

CANADIAN MENNONITE

April 4, 2022 Volume 26 Number 7

Called to deep hope



Catching a glimpse into the end of the story pg. 4

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EDITORIAL

Trusting the Easter story

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



I have a vivid childhood memory of hearing my mother read C.S.

Lewis's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Chapters 14 and 15 tell the story of the battle between life and death: the horrific killing of the hero, Aslan, the grieving of his faithful friends, and his triumphant emerging into life once again. Raised also on Bible stories, this young child saw the parallels between the ropes that bound Aslan and the cross that held the hero Jesus captive. I saw a connection between the broken Stone Table and the empty tomb. With life restored, mourning turned to rejoicing.

There is a lot I don't understand about the Christ's resurrection. Lacking scientific or theological language to explain the resurrection, at Eastertime I often just cling to the stories: the grieving of Jesus' followers approaching the tomb, the disciples racing to the burial site and spotting only burial cloths inside. An angel's announcement and the "gardener" who utters a distraught mourner's name.

This old-yet-new story comes to us every year and we recognize its power: out of betrayal, suffering and death came the surprise of new life. Sad news turned into good news. Mourning became rejoicing. Discouragement led to energy for new steps of faith.

Somehow the entire history of God's people hangs on that first Easter day. Where would we be if the garden tomb had remained occupied?

In 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul invited the early Christians to trust that death-to-life story told every Easter.

Surviving through persecution and prison, he had staked his life on the truthfulness of the empty tomb.

To Christ-followers living in uncertain times, he wrote, *"If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God. . . . And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. . . . If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot"* (1 Cor. 15:14-20, The Message).

What does the resurrection mean for you and me today, in our individual lives and in our faith communities?

In the dark times of Good Friday, we witness the forces of destruction at work: illness in our bodies and in the bodies of the ones we love, conflict close at hand and raging wars across the world. Greed and selfishness seem to win over justice, and strong forces threaten to destroy the planet we love.

And yet the power of Easter calls to us. In the feature on page 4, preacher Mark Diller Harder invites us to a "deep hope," with a reminder that—in the final chapters—death will eventually see defeat. The resurrection of Jesus foreshadows where God's story will ultimately lead: a place of joy and restoration.

In the meantime, we cling to signs of new life and accept them as Easter gifts. Living in the northern hemisphere, we

experience spring as a kind of resurrection, with signs of new growth after a long winter. We hear stories that inspire hope: of human kindness, of relationships restored, of courageous stands for justice, of gifts shared and multiplied. And we gain strength to take new steps of faith.

Following the living Christ, Paul concluded, *"With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort."*

May we trust that ancient Easter story and live into its reality here, today. The risen Christ beckons us to turn our backs on the tomb and leave the burial cloths behind. By his side, and trusting the Author of that Story, we walk together toward new life.

New correspondent



In this issue you will see a new byline—of Jessica Evans, the new Alberta correspondent. We welcome her to the *Canadian*

Mennonite team and look forward to sharing her work in the magazine.

Jessica grew up attending Springridge Mennonite Church in Pincher Creek, Alta., and graduated from Canadian Mennonite University. She has writing and photography experience working for non-profit organizations, newspapers and magazines. Feel free to send her your ideas for news stories in the Alberta Mennonite community. Her email address is ab@canadianmennonite.org. ✉



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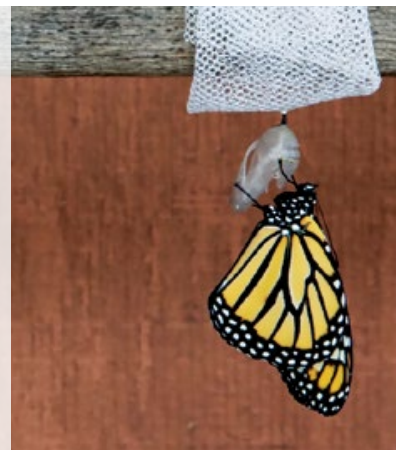
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EASTER FEATURE

Called to deep hope

Catching a glimpse into the end of the story

By Mark Diller Harder



PHOTO BY MERRI-LEE METZGER

Mary Magdalene couldn't have known the end of the story—how things would turn out. How could she?

She, and the rest of the disciples, were no different from the rest of us. The future is cloudy at best. We don't know what the next day will hold. Back then, no one saw the resurrection coming. Today, we see the signs, looking back at that first Easter, hearing the story of that morning through the voice of the gospel writers. It is all right there, but hidden in plain view—the empty tomb, the linen wrappings lying there, the angels, Jesus himself standing before Mary.

Even before this, Jesus had told the disciples that he would die and in three days be raised from the dead. But Mary could not see it; she could not put it all together.

All Mary knows is where she needs to be in that moment. So, it is no surprise that early in the morning she is at the tomb weeping for the Jesus she loved, caring for his memory and for his body by bringing spices. She is living moment by moment and doing what she can to hold on to the hope she had experienced through her living encounters with Jesus, the embodiment of good news.

How could she even imagine the end of the story standing right in front of her? Not until Jesus called her by name did everything suddenly come into focus, move from hope to reality, from sadness to utter joy. Even then, Mary could not hold on to Jesus, but she could tell the others and share this good news and the transformational power of God. Through the Resurrection of Jesus, Mary was called to a deep living and a deep hope.

On this Easter morning, an Easter after a tough and trying year, we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus; we join Mary in the call to deep hope and deep living, and we proclaim our trust in the end of the story.

A story of hope

During the Vietnam War, James Stockdale served as a vice admiral and aviator in the United States navy. On

Sept. 9, 1965, his plane was shot down in North Vietnam and he was captured by the Viet Cong. They held him for seven-and-a-half years in the brutal Hoa Lo Prison or “Hanoi Hilton” as the American prisoners of war called it.

There, Stockdale endured solitary isolation, torture, beatings, broken bones and unimaginable suffering. He also became a leader among the POWs. Somehow, he endured those years, was released and went on to a full career back in the United States.

Stockdale was once asked how he survived those difficult circumstances. This is what he said: “I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade.”

The interviewer then asked who didn't make it out. “Oh, that's easy,” said Stockdale. “The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, ‘We're going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, ‘We're going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart.”

Stockdale saw this as an important lesson. “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

This attitude has been called the “Stockdale Paradox”—living day to day, in the moment, in full reality, but holding onto hope for the end of the story.

I first heard about the Stockdale Paradox from consultant Betty Pries, who shared it with a group of pastors in a session on what it means for us as church and society living during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She used this story to ask about how we were doing in that day-to-day basis, despite all the pandemic challenges. But she went on to ask how we are also

holding onto the end of the story, not knowing when and how the pandemic might end, but also holding onto that larger story of God and the kingdom of God promised—something already here and yet to come.

Called to mystical hope

Betty drew on the writings of Christian author Cynthia Bourgeault and her book, *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God*.

So often we have what is called “outcome hope”—we hope for a very particular outcome in the future, and we need things to turn out that way for us to be happy. It is like that false optimism Stockdale talked about. Then, when things do not turn out how we had hoped, when it is a different outcome, we become unglued.

Rather, Christian faith calls us to a “mystical hope.” Bourgeault writes, “The spiritual life can only be lived in the present moment, in the now. . . . Hope fills us with the strength to stay present, to abide in the flow of the Mercy no matter what outer storms may assail us. It is entered always and only through surrender; that is through the willingness to let go of everything we are presently clinging to. And yet, when we enter it, it enters us and fills *us* with its own life—a quiet strength beyond anything we have ever known.”

Easter calls us to this kind of mystical hope, rather than an outcome hope. To a hope that calls us to live deeply into the moments and days we find ourselves in, knowing God is with us even when it is very hard. This kind of hope holds on to the end of the story, trusting that God will bring us into promises yet unknown, into the kingdom not yet arrived.

It is a paradox: living in the “already and the not yet.” It is holding together deep living and deep hope. It is proclaiming God's mystical hope, remaining anchored in the “now” while also keeping our eye on the horizon.

We see this in Isaiah 25:6-10. Amid the defeat of a nation, and a horrible exile filled with much suffering, the prophet Isaiah dares to dream and dares



PHOTO BY MERRI-LEE METZGER

It is like the caterpillar, changing into a butterfly over time. In the cocoon, the caterpillar trusts the deep transformation that is happening without knowing what the end might possibly look like.

the caterpillar trusts the deep transformation that is happening without knowing what the end might possibly look like.

Can we see this in the here and now of our own lives?

At Easter, we are called into this mystical hope. We are called to live deeply, facing the challenges and the pain of this time, holding them with the trust that God is here with us, that God's kingdom has already begun.

God also calls us to a creative and even wild imagination that dares to glimpse into the end of the story. It is an end we can't see clearly, but it is an end where all can feast with God on the holy mountain, an end where the fullness of God's kingdom comes to fruition. That

end is wrapped up in the Resurrection power of God to give us life.

We sing with the beloved hymn: "This joyful Eastertide / away from sin and sorrow! / My love, the crucified, / hath sprung to life this morrow. / Had Christ, who once was slain, / ne'r burst his three-day prison, / our faith had been in vain. / But now hath Christ arisen, arisen, arisen!"

We have seen the Lord! Deep living and deep hope! ❧



Mark Diller Harder is a pastor at St. Jacobs (Ont.) Mennonite Church. This is an adaptation of a sermon he preached there on April 4, 2021.

to practice a courageous imagination. He can imagine the end of a story, when there will be a great feast on the mountain, for all peoples on earth.

Isaiah names the shroud cast over the peoples, the disgrace and the long time of waiting. This is not sugar-coating the present situation. But the waiting is for a grand, expansive picture of salvation that is for all peoples, with death swallowed up forever and everyone partaking in a feast of delight. This very hope makes a difference in how the people live in the here and now.

We see this mystical hope in Mary, early on that first Easter morning. Through the pain and loss of Jesus, Mary goes to the tomb while it is still dark, follows where love has led her to offer her care, her prayers and her presence. In the unexpected greeting and recognition of Jesus, Mary sees the Lord and glimpses the end of the story. She sees the Resurrection power of life given from God, and she becomes a witness in the here and now.

There is a mystery in this act of going deeper and a hope that life will spring forth. It is like the caterpillar, changing into a butterfly over time. In the cocoon,

❧ For discussion

1. Can you remember a time when you were in despair, feeling there was no hope? Looking back now, were there signs of hope that you simply could not see at the time? What are some ways that we can encourage others when they feel hopeless?
2. As you consider the story about James Stockdale, what is the difference between being optimistic in hard times and having faith that you will prevail in the end? What does it mean to have "discipline to confront the brutal facts of your current reality"?
3. Mark Diller Harder says that Easter calls us to a mystical hope that he compares to a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. If you were a caterpillar, what might you be thinking as you struggled to emerge from the chrysalis? Why is this hope "mystical"? What do you imagine the end of time will be like?
4. The Apostle Paul frequently reminds his readers of the hope they have in Christ. What specific things is he referring to? How would you express your hope in Christ? Which Easter hymn best expresses your hope?

—By Barb Draper

/// Readers write

✉ Marriage is a spiritual union of soulmates

Re: “God didn’t create you wrong,” Feb. 21, page 4.

Nicolien Klassen Wiebe shows how Mennonite churches have been struggling with questions around the growing number of transgender and gender-diverse members in our congregations. One of the key issues is about marriage in the church. In the past the response of Christian churches has been mainly to ignore the issues. However, it is now time to reconsider.

I met my wife, Sheilah, the love of my life, the same day that each of us arrived in a strange city, from opposite ends of the country, to begin new and exciting chapters in our lives. We were joined together by God, in December 1970 in the Wolfville Baptist Church, and we’ve been together ever since, in good times and in challenging times. Truly, we are soulmates, joined in a spiritual union that has transcended time and place. It is what I would wish for everyone.

Such was the strength of our bond that we have wondered if we would still have found each other if both of us had been a man, or both a woman. We might well have, but if we did, we would not have been able to marry in either her church or mine.

The purpose of Christian marriage is to affirm the marriage as a spiritual union, above and beyond the societal and legal requirements. To accomplish this, I propose that we think of those who are joined in holy matrimony as soulmates. The union of two human beings in an intimate relationship is, at its heart, a spiritual union, bound together by the movement of the spirit, joined by God. Therefore, it is a relationship that needs and deserves a Christian wedding, regardless of the sex and gender of those who are joined in that union.

PAUL REDEKOP, WINNIPEG

The writer is a retired professor of conflict resolution studies.

✉ Two views on the ‘freedom convoy’

Re: “MC Canada executive ministers release statement on ‘freedom rallies,’” Feb. 21, p. 8.

We are deeply saddened and troubled by this statement. While as Christians it is important to stand against hatred in the world, such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racism, it is a gross misrepresentation to say that the convoy and rallies in Ottawa and across Canada represented any of these prejudices.

We seem to be facing an information war, in which the portrayal of this event in the mainstream media vastly differs from what thousands have experienced in person, and many more across the world have seen through live videos.

Those who were present in Ottawa experienced many people coming together for church services and worship led by pastors on the Hill. Prayer circles were formed to support the convoy and pray for peace, with many people coming to Christ during this time.

The Freedom Convoy group showed love and support to others: feeding the homeless, shovelling the streets, providing activities for children, with many cultures, races and diverse voices coming together for a common cause.

After three weeks, this group, which protested peacefully and lawfully, was met with force, including tear gas, pepper spray and police horses.

With that statement, MC Canada is not showing its support to many people across the country and globe advocating for their freedoms and peace in their country.

“Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Philippians 4:2). This verse represents what the truckers were doing for all Canadians, at their own cost and peril.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP IN ST. CATHARINES, ONT.:
BETTY ANNE ADAMS, MARTHA FRANSEN, MARY
HUMINILOWYCZ, SUSAN PARK, ELAINE REIMER,
MARGARET WIENS, AND REBECCA HAHN

RE: Learning to listen, Feb. 21, page 2

My compliments on this perceptive and well written editorial. My ability to give ‘gracious space’ to those with whom I disagree has been sorely challenged during these past months, especially with what I consider the woefully misbegotten “freedom convoy,” which has a flavour of being covertly and even overtly anti-vax.

Vaccines have been the unequivocally greatest advance in medicine in my 45-year pediatric career, with a host of infectious diseases such as bacterial meningitis simply disappearing. I was reminded of this while talking with a neighbour who is approximately 70 and has needed three spinal surgery procedures due to the ravages from polio at the age of two. He was unfortunate enough to be born just before vaccination for that dreaded affliction emerged in the 1950s.

Do we really want our loved ones to have the “freedom” to acquire dreadful and deadly infections like polio or COVID-19 for which we have the amazing protection afforded by effective vaccines? I

admit that the “freedom convoy” has not elicited gracious sentiments from me.

PAUL THIESSEN, VANCOUVER

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

✉ **Memories of Ukrainians coming to Alberta**

During the early 1930s, George MacDonald welcomed a trainload of Ukrainian immigrants to farm in the Peace River region of northwestern Alberta. They dressed in beautiful sheepskin coats, but my grandfather noticed their poverty, confusion and need for understanding. As chair of the local school board, he brought Ukrainian children into the classroom and gave other kids a lesson in acceptance of newcomers.

The Depression was hard for Albertans struggling against economic collapse and drought, but the Ukrainians who joined them on the land were escaping persecution in Communist Russia, where 10 million had died from starvation. Previous generations of “Galicians” had found freedom in Canada from oppression in Europe.

My grandfather met many Canadians originating from Eastern Europe on his beat as a police constable in working-class northeast Edmonton. During the First World War, the government saw these citizens as “enemy aliens” and jailed them in a detention camp near Banff. Immigrant children were rigorously drilled on the “superior” values of British culture, which did not bode well with my grandmother, a teacher who treated all her students the same.

Despite their difficulties, Ukrainians stayed and contributed to Alberta’s multicultural society. When I was a kid attending school during the 1960s, many of my classmates were of Ukrainian ancestry. I learned about their dancing and music; how they kept their second language via attending Ukrainian school; and about their traditional foods: *pierogis* (dumplings), *holopchi* (cabbage rolls), and *kubasa* (pork sausage). I listened to “Ukrainian Hour” on the radio and visited the Pioneer Village east of the city.

I hope Canada will continue to assist those suffering in Ukraine today. Whether asylum seekers settle here or return home when it is safer, we care about them!

ROBERT PROUDFOOT, EDMONTON, ALTA.

The writer is a member of First Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

✉ **European Mennonites offering support in Ukraine**

I am writing about the current situation in Ukraine and how that affects the rest of Europe.

Since the conflict there started, the conferences of Mennonites in Europe have been mobilized to pray, help, and support Mennonites in Ukraine.

In October 2018, I had the privilege of visiting that wonderful country and churches in Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and Molochansk. I saw wonderful and vibrant churches, with lots of youth and great relationships among the members. Unfortunately, those great times are mostly gone now, and the Mennonite churches in Ukraine are making great efforts to support everyone in need.

The Mennonites in other parts of Europe and their partners are committed to supporting our sisters and brothers in Ukraine, not only financially but also with material goods and anything else they need.

Currently 12 European Mennonite conferences in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Lithuania, Ukraine, Netherlands, Germany and United Kingdom are offering help. For example, Mennonites in Lithuania are doing a fantastic work of driving vans full of goods, from Vilnius all way to the Ukraine border, covering around 2000 kilometres round trip. Because there are so many refugees waiting at the border, sometimes drivers need to wait several hours before entering the country. When they get there, they also gather with the members of the Ukrainian church, and after some time they return home.

The European Mennonite conferences are also working with Mennonite Central Committee Europe, Multiply and Dnipro Hope Mission, an organization connected with the Anabaptist Network in the U.K. that has social projects in Ukraine.

Please keep Ukraine in your prayers and pray for European Mennonites, that we can continue being effective and committed to our sisters and brothers in that troubled country.

JOSÉ ARRAIS, PORTUGAL

The writer serves as regional representative for Europe with Mennonite World Conference.

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

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Upfield—Hannah Faith (b. Feb. 6, 2022) to Alanna and Joe Upfield, East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Deaths

Becker—Peter, 101 (b. Sept. 22, 1920; d. Jan. 26, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Brenneman—Norma Laurene (nee Schmidt), 77 (b. May 11, 1944; d. Nov. 14, 2021), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Bueddefeld—Helen (nee Krahn), 98 (b. July 9, 1923; d. Dec. 4, 2021), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Dick—Elsie (Tiessen), 87 (b. Aug. 17, 1934; d. Feb. 28, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Driedger—Margaret (Willms), 91 (b. Jan. 31, 1931; d. Feb. 27, 2022), Leamington United Mennonite, Ont.

Dyck—Aganeta (Nettie) (nee Froese), 97 (b. Oct. 28, 1924; d. March 11, 2022), Vineland United Mennonite, Ont.

Enns—Irene (nee Wieler), 97 (b. April 5, 1924; d. Jan. 2, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Friesen—Doris, 89 (b. Sept. 22, 1932; d. March 6, 2022), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Friesen—Katie, 94 (b. June 3, 1927; d. Feb. 24, 2022), Rosthern Mennonite, Sask.

Kliwer—Maria (nee Janzen), 97 (b. Jan. 8, 1925; d. Jan. 18, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Kuepfer—John Raymond (Jack), 83 (b. Jan. 30, 1938; d. Nov. 15, 2021), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

Jutzi—Judith, 72 (b. Oct. 12, 1949; d. March 5, 2022), Erb Street Mennonite, Waterloo, Ont.

Leis—Clara Leis, 84 (b. May 31, 1937; d. Nov. 21, 2021), Poole Mennonite, Ont.

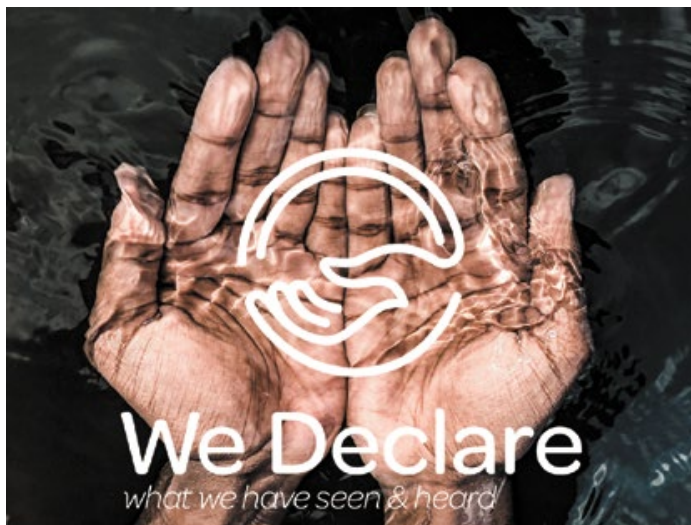
Peters—Edward, 94 (b. Aug. 17, 1927; d. Jan. 16, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Rempel—Leona, 97 (b. March 27, 1924; d. Jan. 26, 2022), Grace Mennonite, Steinbach, Man.

Steinmann—Joseph, 94 (b. Aug. 16, 1927; d. March 4, 2022), Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Yantzi—Nelson, 93 (b. June 14, 1928; d. Jan. 1, 2022), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to milestones@canadianmennonite.org, including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please also include birth date and last name at birth if available.



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



Mennonite Church Canada
Our nationwide community of faith



**Mennonite
Church
Saskatchewan**

**Employment
Opportunity
Executive Minister**

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, a regional church of MC Canada, comprised of 22 congregations in covenant with each other, invites applications for an Executive Minister.

Those called to lead the church into the 21st century with its growing diversity and change are sought for this position.

Gifts of a pastoral nature and leadership skills are valuable attributes for those applying.

The ability to reach out in support of pastors, in both rural and urban congregations, is an important component of the position.

For the Executive Minister job description, with preferred qualifications and current responsibilities, visit www.mcsask.ca or contact Andrea Enns-Gooding at searchcommittee@mcsask.ca. We will acknowledge receipt of all applications.

FROM OUR LEADERS

'It is hard to be afraid when you understand'

By Suzanne Gross

Our new *Voices Together* hymnal invites us to expand our circle. This involves getting to know people with different abilities, cultural ways, histories, faiths and stories that shaped them. It involves welcoming everyone as members of our human family.

In a recent webinar, author Omar Mouallem shared from his recently published book, *Praying to the West: How Muslims Shaped the Americas*. I asked Omar what advice he would have for an interfaith worker like myself. He responded that good interfaith work considers each group's histories as part of the bridge-building. As well, he encouraged me to explore smaller groups who have particular histories, not just the mainline groups that have greater power to represent others.

Omar summed up his advice with this: "It is hard to be afraid when you understand." Interfaith work is about bridging to create opportunity for understanding.

The nudge I heard from Omar is that deep understanding comes from knowing about faith practices and beliefs, but, perhaps even more importantly, understanding the stories and

histories that have shaped each individual and each group. These histories include what happened long ago and current geopolitics, but also the local history of the group in recent times. Our tendency is to take shortcuts, reducing people's stories by taking our cues from leaders and a media that often distorts the balance that stories of individuals and small groups offer.

Understanding is an antidote to fear. What is the opposite of "afraid"? And what is the opposite of "understand"? I propose that, in the context of interfaith work, the opposite of "afraid" is "familiar" and "predictable." When something is unfamiliar and unpredictable, it can give us a sense of fear. When things are familiar and predictable, we settle into acceptance as part of our normal. Of course, this takes time and practice.

The opposite of "understand" might be captured as the "oppression of misinformation." Misinformation encompasses all of the stories that are either only partly true or entirely false representations of me, my people, my history, my reality and my faith. When we understand, then we have done the work of listening to stories of others, which leads to that

which we most need in relationship—for those stories to be believed as true. When we accept misinformation as truth, we become part of an oppressive machine that perpetuates stories that allow harm to flourish.

Part of my job is to work with our Mennonite Church Alberta community to create opportunities for relationships to develop safely in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts. Then we, as a community, can begin to feel that there is familiarity and predictability in our interactions with people of different faiths. I do this by reaching out, showing up and hanging out with Muslims of all types, and by sharing my stories with you.

As we Mennonites absorb these stories, we can push back against the oppression of misinformation and we can create spaces for trusting and allied relationships to flourish—in the spirit of Jesus, our great example and saviour. ☞



Suzanne Gross is an interim worker for Mennonite

Church Alberta in its

North Edmonton Ministry. Her blog is at mcab.ca/north-edmonton-ministry.



A moment from yesterday



Spring! A time to shake off the cold and grey, decorate the church auditorium with quilts and share lunch and spiritual sustenance. This is the annual spring meeting and lunch of the Ontario Women in Mission at Bethany Mennonite Church in Virgil, Ont., in 1986.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing

Photo: Ontario Women in Mission / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

A difficulty for all of us

Arli Klassen

War seems close to home for many of us when it hits Ukraine. My paternal grandparents (and my husband's) fled Crimea as refugees nearly 100 years ago, getting married in Kitchener, Ont., and then moving to Manitoba. Conversations are being triggered in my family and in our congregation on the multi-generational impacts of those traumas.

The media coverage of war in Ukraine is detailed, vivid, and constant. We see the maps, hear the stories, watch the people, and our hearts break. As of late March, there are at least 3.4 million people who have fled Ukraine.

We heard similar stories in this last year from Ethiopia and Myanmar, but not as detailed, vivid or constant.

As of late 2021, the affected population in northern Ethiopia increased to about 7 million people, with more than 2.4 million people internally displaced. President Desalegn Abebe of Meserete Kristos Church said that at least 400 of their congregations were impacted by the conflicts. He told *Canadian Mennonite*, "A difficulty for one church is a difficulty for all of us."

In February, the UN Refugee Agency reported that there are more than 800,000 internally displaced people in

Myanmar. In March, Amos Chin, leader of the Mennonite World Conference member church in Myanmar (Bible Missionary Church) reported that "our situation is worsening because of the coup and unrest in the country. Most of our people in our churches have left their villages and stay in the forest because of the war."

This is not a competition; all these stories are tragic. Some are covered by the western press far more than others, for reasons of accessibility, politics and racism. Whether our families fled from their homelands just 10 years ago, 100 years ago, or more, we share the impact of loss and destruction of one's home and community.

Ly Vang of First Hmong Mennonite Church holds vivid memories of her family's flight when she was 12 years old, walking for 12 days to find safety, seeking food and water. Yoel Masyawong, pastor of the Grace Lao Mennonite Church, also has vivid memories as a child, walking 30 kms all night when they fled to safety, bringing nothing with them. Watching children walking to the border in Ukraine brings it all back, even though their stories are from a different continent and a different time.

"Sometimes I feel again like a little child who is lost, frightened and sad, but I can face it now, because God has brought so many good things into my life," says Vang.

Roman Rakhuba is the executive director of the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Ukraine. In mid-March he wrote: "Historically the Mennonite creed of life has been peacemaking and social service, and today is the time when we, as a large Mennonite family, can turn our calling into action. . . . People share everything they have and let strangers into their homes, help the wounded, serve in hospitals and risk their lives to evacuate people from under the shelling. . . . All churches of all denominations are open to people who need shelter and food, and this is a huge testimony for non-believers. These are challenging times, but they help us put theory into practice."

These stories connect us to our own stories, and to stories from other parts of the world—the stories of fear and loss, of peacemaking and service. As the church, we find ways to generously respond to suffering, for where there is difficulty for one there is difficulty for all. ❧



Arli Klassen is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, and has served with Ly Vang and Yoel Masyawong on the MC Church Canada Joint Council.

Et cetera



German children care for creation

The Creation Care Task Force of Mennonite World Conference received 353 responses to their survey of how churches are caring for creation. Dora Schmidt of Mennonitengemeinde Enkenbach, Germany, wrote, "During a church service for *Erntedankfest* (Thanksgiving), the church members were invited to plant an apple tree on the church lawn. Together, we stood on the grass and watched as the children took their little shovels and filled the hole where the new tree (a heritage variety) stood. This year at *Erntedank*, three little apples were presented as the first gifts. We were reminded of the goodness of our Creator who makes all things new."

Source: Mennonite World Conference | MWC photo by Dora Schmidt

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Good Friday and the important travel companion

By Troy Watson

Can you believe that I proposed to my wife in a cemetery? It wasn't premeditated. We went for a walk and ended up there. That's when it felt right. I got down on one knee like a sentimentalist and said, "This is where it starts and this is where it ends." The line just came to me.

It was pretty cheesy and kind of ominous, but there was something so important about death for me that I wanted it to be part of our marriage journey from the beginning. Thankfully (and surprisingly), my preoccupation with death didn't kill the moment. She said "Yes."

I believe death is an important travel companion in life. It has much to teach us. The longer we delay our relationship with death, the more superficial our lives and the meaning we ascribe to them become.

A Buddhist monk encouraged me to treat everyone as if they're already dead and everything as if it's broken or gone. Imagine the person you are holding, your job or career, the possession you are admiring, the accomplishment you are relishing, the dog you're petting—all gone. Yet, here in this moment, you are getting "bonus time" to enjoy them.

I don't think this is a morbid practice. It's not completely hypothetical either. It's just an expanded perspective on what is true on a certain level.

Grieving people often say, "I wish I could hold them and tell them I love them one more time." We are getting that opportunity now. The person in front of you is in a sense already gone, yet in this moment you are getting that last chance.

Buddhist monks call this meditation on death "*maranasati*," which means

"remember death." Stoic philosophers called this practice "*memento mori*."

Most cultures in most eras have been keener to reflect on death than our 21st century Canadian culture. On the surface it may seem morbid and twisted but reflecting on death is a way of appreciating the amazing but fleeting gift life is—that the present moment is nothing short of abundance.

Jesus teaches us that death is really important. It is the gateway to life. We must die in order to live.

What kind of death is Jesus referring to? I think it's more than a poetic

wife told me he was surprised at how awkward most people are around death. "There are worse things than death," he said. "Never really living is worse than death."

Loss is real. It hurts. Grief is hard. We don't desire it. Nor should we. Dancing with death is more of a sparring match than a tango. You spar with death and his jabs hurt. But they also inform. They provide insight and wisdom. They prepare us for a reality we can't perceive in our lower states of consciousness.

The strikes and stabs of death wake us from our tendency to numb out, hide,

The longer we delay our relationship with death, the more superficial our lives and the meaning we ascribe to them become.

symbol or metaphor. You have to dance with death, get intimate with the grim reaper. You have to enter the abyss, the cave where you most fear to tread. It's not that your heart stops beating; your heart will probably race as you pass through the veil of non-being into "the Great Perhaps." To die and be reborn means passing through another birth canal, stripped naked of all you hold dear. You have to relearn everything which means you have to unlearn everything.

If you never go there, you're missing out on what Jesus calls abundant life. Full life. There's a deeper quality of existence on the other side. You tap into a great reservoir of joy, meaning, peace, purpose and love, but only death can be your guide on this path. You have to reach out and let death take you by the hand.

A friend who had recently lost his

sleepwalk and coast on autopilot. If we let them. But you have to feel them. You have to let death do its work.

Good Friday isn't just something that happened to Jesus that we are supposed to remember; it is something we must experience ourselves. It is an invitation to spend time with Death. To let the clarity of its shadow illuminate what really matters in life. Each day, hour and minute. Death helps us redirect our time and energy to invest in the few things that survive his fire. The things that endure, like faith, hope and love. Above all, love. ☩



Troy Watson is a pastor at Avon Church, in Stratford, Ont. You can reach him at troy@avonchurch.ca.

VIEWPOINT

Mend our beating heart

By Michael Wilms

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

My grandfather, Harry Giesbrecht, referred to the country, language and people of Ukraine as his “beating heart.” The many trips back “home” breathed life into his aging lungs. The cool water of the Dnieper, the pothole-riddled roads near Lichtenau, Molochansk and Nikopol, and the patriotic anthems transformed my 80-year-old grandfather into a young man. During the many times I accompanied him, this transformation occurred right before my eyes.

Opa grew up shoeless on the banks of the Dnieper River during Stalin’s infamous purges. His family was fractured because of Stalin and the Second World War. His brother died,

Ukraine. There is something powerful about touching the ground your ancestors worked and lived on. It shapes you. What Opa’s generation went through and faced no one should ever have to.

I used to think his story was unique. I thought it was powerful how he survived and was able to prosper. It is an important part of his story. As I got older and matured, I realized the true power of his story is that it was one individual example of what countless Mennonites endured. My grandfather’s story, as harsh as it was, was just one grain of salt in the hourglass.

This realization unites Mennonites across Canada. Every family that made

‘I grew up with his stories and they created a close bond between us. His story of escape and survival captivated me.’

his father was sent to Siberia and his friend was killed. At 16 he was forced to fight in the war. He survived and on May 1, 1948, Opa arrived in Canada. It is a day we still celebrate, seven years after his passing.

I grew up with his stories and they created a close bond between us. His story of escape and survival captivated me. Much of our time together centered on these stories and our conversations were a mixture of wonderful memories of his childhood, which was filled with boyish joy.

But woven into that joy was the absolute terror of war—the terror that still woke my grandfather in the middle of the night as an old man. My studies and my passions became intertwined with this history and our conversations.

I spent 10 years of my life traveling, writing and tracing Opa’s steps through

the trek from Ukraine and the former USSR from 1918 to 1948 is united. The stories, conversations and history stick to us like the thick clay of the Assiniboine River during a Manitoba spring. Every Mennonite family that I know has a story about relatives who dodged gunfire and explosions, fleeing with what they could carry on their backs. But even after all the pain and suffering, there still were whispers of joy—memories of a better time.

Despite all the suffering these families went through we have this deep-seated connection to the golden grain fields of Ukraine. It is one of the main reasons so many fleeing Mennonites chose Manitoba as their new home: it looked like their last one.

This is why the war in Ukraine is visceral for so many Mennonites today. It feels like we are losing our homeland

all over again. We watch the death and destruction on the news. We see the faces of our parents and grandparents in the victims of this heinous invasion. Generational wounds are being sliced open.

Mennonites are also known for helping their neighbours. The first chance Opa got later in life, he went back “home” and started giving back to the people of his former community. For 15 years, Opa was a board member of the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine. He wanted to give back to the people who lost so much. His history, his home and his past shaped him. And he didn’t want future children to lose their childhood like he did.

Today, our neighbours need us more than ever. Many are hiding in shelters, holding onto hope that this war will end soon. Millions of others have fled the country. They have begun the same trek our parents and grandparents made 80-plus years ago. They are travelling the same dirt roads looking for safety, with nothing more than what they can carry on their backs. They are bleeding, each of them leaving their “beating heart” behind in a pile of rubble.

We need to help this next generation of refugees on their journey and tend to their wounds, provide shelter for those with none and feed those who are hungry. We need to help mend their beating hearts. Perhaps our care will mend our own wounds of the past as well. ❧



Michael Wilms lives in Winnipeg. He is a board member of the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, which his

*grandfather co-founded. Michael spent a decade retracing his grandfather’s footsteps and backpacking through Europe, which culminated in his 2015 book, *The Grain Fields*. Read more of Michael’s writing at thegrainfields.com.*



NEWS

In search of the holy grey

Navigating post-pandemic polarization

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

With the worst of the pandemic behind us—hopefully—how can the church help address the division left in its wake?

Those divisions were highlighted rather starkly by the truck convoys. And though the trucks have gone home, the fervour lives on. On both sides. Lines are drawn.

Officially, our denominational leaders were 100 percent onboard with government restrictions. Leaders said there should be no religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccines, and they issued a terse “Statement on white nationalist symbols at ‘Freedom Rallies.’”

The temptation is to oversimplify the division. I have talked to enough pro-restriction progressives to know there is an urge to paint all “anti-vaxxers” with a single conspiratorial, white nationalist-adjacent, anti-science brush. But I have also talked to enough people who question restrictions to know the lines are much more blurred.

The public discourse has tended to ignore the grey areas and the legitimate questions, preferring instead stark lines of division. To address polarization, I believe we must now create more room for grey.

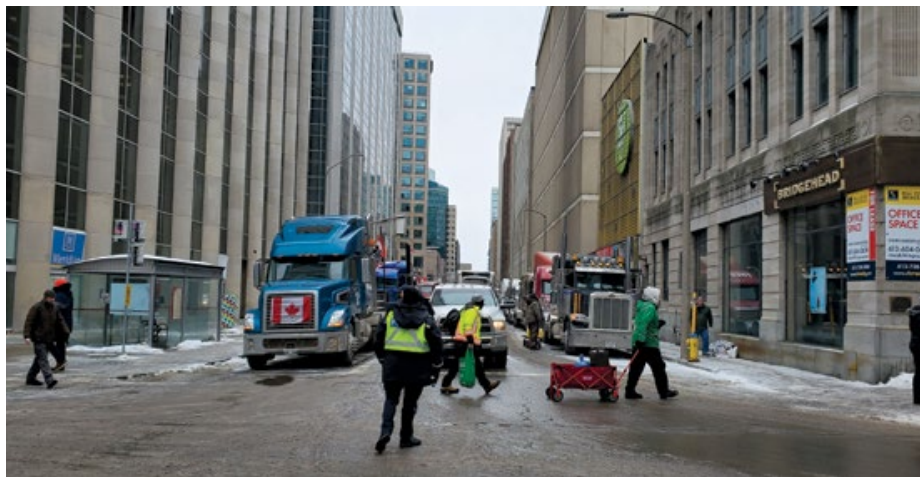


PHOTO BY LEZUMBALABERENJENA ON FLICKR

Truck protests in Ottawa highlighted pandemic-related division in society.

Of the 10 churches I spoke with last August, some reported no division—everyone was masked and vaxxed—some said they had lost members over restrictions and some were in between.

If we are to be candid, pandemic-related polarization in our denomination is surely reduced because some of the more conservative congregations and people have left in recent years. Still, there is certainly some division within our congregations, and plenty in the world we inhabit on weekdays.

The limits of welcome

Michael Pahl, executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba, leaves some room for grey, saying, “I can myself think of good reasons to be at least vaccine hesitant, and there is no doubt that pandemic protections have had some harmful effects on people and society (e.g., mental health, increased ‘silo-ization’ with inability to gather in person, etc.)”

But in response to my question about what churches can do to make people who

have not been fully onboard with restrictions welcome, his reply was less grey. “We need to do what we can to ensure all people truly are welcome,” he said via email, “but if welcoming some puts vulnerable people—especially physical/mental health-vulnerable people—at risk of real harm, then those people cannot be fully welcome.”

If a church maintains a mask mandate, Pahl says those not willing to comply “should not be welcome to attend an in-person gathering.”

Still, he says that once the “temperature around all this starts to cool,” he would like to see congregations “make deliberate efforts to reach out to all among them, including both anti-protection folks and those most fearful of COVID.”

Church got ‘sucked in’

Marcus Rempel is credentialed by MC Manitoba while serving a small Anglican parish in Beausejour, Man. He is vaccinated and has used masks diligently but felt the level of state pressure was too easily adopted by churches.

As the pandemic lines hardened and narratives solidified, Rempel was aware of “credible, intelligent people” who differed with the mainstream view. One of those people was David Cayley who was involved in producing over 250 shows for the CBC radio program *Ideas*, including a major series entitled “How to Think About Science.”

On his personal website, Cayley has said that there should have been more debate about the pros and cons of lockdowns and more space for the credible scientific experts who questioned what so quickly became COVID orthodoxy. The lack of such space, he says, is contrary to the sciences, which, “by their nature, are plural, contestable and subject to endless messy revision.” For him, those who appealed dogmatically to “the science” were misguided. Without room for disagreement and debate, science becomes something else.

Rempel says he started to resent that people like Cayley were largely excluded by the media.

And he believes the church missed an opportunity to blaze a distinct path. He

notes that early Christians were known for not being afraid of death. They cared for the ill, lepers, people who others considered untouchable. Now he says he feels like he has had an “allergic reaction to being told to relate to [his] neighbour by treating [his] neighbour as some kind of leper.”

Rempel feels there was “not nearly enough discomfort [in the church] about being willing to institute a passport system at the family gathering of Jesus.”

He says the church “got sucked into a monopolization of what loving your neighbour looks like, as dictated by the state.” And he felt there was little room for questions. In fact, the first time Rempel tried to raise some of these concerns with me in a social setting last summer, I shut him down. It was only later that I came to a point where I could appreciate the grey.

Another person in leadership in an MC Canada congregation chose not to raise concerns about church use of vaccine passports in these pages due to

the sensitivity of the matter.

Leader of the divided

Marvin Plett navigates the sensitive grey areas around COVID-19 division in a different context. Plett is a longtime city councillor in Winkler, Man., where vaccine uptake is 46 percent. Early in the pandemic, his social media post about why he masked up drew a harsh response. In terms of online negativity directed at him and his colleagues, he says there is no comparison between the pandemic and the times prior.

Plett has tried hard to avoid negativity, focussing on kindness and common ground. We can all agree, Plett says, on the importance of “community, families, each other’s spiritual and mental wellness.” We need to be respectful of one another and listen to one another, he says. Plett invites discussion. “If you really listen to others,” he says, “you’ll find common points.”

He is concerned about the extent to

which social media algorithms work against the creation of common ground and mutual respect. As a civic leader he has to do the opposite, seeking out and respecting the voices of all those he represents, and “always keeping in mind the people that are outside the majority . . . people who have not felt heard.”

Plett’s sense is that generally five to 10 percent of the population is at the far ends of the political or ideological spectrum. He feels those percentages have grown significantly during the pandemic. The hope now is to expand the middle.

In terms of getting back to normal, Plett sees this as a time to re-evaluate our values and perhaps improve on the previous normal. The values he points to are “kindness, caring, respect, empathy.” The pandemic has been hard on all of us, he says. “All of us were afraid of the unknown.” Different people responded in different ways. The question for him now is this: “Can we be gracious to one another?” ❧

News brief

Church ministers with muffins

Saskatoon—Once a month, volunteers from Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, Sask., spend the day baking 500 muffins. It’s part of an ongoing relationship between the church at Westmount Community School, a kindergarten to grade-eight school, located a kilometre away. “Westmount is a community school, so they have some students who need a bit of extra support,” said Claire Ewert Fisher, one of the pastors at the church. “The school has a free, daily snack that is made available to all 250 of their students, to ensure they’re at their best in the classroom.” Anne McLellan, the school’s community support worker, reached out to see if the church could help with baking the muffins. The Spiritual Care Team took on the project. “It’s another way that we can love our neighbours and our neighbourhood,” said Ewert Fisher.

—EMILY SUMMACH



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT ROYAL
MENNONITE CHURCH

Volunteers gather in the kitchen at Mount Royal Mennonite church to prepare, bake and package muffins.



!Explore: A Theological Program for Youth

In July 2022, participants (**grades 10 to 12**) can attend Mennonite World Conference in Indonesia with other Indonesian youth, explore theological questions and lived faith together, and visit parts of beautiful Java Island.

Sign up by Dec. 31!

Learn more: ambbs.ca/explore

Out of the pews and into the community

Toronto church reaches out around the world and in the neighbourhood

By Christen Kong
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

“We are out of the pews but in the community,” writes congregational member Olga Duran in the latest Toronto Mennonite New Life Church report, which summarizes 2021 as a year of immense giving and receiving of community support. For this congregation, gathering virtually has contributed to growth in a myriad of ways, including fostering local and international relationships and expanding fundraising efforts.



PHOTO BY BEATRIZ MENDEZ

A gathering of pastors from Artemisa and Mayabeque provinces in Mexico who received medical supplies from Toronto Mennonite New Life Church.

New Life was founded in 1983 by Adolfo and Betty Puricelli to reach out to refugee and immigrant communities and to respond to their diverse needs. At the time, there were many refugees coming to Canada from Latin American countries due to civil war and political violence.

Today, the church continues to support Spanish-speaking immigrants and refugees. The church is not only supporting integration into Canada but is “a place where spiritual needs can be nurtured among newcomer families,” says Maciel Hernandez, a longtime member. She says that for some, this is the first place where they held and read the Bible.

The church has experienced many

pastoral transitions. The 2013 retirement of Pastor Adolfo Puricelli opened up an opportunity for a new model of lay leadership, with mentoring and support from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. “It is a small, mighty community where God is at work,” says Maciel. “It is a community in action.”

However, as many church congregations shifted to virtual life together during the pandemic, the congregation found a new way of serving across borders. Each Sunday, Pastor Moises Hernandez has been hosting and leading service from Mexico over Zoom for the Toronto-based congregation.

Upon travelling to Cuba, Pastor Hernandez connected with Beatriz Mendez, a Cuban Mennonite pastor, who told him about an urgent medical need due to COVID-19. Many of her church’s members had contracted COVID-19 and were requesting medical supplies.

The New Life congregation mobilized quickly and collected funds to meet this need. It was more efficient for Pastor Hernandez to purchase supplies in Mexico to be delivered to Emmanuel Mennonite Temple (Templo Menonita Emmanuel) in Cuba. In just a few weeks, New Life had raised \$800, resulting in a total of eight boxes of the required medications and other health supplies.

At New Life’s 34th anniversary in November 2021, the Cuban congregation joined them to express gratitude for the medical-support boxes. This donation had extended beyond that church and had been shared with other church congregations in their local community.

“This Zoom business has a purpose to show there are no limitations no matter where you are from,” expressed Maciel.

Bridging local and international church communities did not end there. At New Life, Sunday services are often attended by many former congregational members from Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala. Virtual churches foster conversations between members who would not have the chance to physically gather in person.

The intermixing of Latin cultures helped catalyze the church’s popular fundraiser, called “Taste of Latin America,” prior to the pandemic. The fundraiser offered foods from countries reflective of New Life’s diversity, such as Ecuador, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Argentina, Honduras and Cuba. “It is like going to a different country. A chance to try new foods without purchasing a plane ticket,” says an attendee.

Since 1997, New Life has shared a building with Toronto United Mennonite Church. Although they were not able to meet in the building, they discovered last year that the roof needed costly repairs and improvements. Building on the success of “Taste of Latin America,” the two congregations were joined by Wideman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont., to carry out a virtual auction of baked goods.

There was a cake in the shape of a cathedral that sold for more than \$600. Another cake sold for \$500 and a dozen raisin tarts sold for \$200. In total, the virtual bake sale fundraiser raised more than \$6,000.

“What may seem impossible is possible for God,” says Maciel. “Keep your eyes open, mind open, heart open and hands willing to do.”

Gloria Lily Hurtarte is an example of willing hands. She serves as the spiritual counsellor at New Life, but she also uses her skills as a hairdresser as a means for ministry.

She began her hairdressing business seven years ago in the basement of her home. As Hurtarte cuts people’s hair, she finds opportunities for speaking about faith and God. She sees her work as a blessing in this form of service.

Maciel noticed that New Life’s church building was receiving mail from various organizations like Mennonite Central Committee and *Canadian Mennonite*. As

a way to disseminate Mennonite literature, Hurtarte's hairdressing business became what Maciel calls the "Mennonite New Life Church post station," with church publications displayed on a table at the

salon entrance.

Betty Puricelli describes the salon as a "church foyer."

In a time when church members are scattered because of the pandemic, they

continue to re-imagine fundraising and their community building continues through technology and homes used as places to gather. ☸

Mennonite Heritage Village hosts community prayer vigil

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
STEINBACH, MAN.

On the cold evening of March 13, about 60 people gathered outside at Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach, Man. to pray for peace in Ukraine. The museum, which commemorates the Mennonite people and their 500-year journey of migration, hosted the vigil to provide Manitobans an opportunity to grieve, pray and stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

The group encircled a monument that memorializes Mennonites and others who were displaced or killed in the violence following the Russian Revolution in present-day Ukraine. Almost 100 years later, the homeland of many Mennonites' ancestors is again facing violence and war. The cenotaph stands near the museum's entrance as a representation of those in the Mennonite community who know such loss personally and as a reminder to stand with those suffering in Ukraine today.

Gary Dyck, executive director of MHV, heard of many fundraisers being organized in support of Ukraine, but nothing encompassing prayer. "During times of grief and tragedy we need to come together as a community, support one another and pray for an end to the violence we see," Dyck said.

Alvin Suderman, chair of Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, gave an update on the centre in Molochansk. It has ramped up its operations, aided by increased donations, to help a growing number of refugees in its vicinity get food and supplies.

Participants broke into small groups



PHOTO BY JUDY PETERS/STEINBACH ONLINE

Sixty people gathered at Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach, Man. to pray for peace in Ukraine.

to pray for those affected by the conflict.

"For me it was really moving that the Mennonite Heritage Village would choose to honour the heritage of many other Mennonites and Ukrainian people here in Canada that still have historical connection to the homeland," says Elsie Kathler, a member of Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach and an MHV volunteer. "It gave us the opportunity to pray together; that was really special."

The 74-year-old is a third-generation Canadian whose great-grandparents emigrated from Ukraine. She's still in contact with extended family there, as well

as with a former Ukrainian student that her church sponsored to study in Canada. He has been like a brother to her and has been sending weekly updates from the frontlines of the conflict. When she told him of the prayer vigil, he said that "it really warmed his heart and brightened his spirit, to hear that people in Canada were doing that."

Kathler taught the gathering how to say "God bless Ukraine" in Ukrainian, which is her first language. They joined together in prayer, candles in hand or flickering around the monument, repeating the refrain after each prayer. ☸

Dare to dream

MC Alberta delegate sessions explore challenges and look ahead

By Jessica Evans
Alberta correspondent

In spite of a global pandemic, we dared to dream,” said communications coordinator Ruth Bergen Braun in her review of the year at the Mennonite Church Alberta annual delegate sessions held March 19. “We dreamt of a future filled with healthy congregations with strong capable leadership, growing relationships, a renewed camp ministry and new ideas for interfaith work.”

Ninety-three people were in attendance via Zoom, including staff, guests, and visitors. Forty-five delegates represented eleven churches from MC Alberta.

Throughout the day, attendees were encouraged to reflect on who they are and who God is calling them to be. The theme, “Encounter, Embrace, and Embody Christ in the World,” called attendees to look outward.

“I pray that in the year to come we may live into this calling, and in doing so more fully experience, recognize, and share Christ’s Good News,” encouraged Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, the regional church executive minister.

MC Alberta is currently in last year of a three-year-plan called E3, “Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ: In life, in community, in the world.” The questions invite members to ask how they are being called by God to engage with the world and to open themselves up for the challenges of these encounters.

In the business sessions, delegates approved the resolution to accept the revised bylaws to the MC Alberta constitution, which went into effect in Dec. 2021. The financial reports indicated that many in the regional church responded to God’s call to generosity in 2021. The finance team had planned for a deficit of \$75,200 in 2021 but due to the generous support and by keeping costs under budget, the regional church ended the year with a \$34,800 surplus.

Delegates heard reports about the transitions in 2021, a time to both grieve those who have left and to rejoice in future possibilities. This past year, Wiebe-Neufeld commissioned Werner and Joanne De Jong for ministry in Ethiopia through MC Canada International Witness. He led a licensing service for Steven Giugovaz, MC Alberta’s new church engagement minister, and organized an in-person retreat for pastors at Camp Valaqua.

With the retirement of Donna Entz from the North Edmonton Ministries, Suzanne Gross stepped in as an interim worker. She will be continuing the ministry of interfaith and intercultural relationship-building that Entz spent 10 years cultivating.

In his new position, Giugovaz will be helping congregations and individuals build stronger relationships and will nurture financial support of the various ministries. The role will be instrumental in helping members of MC Alberta consider how they are involved in the ministries they share and with the neighbours around them.

Delegates learned about Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton, which is currently in transition after the departure of pastor Werner De Jong. Speaking of the congregation’s history, member Margot Brunn said, “A seed was planted 65 years ago. It was a safe place, a place of refuge.” The congregation requested financial help from MC Alberta to hire an intentional interim pastor who would help them envision and plan.

Camp Valaqua saw ups and downs this year, with budget shortfalls and health restrictions. But, with the young adults in MC Alberta stepping up to participate in fundraising endeavors, Camp Valaqua has seen increased giving.

“It has been a year of huge challenges and amazing support,” reported camp director

Jon Olfert. “We were blessed beyond belief by everyone who has offered their time, prayers, and financial assistance to help us enter 2022 ready to go.”

The delegates heard updates from congregations, schools and workers abroad. Sandy Koop Harder and Reynold Friesen, representatives from Canadian Mennonite University, thanked delegates for their support and acknowledged that “students choose CMU because of influences in their life like you.” Delegates were then treated to a video rendition of “In the Morning When I Rise, Give Me Jesus,” sung by the CMU Singers.



PHOTO BY RUTH BERGEN BRAUN

On the day following the annual delegate sessions, members of MC Alberta took part in a joint worship service at First Mennonite Church, Calgary. Jenn Ratzlaff offers communion to Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, executive minister.

Alex Tiessen, admissions and development director at RJC High School, gave an update on what students are engaged in despite health restrictions, and the school’s concert choir performed “Over My Head.”

Hugo and Doreen Neufeld told stories about the ministry of Christine and Tom Poovong, International Witness workers in Thailand. Witness workers George and Tobia Veith, who returned to Canada this past fall, enlightened attendees about their 30 years of service in China.

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, who is in her third term as MC Alberta moderator, issued invitations for two summer events: Gathering 2022, happening in Edmonton and Amplify! the youth gathering at Camp Valaqua. ☸

Valleyview Mennonite honoured for supporting local community

By Charleen Jongejan Harder
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*
LONDON, ONT.

Valleyview Mennonite Church has been recognized with an award for more than a decade of engagement and advocacy around food security issues in their community of northeast London, Ont.

LUSO Community Services, a neighbourhood resource centre, presented the church with its Community Service Award late last year.

“Despite the unknowns of the pandemic, we were able to count on the support of volunteers from Valleyview at a critical time,” Elisabete Rodrigues, LUSO’s director, said when she presented the award.

Valleyview’s leaders are quick to point out that their work has been a partnership and community effort from the onset.

Doris Kipfer of Valleyview has served as volunteer coordinator and meal coordinator for the Welcome Wednesday meal program and also supported the Basic Needs and Community Support, two programs at the heart of Valleyview’s food security effort. She is the first to say that she doesn’t work alone.

“It wasn’t me that did all the work, but I had a heart behind it,” she said. “I supported the process of finding and connecting people who had the abilities and connections to see the project(s) through.” She recalls that growing up on the farm, “We never let food go to waste. If we had too many apples, we’d tell the neighbours to get some. And if they had too many cherries, they’d call us. It was considered almost a sin to waste food. Surely there is a way to harvest wasted food, and to use it for people’s benefit.”

Valleyview has long been investing in food and community. In 2008, Lynne Williams, who was serving as pastor of Agape Mennonite Fellowship, also in London, confirmed a need for a weekly daytime hot meal program in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF VALLEYVIEW
MENNONITE CHURCH

Mary Boniferro, chair of mission and social concerns at Valleyview Mennonite Church accepts a community award from Elisabete Rodrigues, executive director of a local community organization in London, Ont.

city’s underserved northeast. Together with Sue Eagle of East London United Church Outreach, Williams helped local churches launch what became Welcome Wednesday, a weekly gathering and meal hosted at the Salvation Army building, with five churches contributing on a monthly rotation.

Over time, other local congregations contributed financial support and volunteers with Baptists, Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Vietnamese churches playing a role. The meal became a community hub for 50 to 90 persons each week, and an important touchstone of fellowship including many isolated seniors. Meals were often preceded by crokinole and card games, with church volunteers and participants sharing the work.

From here the vision grew. The London Food Coalition was created in 2017, hosted by the Northeast London Basic Needs group, a collaborative effort of

churches, non-profit organizations and government agencies. Their vision was to rescue, recover and redistribute food waste from the city’s grocery stores. The city of London contributed a refrigerated truck that picks up food and takes it to a central hub at the Salvation Army’s Centre of Hope. From there it goes to various community groups. Valleyview’s share supports the Welcome Wednesday program, with extra fresh fruit and vegetables for people to take home.

In 2018, Valleyview helped launch a summer snack program in London’s northeast, providing funding and volunteers to serve families who rely on school breakfast programs during the school year. Nutritious snacks are prepared and distributed to children via three local YMCA day-camp programs, serving more than 200 children daily over the summer weeks.

In 2019, Valleyview participated in an experimental program in which a small group of families came together to shop, cook, learn, save and celebrate food together.

Over these years, the need for a local hub for the food bank was identified. Mary Boniferro of Valleyview was involved in that project which is connected with the local Hillcrest Salvation Army building and the Welcome Wednesdays program.

The pandemic changed things. Most in-person programs were put on hold, while the Welcome Wednesday became a takeout enterprise. During the pandemic winters, Valleyview contributed clothing, hygiene items, baked goods and fruit to Ark Aid Mission and St. Andrews United Church for people in overnight shelters. The homemade baked goods are most appreciated, as they show a personal touch at a time when personal connections are so limited. ❧

'Called to Here'

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan holds annual delegate sessions

Story and photos by Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan held its 2022 annual delegate session (ADS) as a hybrid event, allowing for both in-person and virtual attendance. Delegates met at the Youth Farm Bible Camp just south of Rosthern, Sask., on March 12.

Josh Wallace, interim executive minister for MC Sask commented, "After meeting only virtually for two years, we knew folks were yearning for a chance to be together, talk together, pray together, sing together. But we were in the middle of the unmitigated Omicron [subvariant] wave in Saskatchewan. We delayed our decision about ADS until mid-February, watching the COVID numbers and hospitalization rates closely."

He said the organizers were happy when it seemed that an in-person gathering would be a possibility, but they wanted to protect the most vulnerable people who might attend the meetings or get

infected by those who had attended. "So, we chose to insist on masking (even as the public order dropped), to encourage day-of rapid testing, and to invest in a high-quality Zoom experience for folks who opted to stay home." Fifty-eight people registered to attend the event in person while another 36 were registered for online attendance.

With the theme "Called to Here," participants were invited to consider how to live out the God's kingdom in their home communities, with their neighbours. At the forefront of the sessions were the global neighbours in Ukraine. The morning worship time was devoted to praying for peace for Ukraine, and a special offering was taken to support

Mennonite Central Committee's Ukraine emergency response. The offering raised just over \$1,000.

A portion of the business meeting that drew significant discussion concerned the three MC Sask-affiliated camps—Shekinah Retreat Centre, Camp Elim, and Youth Farm Bible Camp. Each camp has its



Gordon Peters (left) and Ernie Epp bring their "voices together" at morning worship.



Attendees of the annual delegate sessions enjoyed a pre-packaged lunch at socially distanced tables in the Youth Farm Bible Camp Quonset hut.

own distinct identity and corresponding challenges.

The MC Saskatchewan Council proposed hiring an outside consultant to connect with each congregation to ask the question, "What do you think MC Sask's camping ministry should be?" The cost for the consultation and reporting will be approximately \$20,000.

A few suggestions on how to reduce the cost were offered, such as commissioning a person within the regional church to do the survey and then hiring an outside consultant to interpret the results.

Terry Stefaniuk, MC Saskatchewan moderator, said, "The camp listening and consultation process has been discussed at council for some time. The impact of events of the past two years upon congregations and camps helped us to sharpen our focus on listening and learning how to move forward in ever-changing times within society and the church. A question that needs attention is, 'How can we as a community move forward and most effectively meet the changing needs of

our community and share the words of the Bible?”

Considering the impact of the pandemic, the regional church is in a reasonable place financially, according to Gordon Peters, MC Saskatchewan finance chair. Peters reported a deficit of approximately \$24,745.

Another invitation to care for “place” came when the Ministries Commission announced the formation of a Climate Emergency Response Team. This team would help churches navigate the real, human impact on the global climate while recognizing the diverse viewpoints on the topic. The team has six action pieces in their portfolio to churches: invite prayer and fasting; provide educational materials; help with action items such as planting trees and installing solar panels; do advocacy work; engage with youth who are experiencing eco-anxiety and climate grief; and foster respectful and compassionate postures toward all people who are impacted.

“It all begins, for me, with “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and all who live in it,” said Claire Ewert Fisher, chair of the Ministries Commission, quoting Psalm 24:1. “For the early Anabaptist followers of Jesus Christ, this verse provided comfort and encouragement as they faced mortal death. Now it can provide us with encouragement as we face the destruction of our earth. Together we can make a difference for good.”

After two years of pandemic, when turning inward was an expression of neighbourly love, MC Saskatchewan churches now want to open up more fully to their communities once again. Preston Pouteaux, the keynote speaker for the event, summed up that idea saying, “Jesus gives us a path through hard times, like coming out of COVID, and that path leads us to our neighbours.” ☞



Time to move

Mexican Mennonites in the Niagara Region look for more land

By Maria H. Klassen
Special to Canadian Mennonite
ST. CATHARINES, ONT.



PIXABAY PHOTO BY PHOTO_SPIDER

A Mennonite farm in Cuauhtémoc, Mexico.

There are about a hundred Mexican Mennonite families currently living in the Niagara Region.

According to Wilhelm Harder, most of these Old Colony Mennonite families came from Mexico, between 20 and 30 years ago, to settle in and around Virgil and Niagara-on-the-Lake. He and his wife, with their three children, came from Zacatecas, Mexico. They were planning to work only for a summer, but then got work year-round in a greenhouse, followed by factory work, and now he has his own business building decks, fences and gazebos.

That happened to many families, who ended up staying for many more years than they had planned to. The dream had always been to save up money and go back to Mexico.

“About four years ago, some families started looking to move elsewhere,” Harder says. “Their thinking was that their children would not have the opportunity to buy a house or a farm with the prices increasing rapidly.”

The families want to move to a place

where they can have more land, where they can work together with their entire family and start their own villages.

Most of these families have relatives somewhere in South America, and they heard about land possibilities in Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia. Some men flew down and checked out these places, deciding on Bolivia. Others planned to return to Mexico.

But plans were delayed when the pandemic hit in 2020. However, when restrictions were somewhat lifted in the fall of 2021, plans to move finalized. For some families unfamiliar with vaccines, it was an incentive for them to move when they could still fly without being vaccinated.

To date, about 14 families with approximately 40 children have moved to Bolivia, and another eight families with about 24 children have moved to various parts of Mexico. The men of these families work mainly in construction and on farms.

This migration makes up about 10 percent of their church population in the Niagara Region. ☞

‘I didn’t have any hope it could be played again’

Princeton, B.C., musician gets his banjo back with help from MDS Canada

By John Longhurst

Mennonite Disaster Service Canada

Wesley Emmelot and his wife, Maureen Parsley, lost almost everything when the Tulameen River overflowed its banks in the town of Princeton, B.C., in mid-November 2021.

“There was a foot of water in the house, and the basement was filled with water and mud,” Emmelot said.

Parsley, who works for Princeton’s emergency support services, was at work when her husband evacuated their home.

Emmelot could only take a few things when he waded out the door. Among the things the 66-year-old left behind were his prized instruments: accordion, ukulele, guitar and banjo.

“I play on the music team at my church and for people in a local personal care home,” said the amateur musician.

When he got back home after the flood, he found all the instruments had survived—except the banjo.

“It didn’t look salvageable,” he said of how it was waterlogged and stained. “I didn’t have any hope it could be played again.”

Mike Davis disagreed.

Davis, a Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) Canada volunteer from Trail, B.C., was in Princeton in January mucking out the couple’s house. When he first saw the banjo, it was standing in the corner of a bedroom on wet carpet.

“Wesley told me it was most likely done and might only be good for parts,” he said. “Little did he know I have a friend who repairs guitars.”

Davis told Emmelot that his friend, Dallas Fletcher, could do amazing things with damaged string instruments. “Let me ask him to give it a try,” he told Emmelot.

Emmelot wasn’t convinced it would work. But he agreed.



MDS CANADA PHOTO

MDS volunteer Mike Davis, left, presents the repaired banjo to Wesley Emmelot.

When his week of volunteering was done, Davis took the banjo home and showed it to Fletcher, who felt it could be restored to playing condition.

“Repairing stringed instruments is a hobby of mine,” said Fletcher, who is retired and goes to Trail Alliance Church with Davis.

It wasn’t easy; the water had caused the glue holding the neck to the body to become soft, with the result the pieces were separating. Fletcher clamped and glued it back together and made other repairs. He also removed most of the stains.

“Not all of them,” he said, noting that some stains wouldn’t come off. “Now it has history and character, and a story to tell.”

A bonus for Fletcher was this was a way he could do something for MDS, since a bad back and arthritis prevent him from volunteering to serve at a project.

“It’s something I could do to help someone hit by a disaster,” he said.

On Feb. 16, Davis presented the restored banjo to Emmelot, who was surprised to get it back in playing condition.

“I’m very thankful for what Dallas and Mike did,” Emmelot said, adding that if there is an event to celebrate the completion of MDS’s work in Princeton, “I can play my banjo.”

In the meantime, he is looking forward to playing it again at his church, New Hope Christian Fellowship, a Pentecostal congregation, and at the personal care home—once pandemic restrictions are lifted.

As for his house, MDS volunteers have cleaned out the mud from the basement, put in a new subfloor and are putting up new walls. The furnace, hot-water tank and electrical panel have been relocated upstairs to keep them safe from any future flooding.

“There’s a way to go yet, but it’s coming along,” said Emmelot. “I’m very thankful for all the help we’ve received, and for making so many new friends from MDS. I don’t know what we would have done if MDS hadn’t shown up.”

Since December, 93 MDS Canada volunteers from B.C., Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario have worked on 43 houses in Princeton, doing clean-out and repair; nine of the houses are complete rebuilds.

And they also fixed one banjo.

Recovery work in Princeton and the Fraser Valley is being done jointly by MDS Canada and Mennonite Central Committee B.C., which have entered into a partnership agreement to respond to the floods that hit B.C. last November. ❧

Celebrating 50 years of MCC Thrift

By Lori Giesbrecht

Mennonite Central Committee Canada
WINNIPEG, MAN.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is celebrating 50 years of thrifting with the anniversary of the opening of the first MCC Thrift shop in 1972. The MCC Thrift network provides financial support for the work of MCC around the world. Over the last 50 years, MCC Thrift shops have contributed over \$305 million to help people in need.

Before opening the first shop, MCC had been shipping secondhand clothes to partners all over the world. Clothing had been in short supply due to the devastation of the Second World War. In the early 1970s, MCC leaders determined that the money spent on shipping would be better used buying items locally at a fraction of the cost.

After hearing about this change, Linie Friesen, Selma Loewen, Susan Giesbrecht and Sara Stoesz of southern Manitoba dreamed up the concept of opening a temporary shop with the goal of turning secondhand clothing into cash to help others. In March 1972, the first MCC Thrift shop opened, in Altona, Man.

Fifty years later, with more than 85 shops in operation across Canada and the United States, MCC Thrift continues to help provide relief, development and peace in the name of Christ for people all over the world.

"We thought after about six months, everyone would have cleaned out their closets and we'd be out of business, but as you can see, that's not the case," said Susan Giesbrecht, one of the founders. "It grew much beyond what I or any of the four of us thought it would grow into."

Thrift shops are continuing to grow in popularity as people move towards living more sustainable lifestyles with eco-friendly practices. Secondhand shops offer individuals and families a unique shopping experience while extending the lifespan of clothing and housewares, helping to cut down on environmental waste. Plus, budget-friendly prices help

hard-earned wages go a little further with current supply chain shortages and increasing prices on everyday essentials.

"It's encouraging to see more people choosing to shop thrift," said Scott Campbell, MCC Canada director of development. "Awareness about the impact that unchecked consumerism, including fast fashion, is having on our environment is growing. Shopping secondhand is a great way to help reduce our impact on the planet."

To encourage people to develop eco-friendly practices and to celebrate this anniversary milestone, MCC Thrift launched its "Thrifty 50 Challenge" on March 14, 2022. Participants will receive a weekly sustainability challenge in their inbox every week for 50 weeks, plus a



MCC PHOTO

In November 1975, Mary Thiessen displays items at a thrift store in Clearbook, B.C.

chance to win weekly MCC Thrift gift cards. For more information about this challenge and to sign up, go to thrifty50challenge.org. ☘



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PEOPLE

Organizations started by Canadian Mennonites providing aid in Ukraine

By Aaron Epp
Online Media Manager

A humanitarian aid organization in Molochansk, Ukraine, founded by Canadian Mennonites continues to help the community amidst Russia's ongoing invasion.

Staff at the Mennonite Centre are serving food and occasionally providing shelter to embattled Ukrainians in Molochansk, which is occupied by Russian forces. The staff is also helping to fill requests for essential items such as medication, underwear and socks.

Based in a former school from the village's 19th-century Mennonite colony roots, the organization is supported by Friends of the Mennonite Centre, a registered charity based in Beamsville, Ont.

The war has been trying for everyone involved, says Alvin Suderman, chair of the non-profit. At the same time, the centre has been in a unique position to help. Roughly two weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, staff members stocked up on nearly \$2,000-worth of food after Suderman instructed them to do so.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUIE SAWATZKY)

In a photo taken prior to the invasion, Boris Letkeman, director of the Mennonite Family Centre, speaks with a group of women who are part of the Mennonite Family Centre's day program.



MCC PHOTO BY MATT SAWATZKY

The Mennonite Centre in Molochansk, Ukraine, pictured in spring 2019.

"We have been deeply involved," says Suderman, who lives in Winnipeg.

Oksana Druchynina, the centre's manager, has been managing remotely from Langley, B.C. as staff in Molochansk distribute aid.

Druchynina and her three children were travelling from Molochansk to Kyiv when the invasion began. Druchynina had planned to get her three children to an airport so that they could travel to Vancouver to be with their father, and then she planned to return to Molochansk.

Instead, the invasion meant that she and her children had to cross the border into Poland on foot before receiving a ride to Frankfurt, Germany. Because Druchynina had an active Canadian visa, she decided to accompany her children to B.C. until further decisions could be made.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUIE SAWATZKY

The Mennonite Family Centre, pictured before the invasion, occupies the first floor of this apartment block in Zaporizhzhia.

Zaporizhzhia operates a home-care program for about 145 seniors, as well as a six-bed respite program and a day program. The centre was started in 2002 by the Mennonite Benevolent Society in Winnipeg.

Despite attacks on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the city was relatively intact and still under Ukrainian control on March 16 when *Canadian Mennonite*

spoke to Louie Sawatzky, project director of the Mennonite Benevolent Society. The centre's clients and its 32 staff members are safe.

The respite program is ongoing and staff are making house calls and delivering food to those who need it, according to Sawatzky.

Only time will tell what impact the invasion has on the centre's activities. Sawatzky invites people to make donations at mennonitebenevolentsociety.org.

"[Once the invasion ends] we will assess the new needs... and see how we can adjust our programs," he says. "I just can't visualize there not being a fairly long period of dealing with trauma and loss. That is there already—the feeling of tremendous loss." ❧

"It was hard because I have my parents and I knew that my husband wasn't able to come with us because no men are allowed out of the country right now," Druchynina told CBC in mid-March. "But the fact that you have to save your kids, you have to save your family was stronger than that. You basically have to leave everything behind."

Established in 2000, the Mennonite Centre has an annual budget of \$300,000. The centre has been involved with a variety of projects over the past two decades, including supporting seniors, funding educational initiatives for young people, and paying for medical supplies and equipment for hospitals and clinics.

George Dyck of Beamsville, Ont., treasurer for the Friends of the Mennonite Centre, has been updating the centre's Canadian supporters almost daily via e-newsletters and social media.

"The response from the community has just been tremendous. We really appreciate the financial response," Suderman says, adding that anyone interested in making a donation can do so by following the instructions at mennonitecentre.ca.

Meanwhile, another humanitarian organization in Ukraine founded and supported by Canadian Mennonites has partially resumed its operations after suspending them at the start of the invasion.

The Mennonite Family Centre in

/// Staff changes

MC Canada, U.S. appoint new board chairs



• **Ron Ratzlaff** was welcomed by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada as the new chair of its board of directors, replacing Paul Gilbert who held the role since 2018. Ratzlaff has been involved with MCC in a variety of roles over many decades. He served as advancement director for MCC B.C. (2018-2020), MCC country representative in Kenya with his wife Martha (2008-2013), project consultant (2013-2021), and university instructor in Nigeria under MCC's Teachers Abroad Program (1974-1977). The Ratzlaffs currently live in Cochrane, Alta., and attend Dalhousie Mennonite Brethren Community Church in Calgary. "Ron was a clear choice because of the depth of his involvement with MCC over the years and his commitment to our strategic directions," says Cindy Klassen, chair of the board nominating committee. "Ron has an incredible knowledge of MCC, a heart for Jesus and a passion for the kingdom of God. His participative leadership style will bring out the best from all board members as we make decisions for the future."



• **Gilberto Pérez Jr.** was appointed as board chair of Mennonite Central Committee U.S., effective March 2022. Pérez has worked at Goshen (Ind.) College since 2012, where he now serves as vice-president for student life and dean of students. Formerly, he served as associate professor of social work and co-director of the Center for Intercultural and International Education. Pérez grew up in South Texas and now lives in Goshen, where he attends Waterford Mennonite Church with his spouse, Denise Diener. He holds a doctorate of educational leadership degree from the University of New England, a master of social work degree from Universidad Interamericana in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and a bachelor's degree from Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. He replaces outgoing MCC U.S. board chair Gwen White, who was appointed to that role in 2019 and has served on the board since 2008.

—MCC CANADA / MCC U.S.

International Witness workers arrive in Ethiopia after delays

De Jongs experience visa challenges

By Jessica Evans
Alberta correspondent

After a number of delays, Werner and Joanne De Jong arrived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in mid-January in order to begin their work as Mennonite Church Canada International Witness workers at the Meserete Kristos Seminary (MKS). The road has been rocky for the couple, as they navigate restrictions, visas and an encroaching civil war.

With their appointment set to begin July 2021, the De Jongs began preparing for the move. They sold their home and, with the help of friends, moved their belongings into storage. Surrounded by their church family, they were commissioned at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton in September.

The couple eventually managed to attain 30-day business visas so that they could fly, with the expectation they could extend the visas for another three months. The De Jongs are seeking a three-year work permit and residency visa, but after visiting a dozen offices, the process is not yet clear.

In February, the De Jongs' business visa renewal application was rejected. They then planned to leave the country and re-enter with a three-month tourist visa while waiting on the work permits. Because neighbouring countries also required visas, the couple ended up in Turkey, where no visa was needed and where their son resides.

A week later, they were able to rejoin their students and finally settle into their day-to-day routines at MKS.

The De Jongs, who previously worked in Ethiopia with MKS during a teaching furlough, find solace in the familiar.

"I can't believe how easy it has been to fall back into a routine of visiting with students and jumping into a *bajaj* (three-wheeled taxi) to go to town for errands," says Joanne. "I do miss having



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOANNE DE JONG

Werner De Jong enjoys coffee with his students.

reliable electricity and Wi-Fi as well as hot showers, but the people and drinking *buna* (coffee) under the trees makes up for it all."

Werner teaches pastoral care and counselling, wisdom literature and biblical and social ethics to third- and fourth-year students at the newly formed seminary. Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia is the largest denomination in Mennonite World Conference and is growing fast. The denomination decided to expand its capacity for leadership training by developing its college into a seminary last year. Joanne is providing support for the media and public relations department and mentoring students in English.

"Having been at the college once before makes it exciting to return," says Joanne. "Lots of happy memories of walking hand in hand with the students in the cool evening to drink tea and freely discuss questions around faith and current issues. I am excited to teach and be taught."

The De Jongs bring a wealth of experience in cross-cultural teaching and church ministry. Werner pastored at Holyrood Mennonite Church, an intercultural church in Edmonton, for 15 years. They

served in several short-term ministries in Africa, including at Meserete Kristos College in 2018. Joanne most recently worked with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and has experience as a youth pastor and with several non-profit organizations.

When they were asked to return to the college, there was a request for Anabaptist training focusing on leadership, discipleship and "what is a Mennonite?"

Excited about the prospect of teaching and engaging in fellowship, Werner says, "I had a wonderful experience teaching there during my sabbatical. I enjoy relating to people of other cultures, and I look forward to learning more about following Jesus from our Anabaptist sisters and brothers of the Meserete Kristos Church."

With conflict currently happening in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, many students have been impacted and are unable to return home for school breaks. One student shared with the De Jongs how his farming family was displaced because of the violence.

"It is true that we are in a very safe place in the country while other parts are more dangerous," says Joanne.

Despite obvious hardships, Werner has been experiencing the sincere generosity of the students he teaches.

"Students are repeatedly showing care for one another, even giving coins to those who beg when they barely have enough themselves," he says. "Often they pay for our coffees and just recently set up a fund to help support 18 students who could not pay tuition."

The De Jongs ask for prayers for peace in Ethiopia, a successful three-year visa application and that the students will grow in their understanding and actions as followers of Jesus. ☸

Nah Yo-dle: Low German Wordle

Popular word game gets a Mennonite twist

Story and photo by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG, MAN.

You may have just done a double take, but no, this is not a *Daily Bonnet* article. A Manitoba Mennonite really did create a Low German version of Wordle, a word puzzle craze whose popularity skyrocketed in December 2021.

Jared Falk, 37, launched Nah Yo-dle (nahyodle.com) on March 20 after becoming a dedicated Wordle fan himself.

Wordle is a daily online word game that gives players six chances to guess a five-letter word. Each guess gets feedback in coloured tiles that indicate when letters are correct, incorrect or need repositioning.

Falk, who works as a music publicist,

having a nice little chuckle at it, which I think is the initial point anyway.”

He describes his Low German comprehension as relatively surface level, gleaned from years of grandparents telling jokes and parents discussing things they didn't want him to hear. Yet there are many words and phrases from the language that he uses in everyday life.

To help him fill out his knowledge of the language, he grabbed a Low German dictionary, gathered several Mennonite and Mennonite-adjacent friends and brainstormed. The result is a game that includes a mix of English Mennonite-themed words, like choir and quilt, Low German words and slang from both languages that can't be found in a dictionary.

Creating a word game in a primarily oral, non-written language, like Low German, has its challenges. Spelling is one of them, but the spelling feedback has been one of Falk's favourite parts of the experience so far. Spelling debates can get lively in the comments at Instagram.com/nahyodle, where Falk posts previous answers and explanations of each word.

On day one, someone complained that “zoats,” Low German for “seeds,” was not in the dictionary, which sparked a long debate about the plural of “zoat.” “Lots of people have been saying this is a great way to have fun with the language and explore it a little bit more, and maybe introduce it to some more people,” Falk says.

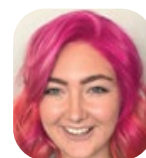
With a fairly simple, user-friendly

interface, Nah Yo-dle can be played by people of many ages. “That would be fantastic if we could get older generations and younger generations playing this together,” he says.

Collaborating on this project with Falk is Adrian Turnbull, a freelance web designer and graphic designer. ✎

✎ Staff changes

Pastoral, staff transitions in Manitoba



Kennedy Froese

became associate pastor of Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg on Jan. 1. She has been working at the church

since July 2020, first as a student intern, then filling in during the pastor's sabbatical. Froese is also a student at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, where she is working towards a bachelor's degree in biblical and theological studies with a minor in counselling practices. The part-time pastoral position focuses on youth and young adult ministries but also includes other responsibilities.



Melanie Neufeld

began working as director of mission engagement at Mennonite Church Manitoba on March 1.

The full-time position involves supporting congregations as they connect to God's mission in local and global communities. She previously served as pastor of community ministry at Seattle Mennonite Church in Seattle, Wash., for 14 years and, in 2015, became the founding executive director of a non-profit organization called Lake City Partners Ending Homelessness, which operates a shelter and conducts street outreach. Neufeld holds master's degrees in social work and divinity through a dual-degree program of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and Andrews University in Michigan.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE



Jared Falk created a Low German version of Wordle, the newest word puzzle craze racing around the world.

wanted to create Nah Yo-dle partly because he likes “that intersection where Mennonite culture meets satire and where we can celebrate and make fun of ourselves at the same time. I feel like this is a tiny extension of that, in being able to have fun with the language a little bit,” says the Winnipegger, who is originally from Altona, Man. “Mostly it's a lot of people

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Lent-opoly at RJC High School

By Alex Tiessen

It's common for some people during the Lenten season to give something up, like chocolate, while others choose to take something on that will add meaning to their life. At RJC High School, students participate in "Lent-opoly," a school-wide fundraising game that encourages students to take on acts of service.

The goal of Lent-opoly is for students to raise money by doing acts of service in their community, such as shoveling snow for their neighbours or baking pies for their church. During this time the school chapel is transformed into a giant Monopoly-like board, and as students raise money for the school team, they have the opportunity to roll the dice and move across the board. The game provides a motivation for students to raise as

much money as they can, as winning teams win various prizes.

Over the past 14 years students have raised approximately \$50,000 that have gone toward partner organizations that RJC students will work with during the Alternative Learning and Service Opportunities (ALSO) week. This year, RJC students have a particular focus on supporting the Florence Center, a community development centre located in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, that supports children, adults and families dealing with disabilities, abuse, addiction and mental health issues.

We continue to be grateful for the ways in which the community that surrounds RJC continues to support its students, and the projects they take on. ☸




RJC HIGH SCHOOL PHOTO

Students roll giant dice as they participate in Lent-opoly to raise funds for Ukraine.



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Musicals are back

By Janna Wiebe
Mennonite Collegiate Institute

The Buhler Hall auditorium is buzzing with palpable energy and excitement at Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, Man. these days. That’s because after a long hiatus, musical is back at MCI. The last musical production, *Annie*, took place in March 2020, only two weeks before the province shut down due to the pandemic. Now they’re rehearsing *Matilda the Musical*.

To have a musical back at the school means a lot to students and staff alike.

“It feels like the entire school is working towards something,” says grade 12 student Sidney Poettcker.

Classmate Ayub Regehr agrees: “It feels like it’s symbolizing the return to normal. There’s going to be people here!” he says, gesturing around the auditorium. “Life here!”

Christina Banman, music director, understands how much the return of a musical means to the students and the wider MCI

community. “The musical at MCI is a core part of the overall MCI experience,” she says. “Participating in the musical helps develop student relationships, promotes mentorship across grade groups, contributes to student confidence, and is a significant source of accomplishment for the students who are involved. It’s so exciting to see students come alive with energy and purpose again.”

Banman continues, “The students have the opportunity to participate in something bigger than themselves and develop skills that they often take with them after high school.”

Musicals have been part of the MCI experience for over 50 years and draw patrons from as far as 200 kilometres away. It is considered a vital piece of MCI’s commitment to quality high school education.

Matilda the Musical runs at MCI from April 28-30th. ☘



After two years of restrictions, the return of a musical production at MCI in Gretna, Man., has breathed new life into the student body.

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MCC partners work to meet physical, spiritual needs

A Mennonite Central Committee staffer in Ukraine, who used to work with displaced people, shares the story of her own displacement.

canadianmennonite.org/anna



Sponsors sought for Afghan refugee families

Mennonite church leaders in Canada are appealing to their congregations to help bring 100 Afghan Christian refugee families to this country.

canadianmennonite.org/appeal



Bible curriculum celebrates diversity

A new multimedia study from Mennonite Church U.S.A. calls young adults to celebrate the intentional diversity of God's creation.

canadianmennonite.org/godsdesign



The Mennonite Game's winners and losers

Who is "in" and who is "out" in Mennonite churches in North America? Laura Pauls-Thomas reflects on that question.

canadianmennonite.org/mennogame



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Focus on Books & Resources

Send your suggestion of a new
book by or for Mennonites to
edassist@canadianmennonite.org

**CANADIAN
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Calendar

Nationwide

July 29-Aug. 1: MC Canada Gathering 2022, in Edmonton. Theme: "We declare what we have seen and heard." Information about Gathering 2022 will be regularly updated at mennonitechurch.ca/gathering2022.

July 31-Aug. 4: MC Canada National Youth Gathering at Camp Valaqua, Water Valley, Alta. Theme: "Amplify! Giving voice to what we have seen and heard." Registration now open at mennonitechurch.ca/amplify.

Saskatchewan

May 13-14: MC Saskatchewan women's retreat will be held at the Shekinah Retreat Centre. More details to follow.

June 11: MCC Saskatchewan Releaf Sale and Auction with drive-through lunch at Forest Grove Community Church, Saskatoon. For the online auction, items will be on display from May 23 to June 11. More info at mccskreliefsale.com.

Manitoba

Ongoing: Join an MC Manitoba gratitude group every second week for six weeks on Zoom, for 40 minutes of gathering with others in encouragement and sharing gratitude. Leader: Laura Funk, MC Manitoba's spiritual director-in-residence. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2YbxzRf>.

Ontario

Until May 6: "Voices Together: A Celebration of Art and Music," the Grebel Gallery, Waterloo. Featuring more than a dozen works of art found in *Voices Together*, the exhibition offers visitors a more intimate view of the art found in the new Mennonite hymnal. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/3GZ2aJE>.

April 25: New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale promotion dinner at Bingemans, Kitchener, 6:30 p.m. Tickets available online at www.nhmrs.com.

April 29-30: MC Eastern Canada

hybrid annual church gathering (on Zoom and in person at Redeemer University, Ancaster). Reflection on the parable of the mustard seed in Luke 13. (29) worship celebration from 7 to 9 p.m. (30) church business including the regional church's updated identity and mission statements, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Register at mcec.ca.

May 4: MCC Ontario online webinar, "Ndoozigbidoon Nibi: I am connecting to the water" with Mary Anne Caibaosai, water walker and Shirley Lynn Martin to discuss spiritual and cultural importance of water. Visit mcco.ca/events for more information.

May 12-15: "Indigenous-Mennonite encounters in time 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. For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2UhmHnHu>.

May 27, 28: New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale, in person at the New Hamburg (Ont.) Fairgrounds. For updates sign up at nhmrs.com/subscribe.

International

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

July 5-10: Mennonite World Conference's global assembly, in Semarang, Indonesia. Theme: "Following Jesus together across barriers." For more information, visit mwc-cmm.org/assembly/indonesia-2022.

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



July 31 – August 4, 2022
Camp Valaqua, Alberta

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mennonitechurch.ca/amplify

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Classifieds

Osler Mennonite Church

Employment Opportunity
Pastor of Faith and Community

Osler Mennonite Church, in Osler, SK, seeks a **Pastor of Faith and Community (0.75 FTE)** with a youth/intergenerational focus and worship participation.

Applications due June 15, 2022, with job start July 15, 2022. Contact Ben Buhler, chair, bbuhler@hotmail.com, 306-239-4706.

Job description available at www.oslermennonitechurch.org.

Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
April 18 <i>Focus on Books & Resources</i>	April 4
May 2	April 18
May 16 <i>Focus on Mental Health</i>	May 2



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHINATOWN PEACE CHURCH
Stephanie Ho (left), Sandra Kuepfer, Caleb Liu and Doug Peterson are ready to begin their work with fresh clean Tyvek suits.



MDS doesn't only repair or clean out houses, as Caleb Liu discovered when he moved waterlogged and frozen hay out of an outbuilding.

Chinatown Peace Church young adults serve with MDS

Mennonite Disaster Service

Six young adults from Chinatown Peace Church, Vancouver, B.C., spent university reading week, Feb. 20-25, volunteering with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) in Princeton, B.C. The group was led by the church's English pastor Tim Kuepfer

and his wife, Sandra. The Chinatown Peace Church is made up of two congregations—English and Chinese—to tallying approximately 100 people.

“It was a really positive time for everyone. I think everyone enjoyed it and

worked hard,” said Kuepfer. “Relationally, it was good for the group,” he added. “We got to know each other in a new way.”

They plan to send another group of university students in May, after final exams. ✎



Stephanie Ho and Ray Tsan were involved in some serious demolition.



Tim Kuepfer spent half a day in a crawl space, disconnecting and removing a furnace destroyed by the water and muck.