By Emily Summach  
Saskatchewan Correspondent  
SASKATOON

"I'm very grateful for my time with Mennonite Church Saskatchewan," says Ryan Siemens, current executive minister of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. "It's been wonderful getting to know the congregations, the pastors, the denominational leaders and just to connect with people who want to do the work of the church."

Siemens wraps up his time with MC Saskatchewan at the end of January. He will begin as executive director of Mennonite Central Committee Alberta starting in February.

Siemens joined the MC Saskatchewan family in 2007 as the pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Prince Albert. He put his leadership gifts and people skills to work quickly.

approached about considering the executive minister position. "I was asked, 'If your church asked you to take on this role, what would you say?' I said, 'I'd have to think and pray about it.' 'Well, the church is asking you!'" he says with a laugh.

Siemens began the half-time position in August 2015, moving to full time in the spring of 2016.

His six years as executive minister have included changes and challenges.

"When I started, there was a lot of wrestling about Future Directions and the reorganization of MC Canada," he says. "How do we integrate? That was a huge task. And when I started, there were 29 MC Saskatchewan congregations, and now there are 22. That's indicative of a

ways of being faithful," he says. "We just need to be more open. I always say, 'It's easier to die than it is to change.' But we need to change to see something new, to broaden our imaginations. We have to find the energy for change. And for MC Canada to have a future, it has to be one that is integrated to the regions."

He acknowledges that Mennonite churches often struggle to connect with their neighbours, and with welcoming those who are not ethnically Mennonite. In spite of the challenges that lie ahead for the church, for Siemens, the strength of MC Saskatchewan is found in the people who make up the individual congregations.

"We're very interconnected here: our pastors, our churches, our councils, and our pastoral leadership commission," he says. "There is such a desire to be the church together."

Siemens observed that strength up close. One of the fondest memories of his tenure were the all-congregation interviews he conducted with several churches. "I loved sitting down with people, hearing their stories, and asking, 'Where do you want to go as a church?' Hearing those stories of faith and hope was a big part of why I loved his role."

The warm feelings were mutual. At one annual delegates session, a loonie and toonie collection was taken up to buy Siemens, who is diehard Winnipeg Blue Bombers fan, his very own Saskatchewan Roughriders jersey. The jersey was emblazoned on the back with "MC Sask" and "No. 59," a reference to 1959, the year that the Conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan started. "It's one of my all-time-favourite memories," he says with a chuckle.

Ultimately, Siemens expresses gratitude for his six years in this role.

"MC Saskatchewan gave me space to do the work and to connect with our congregations," he says. "I've been deeply privileged to have the trust to do this work. I'm thankful for all the opportunities I've had, and I hope that I've been able to bring people together as we strive to be the Body of Christ. I love the people I've served."%



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RYAN SIEMENS

*Ryan Siemens ordains Susanne Guenther-Loewen in June 2021.*

"I was sort of always involved broadly in leadership at MC Saskatchewan, being on committees, being involved with Person to Person [prison] ministry, and serving as the vice moderator," he says. "It was a great place to test out and grow my leadership skills."

In the summer of 2015, he was

bigger trend of the decline of Christianity and the rise of secularity."

Still, as Siemens moves on, he sees hopeful possibilities for MC Saskatchewan and MC Canada.

"Because of the decline in Christianity, there is so much potential for new things, new ways of doing church, new

# Working in a life-giving job is the silver lining

By Angelika Dawson  
Communitas Supportive Care Society  
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

There are not many people these days who can say they have been in a job they love for 25 years, but Jeff Nickel says exactly that. As he celebrates his silver anniversary working with the Communitas Supportive Care Society, he reflects on the many reasons he has stayed.

I became a residential support worker (RSW) and that's what I've been doing ever since," he says. "The draw was being able to support and care for people who gave me so much in return."

In his time as an RSW, Nickel says he has learned a lot from the people he

serve as they share their vulnerability with us," he says.

Louise Duck manages the home where Nickel has worked for the last seven years. She struggles to find adequate words to acknowledge him in the way she feels he deserves. "Jeff is the perfect definition of a 'gentle soul,'" she says. "He is kind, calm, has a gentle approach and a tender disposition. He is soothing to be around and he really knows how to support a person who is non-verbal, to just be."

While Nickel brings his own character and gifts to the job, he is grateful for the training that Communitas has given him. Specific training through Gentle Teaching and The Mandt System have been invaluable both in how he interacts with the people he serves and with his colleagues, he says.

It's made a difference to him personally as well. "These trainings have helped me in all of my relationships, especially in being a better parent in my family," he says.

Having a great team to work with and managers who support him have been other silver linings in his work. Nickel says he has come to appreciate the value of doing a good job amidst a daily routine. He is grateful for a workplace that emphasizes celebration. Having co-workers that come from many parts of the world, who bring their life experience into the home, makes each day special.

Having to pivot quickly when extraordinary events pop up is still a learning curve. "I'm still working on the need to 'go with the flow,'" he says with a smile.

Nickel acknowledges that, as in any job, working as an RSW can have challenges and sometimes "the job isn't glamorous." Still, he says he would not have stayed in this work for 25 years if the benefits didn't far outweigh those challenges. His words of wisdom for anyone considering working in this field are to remember the gifts that come from a job that is focused on person-centred care.

"There are many opportunities to support people, giving them the fullest life possible in their homes and communities," he says. "It's a life-giving environment for everyone involved. This has been a job, and a life, that I have thoroughly loved being a part of these past 25 years." ❧



COMMUNITAS PHOTO BY KRISTA PETRIE

**Jeff Nickel, right, has served with Communitas Supportive Care Society for 25 years. He is pictured with his friend Richard**

When he began with the organization in 1996, Nickel, a member of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, didn't foresee this longevity. He was finishing up as youth pastor at his church and members of the congregation already working for Communitas encouraged him to explore its opportunities. It took a while for him to find the right role, but that is one of the strengths of an organization that has a lot to offer.

"I started working in mental health and adult respite but, after about a year,

serves. Being content with simple things in life, he says, is perhaps the biggest lesson: taking slow walks through the community's beautiful parks, reading a good book together, sharing a laugh. Many of the people he has served over the years live with challenges that make them vulnerable, and yet he only sees strength in their ability to trust that those caring for them will do so with respect.

For him, it is holy ground. "There is sacredness and respect that we as support workers need to return to the people we



## OBITUARY

# Church planter-entrepreneur leaves rich legacy in France

Robert Witmer  
b. May 15, 1929; d. Dec. 2, 2021

By Lynda Hollinger-Janzen  
Mennonite Mission Network

**R**obert Witmer, who served in France from 1956 to 1984 with the Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM), helped to plant the Châtenay-Malabry church in Paris and was instrumental in opening doors for people with disabilities. He died on Dec. 2, 2021.

Robert “Bob” Witmer helped bring life to the vision of the church as a priesthood of believers whose witness extends beyond the walls of institutional religious establishments. His legacy includes helping Mennonites in France plant the Châtenay-Malabry church and the French Mennonite Mission, out of which were founded Friends of the Workshop and Domaine Emmanuel (now AEDE) to serve people with disabilities.

“Robert was a key player in initiating and developing relationships with French Mennonites that are still producing fruit today,” said James Krabill, former senior executive at Mennonite Mission Network.

From 1956 to 1984, Robert and his wife Lois served in France with Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM), a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network (MMN). At the beginning of their ministry in Paris, the Witmers contributed their gifts to the emerging Châtenay-Malabry church, which is now a multicultural Mennonite congregation whose members have roots in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and North America.

They also worked alongside French Mennonites to create AEDE workshops for adults with disabilities, both on the Châtenay-Malabry church property and on a farm in Hautefeuille, east of Paris. Today, AEDE employs 1,550 people and has grown to include 28 properties with wide-ranging services in 19 locations in France.



CANADIAN MENNONITE FILE PHOTO

*In the late 1990s, Robert Witmer served as a consultant for the Giving Project in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.*

“Robert, in accordance with his Mennonite beliefs, put his faith into practice,” said Bernard Huck, a long-time member of the Châtenay-Malabry congregation and retired professor of theology in France and Chad. “He was a man of vision, a builder, a zealous planner, and a pastor. His family left a blessed memory with the families of our church, for which we are so grateful.”

Janie and Neal Blough, who retired in France last year, after more than four decades of ministry through MMN, expressed warm appreciation for the Witmer family. “The Witmers’ experience, friendship and advice were precious in our time of adaptation,” the couple wrote in MMN’s tribute to Witmer.

Born May 15, 1929, on a farm between New Dundee and Petersburg, Ont., to Vernon and Vinetta (Shantz) Witmer, Robert attended Mannheim Mennonite Church near Petersburg. He and his future wife, Lois Martin, were members of the first graduating class at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ont.

Robert paid his way through high school

by milking cows on a local farm, doing custodial work at Rockway and developing a successful door-to-door business selling vacuum cleaners. According to his family, he was an entrepreneur at heart, a skill that he put to good use in every aspect of his life.

After Lois and Robert married in 1949, they studied at Eastern Mennonite College (University) in Harrisonburg, Va. In 1953, they moved to Goshen, Ind., for seminary studies at what is now known as Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. After completing their formal education, they began their MBM ministry in Paris in 1956.

The chapter of the Witmers’ life in France closed in 1984, and they moved to northwestern Quebec, where they worked alongside the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Rouyn-Noranda for 10 years.

In 1995, the couple retired to a cottage at Fairview Seniors Community in Cambridge, Ont., and became active members of Preston Mennonite Church. ❧

*A fuller account of Robert’s life and ministry in English, can be found in David Yoder Neufeld’s book Common Witness: A Story of Ministry.*

## ❧ Staff change

### Pastoral transition in Manitoba



**Darrel Toews** concluded just over seven years of service as lead pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, on Dec. 31, 2021. He is retiring from an

almost 40-year career in pastoral ministry, which he began in 1983 at Gospel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg after being ordained the year before. In the years following, he pastored at Tavistock and Breslau Mennonite churches, both in Ontario, before starting at Bethel. Toews earned a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. He is looking forward to nurturing relationships and appreciating literature, arts and theological reflection in his retirement.

— BY NICOLIE KLASSEN-WIEBE

# Physical appearances don't reveal what's inside

By Carl DeGurse

**M**att Ferguson is smart, likes rocking out to music such as the Tragically Hip, is a big fan of the Winnipeg Jets and Winnipeg Blue Bombers, and has cerebral palsy. He relies 100 percent on other people to attend to all his bodily needs, such as putting food and liquids in his mouth.

When in public with Matt, I've seen many people who aren't sure what to make of him. He speaks slowly and painstakingly, which seems to prompt some people to speak to him loudly and patronizingly, as if he is hard of hearing or slow of mind, neither of which is accurate.

Many people won't even try. They just stare briefly at this 39-kilogram man and cut a wide berth around his wheelchair to avoid an encounter. For such people, perhaps reading an opinion column dictated by Matt will remind them that physical bodies don't always reflect the person inside.

## 'Living life in the wilderness'

By Matt Ferguson

The sun is rising to a new day. Hallelujah! I am so grateful.

I am looking out the window and see lightly falling snow. It is so pretty. There is hope in the air.

In my circumstance, I need to depend on others. Just having a sip of water can be so refreshing. It's exhausting to make sure I have everything and get to places on time. Society is not designed to meet my needs.

There is so much on my heart. It's nice to be invited to my share thoughts and stories with others. It's such a relief because my life can be so stifling.

For the last decade, I've gone to university, which is fulfilling my desire to learn. I am pursuing a degree in recreation management, hoping to do something in God's beautiful creation. I enjoy being

outside, surrounding myself with people, working as a team.

I recently gave a sermon at Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg. I love to share my story and life with others, giving back in any way I can. My sermon was on living life in the wilderness, not an easy thing to do.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT FERGUSON

**'I am fine with not being able to walk, but I want to make a difference in the world, and a difference in the lives of people I meet,' says Matt Ferguson, who attends Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg.**

I am 32 years old now, struggling with this feeling of being anxious and alone in the wilderness since I was 16.

Living with cerebral palsy, I find it hard to find purpose, enjoyment and meaning in life. I know I have a voice, but I often don't know how to share, which is why I believe I have anxiety.

I have been asked why I get depressed. I used to be so happy. What happened?

I don't know what to say or do. I can get caught up in the anxiety of the moment and not know how to get out of it.

I feel so empty sometimes. It comes from living my life within four walls, not knowing who to share life with, how to spend my days, not knowing where to turn.

I desire to have a partner, but I do not know how to obtain that goal. I am also unable to find funding for a service dog, which would provide a connection I am looking for.

I feel like I found my voice for a little while, as I did when I gave a sermon, but I must figure out what to do next. I dream of hitchhiking. I'd like to travel the world.

I have made it to Mexico. When the plane landed, I had to wait for everyone to get off before me, like I always do. I was looking out the plane's window in awe and amazement when the stewardess asked if I was in a hurry to get off. I said no, I was just so happy to be there.

I am fine with not being able to walk, but I want to make a difference in the world, and a difference in the lives of people I meet. I want to be part of a community that's like a family. I want to be around other people so that we can lift one another up when we need someone to lean on.

I know that all I have is the moment I am experiencing, just taking the time to notice what's around me. I desire to have life flow easily from one event to the next and to feel more connected to life.

Each day that we are on this earth is a gift for which I am so grateful. ☘

*This column is reprinted with permission of the Winnipeg Free Press; it was originally*

*published on Dec. 4, 2021. A video of the sermon Matt Ferguson preached on July 18, 2021, can be viewed at [wfp.to/mattferguson](http://wfp.to/mattferguson). He can be reached at [fergusonjets99@gmail.com](mailto:fergusonjets99@gmail.com).*



# MC Eastern Canada creates new eco-minister position

*Providing a faith response to issues of climate change and environmental impact*

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

**W**endy Janzen began her role as Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's eco-minister, a new quarter-time position, on Jan. 1. She will work closely with both the leadership and the mission portfolios within the regional church.



**Wendy Janzen**

faith speaks into how we live and how we relate to the world."

An ordained minister, Janzen leads Burning Bush Forest Church, an expression of church within MC Eastern Canada of a worshipping group of individuals who have found themselves longing for connection with God in the natural world.

"I have been working as a pastor at Burning Bush . . . for the past five years," she says. "During that time I have experienced an up-swell of interest and curiosity . . . about what it means to connect what we're doing as a church with the whole question of how we relate to our environment in this huge looming environmental crisis."

"Wendy is a leading voice in the Wild Church movement and has already been a resource to many pastors and

congregations across denominations seeking to respond locally to climate change and environmental sustainability," says Marilyn Rudy-Froese, MC Eastern Canada's church leadership minister.

"We can become overwhelmed by the global environmental crisis," Janzen says, "but if every congregation was aware of one particular place in their local environment where they could be involved, what an impact that could make! My prayer is that we can work collectively to expand our understanding and experience of God in a way that transforms how we live and how we view the world."

*Janzen is available to preach or consult with congregations about engaging in restorative relationships with God's creation in their local watershed. To learn more, email her at [wjanzen@mcec.ca](mailto:wjanzen@mcec.ca).*

## News brief

### Steinbach pastor Kyle Penner named 'fascinating Manitoban'

A Mennonite pastor known for his vocal support of COVID-19 vaccinations has been named one of the "Top 100 (plus) most fascinating Manitobans for 2021" by Winnipeg radio DJ. Ace Burpee. Kyle Penner, assistant pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach, was included in the list, which the *Winnipeg Free Press* published at the end of December. "[He] went on the record early and often in support of COVID-19 vaccinations," Burpee wrote of Penner, who uses social media to promote vaccinations and who served on the advisory committee for Protect MB, the provincial

government's vaccination outreach initiative. "There has been backlash along the way, but he's put in a ton of time communicating facts while also trying to ease concerns and clear up misinformation." Burpee, who is known for using his platform to highlight interesting people and charitable causes, contributes the list to the *Free Press* every year. Among the people who made the list were a Juno Award-winning jazz musician, a board game creator, the founders of a non-profit residential treatment centre for people seeking recovery from substance abuse, and the doctor leading the charge for Manitoba's vaccination.

—BY AARON EPP



PHOTO COURTESY OF [TWITTER.COM/KYLE\\_PENNER](https://twitter.com/KYLE_PENNER)

**Kyle Penner, pictured after receiving his second vaccination last June. He is wearing "stickers" that his children made.**

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 —Nelson Lee, Chinatown Peace Church (Vancouver, BC)

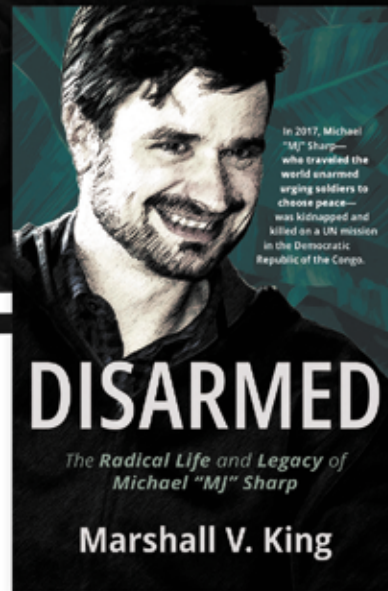
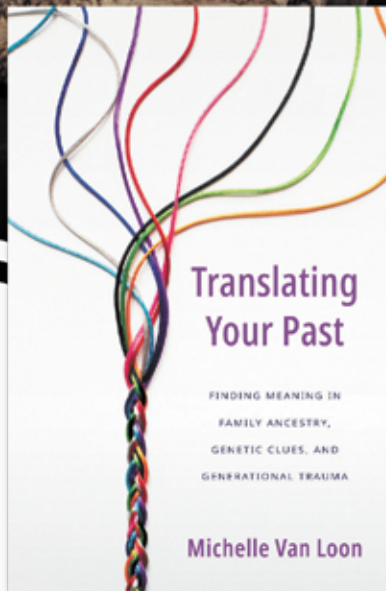
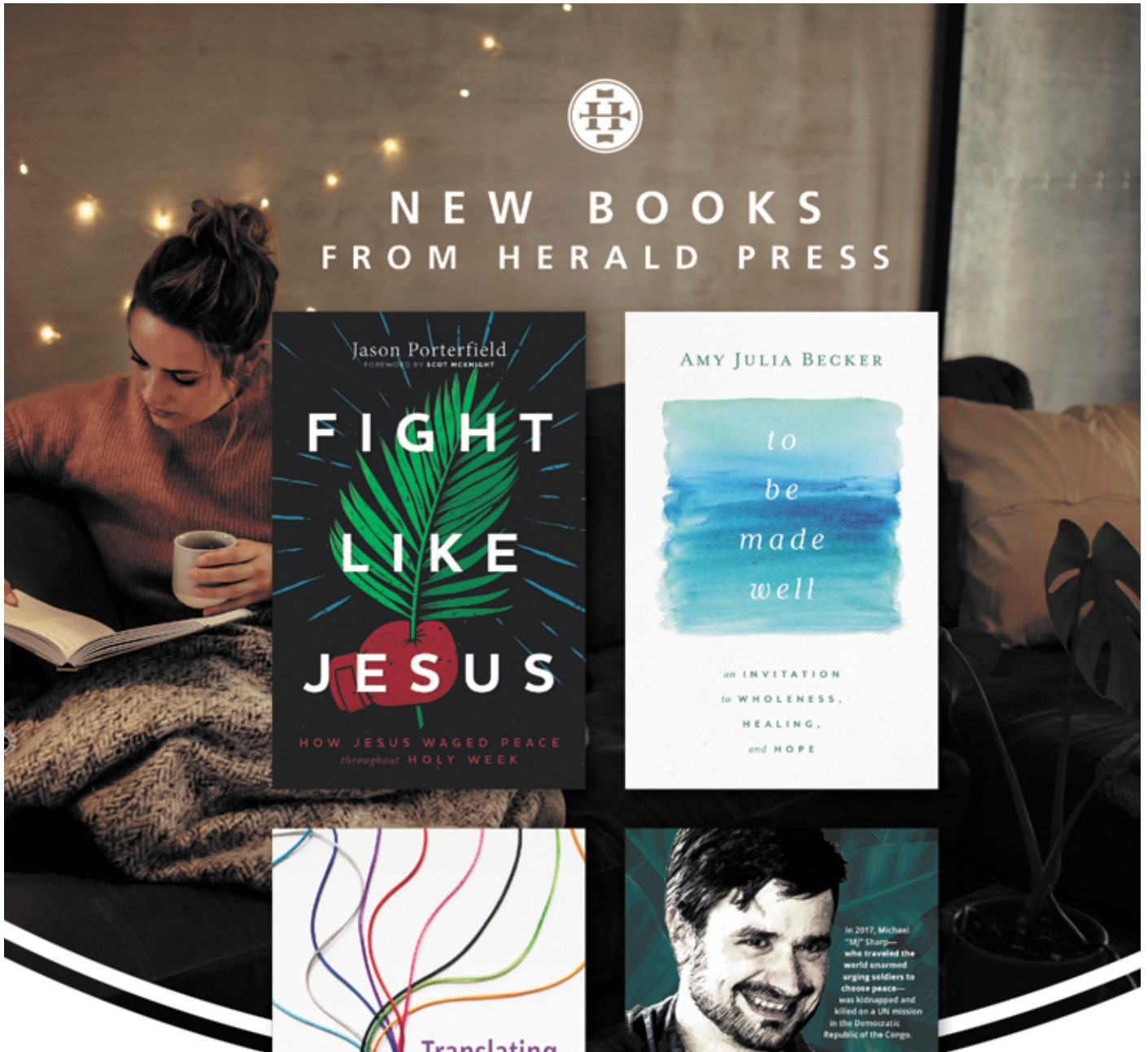


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# Broken connections to the land

*Rooted and Grounded keynote addresses explore loss, connection and imagination*

By Jennifer Schrock

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary / Mennonite Creation Care Network  
ELKHART, IND.

“Healing and restoring our broken connections to the land—as individuals and communities” was the focus of the fifth Rooted and Grounded Conference on Land and Christian Discipleship, held in mid-October at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS).

More than 60 people participated in the event in person, and 20 people from across the United States and Canada joined selected sessions online. At least 17 different higher-education institutions were represented by participants at the conference, which was sponsored by AMBS, the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions and Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen (Ind.) College.

Over three days, keynote addresses, immersion experiences, workshops and imagination exercises moved those gathered from lament to longing, hope, faith and commitment to act for change.

## Lessons from Timorese place relationships

Laura Meitzner Yoder, a political ecologist and professor of environmental studies at Wheaton (Ill.) College, gave the opening keynote address.

Her address, “Mobility, displacement, replacement: Learning from Timorese place relationships,” pushed listeners to view their own experiences through the lens of the Indigenous (Meto) people of western Timor island. After describing the ways in which Timorese family names incorporate place names, Yoder asked those present if any of them had names that refer to places. She also explained the Timorese practice of topogeny—the telling of one’s history through reciting strings of place names that highlight ancestors’ mobility and important happenings as they moved through the landscape—and asked her listeners to briefly reflect on

their own topogenies.

Drawing parallels to authors like Kathleen Norris and Wendell Berry, Yoder invited listeners to picture people they knew who were well grounded in a particular place.

“How does this spatial intimacy enable the person to communicate the sacredness of that place?” she asked.

Timor-Leste’s complex history contains much tragedy, Yoder said. The people have survived colonial displacement from laws favouring European landowners, Indonesian military displacement that killed a third of the population, and a recent displacement due to economic modernization plans. According to Yoder, villagers still weep when they describe how, in the early 1980s, people were forced to cut down their protected sandalwood trees and load them onto military ships.

Yet the Timorese have displayed resilience. Yoder described the practice of *tara bandu*, a time-bound prohibition on resource harvesting that Timorese have

observed even in dire circumstances, such as when all of their palm and grass thatch roofs had been burned at the same time and the forest could not provide enough roofing material for everyone.

“I marvel at how tens of thousands of Timorese took the collective action necessary to allow their land and forests to heal and to recover,” Yoder said.

## Shipwrecks, ancient and modern

Timothy R. Eberhart, the Murray H. Leiffer associate professor of public theology and ministry at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., offered the second keynote address, “Regenerative solidarity among the remnants.”

“How should we describe the present age?” Eberhart asked. “What metaphors or analogies might best convey a sense of the social and existential realities of our time?”

He likened the current circumstances to a societal shipwreck, referring to the story in Acts 27 of the Apostle Paul during



MENNONITE CREATION CARE NETWORK PHOTO BY JENNIFER SCHROCK

**Debbie Bledsoe, third from right, AMBS master of divinity student who is co-chair of the AMBS Garden Committee, speaks during a Rooted and Grounded Conference workshop entitled ‘Community gardens as a place of encounter and transformation.’ Bledsoe described how one-seventh of the land in the garden is left fallow, as directed in the Book of Leviticus, and 10 percent is devoted to local community needs.**

## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

a storm at sea, and noting that, in the third and fourth centuries, the desert mothers and fathers used shipwrecks as a common metaphor for the time of upheaval they lived in.

In the Acts story, prisoners, including Paul, clung to their ship's wreckage and paddled ashore to the island of Malta following a devastating storm. The boat was an imperial ship, run by soldiers prepared to kill the prisoners in their care.

Likewise, Eberhart said the present time is one of immense upheaval and collapse. The many crises in the world today have a deep history and include the removal of people from a direct relationship with the land; the exploitation of land and labour; the expansion of "free" market logics into more and more spheres of life; and the use of ideological frameworks such as white supremacy to justify abuses.

Referring to the adaptive cycle of growth, conservation, release and reorganization that is present in natural systems, he emphasized that times of release also offer an immense opportunity for creative reordering, an "opportune time for deep, systemic change."

While Eberhart sees Christian denominations as among the institutions experiencing upheaval, he insists that there are still spiritual and theological remnants to cling to.

"Grab hold of the remnants and stay afloat!" he urged. "Look for the gifts of the Spirit, for stored-up financial and institutional resources, and for the contributions of our distinct traditions, including Mennonite simplicity and peacemaking, and the holistic theology of Methodism. Life-sustaining resources are floating all around."

"Ours will remain a time of crucifixion and lament," he concluded. "But as we weep, and come undone, let's also grab hold, not just to what remains, but to one another. And then let's reach together for the safety, and toward the just peace, of the land." ❧



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### Top 10 online stories of 2021

Stories about vaccines, sexual misconduct and defunding the police attracted visitors to *Canadian Mennonite's* website last year. Here are the top stories, based on page views:

10. "A hymn by any other number"
09. "Watch: 'Amish Paradise,' 25 years later"
08. "It was a wake-up call"
07. "MCC initiates research into historical connections with National Socialism"
06. "Will COVID-19 create lasting divisions in churches?"
05. "An Indigenous woman's journey and advice to Mennonites"
04. "Defund the police?"
03. "Investigation reveals misconduct by influential Mennonite leader"
02. "Mennonite leaders weigh in on vaccination"
01. "No religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccines: MC Canada"



Visit [canadianmennonite.org/topten2021](http://canadianmennonite.org/topten2021) to learn more about these stories.



Coming up in the February 21, 2022 issue  
**FOCUS ON CAMPS**

Rooted &  
Grounded



A Conference on Land and Christian Discipleship

## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

# 'That's when MCI came to mind'

By Julia Bergman

Mennonite Collegiate Institute  
WINNIPEG

**B**eing a graduate of Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) remains a precious part of my life's memory bank.

Moving into the dorm my Grade 11 year gave me a sense of independence and pride to be stepping into more freedom. At the time, I didn't fully understand my parents' thoughtful consideration in making this significant decision in releasing me into

the loving care of the MCI community, but I am so glad they did!

I got a taste of managing my own time, schedule and responsibilities while learning to live with accountability away from my parents. Living at MCI also gave me the experience of claiming my faith in Jesus for my very own. Being surrounded by other students, and having teachers who wore their faith on their sleeve, forever marked my life.

Now, almost 20 years later, it became our turn as parents to wholeheartedly consider offering this unique opportunity to our children as we prayerfully weighed out the pros and cons.

Nearly two years into this COVID-19 pandemic we wanted, perhaps more than ever, to offer our children opportunities to do life in and with community. Lockdowns and cancelled events have been necessary, and yet we were eagerly keeping our eyes and ears peeled for doors to open for our children that would continue to engage their learning, spiritual growth and continue to fuel their passions of sports and music.

That's when MCI came to mind.

Our eldest son, Eli, has just finished his

first semester of living in the dorm while attending MCI, and we are so thankful that it has been all we were dreaming for—and then some!

It can feel tricky to wrap your head around sending a child to live at school before the more traditional timeline. We wrestled with this. Having regular and open communication as a family, and with the incredible staff both in the dorm and in the academic part of the school, has made this transition more peace-filled than we thought it might be.

It has been a joy to see Eli flourish with the opportunities that are at his fingertips. Cheering his teammates on to the volleyball provincials, sharing thoughts and opinions over a meal, impromptu floor hockey matches, listening and making music with fellow students, have all been good for the mind, body and soul.

Our family is excited to think about what the future holds as we step into the MCI community.

*Julia (nee Hogue) Bergman graduated from MCI in 2002.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIA BERGMAN

**Eli Bergman, left, a first-year student at Mennonite Collegiate Institute, gets a hug from his mother Julia, a 2002 MCI graduate**

## Building connection

*Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care: George Graffunder*

Menno Simons Christian School  
Calgary

**M**enno Simons Christian School was blessed to appoint George Graffunder as its vice-principal this school year.

He completed his bachelor of physical education degree in 1987 and his bachelor of education degree in 1989, both from the University of Calgary. He completed

his bachelor of religious education degree in 1990 at Alberta Bible College, and also has his Level 1 Google Certified Educator status.

He has spent the last 21 years teaching at Trinity Christian School, and we are excited for him to bring his knowledge and experience to Menno.

He came to Menno because the chance to be involved in administration is a challenge that he wanted to be involved in. A niece and two nephews attended Menno and two of his sisters worked at the school, so he had good insight into what he would be getting into and also what an amazing place Menno Simons



## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

# Supporting transformation for years to come

RJC High School  
ROSTHERN, SASK.



*Menno Simons Christian School was blessed to appoint George Graffunder as its vice-principal this school year.*

Christian School is.

Two very interesting teaching experiences that he has undertaken in his career were spending two years teaching at Rain Forest International School in Cameroon, and assisting with Google training with teachers from the Commonwealth of Dominica and the IT for Dominica Foundation.

Psalm 121 became very real to him while he taught in Cameroon, as he was so far away from family and friends. He realized more than ever his help came from the Lord, and that he is the one who would watch over him.

He has been married to his wife Charlene for 20 years and they have six children between the ages of 11 and 27. Needless to say, it's a very busy household. Not content with the craziness of a large household, they also have two dogs, Dixie and Chloe.

He loves God, pizza, playing guitar and almost all sports. He grew up in central British Columbia and is a huge Vancouver Canucks fan.

"My deep hope is that every student would know who they are in Christ, and would know how this impacts their daily choices," he says of his teaching philosophy.

"I have always said that students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care, so I make it a priority to build strong relationships with students and their families."

Welcome to our community, Mr. Graffunder. ☘

For his Grade 12 year, Jacob Harder (1946) was determined to go to Rosthern Junior Collegiate (RJC). But he had two big problems. One was that he didn't have any money to pay for tuition. And the second was that his father believed any education past Grade 9 was a waste of time.

His mother, on the other hand, believed strongly in the value of education. And although Jacob was never quite sure what she said, she somehow convinced his dad to send him.

And though he only attended for one year, his time at the school felt transformative. He loved playing sports, and living with friends at the House of Lords, a student residence about a kilometre from the school. He also loved being with other young people who had similar values to his own, and he found the experience broadened his horizons.

Jacob's wife, Hella (Dahl) Harder, attended the school a few years before Jacob for Grade 11, in 1943. She loved the year she spent there and made fast friends with three other young women. Hella was very social, earning the nickname "Bubbles," and she forged friendships that lasted for decades.

Jacob and Hella remained connected and supportive of RJC throughout their lifetimes. Both their daughters, Leila (Harder) Olfert and Rhonda Harder Epp, attended the school, and three of their four grandchildren did as well.

Jacob also served on the board for 12 years. Hella supported the school as well. When the Chorale came to Camrose, Alta., on tour when their grandson Stefan was a singer, she helped bake enough buns to provide sandwiches for lunch for a group of

approximately 40 people.

Jacob and Hella also supported RJC financially over the years through a fund that supported tuition payments for students every year. And they made plans to support the school after they were gone by leaving a gift to RJC in their will. Jacob passed away in October 2019, and Hella in May 2020.

"I think it was just a real natural thing," says their daughter Leila of the gift they left to the school in their will. "They gave money to RJC every year, and so it was just kind of a given that that's what they would do." ☘



Jacob Harder



Hella (Dahl) Harder, front row centre

## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

# Graduate students find meaningful connections in small pods

By Ashitha Mantrawadi  
Conrad Grebel University College  
WATERLOO, ONT.

As the pandemic lingers, and students persevere in challenging times, students in the master of theological studies (MTS) program at Conrad Grebel University College created pods. These small groups, made up of students with a mix of experiences, met virtually or in person to offer mutual support, encouragement and advice throughout the term.

Peter Haresnape, Don Neufeld and Christa Van Daele participated in these pods in the 2021 fall term, and all appreciated their experiences within them.

"I joined the pod primarily because, as a new student in the MTS program, I felt that it would give me an opportunity to connect with other students in the program," said Neufeld, who lives in Virgil, Ont. "This was especially meaningful because, as a remote student, I was not on campus with the opportunity to meet more informally with other students."

"As a remote student, I have missed the opportunity to socialize and learn



Don Neufeld



Peter Haresnape



Christa Van Daele

more about my fellow students," echoed Haresnape from Toronto. "A study pod was a great option to learn more about Grebel and its culture, and cross-pollinate ideas with people taking other classes."

Both Neufeld and Haresnape have felt the effects of the pandemic on their social lives, but the MTS pods helped them create a close-knit group of diverse-minded people, which lessened the burden of the pandemic.

This was also true for Christa of Waterloo. "For me, it was for social and community reasons," she said. "Virtual work can be pretty limiting socially. What a nice change to meet folks in person, to

laugh together, to exchange very basic facts, basic course information. We talked about everything from family life to the actual courses and their challenges."

"Numerous pods last term helped MTS students generate and communicate ideas, as well as seek spiritual support from peers," said professor Carol Penner, the new director of theological studies at Grebel. "Connecting with others on a spiritual and emotional level by building a strong and diverse community is a core component of Grebel's programming."

The MTS program at Grebel and the University of Waterloo offers courses that focus on the Bible, theology and ministry. With full-tuition scholarships available for full-time Canadian and permanent-resident students, Grebel welcomes students from all backgrounds. Courses are taught by full-time Grebel faculty members and guest instructors with expertise in various disciplines. ❧

## Rockway mounts virtual Christmas concert

By Jeff Enns  
Rockway Mennonite Collegiate  
KITCHENER, ONT.

Musicians come from all walks of life, with varying degrees of passion for what they do, but most are quite resilient to begin with. Add a global pandemic for two years, with assorted lockdowns and restrictions, and the desire to make music together with others increases

exponentially. Rockway Mennonite Collegiate musicians are no different.

As we tentatively dip our toes into the pool of 2022, and start to wend our way through COVID-19 restrictions, I can't help but think back to early December, when Rockway had a Christmas concert

once again. Granted, we did have to record it, and it was on a much smaller scale, but it was in person, and it was glorious.

Since Rockway had planned not to start our high-school music classes until February, we launched extracurricular ensembles in September to build back momentum for the music department. The response was fantastic and we quickly had enough student interest to create four eager and excellent ensembles.

Rockway was a hive of activity at lunch times throughout the fall, as committees and clubs returned, so our ensembles had reduced amounts of time to practise, but we were excited to get together once again.

Students joined the stage band, which

## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

also included strings, a string ensemble, and either the upper- or lower-voice ensemble. For our Christmas concert, each group recorded two or three pieces of music. We wanted our recording to have the feel of a live concert, so there

were only a few retakes of pieces.

We hired a professional videographer, and ended up with a beautifully recorded concert with at least five different cameras to capture multiple angles, and high-quality microphones to give as close to an

off-the-floor sound as possible.

It was a lot of work and organization, as most concerts are, but the students and their teachers more than rose to the occasion, giving a concert that was worthy of Rockway's reputation for excellence in music. It was wonderful to be able to prepare and celebrate the advent and birth of Christ in so many musical ways.

I personally can hardly wait to work in person with these amazing students again. We may not know what this new year will bring to our daily lives, but the creative spirit and energy is alive and well in our students at Rockway. ✎

*The author is a 1990 Rockway graduate.*



PHOTO BY XINGYI (JESSICA) LI

*Pictured here are several high school students who participated in the Lower Voices Ensemble, directed by Jeff Enns.*

# CMU alumni collaborate on book featuring women in music

Canadian Mennonite University  
WINNIPEG

**A**vibrant children's book featuring 26 women in music will soon hit bookstore shelves, and it was created by two Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) alumni. Anneli Loepp Thiessen first wrote *The ABCs of Women in Music* in the fall of 2020 as a creative project for a feminist theories class at the University of Ottawa, where she is a doctoral student in interdisciplinary music research.

Citing consistently low numbers of women in music, Loepp Thiessen hopes this project can be a helpful music education resource that inspires a new generation of girls. The book features a different woman in the music industry for each letter of the alphabet; spanning more than a thousand years of music history; and representing a diversity of ethnicities, abilities, genres and professions.

Loepp Thiessen instantly knew that she wanted Haeon Grace Kang to illustrate the book, whose colourful pictures make the stories come alive.

"I think diverse visibility is really

important to kids," says Kang. "If I had different models when growing up for what it meant to be a successful person, it would've been easier to accept myself as who I am and pursue things with more confidence."

The support Kang received at CMU was influential in her artistic development, she says: "So many of my profs provided creative project options for assignments that helped me grow as an artist and learn what it means to make meaningful work. The encouragement and mentorship from CMU instructors really formed me as a person and as an artist."

Loepp Thiessen says CMU faculty also

shaped her work on the book. "I think of the influence of faculty like Janet Brenneman, who has done her own research on gender issues in music," she says. "I was really honoured to study under her during my time at CMU."

Loepp Thiessen completed her master of music degree in piano performance after graduating from CMU with a bachelor of music degree. Meanwhile, she was also a part of the new Mennonite hymnal, *Voices Together*.

Kang graduated from CMU with a bachelor of arts in biblical and theological studies and was quickly back in the university's halls, completing a master of arts in theological studies at CMU in 2021. ✎

The *ABCs of Women in Music* will be available on May 1, but is accessible earlier through pre-order (<https://bit.ly/3FiQa3M>). It has already reached Amazon's Top-20 list in children's music biographies.



## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

# Beyond the expected

By Pamela Doerksen

Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools  
WINNIPEG

**W**hen I reflect on my years at Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary and Middle Schools (WMEMS), the thing that stands out to me the most is the community.

I still connect with some of the friends I made back when I was a student. The students in Mrs. Dyck's class welcomed me into their classroom family. The parents of the Before & After program blessed me with amazing gifts when I left on maternity leave. When I was a new teacher navigating the struggles of those first few days in Grade 1, the school families and staff supported me in every way.

Even as a more experienced teacher, the love and support I have felt, especially in this season of COVID-19, has been overwhelming.

My own children got the same care from their teachers that I experienced when I was a student here. I loved the way their teachers were able to integrate faith into their lessons and, just like it happened to me, my children were challenged to think about making and maintaining a personal relationship with God.

The WMEMS community is amazing because it extends beyond the expected. It is seen in:

- **Former students** stopping by for a visit.
- **Parent volunteers** tearing up at the thought of helping out at their last hot lunch day.
- **Staff having** ugly Christmas dress/sweater dress-up days.
- **The newspaper** cutouts in the staff room of students we used to teach and news about what they are doing now.
- **The school** parents and families going above and beyond to make our school better and to make staff feel appreciated.
- **The surprise** gifts from school parents, just because.
- **The messages** and cards that come just at the right time.
- **The WMEMS** alumni who are now on staff or are school parents of their own WMEMS students.
- **The joy** of working with awesome students, families, and staff that make WMEMS special.



WMEMS PHOTO

*Grade Two students build cardboard cars together.*

Every year I get at least one message from a former student or parent that they have put their Grade 1 Thanksgiving blocks or their nativity set out on display, and that warms my heart to know that I had a tiny part in what has become a family tradition. ☺

*The author is a WMEMS alumna.*



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Hanneke Isert Bender, Class of 2021



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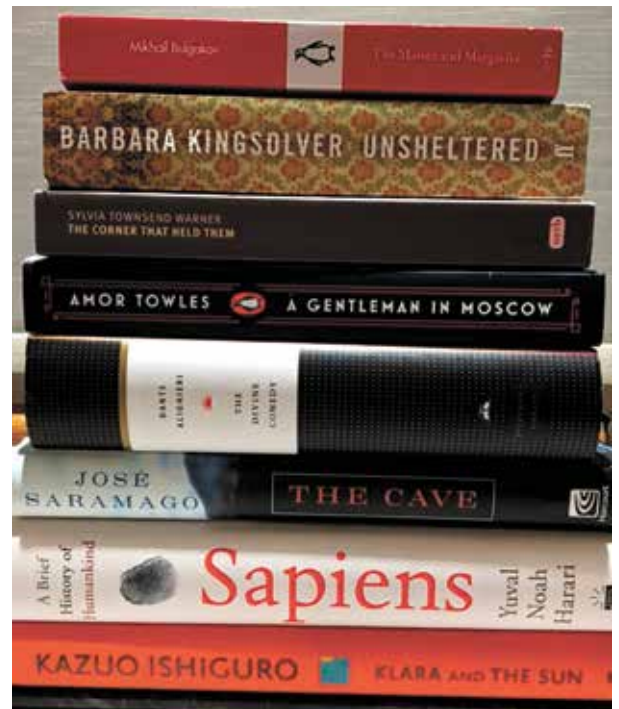
## FOCUS ON EDUCATION

## /// News brief

## Book club continues during pandemic

ST. CATHARINES, ONT.—One way to spend a cold winter's evening during a pandemic is to read a good book. And being a member of a book club adds to the choices. Amalie Enns, who attends Grace Mennonite Church in St. Catharines, Ont., started a book club at the suggestion of a pastor friend. This book club is still going strong in the midst of COVID-19. Depending on health regulations, the book club is small enough that members can gather indoors when the limit is 10 people. When the weather is favourable, the women and men gather outdoors. In lockdown, they do Zoom meetings. Members of the group make suggestions as to the book choice, and then lead the monthly discussions. Some books read have included: *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrick Blackman, *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl, *My Harp is Turned to Mourning* by Al Reimer, and *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbach. Enns is hard pressed to pick a favourite book, as she has enjoyed so many of the choices, but finally names *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. Not every month includes only a book choice. The summer meeting includes a barbecue and, in December, a potluck is shared.

—BY MARIA H. KLASSEN



A STACK OF SOME OF THE BOOKS THE BOOK CLUB HAS READ.

Photo credit: Amalie Enns

## /// Calendar

## British Columbia

**Feb. 26:** MC. B.C. annual general meeting, to be held virtually on Zoom.

## Alberta

**March 19:** Mennonite Church Alberta annual delegate sessions, to be held virtually on Zoom.

## Saskatchewan

**March 12:** Mennonite Church Saskatchewan annual delegate session, at Youth Farm Bible Camp, Rosthern.

## Manitoba

**March 5:** Mennonite Church Manitoba annual gathering, at Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

## Ontario

**Until March 7:** "Not Traumatic Enough for a Shock Blanket" exhibit at the Grebel Gallery,

Conrad Grebel University College. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/3G4MBjD>.  
**Feb. 24:** MCC Ontario will celebrate more than 100 years of relief, development and peace in the name of Christ with best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell, at Bingemans Conference Centre in Kitchener, at 6 p.m. To purchase tickets, visit [powerofpartnership.ca](http://powerofpartnership.ca). Options include to attend in person or virtually. All funds raised will support MCC's efforts in Ontario and worldwide.  
**April 19:** "Diverse paths: An exploration of Low German Mennonite experiences," at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo. The conference will bring together members of Low German-speaking communities and those who work within those communities, including service providers, educators and academics. To learn more, visit <https://bit.ly/3vNaOx>.  
**May 13-15:** "Indigenous-Mennonite encounters in time



## Where faith and community matter

Small university – big opportunity  
[cmu.ca/admissions](http://cmu.ca/admissions)



and place” academic conference and community education event, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo. The event will include academic presentations, community storytelling, artistic offerings, and both Indigenous and Mennonite ceremonies.

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



## Classifieds

### Employment Opportunities



**Mennonite World Conference**  
A Community of Anabaptist related Churches

Employment opportunity  
**Bookkeeper**

Mennonite World Conference invites applicants to apply for the part-time position of **Bookkeeper**, starting as soon as possible. The MWC Bookkeeper is part of the MWC Operations Team and will be based in Kitchener, Ontario. This position is responsible for maintaining all MWC financial records and systems up to the monthly trial balance.

See [mwc-cmm.org/bookkeeper](http://mwc-cmm.org/bookkeeper) for more information.



**Mennonite Church Manitoba**

Employment Opportunity  
**Director of Leadership**

Mennonite Church Manitoba invites applications for the Director of Leadership position. Please send cover letter and resumé to [office@mennochurch.mb.ca](mailto:office@mennochurch.mb.ca). For more information about the position, visit [www.mennochurch.mb.ca/get-involved](http://www.mennochurch.mb.ca/get-involved) or contact Michael Pahl at [mpahl@mennochurch.mb.ca](mailto:mpahl@mennochurch.mb.ca). Review of applications will begin February 1, 2022. Position open until filled.



Employment opportunity  
**Pastor of Worship and Outreach**

**About us**  
We are neighborhood church in east Richmond, B.C. with strong ties to our community. We are on a journey of revitalization and growth, seeking to share Christ as the center of our faith and to live out our missional identity as ministers of reconciliation and peace in a changing world.

**About the role**  
This exciting new full-time role combines worship with community engagement and outreach to help bring our missional vision to life. Send a cover letter and resume to [pastorsearch@peacemennonite.ca](mailto:pastorsearch@peacemennonite.ca) by **31 January 2022**. Visit our website at [www.peacemennonite.ca](http://www.peacemennonite.ca) for more about the opportunity.



**Mennonite Church British Columbia**

Employment Opportunity  
**Executive Minister (MC B.C.)**

Mennonite Church British Columbia (MC B.C.) is looking for an **Executive Minister (EM)** to work with the MC B.C. Leadership Board to shape and implement the mission and vision of MC B.C.

The EM will help foster and sustain spiritually vibrant congregations and develop and mentor leaders. The chosen candidate will be someone who assists in shaping, defining, and cultivating MC B.C.’s Anabaptist vision of faith for today. The EM will build healthy connections, grow community, and meaningfully engage with our culture and God’s world in transformative ways.

**Ideal start date is Summer 2022, for handover with current EM.**

Find the job description here: [mcbc.ca/article/12064](http://mcbc.ca/article/12064)

The application deadline is **February 15, 2022**.

Please send cover letter and resume to [emstg@mcbc.ca](mailto:emstg@mcbc.ca).

All interested are encouraged to apply, and only the applicants that meet the expectations of the role will be contacted.

### Upcoming Advertising Dates

| Issue                      | Ads due                  |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Feb. 21 Focus on Camps     | Feb. 7                   |
| March 7                    | Feb. 18 (early deadline) |
| March 21 Focus on the Arts | March 7                  |
| April 4                    | March 21                 |
| April 18 Focus on Books    | April 4                  |

### Advertising Information

Contact  
1-800-378-2524 x.224  
[advert@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:advert@canadianmennonite.org)

# Westgate volleyballers win first provincial title since '78

By Bob Hummelt  
Westgate Mennonite Collegiate  
WINNIPEG

I first heard of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in the fall of my final bachelor of education program year. It was 1978, and this very small school surprised the local sports scene by capturing the Manitoba Provincial "A" Volleyball Championship by defeating teams with several-fold larger school populations.

I joined the Westgate teaching staff in 1982, and it was clear that this championship was deeply embedded in school lore. Stories were often shared in the staff room about pounding spikes and big blocks amid the roar of a fully involved crowd.

Over the years, I came to know many of these former players at school community events, with several sending their children to Westgate to be part of the academic, spiritual, athletic and musical experiences the school offered. I enjoyed chatting with this group of alumni, and it was

common to have the big '78 win come up in conversation.

More than 40 years later, the school's varsity boys team once again has achieved the unlikely by winning this year's AAAA Provincial Volleyball Championship. While the school's size normally posits its teams in AAA competitions, the volleyball planets of gifted players and strong coaching aligned this year to have the team opt to play against teams with much bigger enrolment, ending the season with a 30-0 record.

Guided by Coach Maiya Westwood, the team played spirited ball during the provincial tournament, albeit in front of cameras that streamed games in lieu of having fans in the stands. Team setter Sammy Ludwig was chosen tournament MVP. The Winnipeg Free Press placed the Westgate team No. 7 in the annual "Top

10 Sports Moments of the Year," ahead of the Jets' Laine-Dubois trade.

Many members of the '78 squad watched the championship tournament online and they were delighted to see their athletic legacy replicated.

With pandemic restrictions in place, I was the only school representative allowed to watch the final in person.

No doubt, it would have been near bedlam if the games had been played live before the athletes' friends and family.

Yet, for me, in my last year before retirement in June, I was heartened to see four sons of my former students make up the starting six, and former student Loriann (Sawatzky) Ludwig on the bench as assistant coach. It is a gift, in my year of many school related "lasts," to have this "first since '78" land inbounds before I leave. ☺



WESTGATE MENNONITE  
COLLEGIATE PHOTO

*Westgate Mennonite Collegiate's varsity boys volleyball team won this year's AAAA Provincial Volleyball Championship, ending the season with a 30-0 record. Team setter Sammy Ludwig was chosen tournament MVP.*