

CANADIAN MENNONITE

November 28, 2022 Volume 26 Number 24



Christmas Feature

Women who prepared the way for Jesus

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INSIDE

Queer theology 15
Malcolm Gladwell at MCC gala 17
Join the feast 22

EDITORIAL

My prayer

WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org



Let me share some wishes for *Canadian Mennonite*, which are

largely my prayer for the overall endeavour of faith. These are topics I'm drawn to and challenges I note.

- **Tuesday afternoon.** I'm drawn to church that happens when people are not sitting inside on Sunday morning. Sunday services can be a blessing but what happens when we shift more energy to Tuesday?
- **Marginal Mennonite.** I long for points at which church goes to the margins, or vice versa: prisons, back allies, personal care homes, remote First Nations, war zones, homes for those with intellectual disabilities. Mutual transformation can happen on the margins in ways it cannot at the centre.
- **Evangelical affinity.** I'm leery of overly personalized faith, but I've long had a soft spot for evangelicals. For part of my life I attended a Vineyard service every year or two because I loved the openness, personal examination, conviction and less cerebral approach.
- **Diversity.** I believed in diversity before it got narrowed to include only approved groups.
- **Diversity.** I do not believe everyone must agree with me. It would seem preposterous to believe the opposite, but for much of my life I did.

- **Maybe there is something more important than being right.**
- **The Mennonite "we."** As Canadian Mennonites, who exactly do we mean when we say "we"? Most new congregations in our denomination consist of people who are not white and don't know who peacebuilding legends Peter and Elfrieda Dyck were. Plus, a quarter of global Mennonites are Ethiopian.
- **Intense and quirky.** I love big ideas and intense questions. I also like quirky, light and fun material. I did once co-edit a magazine that offered "holy mischief in an age of fast faith." And, of course, we all love stories.
- **Healing.** My heart aches for the broken relationship between Indigenous peoples and the rest of society. And for the broken relationship between all of us and the earth. These matters are impossibly big. We are people of impossibility. The church is in a strong position to bring truth and healing. I rejoice for glimmers of this healing and pray they increase many fold.
- **Isms and phobias.** Talk of isms and phobias abounds. In those critical conversations, I think we do well to address dynamics like anger, forgiveness, meekness and humility. On all sides, we do well to examine our hearts and test the posture of society against the holy paradox of Scripture.
- **Intergenerational.** The world is

embarrassingly obsessed with youth and newness, but tradition and old age are as much gifts as youth. Especially when the wisdom of elders emerges.

- **Solace.** I feel the pandemic meddled with individuals and society in ways we have yet to apprehend or address. I hope we can find understanding and solace.
- **Prophetic.** The church has to have something to say about tech and overconsumption.
- **Bible.** Love of enemies. Dying to self. Emmanuel. The upside-down Beatitudes. Love.

I'm also interested in what interests others. What are the pains and passions we may be slow to speak of? What's beneath the surface? What's happening at the heart of the church?

Corrections

- **Johann Funk's sermon**, "Listening to the Spirit..." was delivered at Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship on March 13. In the Nov. 14 issue we omitted "Inter-Mennonite" and used the wrong date.
- **The correct title** of Sarah Ens's book—listed on page 30 of the Nov. 14 issue—is *Flyway*, not *Flyaway*. Ens says of the title: "A flyway is a flight path used by birds as they migrate . . . I thought of this book, which follows our many routes to home, as a kind of flyway." ❧



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CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 28, 2022 / VOL. 26, NO. 24

ABOUT THE COVER:

"May the 'Light that has Lighted the World' fill your Christmas with cheer and your New Year with blessings."

'CANADIAN NATIVITY NO. 1' /
A MENNOPIX CHRISTMAS CARD BY ROSS W. MUIR

Treats, not tricks, for Mission church members 16

Cedar Valley Church's Halloween hot-chocolate stations offer neighbourhood outreach in Mission, B.C.

Eyes to see 18

MC Saskatchewan and New Leaf Network host panel on speaking about faith in post-Christian Canada.

Drawing the circle bigger 20

Ninth annual Christian-Muslim dialogues discusses right relations with First Nations

The gift of sewing 24

Helga Bergen of St. Catharines (Ont.) United Mennonite Church says, "I... feel my sewing ability is a gift from God."

Women who prepared the way for Jesus 4

"As hard as birthing Jesus was, mothering him surely proved much more difficult. And isn't that the way it always is?" asks

Joanna Harader in her profiles of Rahab, Mary and Anna from her book *Expecting Emmanuel*.



Regular features:

Readers write 8 Milestones 8
A moment from yesterday 9 Online NOW! 28
Schools Directory 29 Calendar 31 Classifieds 31

Fun, smart and committed Patty Friesen 9

Indonesian peacemaking Arli Klassen 10

Pain, longing, hope and joy Anneli Loepp Thiessen 11

Who is my Samaritan? Troy Watson 12

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FEATURE

Women who prepared the way for Jesus

By Joanna Harader



This artwork was submitted to the Canadian Mennonite call for student art by Aishel Nag of Bethesda Mennonite Church, Champa, Chhattisgarh, India.

Rahab acts by faith

Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:29-31; James 2:23-26.

Beyond the narrative in Joshua and Jesus' genealogy, Rahab is mentioned two other times in Scripture.

Both times her name appears in a list of heroes of the faith, and it seems like a miracle that this woman, a prostitute with only a brief mention in the Hebrew Scriptures, manages to make the cut. The author of Hebrews lists several people who acted "by faith" and were thus rewarded. In this long and illustrious list,

Rahab is the only woman commended for her faith. The author of James gives two examples of people *“justified by works and not by faith alone”* (2:24): Abraham and Rahab.

Clearly, Rahab loomed larger in the faith tradition than her brief story in the Book of Joshua might suggest. She is, in a sense, the saviour of those who would become her people; an exemplar of the type of faith in God that leads to courageous and significant works on behalf of God’s people.

One might think that as her status in the community grew, her story might have been cleaned up a bit. We might expect the focus to shift from Rahab’s earlier identity as a prostitute to her later identity as the wife of the Israelite Salmon and the mother of Boaz. Yet in both of these New Testament books, the authors identify this great hero of the faith as “Rahab the prostitute.”

I find myself wondering why the authors of both books would designate

Yet the full content of these two passages suggests that we all find our identity in our relationship with God, not in how other people view us. The authors of Hebrews and James may have viewed Rahab as a prostitute, but the crux of her identity was her faith in God and the courageous action she took.

When traditionally marginalized people are included in more mainstream contexts, there is often still a tendency to qualify their identities, to make sure that their marginal status is understood even as they may be placed alongside “important” figures. I am identified as a “woman pastor” far more often than my male colleagues are identified as “men pastors.” Those with physical and mental differences often receive qualifiers with their identities: the blind writer, the athlete in the wheelchair, the autistic professor. People who identify with racial and ethnic minority groups know this experience well, as do LGBTQ+ people.

One might think that as her status in the community grew, her story might have been cleaned up a bit. We might expect the focus to shift from Rahab’s earlier identity as a prostitute to her later identity as the wife of the Israelite Salmon and the mother of Boaz.

her in this way. Is this an attempt to diminish her even as they acknowledge her important role in Israelite history? Or is the mention of Rahab’s social position meant to emphasize the grace offered by God? “God can use anyone, even a prostitute!”

Why does Rahab alone have her morality questioned in the way she is identified? In the entire litany of the faithful from Hebrews 11, Rahab is the only one whose name is followed by any sort of qualifier. She is included with the men, but she cannot be just “Rahab” as the men are allowed to be identified solely by their names. She is “Rahab the prostitute,” a label that defines her in relation to men.

Those who benefit from the status quo want to control how we are identified. And to a certain extent, we can’t stop them: what they write gets into the history books; what they say gets broadcast over the airwaves. But in our own selves, in our own relationship with God, we can claim our pure identity as beloved children. In the context of God’s reign, Rahab is not “Rahab the prostitute,” or even Rahab the mother of Boaz; she is Rahab the faithful and courageous. May we also find our identity in our relationship to God.

• **Connect:** Sit in silence for at least three minutes and appreciate your identity as a child of God.

• **Consider:** What labels have people given you? What labels have you given others? What labels have you given yourself? What is the difference between an identity and a label? To what extent is one’s identity—be it gender, race, occupation, religion, relationship—important? In what ways does a focus on external identity diminish us? How can you claim your relationship with God as your central identity?

Mary treasures and ponders

Luke 2:1-20

This story of Jesus’ birth has a warm glow around it as we remember Christmas Eve services filled with candlelight and familiar hymns. When we hear these words, we envision the nativity scene: a loyal father and loving mother gazing down contentedly at their blissfully peaceful newborn son. By all means, we should hold that warmth in our hearts and enjoy the joyful memories. And we should also acknowledge that the holy family was quite possibly not in such a serene state at this point in the story.

After a long and difficult journey, Mary gives birth in a strange town, in a strange room, with an animal feeding trough for her son’s bed. None of this was in her birth plan. There is, for some new mothers, a surge of joy at holding their child for the first time, looking into the face of the one who has been hidden within their body for the past months. And mixed with the joy they may feel, there is also exhaustion, deep weariness, and fear—a terrifying realization of how vulnerable this human is that they love so deeply.

Amid all this, Mary receives unexpected visitors: the shepherds. They have come straight from the fields “with haste,” so they are likely dirty, smelly, out of breath. Imagine Mary’s surprise when this crew bursts in to gape at the child in the manger, when they start telling anyone who will listen about the angel, the good news, the multitude of heavenly host. It must have been disconcerting, to say the least. But Mary does not kick them out; she does

not ask what they are doing there. She does not start yelling or break down in tears. She *“treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”*

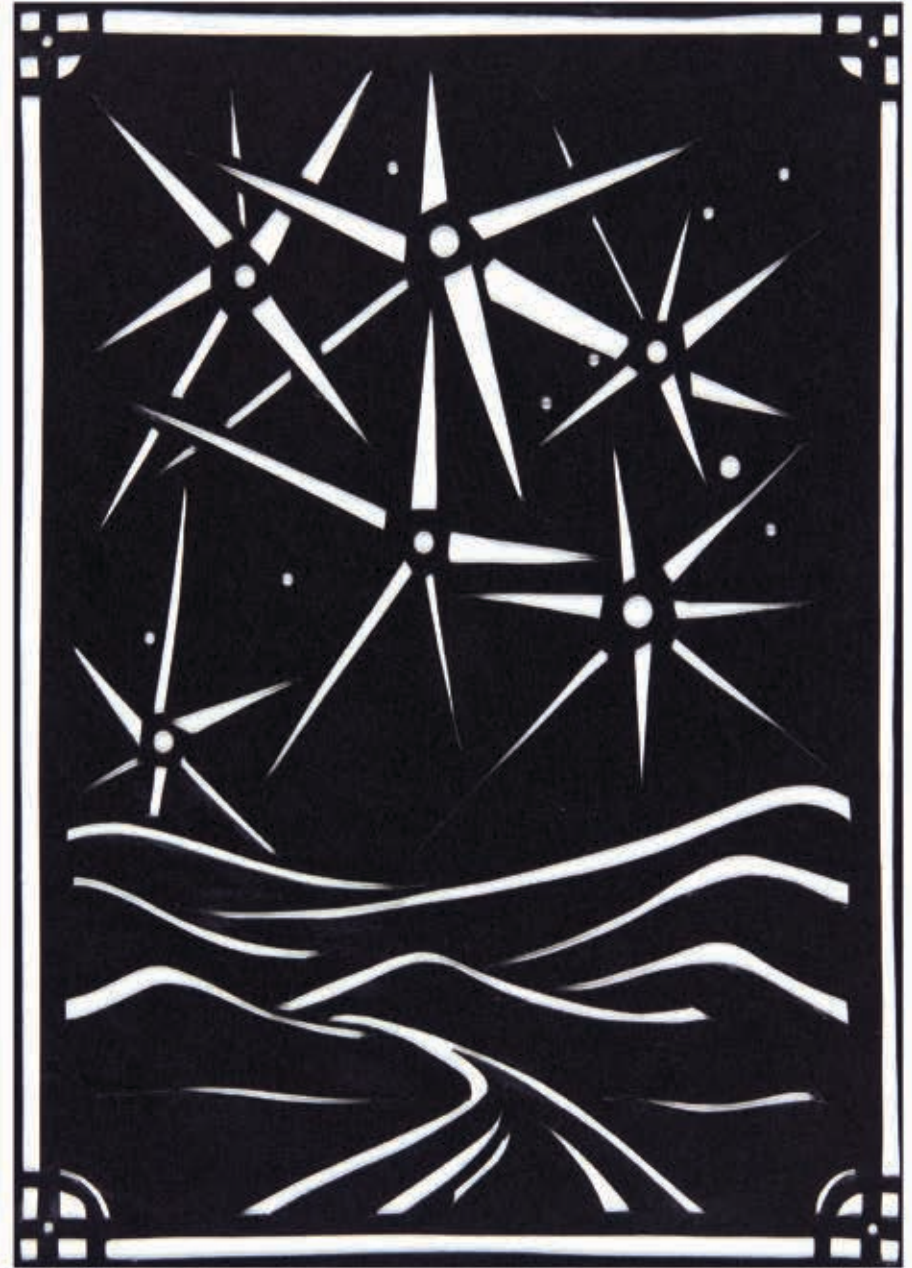
This is the second time we are told that Mary pondered. It is a lovely word. Pondering suggests a calm centre, a certain interior spaciousness, an ability to step back to a place of perspective and contemplation—which is not the state I imagine I would be in if the angel Gabriel visited me, or if a group of rough strangers crashed into my space right after I gave birth and started telling stories of more angel visitations.

I can imagine myself doing many things if I were in a situation similar to Mary’s. I might run or hide, cry or yell, start nervously fidgeting or be completely unable to move at all. What I

As hard as birthing Jesus was, mothering him surely proved much more difficult. And isn’t that the way it always is? Whether we are bringing life to a new human, to a new community, to an artistic work, to a project, or to an idea, the initial creation is often difficult, but it is also exciting.

struggle to imagine is that I would be able to ponder this angel presence, the unbelievable message from the excitable shepherds—to take the significance of these holy moments into my being and hold them tenderly, with curiosity, gratitude and wonder.

As hard as birthing Jesus was, mothering him surely proved much more difficult. And isn’t that the way it always is? Whether we are bringing life to a new human, to a new community, to an artistic work, to a project, or to an



ARTWORK BY MICHELLE BURKHOLDER

From Expecting Emmanuel: Eight Women Who Prepared the Way.

idea, the initial creation is often difficult, but it is also exciting. Creative work is carried forward by longing, anticipation and holy energy. Then comes the equally important, but less recognized, work of nurturing and sustaining our creations.

Mary does not just give birth to Jesus; she raises him. She cares for him, nurtures him, teaches him, walks with him all through his life. And I wonder whether

all this pondering at the beginning of her journey is part of what helped her with the ongoing challenges of motherhood. She maintained the energy of creation; she noticed the presence and work of God; she sat at the still centre of the miracle that was her life and held it as a treasure.

May we do the same in these holy days of Christmas.

- **Connect:** Centre yourself in God's presence. With God, walk through what you expect of your Christmas day and choose a time—even just 10 minutes—when you will step away from the holiday activities to ponder God's immeasurable love for you.

- **Consider:** What have you created? How would you compare the difficulty of creating to the difficulty of nurturing what you created? Where did you get energy for the creative part of your work? Where did you find energy to sustain your creation? Where is God present for you in the process of creation and the task of sustaining?

Anna praises God

Luke 2:36-38

This story tells of two elderly people at the temple who speak about the Christ child. I do not intend to diminish Simeon, who is obviously, as the text tells us, righteous and devout. He is a faithful man who is attuned enough to the Holy Spirit to be led to the temple on the day Jesus shows up. Still, while Simeon is identified as a “man,” Anna is introduced as a “prophet” (Luke 2:25, 36). An authority is given to Anna beyond what Simeon holds. Only three living people are named as prophets in the Gospels: John the Baptist, Jesus and Anna.

While Simeon “*came into the temple,*” Anna “*never left the temple*” (verses 27, 37). She “*worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.*” Of course, simply being in the temple—even being there “*night and day*”—does not make one righteous. In the Gospels, the temple is a conflicted space. It is where Jesus teaches as well as where religious leaders plot against Jesus. The temple is the setting for the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector who both come to pray, but only the humble tax collector “*went down to his home justified.*” And, of course, we have the (in)famous scene of Jesus turning over the tables in the temple court.

To be sure, there are plenty of unpleasant people who spend a lot of time at church yet still act in ungodly,

harmful ways; plenty of people who cultivate a religious veneer for their own selfish purposes. Being in a religious building and doing “churchy” things is obviously no guarantee of a righteous life.

But, for some like Anna, their presence with the religious community is sincere, their prayer is a true connection to the divine, and the spiritual disciplines they practise are for God and for themselves rather than for the appearance of it all. Anna inhabits the sacred space of the temple not for show, not to gain prestige, not even because it's what she is supposed to do; she inhabits the temple as a means of being

together in the narrative and in parables. But Anna shows up here to provide not just gender balance, but theological balance. Yes, the reality of Jesus' life—and therefore the lives of his parents—will be difficult and painful. And the reality of God's life participating in the world through Jesus is worthy of praise and celebration. The crucifixion is real. The resurrection is also real—and more powerful.

While true prophets might speak hard truths, they also radiate hope and joy; they believe deeply in redemption because they are deeply connected to the Redeemer. It is because of Anna's constant presence at the temple, because

Still, while Simeon is identified as a “man,” Anna is introduced as a “prophet” (Luke 2:25, 36). An authority is given to Anna beyond what Simeon holds. Only three living people are named as prophets in the Gospels: John the Baptist, Jesus and Anna.

in relationship with God and with God's people.

We are told that Anna approaches the holy family in the temple “*at that moment.*” Which, of course, means we have to look back and see what exactly “*that moment*” was: when Simeon tells Mary, “*A sword will pierce your own soul too*” (verse 35). That moment. It must have been a painful moment for Mary. Confusing. Heartbreaking. Frightening. Simeon's words are true, but heavy. Anna comes right at that moment and begins to praise God. Even though we do not hear the specific words that Anna speaks, we can imagine what a gift these words of praise must be for Mary at that moment.

While the grief and fear—the piercing swords—that Simeon speaks of are real, Anna affirms that the bigger, the more immanent and eternal reality, is the redemption God is bringing to the world in Jesus. Many scholars will point out that the Gospel of Luke frequently pairs male and female characters

of her prayer and fasting, that she is able to be present for the holy family at that moment, to offer praise and hope.

- **Connect:** Use your holy imagination to write down the words Anna might have spoken to Mary at that moment in the temple.

- **Consider:** What hard truths about your own life do you need to accept? What swords are piercing your soul? And what words of life and hope does God have for you at this moment? What might the prophet Anna say to you? ✎



Joanna Harader serves as pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Lawrence, Kan.

From Expecting Emmanuel: Eight Women Who Prepared the Way by Joanna Harader. Artwork by Michelle Burkholder. Used by permission of Herald Press. All rights reserved.

OPINION

/// Readers write

✉ Loosening a line in the sand

Re: “The sweet solace of polarization” series, Oct. 3, page 32; Oct. 17, page 20; and Oct. 31, page 26.

I wish to express my appreciation for the three articles that Will Braun wrote dealing with the COVID-19 vaccines and freedom convoy. I could relate to so much of what he said.

At one point early on I remember thinking that I hope the antivaxxers all get COVID-19 and die. Then I caught myself: Who have I become? That did not feel good.

When unvaccinated people stayed healthy and vaccinated people started to get COVID-19 and some died, I began to loosen my line in the sand. It wasn't all as straightforward as it seemed at first.

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.



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One does get tired of feeling angry, and there is now much healing work to be done.

I have lost one friendship over these issues. God help us.

MARY FREY-MARTIN, ELMIRA, ONT.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Froese—Benjamin (b. Oct. 4, 2022), to Sean and Meaghan Froese, Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Baptisms

Natalie Lesser—Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg, June 12, 2022.

Deaths

Baechler—Reta Barbara (Schlegel), 100 (b. Nov. 29, 1921; d. Oct. 27, 2022), Avon Mennonite, Stratford, Ont.

Ballau—Else (nee Voth), 95 (b. Jan. 2, 1927; d. Oct. 5, 2022), Niagara United Mennonite, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Bauman—Ada (Martin), 92 (b. June 24, 1930; d. Sept. 10, 2022), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

Bauman—Sonia Alice, 63 (b. Feb. 14, 1959; d. Oct. 3, 2022), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

Braun—Anne (Dueck), 94 (b. March 11, 1928; d. Oct. 27, 2022), Altona Berghaler Mennonite, Man.

Hein—Elizabeth (Betty) (nee Driedger), 83 (b. Aug. 16, 1939; d. Oct. 12, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Janz—Erika Helena (nee Enns), 83 (b. June 12, 1939; d. Oct. 24, 2022), Calgary First Mennonite.

Janzen—Victor, 92 (b. Nov. 8, 1929; d. Oct. 24, 2022), Steinbach Mennonite, Man.

Klassen—Frieda (Neufeld), 89 (b. Sept. 30, 1932; d. Sept. 29, 2022), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

Lehnert—Ann (nee Rempel), 88 (b. July 3, 1934; d. Sept. 26, 2022), First Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Patkau—Cornelius (Corny), 92 (b. July 29, 1930; d. Oct. 30, 2022), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

Penner—Helena (Klassen), 81 (b. July 27, 1940; d. May 4, 2022), Steinbach Mennonite, Man.

Schlichting—Nellie (nee Wiebe), 94 (b. Feb. 2, 1928; d. Aug. 23, 2022), Springstein Mennonite, Pincher Creek, Alta.

Siemens—Bert, 66 (b. Jan. 7, 1956; d. Sept. 18, 2022), Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Valenta—Stan, 89 (b. Feb. 17, 1933; d. Oct. 13, 2022), St. Jacobs Mennonite, Ont.

Winkler—Werner Guenter, 93 (b. June 14, 1929; d. Sept. 25, 2022), Preston Mennonite, Cambridge, Ont.

Zacharias—Ella (nee Dyck), 85 (b. May 26, 1937; d. June 8, 2022), Home Street Mennonite, Winnipeg.

FROM OUR LEADERS

Fun, smart and committed

Patty Friesen

One of my farmers annually invites me for a combine ride to educate this city slicker on “Ag 101.” It’s a thrill to watch the header of the harvesting machine munch through swaths, hawks diving behind us for mice. He’s a captive audience for my complaints and occasionally hits a badger hole on purpose. Good thing I have a seat belt! Generally it’s a cushy ride. Some of my predecessors had to help muck out dairy barns on their pastoral visits to farms!

I think we are visible in the community, but it’s neighbours feeling like they belong that is the challenge.

I observe changing rural demographics: smaller families, the sale of family farms and our shrinking rural churches. Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church will survive awhile because we have committed young families but I do worry about future sustainability. I think we are our own best-kept secret: We are fun, smart and committed. We

are an island here in the valley between the North and South Saskatchewan rivers, surrounded by theological divides in the branches of the Mennonite family. But non-Mennonites still think they have to be born into the family to belong.

We’re trying different community engagement efforts: Putting up a marquee with cute sayings; and hosting Theatre of the Beat, and the *Custodians: A Story of Ancient Echoes* film about Indigenous sacred sites and non-

Indigenous landowners in Herschel, Sask. I think we are visible in the community, but the challenge is for neighbours to feel like they belong. People generally have to know us before they trust us enough to come through the doors. And, to be honest, at this stage of the pandemic we’re still trying to rebuild our own church relationships.

Like other churches, the pandemic created new opportunities for online worship that have engaged our larger community, but haven’t resulted in folks coming through the doors. The pandemic also created more collaborative work with sister congregations through shared Zoom adult education, outdoor services and even pastor sharing. It feels like a season of new leadings of the Spirit, if I can be calm and open to them.

Working in a semi-rural church has attuned me to the seasons. I’ve never watched the rain gauge or talked weather so much in my life. I love how worship leaders pray for safe seeding and harvest, and our altar at Thanksgiving is full of locally grown wheat and pumpkins. I love commuting out of the city where the sky opens up for sunrises. This earthy faith has helped me trust that God will be with us to lead and guide us as God has done for the past 94 years. ☘



Patty Friesen pastors Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church, where she enjoys preaching and combining.

A moment from yesterday



There is a lot to take in on this photomontage of the Mennonite Brethren Church Choir from Badamsha, Kazakhstan—in Soviet parlance, a “closed city”—in 1971. Individual portraits of choir members, identified by first initial and last name, are grouped around an image of a modest building, presumably the “prayer house,” they had just received permission from the Soviet authorities to register as a legal church. Across the top is inscribed a German verse that must have expressed their collective sentiment: “Sing to the Lord a new song.”

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing, with assistance from Leonard G. Friesen
Photo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario



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 THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

Indonesian peacemaking

Arli Klassen

I am frequently asked, “What was it like to be in Indonesia for the Mennonite World Conference [MWC] assembly?” There are many possible answers, but today I want to focus on learning from our Indonesian Anabaptist sisters and brothers on how and why they build strong invitational relationships with their Muslim neighbours.

Indonesia has the fourth-largest population in the world, and the largest Muslim population of any country. Christians are just 10 percent of the population, which can make life difficult for individuals and churches.

Pastor Danang Kristiawan says that building peace in a pluralistic society is a calling for all communities: “Peace is not only the absence of violence or conflict; peace needs relationships, trust and understanding.”

One of the big public evening worship services at the assembly included traditional Javanese dance and music, as well as Islamic Sufi meditative dancers, known as whirling dervishes, or *semazens*. This brought controversy for some assembly participants who considered it syncretism. The Javanese Mennonite Church in Jepara dealt with similar conflict 10 years ago. Dialogue within the Jepara congregation over the

past decade broadened perspectives about what it means to be a peace church in their city, participating in interfaith events that include art and culture, along with theology and spirituality. Together, the two groups learn about and respect each other’s commonalities and differences.

Some assembly participants were able to visit an Indonesian Anabaptist congregation in Winong. The church’s meeting place is directly across the street from a mosque. The two faith communities slowly worked at building relationships of trust and peace.

Pastor Didik Hartono described the trust-building process through which they live out their shared visions of religious harmony in Indonesia. They built a canopy across the street, connecting the two meeting places, creating a shared space for hospitality and community.

A third story was shared in an assembly workshop that was co-led by Pastor Paulus Hartono from the Indonesian Mennonite Diakonia Service and Commander Yanni Rusmanto from an Indonesian paramilitary group. The two groups worked side by side after the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia. They began to dialogue, and found that they

were each working at community-based peacemaking. They continue to find ways to collaborate. Rusmanto said in the workshop that “[t]he world is full of violence, including war. This is the time for us to make peace together. . . . In the end, I say to you, all my Mennonite friends in all the world, to love peace, humility and nonviolence.”

One of the largest Anabaptist congregations in Indonesia is in Semarang, the site of the final worship service of the assembly. I saw how this large church serves as the community centre for their neighbourhood, providing soccer programs, vaccination clinics, food programs, educational opportunities and popular music concerts.

Kristiawan says that “relating to another faith or religion is not just a church method to make peace; it is a part of the very identity of the church, without which the church will not fulfil its own mission.”

And yet I am now involved in some conversations of concern from assembly participants in other parts of the world who find all this troubling.

May our churches also be creative with what it means to fulfil our mission, seeking relationships of integrity with Indigenous neighbours, and building a vision of religious harmony in our own increasingly pluralistic country. ✎



Arli Klassen serves as MWC’s coordinator of regional representatives.

Et cetera

Conscience Canada closes Peace Tax Fund

In a release from Conscience Canada (CC), president Jan Slakov states: “The fund was established decades ago as part of our efforts to withhold any support from war and militarism. As we go through a period of transition, we want to make sure that people who have deposited money in the fund know that it’s shutting down, so they can decide whether to ask us to return their deposits or all the funds to be redirected to Conscience Canada’s operational costs.” CC intends to maintain its Peace Tax Return and letter-writing option, available online at www.consciencecanada.ca. The board is exploring ways to help conscientious objectors to redirect resources from death and destruction towards life and health.



Conscience
Canada

VOICES AND STORIES

Pain, longing, hope and joy

Anneli Loepp Thiessen

On a Monday in the fall of 2014, Christopher Clymer Kurtz was supposed to be teaching middle-school English, but was distracted with an idea for a song. On Tuesday of that week, he worked out a melody. On Friday, his spouse Maria dove into older Christmas songs, like “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,” “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” and “Joy to the World,” gleaning ideas for the text. And on Saturday, the complete song was performed for the first time, a final product called “Solemn Stillness, Weary Streets,” that is now No. 276 in *Voices Together*.

Based in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, the Clymer Kurtzes perform as the singer-songwriter duo Clymer & Kurtz (clymerkurtz.com). Maria is a home educator and gardener, and a member of the women’s vocal ensemble, Shekinah. Christopher has worked in radio journalism, education, nonprofit development and marketing. Together, they have written many powerful songs that are widely loved. They are members at Park View Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

The duo’s website features multiple videos of various ensembles performing “Solemn Stillness, Weary Streets.” Most

lead the piece from the guitar, some with added instrumental lines or choral descants. From high school choirs to local congregations, the piece has resonated with a range of communities. The *Voices Together* arrangement employs unison verses, while the refrain has a soprano melody with a rhythmically contrasting harmony part notated for altos, tenors and basses. These harmonies offer a solid underpinning, complementing the melody by repeating “Joy to the world!” on strong chords.

On their inspiration for writing the piece, Christopher and Maria write: “When we imagined ‘Solemn Stillness (Joy to the World)’—our sole original Christmas song, which is included on our 2018 album *Snow on Snow*, and which was later adapted for the *Voices Together* hymnal—we wanted somehow to celebrate the intermingling of pain, longing, hope and joy that characterizes the season of Advent.”

They effectively communicate this range of experiences, as in the third verse: “Crushing fears are met with joy; sorrow’s curse is torn. Hear the music, fling your load down and unbend your tired form.” It is a hopeful anthem for a season that can be filled with exhaustion and grief.

The piece could be led in a range of ways, but it lends itself to accompaniment from acoustic guitar, taking advantage of the chord symbols provided throughout *Voices Together*. If the song is new to a community, a soloist could sing either the first verse or all three verses, with the congregation invited to join in on the chorus. Additionally, a choir or small ensemble could sing the harmony on the refrain, while the congregation would be invited to sing the melody. If the song is sung for multiple weeks during Advent, it could be slowly introduced with new layers every week.

The Clymer Kurtzes hope that the song will provide a way for individuals and communities to grapple with the range of emotions that emerge at Christmas. They write: “As a patchwork of imagery evoking both desolation and eager anticipation, we hope that ‘Solemn Stillness, Weary Streets’ will be a creative starting point for individuals and congregations to celebrate the Advent and Christmas seasons in the context of their own complex emotions.”



Anneli Loepp Thiessen is a PhD candidate in interdisciplinary music research at the University of Ottawa. She is co-director of the Anabaptist Worship Network and was a committee member for *Voices Together*.

Et cetera

Christianity in Canada on the decline

Based on the 2021 Canadian census, the WayBase organization reports that the total number of Canadians who identify as Christian is down 14 percent since 2011, to 53 percent. For Canadians aged 25 to 34 who identify as Christian, the number dropped by 20 percent, to 37 percent, representing the lowest percentage of any age group. For the Indigenous population who identify as Christian, the number dropped by 16 percent, to 47 percent. By province, the biggest percentage drops were in Nova Scotia (18 percent), and Quebec and Prince Edward Island (17 percent each). WayBase estimates that, during this time period, church attendance dropped from 1.96 million to 1.87 million; as a percentage of Canada’s population, that amounted to a 1 percent decline, to 5 percent. WayBase provides church leaders with data to help them understand the Canadian context they minister in.

Source: WayBase (waybase.com)



WayBase

LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Who is my Samaritan?

Troy Watson

In a conversation with an educated religious scholar, Jesus agreed that the most important thing is to love God and love one's neighbour as oneself. Then the scholar asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" In typical Jesus fashion, instead of answering directly, he told a story: the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In a conversation more than 20 years ago, I said, "If Jesus were preaching in our churches today, he would probably tell the parable of the Good Homosexual or the Good Muslim."

Today, depending on his audience, Jesus would probably tell the parable of the Good Anti-vaxxer who didn't wear a mask, or the parable of the Good Public Health Officer who recommended another lockdown. Why? Because that's how Jesus rolls. It was one of the things that drew me to Jesus as a teenager, his provocative contrarian attitude. He seemed to delight in challenging the assumptions, beliefs and opinions of anyone he was speaking with.

Why did Jesus use a Samaritan as an example of what love looks like in first-century Judea? The answer is obvious to me. Because the people he was talking to despised them. Why did they despise them? That's more complicated.

Samaritans are believed to be descendants of people in the northern kingdom of Israel who intermarried with Gentiles. Some Jewish "purists" viewed them as unclean and impure. It seems the term "Samaritan" was used as a derogatory slur in certain regions of Galilee and Judea.

In the Gospel of John, for example, Jesus was called a "demon-possessed Samaritan" by his opponents.

Samaritans had different religious rituals and a different version of the Bible than Jewish people. They also disagreed on where faithful believers

should worship God. They considered Mount Gerizim to be the true dwelling place of God, not Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

There were likely many reasons behind Jewish people's disdain for Samaritans, but notice how Jesus never addresses any of them. He simply challenges the Jewish attitude towards Samaritans by telling a story about one of them.

I was raised in a fundamentalist church that had many "reasons" for judging and despising all kinds of people. As a teenager, I questioned the

rigid religious views of my childhood tribe. In my 20s, I embraced the classical liberal values of individual liberty, equal rights and freedom of speech. I rejected the judgmental dogmatism of fundamentalism and adopted more tolerant and compassionate socialist values.

I believed, and still believe, I was following Jesus in affirming and supporting the Samaritans that my childhood tribe despised, namely, people who were gay, lesbian, pro-choice, Catholic, Pentecostal, Muslim, welfare recipients, immigrants, liberals and socialists.

A lot has changed over the past 30 years, including our social landscape in Canada, and the tribe I'm connected with. For instance, my professional and social circles consist, almost exclusively, of left-leaning progressive liberals. Lately, I have noticed other changes as

well, like who the Samaritans in our society are, or at least in the liberal world I inhabit. The way most people I know talk about "anti-vaxxers," "anti-maskers," "right wingers" and "Freedom Convoy people" has caused me to pause and reflect. Are these the new Samaritans I'm called to support and love as a follower of Jesus?

This has been a struggle for me. Due to my abusive upbringing in a fundamentalist church, I have lingering issues with right-wing attitudes and beliefs. Truth be told, I have kind of enjoyed right-wing conservatives getting a bit of a taste of their own medicine. I'm not proud of this, but it's true. I also find some of the "logic" and conspiratorial thinking aligned with some of the government mandate resistance, to be

Today, depending on his audience, Jesus would probably tell the parable of the Good Anti-vaxxer who didn't wear a mask, or the parable of the Good Public Health Officer who recommended another lockdown.

bizarre, delusional and even dangerous. So I've been asking myself, "Can I really support these people?"

Then it happened. Wait. Did I just say "these people"?

That was the moment I knew I had to repent. I confessed I looked down on, and dismissed, this diverse group of people, assuming they're all the same. I realized these people were my Samaritans.

It doesn't matter what our reasons are, when we view people as Samaritans, we part ways with Jesus. For years, I've reflected on the question, "Who is my neighbour?" I've recently acknowledged two equally important questions. "Who are my Samaritans?" And, "What kind of positive story would Jesus tell me about them?" ❧



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

VIEWPOINT

A biblical case for vaccines

Michael Pahl

Will Braun's series "The sweet solace of polarization" (Oct. 3, Oct. 17, and Oct. 31) is an important reminder of our calling to love one another even through our strong differences of opinion. Walking in humility, listening patiently, being gentle with each other, showing compassion is crucial if we truly want to live into the unity of the Spirit.

We do have a tendency to view things in binary terms. But life is complex. Humans are complex. Human societies are complex. The church is complex. There are few, if any, true binaries.

As one who has been outspoken about the importance of COVID-19 vaccinations and protections through the pandemic, I have had to learn this lesson myself. Conversations with vaccine-hesitant folks have reminded me that it's important for individuals to consult their doctor about any medical prevention or intervention. They have reminded me that behind alternative opinions are real flesh-and-blood people who have many of the same hopes and fears that I do. They have reminded me that Christians indeed share a common desire to love our neighbours, even if we don't always agree on the best way to do that.

Nevertheless, there are more questions we should ask each other. While humility, patience, gentleness and compassion are foundational aspects of Christian love, there is more of love to discover. We need to dig deeper into love.

At the time I write this, more than 46,500 people have died in Canada because of COVID-19 and its variants. In my province of Manitoba, one out of every 625 people has died because of this virus. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the elderly, racialized persons and the immuno-compromised. Statistics Canada estimates that 15

percent of Canadians who have contracted the virus have developed "long COVID," with symptoms lingering from a few months to potentially years after the initial infection. Some of these long-term symptoms are relatively mild, but for some people they are debilitating.

Major health-governing and research-collecting bodies, like the World Health Organization, continue to conclude that COVID-19 vaccines are safe, with extremely low risk of health complications from the vaccine (a far

Love in the way of Jesus requires a particular posture toward one another—a posture of humility.

lower risk of harm than COVID-19 itself presents). While vaccines have not provided the bullet-proof immunization many of us hoped for, they do reduce the forward transmission of the virus and they significantly reduce severe outcomes for those who are vaccinated. When good masks and ventilation are added into the mix in indoor spaces, the risk of virus transmission is lessened considerably.

All this should prompt us to ask more questions of each other, to dig deeper into love:

- **How do we** relate to "experts" as we make ethical decisions? Which "experts" do we trust, and why do we trust them and not others?
- **How do we** relate to our "governing authorities," to use Paul's term in Romans 13, especially as it relates to the

only debt we should owe: the debt to love our neighbours? How do we balance a concern for the common good with a concern for individual freedoms, again especially as it relates to the call of Jesus to love our neighbour as if their needs were our own?

If we do accept the reports noted above regarding COVID-19's impact on the most health-vulnerable in our society, what does it mean for us to love these neighbours, and how do we weigh that against any potential harms we may be concerned about from vaccines or other public-health protections?

Love in the way of Jesus requires a particular posture toward one another—a posture of humility, patience, gentleness and compassion. But that is not the totality of Jesus' way of love. His is a devoted love of God expressed pre-eminently through loving our neighbour as if their needs were ours (Matthew 22:36-40). And as we see from Jesus in the Gospels, the neighbours we should pay special attention to are the sick, the poor, the stranger—all those most vulnerable to harm.

May the fullness of this love drive us forward as we navigate the complexities of the ethical decisions we face. ☯



Michael Pahl is executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba.

For the research and reports referred to above, visit

*<https://bit.ly/3TnjJZ4>;
<https://bit.ly/3fOV4yQ>; and
covid19.who.int.*



VIEWPOINT

The how and why of Christian giving

Paul Redekop

One thing that struck me during the pandemic was how the right to meet in person for worship services was deemed by some to be so central to their faith that the laws and restrictions regarding the right to assembly at the time should not apply to them.

The practice of Christianity certainly includes regular attendance at worship services, as well as a devotion to personal prayer and contemplation. And, fundamentally, the practice of Christianity is practice of the will to love, in keeping with the commandment to love God and love neighbour as self. Just as our love of God commits us to prayer and devotion, so the love of neighbour commits us to devote ourselves to helping one another. And to giving as much as we can.

That is why, for a serious Christian, Christmas is not something that happens once a year, and that can be taken away, because every day is Christmas Day, a day of celebration and a day of giving and receiving gifts.

We each need to have our own giving algorithm.

But giving as a practice is not something we should do thoughtlessly. We each need to have our own giving algorithm. First, we give whatever we can to those whom we love unconditionally—spouse, children, grandchildren and so on. Then, there is our church, which is the source of our membership in the Body of Christ. If we have the good fortune to be able to give

more, there are decisions to be made. We should give where we can, but with a clear sense of the worth of what we are giving to, and a sense of commitment to the cause to which we are contributing.

As Mennonites, we are generally able to contribute to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) directly through our congregations. Those of us who have been involved with MCC in one way or another know that the staff and volunteers of MCC gather in the name of Christ every day to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ, by responding to basic human needs, and working for peace and justice. We used to say that a donation to MCC provided a lot of "bang for the buck."

Another option is to support Mennonite Christian education, from elementary school to university education.

There are many other needs to be met in the world, and many more worthy causes than we can ever comprehend. But each of us needs to work from the perspective of what we can give. And giving is certainly not just financial. We can—and do—give of our time and our energy in all sorts of ways. And we don't need to be giving all of the time, but just to be aware of opportunities to help.

Thoughtfulness is the Christian version of mindfulness. The Good Samaritan didn't set out to help fellow travellers along the road, but he was able to perceive a need and respond to it, where others didn't. And with that kind of awareness, giving can extend right into our everyday experience: a helping hand here, a kind word there, a quiet compliment at just the right moment.



FLICKR PHOTO BY MARCO VERCH

How we give is also important. Do we give with the expectation of recognition or reward? We may well deserve praise and reward, but if we feel we need it and then don't get it, we may become discouraged and lose our own joy in the act of giving. There are times when we should allow attention to be drawn to our acts of giving, as an example and a role model for others. But there is also a very deep sense of satisfaction from knowing that we have made a difference for others without their having to be concerned with expressing their gratitude toward us or repaying our kindness.

And finally, we need to learn to give ourselves what we need. As the Rabbi Hillel said: "If I am not for myself, who is for me." Be good to yourself, as much as you are to others, certainly not less. Certainly there are times when self-sacrifice is necessary, but sacrifice should never be an end in itself. ❧

Paul Redekop is a member of First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

Queer theology pushes beyond inclusion

Story and Photo by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

Affirming LGBTQ+ inclusion in the church has been discussed for years in many Christian circles, yet congregations and regional churches tend to not move beyond the initial question to discover the rich scope queer theology offers.

First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg is pushing past that boundary with its new series, “Queer theology and the church: After the affirmation.”

throughout the evening and about 50 people gathered in person for the talk, and the subsequent Q&A period and sticking around afterwards to connect with each other.

Kampen is an alum of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and Canadian Mennonite University, both in Winnipeg. She is currently at the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University



Melanie Kampen speaks on queer theology at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

“It’s often said, becoming an affirming church isn’t a conclusion but the beginning of a different way of being church,” said David Driedger, leading minister of First Mennonite. “But I wasn’t really seeing a lot of what that meant concretely in a lot of churches.”

At the first event in the series, held on Oct. 30, Melanie Kampen spoke about “Interrogating Christian theology to be trauma-informed and justice-making.” Almost 70 screens tuned in to the livestream

of Winnipeg where she is doing a post-doctoral fellowship and teaching a course on the history of peace and nonviolence. Her research has focused primarily on Mennonite involvement in colonization in Canada, although she spent last year studying sexual violence in Mennonite communities. Her work in queer theology has stemmed mainly from her personal interest and her experience as a queer person growing up in the Mennonite church.

As a queer Mennonite, Kampen refuses to engage in church conversations that question the validity of her existence.

“There’s this constant weighing of Scripture against the lives of queer people, more often than not without even involving queer people in the conversation,” Kampen said. “The question of inclusion is very tiresome, especially for queer people. Constantly having to do that kind of labour, being put in the position where you need to defend your very existence . . . is tiring.”

The question of inclusion is not even the most helpful, or interesting, question, she said, noting that, with inclusion, “you’ve just widened your circle to include another group of people. But it doesn’t change anything about the structures that made exclusion of those people possible in the first place.”

The church should not only be including people in the current structures; it should be breaking out of those structures and building new ones, she said.

More than a quarter of the event’s in-person participants were people under the age of 30. At a time when worry circulates about the decreasing involvement of young people in the church, this fact stands out.

“There is more that queerness asks from the church than simply inclusion,” Kampen said. “It makes me wonder whose other voices are we missing. People like me who won’t join the normal conversation, who we pushed out too far, that could potentially help churches be better.”

Other speakers included Tim Wenger and Matthew Froese, organizers with In this Together, who led a session about “Worshipping the (w)holy other: Queer theology in our hymns and confessions,” on Nov. 6; Driedger, who spoke on Nov. 13 on the topic, “Undressed or undone?: How sex and holiness change everything”; and Jude Claude, theologian and community organizer, who is scheduled to conclude the series on Nov. 20 with a talk on “Queer theology beyond inclusion: An exploration of the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid.”

To watch the four events, visit firstmennonitechurch.ca/services/.



Treats, not tricks, for Mission church members

Halloween hot-chocolate stations offer neighbourhood outreach

By Amy Rinner Waddell
B.C. Correspondent



PHOTO COURTESY OF LESLIE MILLER

Among the members of Cedar Valley Church who distributed free hot chocolate on Halloween night in Mission, B.C., were, from left to right: Jacob Seward, Carley Seward, Leslie Miller with infant, Grant Miller, Tom Miller and Alvina Miller.

On Halloween night, members of Cedar Valley Church in Mission, B.C., found a fun way to reach out to their neighbours with free hot chocolate and treat stations.

Several years ago, Pastor Grant Miller got the youth group involved in setting up some trick-or-treat stations on Halloween night in hot spots around town. These included a tent, table, fun lights and decor, hot chocolate and candy.

Last year, the church changed the model, encouraging members to set up the stations at the end of their driveways as a friendly way to help people meet and connect with their own neighbours, more than just being a place for a quick handing out of candy.

“Because our church building isn’t in the middle of a neighbourhood, we took the opportunity to head into the neighbourhoods instead,” said Miller. “This

was a fun way to have a presence in our community on an evening where everyone else is out with friends and family. As last year showed, many of us don’t even know all of our neighbours by name. It built up some great rapport with our neighbours and has actually had people remember the ‘hot chocolate’ people from previous years.”

With the church supplying the drinks, carafes and other needed supplies, Cedar Valley members were encouraged to set up stations and offer the treats to passers-by on Halloween night. This year, five stations at church members’ homes throughout the city were set up. The hope was that this would make a lasting impact and build new intentional relationships in the community.

“Tonight was great,” reported Miller at the end of the evening. “Groups got into it

with decorations and costumes. We figure about 50 litres of hot chocolate was made, about 300 cups. What’s really exciting is everyone shared stories of people making their way specifically ‘to the house with the hot chocolate.’ Something as simple as a warm drink on a cool evening makes a lasting impact that starts a real connection with your neighbours.”

News brief

First Mennonite Church celebrates 90 Years



PHOTO BY MARIANNE SIEMENS

Paul Matheson, First Mennonite Church’s pastor, speaks during the 90th anniversary program.

On Oct. 30, First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon celebrated 90 years of congregational life. The church held a special worship service, lunch and anniversary program to mark the occasion. First Mennonite was founded in the 1920s by Mennonites of German descent, primarily as an urban congregation for Mennonite women working in Saskatoon. Reverend J.J. Thiessen gave leadership to this work. In 1936, the congregation built its first church building on 4th Avenue in Saskatoon, but relocated to its present location at 418 Queen Street in Saskatoon in 1956. Over the years, the church helped to establish other Mennonite congregations in the city. The anniversary program included the retelling of the First Mennonite Church story and tributes to past leaders and pastors, as well as the singing of favourite hymns.

—BY EMILY SUMMACH

MCC gala dinner features Malcolm Gladwell

By Barb Draper
Editorial Assistant
KITCHENER, ONT.

Malcolm Gladwell, a widely acclaimed writer and podcaster, drew a crowd of 650 people to a fundraising dinner hosted by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario on Oct. 27 at Bingeman's in Kitchener. As is his style, Gladwell wove together interesting stories, while the audience wondered about the connections between them. But the strands came together in the end as he reinforced the evening's theme: "The power of partnerships."

The event was originally planned for 2020 to coincide with MCC's 100th anniversary but was postponed due to the pandemic.

Gladwell began by telling the story of two extraordinary acts of generosity. Henry Rowan, an engineer living in New Jersey, built a company that became the

largest furnace factory in the world. When he was approached by Glassboro State College to support the struggling school, he was not enthusiastic.

"We don't need schools, we need engineers!" said Rowan. After further conversation, in 1992, Rowan gave \$100 million so that Glassboro could build an engineering school where tuition would be reasonable. Rowan was the first person to write such a large cheque for a private school, beginning a wave of big-dollar philanthropy.

The second act of generosity was by John Paulson, a hedge-fund manager who made a fortune betting against sub-prime mortgages. A few years ago, he gave \$400 million to Harvard for the John Paulson School of Engineering.

"One donor gave to a small school, the

other to Harvard. Who made better use of their money?" asked Gladwell.

Another story was a sports analogy, comparing soccer and basketball. To improve a soccer team, statisticians have determined that it is better to replace the weakest player with a stronger one. As an interactive sport, soccer is only as good as its weakest link. Basketball teams, on the other hand, can get by with a weaker player. The Chicago Bulls in the mid-1990s and the Golden State Warriors of five years ago were championship teams that depended on only three exceptional players. Basketball is a strong link sport.

In life, is it better to strengthen the weakest links or the strongest? Gladwell described Paulson as a strong-link person who gave his money to the best university. Rowan, who depends on people all over the world to make his company work and sees everything as interconnected, tries to improve the weak links.

Modern medicine is also only as strong as its weakest link, said Gladwell. While studies show that there is a strong relationship between the success of a surgeon and number of surgeries he has performed, it does not hold if the surgeon goes to another hospital. The expertise of the team around the surgeon is important to his success.

Asking what Jesus meant when he said, "The first will be last and the last will be first," Gladwell said it is how people treat the last that matters. "We go further as a society when we build up a small university, not Harvard."

Gladwell concluded by saying that "the Mennonite community is a community devoted to weak links." He challenged the audience to carry the message that building a better community requires teamwork. "We are not playing basketball, we are playing soccer," he said.

The evening also included some short videos about MCC's work over the past 100 years, and the news that two containers of relief supplies were recently shipped to Ukraine via the Netherlands. Adding to the funds raised was a silent auction and a direct appeal for donations. While the total has not yet been finalized, the evening raised more than \$100,000. ❧



MCC PHOTO BY SHOUA VANG

Ian Thomas, left, of Kindred Credit Union and Malcolm Gladwell. Kindred was an important sponsor of the MCC fundraising dinner.

Eyes to see

MC Saskatchewan, New Leaf Network host panel on speaking about faith

Story by Emily Summach
Saskatchewan Correspondent
SASKATOON

In the current cultural climate, many churches, Mennonite ones included, are wrestling with the question of how to help members talk about faith and God's work in their own lives. At a time when "evangelism" can seem almost like a four-letter word, how can people of faith bear witness to God's movement in honest and authentic ways?

It was these sorts of questions that sparked "Eyes to see: Naming our divine encounters," a panel discussion facilitated by Mennonite Church Saskatchewan and the New Leaf Network. The hybrid in-person/virtual event was held on Nov. 9 in Saskatoon.

"MC Saskatchewan has been partnering with the New Leaf Network for a while in various ways," said Josh Wallace, interim executive minister of MC Saskatchewan. "This is the first event we've cooked up

together, and we intended to create a conversation that would serve us [the regional church] and their [New Leaf's] wider community." The New Leaf Network is a "collaborative, relational and creative missional organization that supports, equips and connects church planters, spiritual entrepreneurs and missional practitioners in post-Christian Canada."

The network seeks to fulfil its mission and equip people of faith through "online collaboration spaces, interactive learning workshops, events, storytelling and specialized coaching," according to its website.

Josh also served as the emcee for the event. "This is one of the happiest parts of my job—listening to what's going on in people's lives and working with partners as we explore the creative, growing edge for what God is doing in our world," he said.

The evening featured four panellists from four unique faith traditions and perspectives, each of whom was invited to share the places where they encounter God in their own journeys.

Sylvia Keesmaat, author of *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*, was in Saskatoon teaching a graduate studies course on Romans through Canadian Mennonite University. When asked where she sees God in her midst, Keesmaat talked about meeting God in the plants and insects that inhabit her off-grid farm north of Toronto. "Sometimes, I have a hard time seeing God. It's almost impossible to believe in God when I read the news in the morning, yet when I'm outside, it's so easy to believe in God," she said.

Cynthia Wallace, a member of the Backyard Church, a house church in



Jared Siebert, right, founder of the New Leaf Network, shares his story of encountering God in the failures of church planting, as Cindy Wallace of the Backyard Church in Saskatoon looks on.

Saskatoon, shared about meeting Jesus in the pages of novels and poetry, in friends and church members who offer practical care, and also through recent physical health challenges she has experienced.

“It’s not that Jesus’ suffering was exceptional; it’s that it was typical,” said Wallace. “In her poem ‘Descending Theology: Christ Human,’ Mary Karr offers a startling picture of the baby Jesus being made in our image as cross-shaped in our very bone structure, suggesting that just as we were made in his image, Christ was made in the image of our suffering.

“To be human is to know pain. So often I think I’ve been trained to look for God in moments of glory or perfection, but even Jesus’ resurrected body bore its scars, right? What might it mean, then, to centre Christ’s resurrection body: perpetually wounded and holy and good?” Wallace asked.

Talking about faith can be a tricky matter, but events like this help to find a way forward, said Eileen Klassen Hamm of Wildwood Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, who attended the event.

“I think one of the reasons it’s hard to talk about God’s work in our lives, [is because] we don’t want to presume we’re talking for God. We’re cautious for good reasons. At times, we’ve boldly said God is asking me to do this, and we’ve not been right about that. I think we’re right to be cautious about speaking for God, but then the question is, ‘How do we name how we experience God in good, healthy ways?’

“We’re reasonably humble, and don’t want to speak for God. But then the loss is that we then don’t talk about it at all. We take away the sacredness of lots of spaces, and every space is sacred. We’re losing all kinds of nuances,” she said.

For herself, Klassen Hamm said she sees God’s hand in the world around her, in the South Saskatchewan River that she visits almost daily: “The rewilding, spending time along the river has become so important to my daily and weekly routine, being outside, and attending to the daily changes. What Sylvia Keesmaat shared really resonated with me . . . seeing the magnificence of God in minute things. What is the offering for us, for me, on any given day? There is nothing that is not God’s realm.” ❧



PHOTOS BY JAMES NICKEL / TEXT BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE

James Nickel, a member of Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg was one of many people within the congregation who shared their artworks and thoughts on the creation process during a Sunday school series earlier this year. Nickel, 63, began painting when

he retired around five years ago. He creates because he enjoys the discovery. After he paints something, he sits with it and takes photographs, capturing different portions of the work up close; it’s then that the discovery really begins. Pictured above is a full view, and below a close examination of the same painting. ‘I never know at the beginning what’s going to happen at the end,’ he says. ‘I discover what’s there when I get there. I believe that God created us to continually discover us, to say when looking very closely at us: “Wow, that’s so cool.”’



Drawing the circle bigger

By Jessica Evans
Alberta Correspondent

“Our theme for the dialogue today is ‘Drawing the circle Bigger,’” said Scott Sharman, emcee for the annual Christian-Muslim Interfaith Dialogue, held on Oct. 29 in Edmonton. “We are asking our speakers to help us understand how our call into dialogue as Muslims and Christians also calls us to broaden the dialogue further. In particular, the way that Christians and Muslims living in this land we call Canada each have a responsibility to pursue right relations with the First Peoples in whose traditional territories we live.”

“The topic was chosen in part because of the recent visit of Pope Francis to Canada as part of a penitential pilgrimage among the First Peoples,” Sharman continued. “It also has a special urgency because of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that address religious communities. While some of these calls to action are directed in particular ways to Christian churches and institutions, there are also interfaith dimensions.”

The panellists, Christina Conroy

from Ambrose University in Calgary, and Sadique Pathan, outreach Imam at Al Rashid Mosque, were asked several questions on the topic:

- **What in your respective Scriptures/stories from your faith traditions encourage us to take collective responsibility for “sins of the past”?**
- **Can you reflect on the overlap between the Truth and Reconciliation process in Canada and messages and examples of reconciliation from your faith traditions?**
- **Are there Scriptures/stories from your faith traditions that illustrate “drawing the circle bigger” to include everyone as worthy of the mercy or love of God?**
- **Many Indigenous peoples teach that all of us live in a wide web of relationships—to other humans, certainly, but also to lands, to waters, and to what are often called non-human relatives, which includes plant and animal life, and also various kinds of spiritual beings. These relationships always come with mutual responsibilities. Please share a similar**

concept of relationship and responsibility from your own faith tradition and reflect on how it is relevant to dialogue and reconciliation.

Suzanne Gross, the bridgebuilding facilitator for Mennonite Church Alberta, shared a number of themes that emerged through the panellists’ answers and table discussions.

Although our Scriptures did not all include teachings on collective guilt or collective sin, the concept of collective responsibility emerged as a guiding principle as we navigate harms from the past. We reflected on the Christian concept of Jubilee, which is making things right economically, and the Islamic concept of balance, which is about justice in that our behaviours contribute either to God’s mercy or to God’s wrath. Both concepts invite us to live actively into a spirit of recalibrating or rebalancing for justice to prevail.

The Quran starts with ourselves, encouraging believers to be critical thinkers when



PHOTO BY SUZANNE GROSS

The annual Christian-Muslim Interfaith Dialogue at All Saints Anglican Cathedral in Edmonton.

People at Play

Table games throughout history reflect cultural values

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent

ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

it comes to judging others. It calls the faithful to stand firm for justice, even if it is against yourself. The idea that reconciliation is the core work of a Christian can be found in writings of the Apostle Paul in Colossians.

On the topic of overlap with Indigenous teachings about care of, and responsibility for, ensuring a healthy web of relationships with the natural world, Conroy shared how Jesus was so often referencing nature and using natural plants and phenomena in his parables. Who was Jesus' teacher in all of this? Likely his mother Mary. Both traditions have stories of caring for the animal world and the whole of the created world. Pathan talked about how, in the Quran, everything created praises God the creator—even the rocks—a concept echoed in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles as well.

An observation was made that governments seem to get stuck on apology, not able to move to action that brings about justice.

One table participant commented: "If government is the obstacle to addressing the systemic issues that keep us from moving from apology to justice, maybe these interfaith dialogues are even more important!"

Reconciliation starts with an acknowledgement of harm and apology, but can't stop there. Muslims and Christians need to convey intent that "we are with you; what do you need?" when it comes to reconciliation with their Indigenous brothers and sisters.

The event was hosted by All Saints Anglican Cathedral in Edmonton. Gross helped organize the event and find a location.

"We had hoped that the event would be hosted by Sacred Heart First People's Church, the church where Pope Francis visited in the summer, but they are doing renovations, and the work was not done in time, so we had to find a different place," she said.

The nine-year event has been a collaboration between A Common Word Alberta, the Anglican Archdiocese, Al Rashid Mosque, MC Alberta, Sacred Heart Church and Mennonite Central Committee Alberta. ❧

The commonality of playing games throughout history, and how and why civilizations have played those games, are the foci of the current featured exhibit, "Let's Play!" at Columbia Bible College's Metzger Collection museum.

"The exhibit seeks not only to highlight a consistency in humanity across history in the commonality of playing board games, but to understand the unique cultures and societies that have birthed the different games that have been played, and in turn, to understand why, in our day and age, we play the games we do," says a statement from the museum.

Games have been played for thousands of years by people from all cultures, says Greg Thiessen, the Metzger Collection museum's manager, adding that, "board games touch on what it means to be human. There's something about playing tried and true games that never gets old."

Thiessen notes that games have experienced a resurgence recently and, despite the popularity of video and electronic games, people still find face-to-face interaction around a table to be enjoyable and community-building. Columbia students have been gathering regularly to play weekly featured games in the museum.

"Let's Play!" highlights popular and familiar games such as Monopoly and chess along with some obscure and unfamiliar ones. Games fall into different categories, including racing games, games of strategy, games of skill, and war games. Some of the oldest games on display include Senet,



Greg Thiessen, manager of the Metzger Collection in Abbotsford, B.C., explains that Chinese checkers did not originate in China.

dating back to ancient Egypt from 1390 B.C., and the Royal Game of Ur dating back to 2500 B.C. Mesopotamia.

Visitors can learn interesting facts about the origins of games and their adaptation to other cultures, and about religious and historical oppositions to games such as Tarot cards, Dungeons and Dragons, playing cards, and games involving gambling elements. A discussion guide invites visitors to reflect on the types of games they play and whether some games tend to be either constructive or harmful.

The exhibit is interactive: visitors are encouraged to try their hand at the games on display. ❧

"Let's Play!" will be at the Metzger Collection museum until Feb. 17, 2023. See www.metzgercollection.org.



PEOPLE

News brief

Speech contest winner invites us to 'join the feast'



Food can be a tool for peacebuilding if we accept Jesus' invitation to join the feast. This is the theme of Danika Warkentin's grand-prize-winning speech in the 2022

C. Henry Smith Peace Oratorical Contest, a binational and intercollegiate event for students at Anabaptist colleges and universities administered by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) U.S. Started in 1974, the contest commemorates the late C. Henry Smith, a Mennonite historian and professor whose deep interest was in the Mennonite commitment to peace. Warkentin, of Pincher Creek, Alta., is in her third year at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg, where she is majoring in peace and conflict transformation studies. Her speech, "Join the feast," draws inspiration from an experience she had while living in Burkina Faso. A stranger on the street generously offered her and her family a portion of his simple meal. Warkentin says, "He had faith that tomorrow, if he was hungry and had no food, someone might share with him. That's feasting." Warkentin talks about the centrality of food to Jesus' ministry—from banquets with tax collectors and parables about fruit trees and wineskins, to the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus modelled abundance and inclusion. Food used in this way is a tool for peacebuilding, Warkentin states. At the same time, food can be used to exclude and oppress. Warkentin implores listeners to follow Jesus' ministry of sharing food and feasting together, asking, "Are you willing to join the feast?" To watch the three winning speeches, visit mcc.org/speech2022.

—MCC U.S.



Join the Feast (an excerpt)

By Danika Warkentin

So what is feasting? When I lived in Burkina Faso, I began to view the sharing of food differently. One morning, my family and I were walking down the red sandy streets to the marketplace when a local man called out to us from the side of the road. We went over to where he was eating his midday meal outside his courtyard. We greeted the man and entered into playful banter with him, a conversational skill that comes naturally to so many people in Burkina Faso.

Then he said to us, "*Vous êtes invités*" ("You are invited"). This man was inviting us to share the rice and sauce on his plate. He was offering the little food he had to us—foreigners with more than enough money to buy our own lunch.

This is not an uncommon occurrence in Burkina Faso. If you have food and someone else doesn't, it is socially appropriate that you offer to share what you have. The mentality is very much: "I am hungry, but you are also hungry, so let us eat together."

This is an attitude that seems to be less prevalent in North America, where we are sometimes more likely to say, "I bought

this food with my own money, so I get to eat it, even if I'm not hungry."

The man who offered us his rice and sauce was living with an attitude of abundance. He had faith that his plate of rice would be sufficient for the five of us to share. He had faith that tomorrow, if he was hungry and had no food, someone might share with him. That's feasting. You are invited. An offering of peace.

Food has the capacity to be a peacemaker, for two main reasons. The first is that it fills a basic need. It reminds us that we are all vulnerable, thin-skinned human beings who all succumb to pangs of hunger and—if it goes on for long enough—death. . . . We are united in our weakness and dependence on God for the gift of survival and, better yet, life.

The second main reason that food can be a peacemaker? Food is sacred. Think about the last thing you ate. Let's say it was a salad. Can you trace back the process of that lettuce's growth? Every leaf of lettuce was only an appendage of the larger head, which would have sprouted gently and deliberately from rich, dark soil. . . . A living thing burgeons from what would have otherwise been only a seed full of energetic potential. It is a wonder that those pieces of lettuce even made it to your mouth.

Jesus portrayed in Luke was someone who was moved by food and drink. We must remember that Jesus feasted. He was called a glutton and a drunkard, eating with anyone from any social class. The Kingdom of God he preached about was one of banquets. It is a kingdom that starts with faith the size of a mustard seed and grows like yeast mixed with flour. You are invited. Come and join the feast (Luke 14:17). ❧



PHOTO BY TANY WARKENTIN

Danika Warkentin, left, and Esther Bananzaro in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in 2018.

OBITUARY

Ontario Old Colony Church loses beloved leader

By Bill Janzen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

The Old Colony Mennonite Church of Ontario tends to avoid publicity, but the sudden death, on June 30, of the widely beloved *Aeltester* (bishop), Reverend Herman Bergen, at 83, is noteworthy, even belatedly.

The funeral, held in Aylmer, Ont., was attended by nearly 1,500 people, including Old Colony ministers from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the United States. Some 4,200 people came to the “viewings.” He was described in terms of Daniel 12:3: “*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*”

The Ontario Old Colony Church has grown to 14 congregations, spread out from Kingsville and Leamington in the southwest, to Virgil in the southeast, and Kitchener and Drayton in the north. Each of the three areas has its own *Aeltester*, but they form one church. Altogether, it has more than 25 ministers, as well as several ordained deacons. The ministers circulate from congregation to congregation. The church also has 13 day schools, with a total enrolment of nearly 2,000 students.

Like most of the people in the church, Bergen had roots in Mexico. He moved to Ontario in the 1950s. In 1982, he was elected to the office of *Vorsteher*, in 1990 to that of minister and, in 2003, to that of *Aeltester*.

With the warm support of his wife Elisabeth, Bergen was soon appreciated for his wise and compassionate leadership, and for being a caring pastor. He supported various activities for young people and readily involved himself in the extended preparatory classes for those seeking baptism. During his years as *Aeltester*, he baptized more than 2,100 people.

Many of the Mennonites from Mexico who have come to Ontario attend other churches, including the Sommerfelder,



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BERGEN FAMILY

With the warm support of his wife Elisabeth, Reverend Herman Bergen was soon appreciated for his wise and compassionate leadership, and for being a caring pastor.

Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, Evangelical Mennonite Conference, New Reinlaender, Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and a range of others. Most of these worship primarily in English.

The Old Colony Church uses German. However, its day schools are in English. There they use a curriculum developed by conservative Mennonites in the United States. They receive no government funding for these schools, and the church does not issue tax-deductible receipts for donations. A number of Old Colony families send their children to public schools.

Generally, the Old Colonists are cautious about relating to other churches, but Bergen supported inter-Mennonite work in the area, including that of Mennonite Central Committee, the local thrift store, the relief sale, a seniors home and other initiatives. He often expressed gratitude for how the larger Mennonite community extended assistance to newcomers. ❧



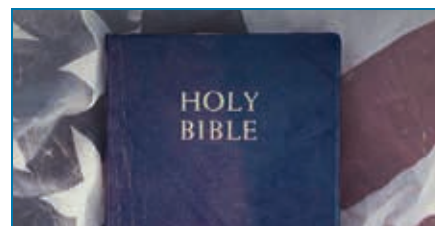
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The gift of sewing

Helga Bergen says her abilities are 'a gift from God'

Story and Photo by Maria H. Klassen
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Working in a long-term-care home in Vineland, Ont., Helga Bergen saw a need among the elderly residents. She came up with an idea to alter clothing for the bed-ridden residents, so they would be comfortable wearing their own clothes. She took an item of clothing, cut open the back, sewed a panel onto each side, finished off the seams, added fasteners, and it was ready to slip on. She didn't need a pattern, just an idea that developed into something bigger.

From a very young age, Bergen knew she wanted to sew. As a young child, she received a yellow floral skirt in a shoe-box package from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), wrapped in a towel held together with safety pins. When the hem of this skirt accidentally ripped, she got out her mother's sewing supplies and fixed the hem.

Growing up in Paraguay, all girls took sewing classes, starting at the age of 18. Bergen was so eager to learn that she started at 16. All clothes were sewn at home, using a sewing machine, as clothes were not sold at the local stores in the Paraguayan Mennonite villages. Bergen worked for the sewing instructor until she had paid for her sewing lessons. This gave her lots of experience sewing pants, shirts and dresses for the local clientele, and doing a wide variety of alterations.

Shortly after she married Jacob Bergen, they immigrated to Niagara Region, where they became members of St. Catharines United Mennonite Church. While raising a young family, Bergen spent many hours

working for local bridal stores, making dresses and doing alterations.

Both her father (in Paraguay) and her grandfather (in Siberia) worked as taxidermists, a skill they learned on their own. They felt they had a special gift from God of knowing what to do to make their work look real.

Bergen says, "I also feel my sewing ability is a gift from God."



Helga Bergen sews in a panel on an article of clothing.

From her father and grandfather she inherited the desire to do what she was gifted with, and watch it develop into something bigger, more than she could have imagined. Giving people pleasure to be able to wear their own clothes when they are bed-ridden is a way for her to serve God with her gift of sewing. ❧

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/// Staff change

Jonathan Neufeld new MC Canada Indigenous relations coordinator



Jonathan Neufeld has been hired as Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous relations coordinator, a role that will seek to coordinate and resource the regional churches in their relationship-building with Indigenous communities. Growing up in Landmark, Man., and Abbotsford, B.C., Neufeld studied and served as pastor in Winnipeg in the 1990s and 2000s. Most recently, he spent nearly 15 years as pastor of community ministry and just peace at Seattle (Wash.) Mennonite Church. Over the past decade he has been involved in forming the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition, a movement of Anabaptist people of faith "to address the extinction, enslavement and extraction done in the name of Christ on Indigenous lands" to Indigenous people. "In my work, I have witnessed the mutual transformation that is possible through respectful relationship when people of faith support Indigenous self-determination," says Neufeld. He was pastor of youth and young adults at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg from 1995 to 2002, and led Sunday services and VBS at Matheson Island and Pine Dock, Man., where he was mentored by Neill and Edith von Gunten, who formerly served MC Canada as Native Ministries workers for many years. Neufeld has a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and degrees in religious studies and theology from the University of Winnipeg and Canadian Mennonite University, respectively.

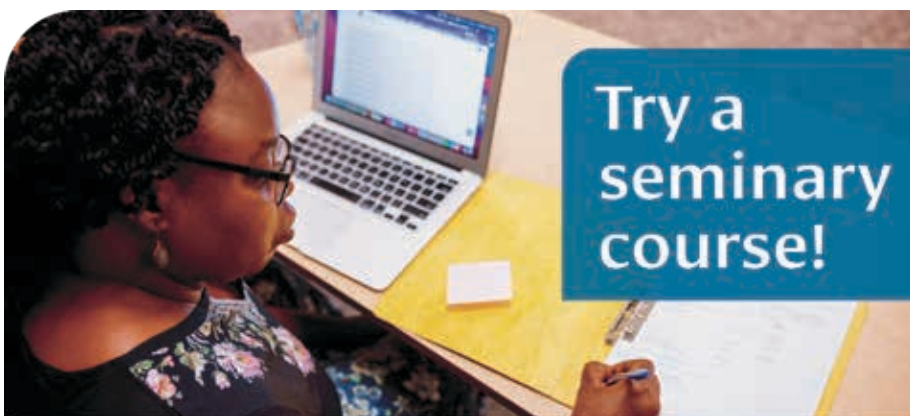
—MC CANADA

/// News brief

Mykayla Turner receives 2022 Abner Martin Music Scholarship

Mykayla Turner of Dashwood, Ont., is the recipient of the \$4,000 Abner Martin Music Scholarship for 2022. A graduate of South Huron District High School and the University of Waterloo, Turner is in her final year of a master of sacred music degree program at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University (SMU), in Dallas, Texas. Mykayla is affiliated with Nairn Mennonite Church in Ailsa Craig and Waterloo North Mennonite Church, where she has shared her piano accompaniment and worship-planning skills. She also completed course work as a master of theological studies student at Conrad Grebel University College and sang in its Chapel Choir. Since transferring to SMU, she has been working as a chapel assistant, which involves planning worship services and serving as a pianist or cantor when needed. The Abner Martin Music Scholarship has been awarded annually since 1981 to a deserving student who is affiliated with a congregation in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and is a full-time student in a graduate or undergraduate music program.

—MENNO SINGERS



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'MDS was such a big part of her life'

B.C. volunteers pay tribute to Evelyn Greenwood, tragically killed in 2021

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service
MONTE LAKE, B.C.

All was quiet on Sept. 6, at 9 a.m., as Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) volunteers in Monte Lake put down their tools and paused for a moment of silence.

They were doing it in memory of Evelyn Greenwood, a long-time volunteer with MDS, who was killed in a tragic accident exactly one year earlier.

They were also doing it in support of her husband Kevin, who came to Monte Lake with his son Ben, and son-in-law Steve Billing, to honour Evelyn by doing something she enjoyed—helping others through MDS.

'A whoosh and a huge bang'

It was Labour Day in 2021 when Kevin



PHOTO BY KEVIN GREENWOOD

Evelyn Greenwood, who died a year ago in September, was remembered for her dedication to Mennonite Disaster Service's mission at a ceremony in British Columbia, where her husband, son and son-in-law were volunteering in Monte Lake.

and Evelyn, members of Leamington United Mennonite Church in southwestern Ontario, were doing some yard work at their house.

"It was a hot and dry summer, and we were digging up the front lawn to plant new grass seed," said Kevin.

He was busy using the rototiller, so he didn't see a pick-up truck suddenly veer off the road at high speed and on to their lawn.

"I heard a whoosh and a huge bang," he said. The truck had sped behind him. It hurtled across the neighbour's lawn before stopping when it hit a tree.

At first, his attention was drawn to the crash. He didn't immediately realize that Evelyn—who was raking about three metres



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behind him—had been struck.

He only discovered her body when he ran to the truck to check on the driver.

He found her lying in the neighbour's garden, about 36 metres away from where she had been hit by the truck. "She was dead. The bang I heard was her being hit."

The cause of the crash is still unknown, and the case is still before the courts. Evelyn was 69.

Serving as a way to honour Evelyn

In the spring of this year, looking toward the anniversary of her death, Kevin, 67, decided he didn't want to be home alone.

"Our three kids are grown and out of the house," he said. "I didn't want to be here by myself."

He decided to serve with MDS in Monte Lake, both as a way to keep busy during that time, but also to honour Evelyn.

"MDS was such a big part of her life," said the retired elementary school teacher, noting they had served together with MDS nine times in places like Texas, West Virginia, South Carolina, Windsor and Ottawa.

"We liked to go serve and combine it with some vacation."

When his son Ben, who lives in Calgary, and son-in-law Steve Billings, who lives in Elora, Ont., heard his plan, they offered to come along.

"It was a great opportunity to support my dad and remember my mother by doing the kind of work she loved so much," said Ben, 37, who had done MDS work once before with his father.

"She loved MDS. It was a great way for her to help others."

For Steve, 45, it was "a chance to honour her by being part of something Evelyn deeply believed in."

Along the way to B.C., they spread Evelyn's ashes in places she loved, like Lake Louise.

A moment of silence and reflection

When the three arrived in Monte Lake, they told project director Roman Heuft why they had come and asked about holding a moment of silence on Sept. 6 at the exact moment of her death a year earlier.

Heuft quickly agreed.

"It was so inspiring to hear why they had come to serve," he said, adding that he was honoured "they were willing to include us in remembering Evelyn, and allowing us to support them."

When the anniversary of the time of her death came, crews at all sites in Monte Lake paused for a moment of reflection.

At the house where Kevin, Ben and Steve were working, the volunteers formed a circle and held hands.

"I cried," said Kevin of the time of silence and prayer. "It was really meaningful."

"It made me feel closer to her," said Ben. "I think she was smiling down on us as we did that."

For Steve, it was "overwhelming and emotional."

After the memorial, Kevin, Ben and Steve spread some of Evelyn's ashes at the work site.

For Heuft, it was a very moving experience. "It touched all of our hearts," he said. "I'm glad we could be part of their journey of healing and recovery." ❧

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MC U.S.A. releases final denominational survey report

Mennonite Church U.S.A. has released the completed report from its denominational survey, "The Mennonite Experience: MC USA Membership Study 2021-22."

canadianmennonite.org/usasurvey



Making goals, building peace

A community in Colombia gathers to watch its children play in a soccer tournament for peace—their own version of the World Cup.

canadianmennonite.org/mplp



An 'egg'-cellent gift this Christmas

For Joyce Ngumbao, a mother of five living in Kenya, a brood of chickens has made all the difference.

canadianmennonite.org/eggcellent



An Anabaptist does Advent

From 2019: Michael Pahl suggests there are some good, thoroughly Anabaptist reasons for observing the seasons of the Christian church.

canadianmennonite.org/blog/mp-advent

News brief

Former MWC president dies



MWC PHOTO

Raúl O. García, the president of Mennonite World Conference from 1990 to '97, died on Oct. 30. A long-term pastor, teacher and professor, he was born in Argentina on Aug. 26, 1930. Converted as a Mennonite from a Catholic family at age 14, his pastoral gifts were recognized and, 10 years later, he was appointed assistant pastor at Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Pehuajó, in a city inland from Buenos Aires. The next year, he graduated from university as a translator and teacher of English, and left for the United States to study at Goshen (Ind.) College Biblical Seminary. There, he re-encountered Anita Schwartzentruber, the daughter of missionaries in Argentina, and they were married on July 28, 1956. They returned to Argentina, where he played a major role in the development of biblical-theological education for South American leaders. Over the years, he served as board chair of the Mennonite Seminary in Uruguay and Paraguay, and board chair of the Argentine Evangelical Mennonite Church Conference. He was the first MWC president to come from Latin America. He was installed at the 1990 assembly in Winnipeg. He authored *I Am A Christian Evangelical Anabaptist* in English and Spanish that was also translated into Portuguese. In 2004, Goshen College awarded Raúl and Anita García its Culture for Service Award in recognition of their lives of exemplary service. García is survived by his wife Anita and their three sons.

—MWC



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Calendar

British Columbia

Feb. 25, 2023: MC B.C. annual general meeting, at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond.

April 21-23, 2023: MC B.C. youth impact retreat, at Camp Squeah, Hope.

May 21, 2023: MC B.C. arts fundraiser, at Heritage Hall, Vancouver.

Manitoba

Dec. 18: Faith and Life choirs perform a carol sing, at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, at 3:30 p.m.

Feb. 3, 2023: CMU campus visit day, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

March 10, 2023: CMU campus visit day, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

July 14-15, 2023: The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies and the University of Winnipeg present "The Russlander Mennonites: War dislocation and new beginnings" centenary conference. The event will mark the centenary of the arrival Russlander from the Soviet Union to Canada.

Ontario

Until Dec. 16: The Grebel Gallery, Waterloo, presents "Unmasking, breathing, moving forward," an exhibit of 17 Indigenous, Black and racialized artists responding to their experiences of COVID-19. Gallery hours: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Dec. 11: Menno Singers presents "Lessons and Carols" at Trillium Lutheran, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.mennosingers.com.

April 1, 2023: Menno Singers presents "Rachmaninov's Vespers," at Trillium Lutheran, Waterloo, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit mennosingers.com.

May 5, 2023: Menno Singers presents its "Spring Concert," at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit mennosingers.com.

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.



Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
Dec. 26 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Dec. 12
Jan. 16	Dec. 23
Jan. 30	Jan. 16

Classifieds

Employment Opportunities

Seeking a leader: **MCC Representative for Jordan, Palestine and Israel.** This position provides strategic vision and programmatic direction, team leadership, and support for all MCC workers in Jordan, Palestine and Israel. **Apply by December 31, 2022** at mcccanada.ca/openings.



Leamington United
Mennonite Church

Employment
opportunity

Ministry Team Lead

Are you seeking an opportunity to lead a team ministry in a vibrant church community?

If you have 10-15 years of pastoral experience with an educational background that includes theological and religious studies combined with a commitment to Anabaptist-Mennonite values and beliefs, please contact the Leamington United Mennonite Church, a member of the MCEC Conference of Ontario.

Direct inquiries with resume to Search Committee Co-Ordinator at: office@lumc.ca

Become the lead member of a team ministry in the southernmost part of Canada!



First
Mennonite
Church
Edmonton

Employment Opportunity
Pastoral Team Member

Inviting applications for a pastoral position with an FTE of up to 1.0.

First Mennonite Church is excited to complete our pastoral team with a dynamic candidate. Our pastoral team works along with our church community to help us grow as a community of grace, joy, and peace. We are a multi-generational, urban church of approximately 180, with Anabaptist theology and principles guiding us. God has called us to be an inclusive, affirming, Christian community. Congregants are actively involved in church ministries and programs. The new pastoral team member will share pastoral responsibilities in a manner that fits with their skills and gifts.

For information or to apply, please contact:
Ruth Friesen, Search Committee Chair
(ruthdavisfriesen@gmail.com, 780-910-2573) or
Tim Wiebe-Neufeld, Mennonite Church Alberta
Executive Minister (execmin@mccab.ca, 780 994-1021).

More information about
First Mennonite Church is available at:
edmontonfirst.mccab.ca/

Christmas blessing from Mary

By Joanna Harader

Dear one, I wish you had been there:
to see the startling light, to hear Gabriel's
brazen promise;
to journey into the hill country, to receive
Elizabeth's bold blessing;
to look with the Spirit's eye,
to sing of joy and justice that echoes through
the ages.

Oh how I wish you had been there:
with sore feet, aching back, Joseph's
encouraging words,
and Bethlehem on the horizon;
with, finally, a place to rest,
then the pain (the pain!) and the pushing,
and the baby—my baby—bloody and perfect
in the manger.

I would love for you to have been there,
gathered with the shepherds
who had somehow found their odd sign
in this scene of me and Joseph and my
swaddled child.

But you were not there, then.
You are here, now.
I cannot offer you the baby to hold and rock
and smell.
So I offer you these words to wrap tenderly in
cloth,
and to lay in the manger of your heart:

In all that God calls you to do and to be,
may you have courage
to say yes to the mystery.

In times of excitement, grief, joy, and fear,
may you have loved ones
to offer companionship and blessing.

In the labour of creation,
may you be strong,
may you be flexible,
may you know joy.

May you, beloved child,
ponder deeply each divine message you hear,
whether from angel or shepherd.

May you ponder and treasure
every gift you receive
from the holy hand of God.



ARTWORK BY MICHELLE BURKHOLDER IN
EXPECTING EMMANUEL: EIGHT WOMEN WHO PREPARED THE WAY