

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

March 13, 2023 Volume 27 Number 5



## The piano ban

A century-long story of  
fervour, family and forgiveness

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# Is the ban back?

WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org



In our feature article, Carol Ann Weaver tells of two Mennonite evangelists who imposed a ban on musical instruments decades ago (page 4). It's tempting to marvel at how utterly unenlightened such a response to perceived wrong now seems. Banning feels so backward.

But the ban is back. On page 14, Emma Siemens discusses the pros and cons of cancel culture, a present-day practice akin to banning. To cancel is to cut off communication, to say that a person is so wrong they are not worthy of interaction. In lesser forms, it is a creeping tendency to dismiss people rather than engage. It is associated with progressives and it is present in church.

If that seems overstated, ask Mennonite professors, pastors, students and magazine editors if progressive backlash keeps them from voicing questions they consider important. The chill is on.

Like cancellers, I care about addressing injustice. I have stood up to oppressors in print, on the street and in government offices. I believe in confronting injustice.

I also believe in tension, self-critique and diversity. As well as grace, humility and freedom of speech. I do not believe everyone must agree with me nor that those who disagree should be silenced.

I disagree with people who oppose LGBTQ+ marriage (which puts me awkwardly at odds with some minorities), but I'm not going to gouge the speck out of their eye.

I am repulsed by elements of macho culture, but I often engage with people who tune into some of the online figures

most commonly accused of toxic masculinity.

I disagree with my pro-Trump neighbours, but I don't think shunning them makes the world safer.

Safety is often the stated rationale for cancellation. Indeed, certain views cause great harm to people. Our natural instinct is to protect ourselves and those we love. That's good. We also need to consider whether cancelling—which tends to supercharge animosity—actually makes society safer and healthier.

There are times to unequivocally dismiss people, but more often we do well to heed the words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who said, "If only there were evil people somewhere . . . and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

A rush to cancel relieves people of this duty of tension and introspection. Cancellers give themselves permission to separate themselves from evil and start casting stones.

Anabaptists have done tremendous work on restorative justice, which shifts focus from punishment to restoration. For decades, Mennonites have done the uncomfortable work of accompanying some of the most seemingly cancel-worthy sexual offenders in society. The outcome in many cases is safety through engagement.

Vulnerable people absolutely need to be shielded from harm. I also grapple with the fact that not everyone can disengage or retreat. Palestinians can't ban armed settlers who burn their

homes. My northern Indigenous friends assaulted by hydroelectric projects have little choice but to step into the nastiness to seek change. For them, the path to safety is dangerous.

The Christian story also involves risk and peril. The cross is not a promise of security. It's a brutal, beautiful paradox—one we must hold in tension with our natural desire for safety.

Weaver's story moves from the ban to apology to forgiveness and wholeness. Siemens also circles round to forgiveness and the possibility of redemption—the possibility that a piano shunner might find music in his heart.

To add another concept much less popular than cancellation, Carol Penner encourages us on page 28 to confess our sins. Such confession humbles us, making it easier to extend grace to the people we may wish to cancel. It reminds us where the line between good and evil passes. At Penner's suggestion, I am using Lent as a time to pray daily for a few people I'd like to cancel (and I mean legit prayers, not: "Dear God, please help them become less annoying").

May God have mercy on us all.

## New team member

We are thrilled to announce that **Madalene Arias** is our new Eastern Canada correspondent. She has an honours degree in journalism, a foot planted firmly in the working-class world and a beautiful story of Mennonite rootage. We will introduce her more fully soon.

## Corrections

In the Feb. 13 issue we called the *Communitas Supportive Care Society* a "Network" rather than "Society," and in the Feb. 27 issue we added an "h" to Esther Epp-Tiessen's surname. We apologize. ☿



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Evangelist George R. Brunk II with his wife Margaret, and their kids, left to right, George, Conrad, Paul, Barbara and Gerald, at a 1952 revival meeting in Waterloo, Ont. See feature on page 4.

MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO PHOTO BY DAVID L. HUNSBERGER

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**CANADIAN  
MENNONITE**

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

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

Facebook: facebook.com/CanadianMennonite  
Twitter: @CanMenno  
Instagram: @canadianmennonite

### Please send all material to be considered for publication to

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

### Canadian Mennonite Staff

**Publisher:** Tobi Thiessen, publisher@canadianmennonite.org

**Editor:** Will Braun, editor@canadianmennonite.org

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

**Graphic Designer:** Betty Avery, designer@canadianmennonite.org

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

**Editorial Assistant:** Barb Draper, edassist@canadianmennonite.org

**Advertising:** advert@canadianmennonite.org

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

**Alberta Correspondent:** ab@canadianmennonite.org

**Saskatchewan Correspondent:** Emily Summach, sk@canadianmennonite.org

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

**Eastern Canada Correspondent:** ec@canadianmennonite.org

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## FEATURE



# The piano ban

Generations after the instruments first went silent, a musical family welcomes an apology for past harms

By Carol Ann Weaver

*Influential Mennonite evangelist George R. Brunk I.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNONITE CHURCH U.S.A.  
ARCHIVES-GOSHEN, IND.

October 22 was a normal Sunday. I had just arrived at Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont., when Conrad Brunk approached me. He is a fellow Rockway member, a former colleague at Conrad Grebel University College and a former next-door neighbour in Harrisonburg, Va. when we were very young. He wanted to talk about “the piano issue.”

My heart froze. Had I played too loudly? Or did he want me to play the hymns “just as written,” as a former theology professor had once suggested?

I was unprepared for what he said: “We Brunks want to apologize to you and your family for the piano ban our

father and grandfather enacted within the Virginia Mennonite Conference in the last century.” I immediately burst into tears.

Conrad Brunk’s father and grandfather—George R. Brunk II and George R. Brunk I—were leading figures behind a move of the Virginia Mennonite Conference that forbade ordained ministers or faculty of Eastern Mennonite College (now University) from having musical instruments in their homes. Mennonites did not have instruments in churches at the time.

The ban was in effect from 1927 until 1947. It devastated my mother’s family. My maternal grandfather, Chester K. Lehman, was an ordained minister,

faculty member of Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) and a great lover of music, having grown up in an exceptionally musical family.

Since my grandfather was both an ordained minister and an EMC faculty member, my grandparents had to remove the piano from the family home.

The piano was a vital part of family life. My mother had been learning to play at the time. For her younger sister—my aunt—those inordinately sad days created her earliest memory.

Many others throughout the Virginia conference were similarly affected, as pianos, organs and other musical instruments were taken out of homes. As noted in the Brunk family apology, J.B. Smith, the first president of EMC, abruptly resigned in 1922 rather than get rid of the piano that he and

his wife had just purchased. While the formal ban was not yet in place at the time, the pressure to get rid of instruments went back to at least 1908, when my great aunt, Annie Wenger, was forced to give up her organ.

## Apology

A century later, I’m in tears in the sanctuary of Rockway Mennonite Church, learning that the Brunk family remembers and cares about the event that caused my mother’s family, and so many other families, tremendous grief.

Several weeks later, I received an official letter of apology from Conrad Brunk and his siblings, Gerald R. Brunk, George R. Brunk III, Paul W. Brunk and Barbara Brunk Gascho. The apology was addressed to me and my sisters, Kathleen Weaver Kurtz and Dorothy Jean Weaver; to our Aunt Dorothy Lehman Yoder, the only living child of Chester K. and Myra K. Lehman; and more generally to the “family of Chester K. Lehman and to all persons similarly affected by the banning of musical instruments in Virginia Mennonite Conference.”

The Brunks offered their “sincere apology for the actions of [their] forefathers in this sad history,” and expressed “deepest sorrow and regret” for the harm caused by the ban.

The Brunks acknowledged that the ban was implemented largely due to the personal views and strong influence of their grandfather, George R. Brunk I, and, for much of this life, their father, George R. Brunk II, who was famous for his tent revival meetings across North America. He died in 2002.

These present-day Brunks wish for their letter of apology to be a public expression of their sentiments. Furthermore, they felt it was imperative for them to take responsibility for the actions of their father and grandfather.

“In recognition of this history and of the serious harm that was, and continues to be felt,” reads the letter, “we, the grandchildren and children of these two church figures, wish to express to you, and all affected, our deepest sorrow and regret for this harm. And in recognition of the fact that it is often later generations upon



PHOTO BY WAYNE KURTZ

*Carol Ann Weaver at the Chester K. Lehman family piano, which was donated to EMU, Harrisonburg, Va.*

whom the responsibility falls for ‘the sins of the fathers,’ we offer to you, and to all, our sincere apology for the actions of our forefathers in this sad history.”

### The dear piano

My mother, Miriam L. Weaver, touchingly recounted her story of the loss of the family piano as part of a music drama I wrote. “Quietly Landed?” included the stories of numerous women who had been silenced. My mom was involved in performing it in the United States and Canada shortly before her untimely death in 1997.

In the drama, she says: “I remember the tremendous sadness I felt as our piano was sitting on the back of the truck that was to take it away, and a man from the store was standing at the keyboard and playing something, and I looked



Chester Lehman, Elizabeth Lehman, Kurtz playing "Star of the East" at Kurlee Harrisonburg, VA. 1952

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROL ANN WEAVER

**Chester K. Lehman and his sister, Elizabeth Kurtz, playing piano in 1952 at Kurtz's house in Harrisonburg, Va.**

longingly at our dear piano as the truck moved down the driveway and out into the street. Now we would no longer hear my father play Ben Hur's 'Chariot Race,' 'Star of the East,' and other favourites of ours. And worse yet, how would I ever learn to play?"

Poet Julia Kasdorf, also in this drama,

maintains that each time my mother read her story, the driveway grew longer and longer. The pain was palpable.

By the time I grew up, pianos were back in homes, but not yet in any of the Mennonite churches in the eastern U.S. or parts of Ontario, where it was all pitch pipes and a cappella singing. One can take a trek to a local Old Order or conservative Mennonite church in Waterloo County, Ont., which I did recently, to hear the kind of singing I grew up with.

Among Amish and certain Old Order and Old Colony Mennonites, four-part singing has been, and sometimes still is, considered worldly, especially by groups who migrated to Latin America.

### Lifting the ban

The ban was officially lifted in 1947. Although the effects lingered, George Brunk II eventually had a complete change of heart.

In the 1950s, when he had his tent meetings in Canada, he realized many Ukrainian Mennonites (sometimes called Russian Mennonites) had pianos or

## Music and worship practices

The use of instrumental music remains an issue with some Mennonite groups. The most traditional sing in unison in German for worship, but many sing four-part harmony in English at other times. There is a broad range of acceptance of musical instruments in homes among conservative Mennonites.

Mennonite groups in Canada that do not use musical instruments in worship include:

- Amish
- Beachy Amish
- Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario
- Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman)
- Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference
- Midwest Fellowship
- Nationwide Fellowship
- Old Colony Mennonite
- Old Order Mennonite
- Sommerfeld Mennonite

—Compiled by Barb Draper

## History of discord in Ontario churches

BY BARB DRAPER  
Editorial Assistant

In the middle of a fierce conflict in the Mennonite church 140 years ago, the Kolb family defied church rules and installed an organ in their home. What made this particularly galling to the traditionalists was that Jacob Z. Kolb was a deacon at what is now First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont. The Swiss-descended Mennonites of Waterloo Region had a long history of eschewing musical instruments.

Likely in response to this infraction, church leaders passed a resolution in 1886 saying: “Instruments have no room in the Gospel. We are agreed to testify against them, and to exercise our influence to foster awareness that the church members put them away.”

According to E. Reginald Good's history of First Mennonite Church, the organ in the Kolb home remained because it was the property of one of the deacon's sons, who was not yet a member of the church.

Within a few years, the church divided. One group was soon learning to sing in four parts and members were able to have musical instruments in their homes. Two of the Kolb sons played key roles in advancing vocal music in the Mennonite church.

It took decades for most Swiss Mennonite congregations to adopt musical instruments for worship. Even today, Elmira Mennonite still mostly sings a cappella.

At Floradale Mennonite, first a piano was donated for use with children in the basement. Eventually the piano made its way up to the sanctuary, but it was the 1980s before it was regularly used to accompany congregational singing.



*Carol Ann Weaver, left, Dorothy Jean Weaver and Kathleen Weaver Kurtz at the Chester K. Lehman family piano in 1952 in Harrisonburg, Va.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROL ANN WEAVER

organs in their churches. Soon he, too, would allow pianos to accompany singing in his tent meetings. As noted in the apology, he even bought an organ for his wife and taught himself to play!

“We have reason to believe,” the Brunk family writes, “that, were our father alive today, he would join us in this apology.”

The fact that the Brunk family chose to take the initiative to account for the actions of their forefathers sets a new tone. Their actions serve as a model for how to deal redemptively with troubling issues from the past.

As I embrace my a cappella heritage with increasing enthusiasm and remain exceedingly happy we always had a piano in our home, I thank the Brunks for their apology and the chance to revisit our past with grace, gratitude and forgiveness. ❧

*Carol Ann Weaver is a composer, pianist and professor emerita of music at Conrad Grebel University College.*

### /// For discussion

1. What role has music played in your family life? How much has the availability of recorded music changed the role of making music? Do we sing less than earlier generations?
2. What might have been the rationale for Mennonite church leaders of generations ago to declare that musical instruments were inappropriate? Why do some Mennonites still not use instruments in worship?
3. Why do you think the Brunk family decided to issue an apology in 2022? How effective is this type of apology?
4. Carol Ann Weaver says she embraces her “a cappella heritage with increasing enthusiasm.” What value do you place on the Mennonite church’s heritage of four-part, unaccompanied singing?
5. What do you think is the future of church music?

—By Barb Draper

See related Reconciliation resources at [www.commonword.ca/go/2585](http://www.commonword.ca/go/2585), and Understanding Music in Worship resources at [www.commonword.ca/go/3329](http://www.commonword.ca/go/3329)

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## OPINION

### /// Readers write

#### ✉ Convenient pacifism

**In response to “Conscientious” (Jan. 30): Wherever religious Mennonites locate in the world, security is usually provided mostly by others. Others suffer and die in their place, while Mennonites denounce their work, reap the benefits and are secretly grateful.**

If Mennonites acknowledged everyone’s dependence on compromise solutions and participated in those solutions, their views on military excesses would be heard. Currently, few listen.

Most Mennonites are good at peaceful living, which is great, but many do harm with fake pacifism. Please be honest. Please be more realistic and less emotional about crime, violence and war. Feasible solutions are greatly needed.

Nonviolent methods, like diplomacy, should be used to the utmost. However, strong militaries and alliances also prevent war. So they’re essential, too, unfortunately. We must accept this fact, not deny and avoid it. Peace is within, first and foremost. Outwardly, we must often compromise.

HOWARD BOLDT, OSLER, SASK.

### /// Milestones

#### Births/Adoptions

**Weber**—Olson B. (b. Nov. 29, 2022), to Maynard and Tiffany Weber, Community Mennonite, Drayton, Ont.

#### Deaths

**Braun**—Mary (Nickel), 94 (b. March 3, 1928; d. Jan. 31, 2023), Springfield Heights Mennonite, Winnipeg.

**Enns**—Hilda Erika (Neufeld) 84 (July 29, 1938; d. Feb. 12, 2023), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

**Friesen**—Glenn, 80 (b. Sept. 16, 1942; d. Feb. 14, 2023), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite, Man.

**Friesen**—Verner, 94 (b. Feb. 18, 1929; d. Feb. 18, 2023), Nutana Park Mennonite, Saskatoon.

**Tiessen**—Rudy, 79 (b. Jan. 5, 1944; d. Feb. 15, 2023), North Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

**Williams**—Lena, 98 (b. Nov. 24, 1924; d. Feb. 14, 2023), Grace Mennonite, St. Catharines, Ont.

### A moment from yesterday



“How did the North become the North?” asks historian Gerald Friesen.

By the Second World War northern Canada was experiencing an influx of “new technology, money and people.”

River landings like this one near La Crete, Alta., were vital links to

supplies and markets of the south. Although the first Mennonites who settled here came seeking independence and isolation, they had inserted themselves into an area with complex non-Indigenous and Indigenous histories and cultures.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing

Photo: The Canadian Mennonite / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



## FROM OUR LEADERS

# Driving Miss Darcie

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens

A few weeks ago I sent a text to a friend who I hadn't seen for quite some time. Although we'd been in touch several times throughout the pandemic, we were long overdue for a face-to-face visit. I had no idea that the timing of this text would set my schedule askew for the next few weeks in the way that it did.

My friend has lived through some significant life experiences.

In a recent incident, her driver's licence was suspended and her car impounded. She had also just moved into her dad's basement because of her financial struggles. This combination of events sent her into a tailspin, scrambling to make arrangements to get her daughter Darcie (a pseudonym) to school and herself to work.

Enter the chauffeur.

My husband and I took turns giving 10-year old Darcie rides to school the first week while her mom took a stress leave from work. This one-on-one time with Darcie turned out to be delightful, as she shared her first-hand perspectives on school, family, friends, religion and life in general. Pieces of wisdom on rolling with life's ups and downs revealed how her eyes and heart have been shaped by her own young life

experiences.

The next week of rides included driving both Darcie and her mom to their morning destinations. This almost two-hour excursion confirmed that not having a rush-hour commute as a part of our regular routine is one of life's joys!

After several weeks, my friend's licence was reinstated and her car returned.

Supporting her through that time was

**My husband and I took turns giving 10-year old Darcie rides to school the first week while her mom took a stress leave from work.**

a reminder of how close to the edge many people live. While this wasn't new to me—I'd spent 10 years working with families of people who are in prison, mostly from low-income households, and had also been with my friend's family through their first years in Canada—it caused me to think again about what giving and receiving support looks like.

The support we provided wasn't about four wheels or the practicalities of getting from Point A to Point B. It was about the conversations along the way, being patient through tears, affirming exasperation with the situation, giving hugs, and saying "I love you" in as many ways as possible. It was about listening to someone at one of the lowest points in her life and hearing how difficult it was to hit "send" after writing, "Can you give Darcie a ride to school?"

I've been thinking about community, family and those we lean on when things get tough. Our lives might be sprinkled with people from arms-length communities where we share the occasional experience, or people from communities that are core to our being and that we can't imagine being without. In the give-and-take of our communities, and among those whose lives we wander in and out of, I pray that there will always be space to freely say, "Don't worry, I'll be there." ❧



*Brenda Tiessen-Wiens is moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta.*

## Et cetera

### American adults more open to God since COVID

A 2022 Barna survey found 44 percent of 2,000 American adult respondents described themselves as more open to God today than before the pandemic.

Sources: [relevantmagazine.com](https://relevantmagazine.com) / [barna.com](https://barna.com)



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 THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE
 

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# Belonging comes first

Arli Klassen

I remember a difficult church meeting at my fiancé's congregation when I was an active participant in the young adult group. I don't recall the topic, but I do recall that I did not speak up during the meeting, but just listened.

After the meeting, in a circle of conversation, I asked some questions and offered an opinion. I was immediately told that not being a member of the church meant I could not say anything, even post-meeting. I felt silenced and rejected. After our marriage, we found a congregation where we were both welcomed even though we never became official members.

Jumping ahead 43 years, our last month has been a time of relying on the community of faith where we belong. My husband Keith and I have a family member who has lived with us for nearly 10 years. She underwent brain surgery a few weeks ago, and recovery is harder than expected. All three of us are being carried by our community of faith in significant ways.

She interacted a bit with the quilting group at our congregation, and made some friends there. She came to the occasional church service, mostly on Christmas Eve.

But during the weeks before her

surgery, when our congregation was praying for her, she came online every week. She accepted a pastoral visit the day before her surgery, for blessing and prayer. She has been welcomed by, and belongs to, our community of faith, even though she says she does not believe in God.

The phrase often used to describe the logical order of faith development in Christendom is "believe, behave, belong." Mennonite writer Alan Kreider coined this phrase in 1999, proposing revising the order for post-Christendom, starting with belonging.

Many theologians picked up on this idea that faith starts with belonging instead of believing or behaving. What is the impact on how we raise our children and youth in the church? What is the implication for baptism? How are newcomers welcomed into the community of faith? Do people on the edge only count once they are officially members?

Our family member was raised in the church in the last century. She hesitantly enters into church relationships because of the deep conviction that she is not acceptable because she does not have the right beliefs or behaviours. I am so grateful that individuals and pastors in

our congregation reached out to her to help her to belong, regardless of those beliefs. Our congregation started with welcome and compassion instead of judgment.

Another theological way of looking at these questions uses a "centred-set" instead of a "bounded set." Last year, Mark D. Baker of Fresno Pacific Mennonite Brethren Seminary published a book called *Centered-Set Church*.

Bounded-set churches focus on correct beliefs and behaviour, and only then comes belonging, while centred-set churches focus on the gospel of Jesus as the centre. Belonging is based on whether a person is slowly, or quickly, moving towards that centre. There are no sharp dividing lines about who is in and who is out, about who makes it into the church directory, or about who is prayed for in a church gathering. This means church is not just a supportive community, but a Jesus-centred community.

Our society is increasingly polarized around political perspectives and doctrinal perspectives. My hope is that our congregations are more centred than bounded, and more welcoming than judgmental. We are grateful for the support of our local congregation for us and our family member. ☸



Arli Klassen ([klassenarli@gmail.com](mailto:klassenarli@gmail.com)) is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

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## Et cetera

### Costly faith

If you're looking to replace your copy of the Old Testament and don't mind spending USD\$30 to 50 million, look no further. The oldest and most complete Hebrew Bible discovered to date—the Codex Sassoon—will be auctioned at Sotheby's in New York this May. The document, which dates back to the ninth century, includes annotations and inscriptions from owners throughout the centuries. It is expected to sell for more than any other historical document to appear at auction.

Source: The Guardian

Photo by Ardon Bar-Hama (Wiki commons)



## VOICES AND STORIES

# Practising for tragedy

Anneli Loepp Thiessen

It's no secret that there are gaps in our congregational song. In particular, gaps in the kinds of words we have available for moments of crisis, despair and loss. *Voices Together* sought to speak into this opening, and features many resources that offer new words for these moments.

Examples include a prayer for mental health, "Hear our prayer, O God of healing and hope" (VT No. 978); a contemporary worship song on crying out to God in our grief, "When I Can't Find My Way" (VT No. 591); and a response to a community crisis, "In our doubt and fear" (VT No. 1044).

In particular, "When Pain or Sorrow/ Hold On" (VT No. 612) has gained significant traction for the way it addresses these themes. Its songwriter, Adam Tice, has noted that there are many songs that invite individuals to commit to a community of faith, but there are few that invite a community to name its commitment to an individual, particularly in times of hardship. This may be a shortfall unique to Christian congregational song, as Tice names several secular songs that fulfil this function, including "You Will be Bound" from the popular musical *Dear Evan Hansen*.

"When Pain or Sorrow" is a

much-needed contribution to our repertoire, inviting communities to uphold those who are in pain. The chorus sings: "Hold on, hold on, to find a way to get through. And when your hope is gone and you can't hold on, then we will hold on to you."

In addition to being the text editor for *Voices Together*, Tice is one of the most well known hymn writers today, well beyond Mennonite circles. His texts are featured in more than a dozen hymnals, and he works as the editor for congregational song for GIA Publications.

"When Pain or Sorrow" is a unique contribution from Tice, as the song came to him in a dream.

"Mike Erb, a fellow member of the *Voices Together* hymnal committee, lost his brother Rudy to suicide in early 2017," Tice says in an excerpt from his text collection *Pulse and Breath*. "Early one Sunday morning I had a dream that the committee was meeting together, and that Mike wanted to share a song with us. When I woke up I wrote out as much of it as I could remember and then worked towards crafting the rest. . . . Once I had a full score in hand, I sent it to Mike, without telling him that I had written it or how it had come to me. He immediately responded that it

captured what he had been going through since Rudy's death."

Tice suggests that communities learn "When Pain or Sorrow" before a situation comes up that calls for the song: "It seems strange to say, but we need to practise for tragedy." On performance practice, he offers: "I'd suggest having a soloist sing the first verse and refrain, and then inviting the congregation join on the second verse."

The version found in *Voices Together* is written in unison, but there is a choral arrangement available online through GIA Publications, as well as a backing piano track. A piano accompaniment can be found in the *Voices Together* accompaniment edition.

"When Pain or Sorrow" offers a text that many have been longing to sing in church, but haven't known how to. It sings of doubt, silence, numbness and absence, while summoning openness and honesty, and inviting unending support. When congregants and communities face tragedy and heartbreak, this song offers poignant and healing words. ❧

Link to the video of "When Pain or Sorrow" at <https://bit.ly/3KH4c5V>.



Anneli Loepp Thiessen is a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa and co-director of the Anabaptist Worship Network.

## Et cetera

### EFC launches new resource on disability and belonging

"Life Together: Disability and Belonging in the Church" is a new online and print resource available free from the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). Life Together centres the voices and gifts of people in the disability community, sharing their profound cultural and biblical insights and personal experiences. The new resource helps Christians to recognize and address discrimination against people with disabilities, known as ableism, in their church communities. The resource is available for free online at [www.TheEFC.ca/LifeTogether](http://www.TheEFC.ca/LifeTogether) as a PDF, with print copies available upon request.

Source: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada



## LIFE IN THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

# The pendulum, Hegel and Christ

Troy Watson

Some have described history as a series of pendulum swings, oscillating from one extreme to the other, between tyranny and freedom, conservatism and liberalism, progress and tradition. It has also been said, the pendulum always swings too far, meaning when we find ourselves in one extreme, there tends to be an overcorrection that takes us too far in the other direction. This pattern has been observed in politics, religion, social values, nutrition and fitness, among other areas of life.

I am learning to accept this pendulum swing, even the extreme overcorrections it often brings, for two reasons:

- **I realize** some kind of correction is usually needed. I trust this correction will stick, while the more fanatical, false and less helpful dynamics fade away; and
- **I know** the pendulum will swing back the other way, eventually. I know whatever stage we find ourselves in the pendulum swing, this too shall pass.

Understandably, many people are tired of the pendulum swing. They rally against it. When the pendulum is favouring the extreme they value, they try to hold the pendulum in place, preventing it from moving back in the other direction. Then they try to force the pendulum back as soon as it moves in a direction they are uncomfortable with. It doesn't matter where we are on the pendulum swing, there are always people resisting it and others trying to speed it up. They typically balance each other out. As a result, the pendulum maintains its motion.

Whether this pendulum swing is good or bad seems inconsequential. It is part of our reality and how change often occurs in the world.

The German philosopher Hegel proposed another model for how change

and progress works. It's called the Hegelian Dialectic. It is a three-step process that begins with a thesis, which results in a reaction, called the anti-thesis. The tension between the two is resolved by finding a synthesis.

For example, in church history one thesis was that faith is an intellectual agreement with the basic tenets of Christian orthodoxy, overseen by church authorities. This gave rise to a counter movement that demonstrated true faith is personally experiencing the love and presence of God, and being filled with

the Holy Spirit. The synthesis between the two was that both are important, that we must balance the head and the heart, personal experience and community, freedom and accountability.

I believe this dialectic dynamic has happened repeatedly throughout church history. In fact, it has been proposed that America has had a revival or spiritual awakening every 80 years or so. Apparently, we are due for another in about 20 years, as the last one started in the mid-1960s, depicted in the recent film, *Jesus Revolution*. Eventually these movements go too far or fade away. Some go completely off the rails, but most simply reveal their insufficiencies over time. Then a correction in the opposite direction comes. And the process repeats itself.

In a sense, this process resembles Hegelian dialectics, in that there is often a thesis, an anti-thesis and a synthesis. It also resembles the pendulum swing, in that the same three positions of its arc keep being revisited over and over again, the left extreme, the right extreme and the middle.

As followers of Jesus, I believe we are called to another way of approaching the dialectics and pendulum swings of life. We are called to give expression to the qualities and values of the divine found in both extremes. I don't believe we are called to hold watered-down versions of both extremes as moderates, but to embody the bold and radical truth found in each extreme, such as mercy and justice, creativity and order, tradition and progress, conservatism and liberalism, grace and growth, truth and mystery, individualism and community,

**We are called to give expression to the qualities of the divine found in both extremes.**

conviction and humility, intellect and experience.

Just as Christ paradoxically embodied divinity and humanity fully, the Body of Christ is called to embody the paradoxical work of God in our world today. This is why the extremes on the left and the right, politically, culturally, socially and religiously, remind me of the extremes I am called to embody as a paradoxical "Jesus freak." However, with this approach, we need spiritual discernment to know what elements of these polar opposites are divine in nature, and what parts are the result of human frailty, folly, ego, dogmatism, tribalism or worse. ☞



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

## RIDING THE WAVE OF INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

## Goodbye 'model minority'

Joon Park

“I refuse to be your model minority,” Simu Liu tweeted.

Liu played Jung Kim on the award-winning Canadian sitcom, *Kim's Convenience*. This drama portrays a Korean immigrant family's life in Canada. Liu's character is the estranged eldest son of the Kim family.

Born in China and having immigrated to Ontario at the age of five, Liu began his career as an extra and worked his way up to *Kim's Convenience* and then to being the first Asian superhero in a Marvel movie.

In addition to acting, Liu has become a strong player in the fight against the disparity of Asian representation in the western film industry, specifically in relation to *Kim's Convenience*. Although the show itself was lauded for its Asian representation on screen, the production process shut out creative input from the Asian Canadian cast. Liu openly criticized the show, creating a significant stir.

By so doing, he broke with the “model minority” role.

I can relate. I was a model minority in the Mennonite church. My church life was always my No. 1 priority. Whenever I was asked to volunteer for the church, I never turned it down (Asian diligence); nor did I belittle the responsibilities endowed to me by the church (Asian loyalty); nor did I forget to bow to the elders (Asian seniority); nor did I confound my congregation with unfiltered announcements or interruptions (Asian conformity). I regularly visited my mentor's place, listening to his stories and advice (Asian filial piety).

I even sent my two daughters to the Mennonite educational institutions (until college) with a sheer hope that they would be like me as an entrusted model minority in the Mennonite world (Asian patriarchy). Unfortunately, this missed the mark. They suffered in the

schools and turned from the Mennonite church.

Despite my efforts to contribute to the Mennonite church in the past 19 years, my keen “bamboo ceiling” realization came after I experienced that there was an invisible barrier to my voice being heard and to me being accepted into the decision-making

### I was a model minority in the Mennonite church.

group in the Mennonite church.

In her book *Warrior Women*, Phoebe Eng writes: “Model minority myths support the belief that the racism ethnic groups complain about is the product of their own shortcomings.” Are the difficulties I have experienced in church primarily my fault?

The term “model minority” was introduced to American society by William Peterson in 1966. He described the success of Japanese Americans despite American people's discrimination and other stereotypes. In his account of the reasons for the success of Japanese Americans, Peterson highlighted their cultural values such as diligence, solidarity, frugality and unobstructive achievement orientation. His rationale was well received in the media and succeeded in finally rendering credence to the whole Asian American community.

However, the result of this popularized myth was terrible; this seemingly “good” stereotyping worked against other racial minorities. People would say to other minorities, “If Asians can do it, why can't you?” They became the over-simplified standard of a model minority which was used against other minorities, especially Blacks. It also

failed to consider the segregated and impoverished reality of many Asian immigrants.

The model minority dynamic exists in the Mennonite church. In some ways, the Mennonite church is ideal soil in which the spirit of the model minority can germinate. Mennonites tend to value non-resistance, peace and unity. In other words, “Don't rock the boat.” In this environment of passiveness and shushing, who would refuse the gifts of diligence, loyalty, conformity, apolitical mindset and evangelical fervour that the model minority groups bring?

The intercultural church must avoid the harmful ideology that equal opportunities are available for all minority newcomers if only they work hard and do so in compliance with traditions, values and styles that old-comers (whites) have solidly built. This belief that newcomers must fit into existing ways is none other than a colonized, lopsided missionology that justifies the unequal relationship of a host (first) and a guest (last).

The intercultural church sternly asks for level ground, the same starting point for all, without power imbalance running wild and without any requirement that newcomers be docile model minorities.

Rather, it should be a place where the different and disharmonious thrash it out one anotherly, sometimes making unsettling noises for the cherishing of each individual's unique identity. That's the church, intercultural church, hard and messy now, but eschatologically fulfilling! ✎



Joon Park is intentional interim co-pastor of Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

## VIEWPOINT

# Is it time to cancel cancel culture?

By Emma Siemens  
CM Intern

**A**t first I thought cancel culture was a good idea. The phenomenon, which emerged a handful of years ago, refers to “ending (or attempting to end) an individual’s career or prominence to hold them accountable for immoral behaviour.” That’s according to University of Cambridge psychologist Rob Henderson.

Writing for *Psychology Today*, he says cancellers seek to “impose long overdue consequences for unacceptable behaviour.” These “consequences” can be anything from the loss of one or two current relationships to the destruction of an entire reputation—career, social network, and all.

The emergence of cancel culture in North America was only natural. The past two decades have included many important social-justice movements that brought serious injustices and harms to light, from the #MeToo movement and sexual misconduct to the Black Lives Matter movement. But awareness itself doesn’t always bring tangible change, so social justice advocates turned to cancelling to deliver results.

Cancel culture, Henderson says, gives “voice and influence to those with no other way to hold powerful figures accountable.” It can “act as a tool for social justice, instilling new values of equality and destroying a dangerous precedent.”

I share this desire to expose injustice and demand justice. But I find cancel culture’s method of doing so intellectually, socially and theologically problematic.

## Aristotle’s slaves

I encounter cancel culture often in my classes at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). When we were assigned an

Aristotle reading in the first philosophy course I took, several students didn’t want to touch the text, given Aristotle’s support of slavery. At that point, I had no conception of Aristotle’s stance on slavery, or anything else. Fortunately, we did go on to work with the text anyway, and I valued learning where Aristotle fits into the course of philosophical thought that carries on today.



GRAPHIC BY BETTY AVERY

Acknowledging the parts of historically significant bodies of work by problematic figures gives us an opportunity for prime, productive, critical thinking. We are pushed to engage actively and thoughtfully with the text, discerning which ideas have shaped our world for better or for worse. We hold on to the ideas that carry timeless wisdom and goodness while understanding and rejecting the ideas that have caused harm. Rejecting these works altogether would deny us this opportunity. As a professor recently named it to me, this is the difference between “calling out” and “calling in.”

That said, the cancel culture that university students like me encounter most frequently is the cancellation of people who are still living. When surveyed about their experiences with

cancel culture, a number of CMU students all told me they’d observed cancellation, whether of beloved celebrities or social acquaintances.

One student said she’d first heard of country musician Morgan Wallen because he’d been cancelled for making a racist comment in public. The student began listening to Wallen and still felt guilty about it a few years later.

Another student said that every person does indeed need to be held accountable for their wrongdoings no matter when they occurred. Still, this person said, in cases where an entire community is ready to move forward in relationship with a wrongdoer after the harm they’ve caused has been properly addressed, cancel culture too often prevents that.

Another student said that cancel culture is certainly effective, but that this isn’t a good thing.

I agree. The lifelong cancellation of a wrongdoer is neither humane nor productive.

## The permanence of guilt

When we subject someone to lifelong punishment, we enact the belief that they cannot better themselves. This belief can be as harmful as the wrong committed in the first place. It means we see them as less than human, thus allowing them to be treated inhumanely. To be human is to have a conscience, which means having the potential for both bad and good, and the potential to change. To see the humanity in another person is to see them both as they are and as they could be. It means treating them with respect.

When we cancel individuals, we strip them of their humanity, believing them to be only what they are in that moment, with no possibility for growth. We rob them of the resources that could foster growth within them. In doing so,

we ourselves fall short of our potential for active, thoughtful engagement, almost forcing a wrongdoer to confirm our mindless assumption of their permanent guilt.

Theologically, cancel culture ignores the concept of forgiveness. As Hannah Arendt, a 20th-century Jewish philosopher, writes in *The Human Condition*, Jesus is the best model of forgiveness. For Arendt, forgiveness at its most fundamental is not the unhealthy continuing of a relationship or the forgetting of a wrongdoing, but the recognition of the common humanity between the wrongdoer and the wronged. Our common humanity is our God-given capacity for doing wrong and right, for bad and good. Recognizing this means recognizing both the full extent of the harm caused, and the full potential of the wrongdoer to do right in the future. Jesus, Arendt says, practised this forgiveness constantly, and commanded his followers to do the same.

When we obey this command and practise forgiveness in this way, we allow ourselves and others to become as good as we can be, and we allow the world to become as good as we know it could be. We act in fully informed hope, and this action inspires others to believe and act in this same hope. We prevent individuals from abusing their positions of power, removing them from these roles when necessary, and we engage with the work of individuals who've done harm with this in mind, altogether dismissing their work when necessary. We allow ourselves to see them as something more than the wrongs they've committed. We treat both ourselves and them with the respect we deserve as humans, as Jesus did.

### Lesson learned

Cancelling individuals exposes injustice. It names a wrongdoer's actions as wrong and dissuades others from behaving similarly. Cancelling individuals doesn't, however, produce justice. It doesn't demonstrate to others how one can right their wrongs and begin living out the lesson they've learned. It doesn't even give the wrongdoer the chance to try.

Those doing the calling out don't get the chance to grapple with, and learn from, the excruciating co-existence of wrong and right, either. As a professor advised me, before allowing yourself to be swept up in the passion of calling out, pause, and listen to your body: "How does it feel standing on the edge?"

If we are attentive, patient and disciplined enough to see the potential for wrong and right in all things, then these moments on the edge are an opportunity to create a future in which these wrongs aren't committed again.

The sexist, homophobic and racist beliefs, policies and actions we have long been accepting as a society must indeed be called out as unjust and harmful. They must indeed be transformed through a commitment to equality and respect. And if equality and respect are the principles guiding this entire societal renovation, our exposure and punishment of those who have committed these injustices and harms must reflect this, too. The consequences for doing wrong must foster doing right. ☞

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## NEWS

# Affirmation of new executive minister highlights B.C. AGM

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent

RICHMOND, B.C.



Shel Boese, front row, third from right, was affirmed as the new MC B.C. executive minister on Feb. 25.

The affirmation of a new executive minister highlighted the annual meeting of Mennonite Church B.C. at Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond on Feb. 25.

Ninety-eight percent of delegates approved the appointment of Shelby (Shel) Boese as executive minister, following an extensive search by the five-member search group. Boese and his wife Anne were introduced, welcomed and prayed for at the afternoon delegate session. Boese starts on Aug. 1. He succeeds Garry Janzen, who retired from the position at the end of December.

At the morning session, Mark Baker, the featured speaker at the Leaders Elders and Deacons (LEAD) conference the day before (see sidebar), gave his final presentation, entitled “Which courtroom shapes your understanding of the cross?”

In the business sessions, considerable discussion surrounded the 2023 budget, which includes a projected deficit of \$119,000. Delegates wrestled with what this means for the future of MC B.C.

“A deficit just doesn’t sit well with me,” said Fran Hofenk of Emmanuel Mennonite in Abbotsford. “There has to be a strategy in place or we really need to cut something.”

Gary Heinrichs of Sherbrooke Menno-

nite in Vancouver said, “Any company that keeps cutting will eventually disappear. We need a strategy to grow.”

One suggestion for cutting expenses was to reduce support for Columbia Bible College, as only four students from MC B.C. churches are currently attending. Jesse Nickel, who attends Level Ground Mennonite in Abbotsford and teaches at Columbia, responded by naming several MC B.C. pastors who are Columbia

graduates, and urged delegates not to discount the school’s value “just because numbers are small.”

Finance committee chair Tom Miller acknowledged the challenge. “We fully recognize [operating in a deficit] can’t continue,” he said, while noting that eliminating such programs as church revitalization would curtail programs already in place. He noted that church attendance has shrunk, some

## LEAD conference: The centred-set church

“Jesus, Be the Centre” was the focus of Mennonite Church B.C.’s LEAD conference at Peace Mennonite Church on Feb. 24. The event featured speaker Mark Baker, professor at Fresno Pacific University and the author of *Centered-Set Church*.

Baker talked about the difference between bounded, fuzzy and centred churches. In a boundary set church, he explained, a clear line distinguishes Christians from non-Christians. A “fuzzy church,” Baker said, is somewhat the opposite of a bounded church, where erasing of the line erodes the church’s sense of identity and results in “whateverism.” In a centred church, people’s relationship with the centre, Jesus, determines belonging.

In a centered-set church, “there is less need to play boundary games,” Baker said. He challenged his listeners to ask: “About what am I most likely to be bounded?”

At the plenary session at the AGM the next day, Baker used a courtroom metaphor to talk about God’s justice in Hebraic and Western terms. Does justice means appeasement (God punishing Jesus for taking on the sins of the world) or recompense/payback (Is God’s justice fundamentally retributive or restorative?).

—AMY RINNER WADDELL



congregations have left, and not all congregations support MC B.C. financially. He encouraged delegates to go back to their congregations to re-evaluate their giving policies regarding the regional church.

Delegates also approved creation of a half-time youth-coordinator position once funds are available from the sale of the Peardonville property in Abbotsford.

Delegates also said goodbye to three churches that closed their doors (Bethel Mennonite, North Shore Japanese and Vietnamese Christian) and one that withdrew from MC B.C. (Vietnamese Grace Mennonite).

Reflecting on the weekend, moderator

Gerry Grunau cited the hiring of Boese and the approval of a youth-coordinator position as highlights. “We give thanks to God for presenting Shel Boese to be the next MC B.C. executive minister and for the affirmation of his appointment by the assembled delegates,” Grunau said. “The time spent with Mark Baker . . . was formative as we talked about the ‘Centered-Set Church’ and the potential impact on MC B.C. congregations. The entire weekend was blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit providing hope and inspiration.” ❧

## /// People and Events

### MC Canada appoints associate executive minister

Al Rempel began serving as associate executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada on March 1. He will work closely with church leadership ministers across the nationwide church in the encouragement of healthy, well-equipped and effective pastoral ministries.

Additionally, he will also be the point person for The Company of 1000, a fund that helps new and experienced pastors pay for education.

The 0.4-FTE position will initially be a six-month term, with the hope of extension.

Rempel is currently regional minister of MC Eastern Canada, work he will continue with a reduced time commitment.

Ann Schultz, MC Eastern Canada’s executive team leader, endorsed Rempel for the role. “Al has much to offer the church across Canada,” she says.

—MC EASTERN CANADA



### MDS Canada returning to Cape Breton



MDS PHOTO BY JOHN LONGHURST

#### *The Cape Breton shoreline.*

Although thousands of fallen trees were cleaned up by Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) volunteers after Hurricane Fiona struck the Maritimes last fall, and some roofs were patched or tarped, the organization was unable to do more before winter came.

Many live in what are called “company homes,” houses built many years ago by coal companies in the region and passed down through families after the mines

closed. Although the mines are gone, the people remain. Those who depend on pensions are struggling to make ends meet, while others face unemployment.

For that reason, MDS Canada is going back to Cape Breton, starting in late March. Already 14 homes are lined up for repairs, with more likely to come.

To volunteer for a week or longer, contact Clara Flores at cflores@mds.org. Subsidies are available to assist with travel. Visit <https://bit.ly/3EJvbtE> for more information.

—MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

## /// News brief

### Saskatoon’s only MCC Thrift store moves to new location



PHOTO COURTESY OF GABBY ALTARUGIO

*Shop assistant Aleli and volunteer Irene are ready to assist customers at the grand opening of the Village Green Thrift Shop.*

Saskatoon’s Village Green Thrift Shop held a grand opening celebration at its new location in Saskatoon on Feb. 11. The all-in-one location, situated on 33rd Street, takes the place of the separate thrift shop, and a furniture store in the city’s Riversdale neighbourhood. Both of the original buildings are now for sale.

“We had simply outgrown those spaces”, said Martin Irving, thrift manager for Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan. “We did our best to make it work within those spaces for the last decade, but the time had come for a change.”

The new building is nearly double that of the previous locations, with more than 640 square metres between the thrift and furniture storefront areas. The extra space allows for a more open style of retail display, said Irving: “Thrifting has really changed in recent years. It’s not the ‘Grandma style’ of thrifting, where everything is crammed into a tiny space. Thrifting has really become trendy; it’s upcycling, recycling and sustainable. Shoppers want a different experience than in the past.”

Total sales from the grand opening event were \$11,000. The Village Green Thrift Shop employs 11 staff members and has more than 50 active volunteers, and are always looking for more.

—BY EMILY SUMMACH

# MC Canada executive minister visits Saskatchewan

*Event highlights need for ongoing dialogue between nationwide and regional church; urban and rural congregations*

Story and Photo by Emily Summach  
Saskatchewan Correspondent  
SASKATOON

In an effort to strengthen communication and relationships between the nationwide and regional churches, Doug Klassen, Mennonite Church Canada's executive minister, paid a visit to Saskatchewan last month.

He came, he said, "because I was invited. Ryan Siemens [MC Saskatchewan's former executive minister] felt it was really important to have in-person visits and face-to-face meetings between myself and regional churches. The pandemic really

kept me from doing those important visits, so now I'm making good on my commitments to connect with the regional churches, and the global church, too."

Nearly 50 people attended the event, which featured updates on the ministries of MC Canada by Klassen, as well as updates from various MC Saskatchewan ministry commissions. Special emphasis was placed on open question-and-answer sessions to facilitate further dialogue.

One of the difficulties brought on by

the 2017 restructuring of MC Canada was determining the best way to share the agenda and vision of the nationwide church with the regional churches. The new model asks the regional leadership to "carry a lot of the freight" of communicating with their congregations, Klassen noted. He shared a video presentation which offered updates from Klassen, CommonWord, and the International Witness, Indigenous Relations and Climate Action ministries.



**Doug Klassen shows no fear despite Mark Bigland-Pritchard's mallet swinging. Bigland-Pritchard shared an object lesson to talk about the 'theological pillars' of the Climate Emergency Response Team's mission.**

The ministries of Saskatchewan's regional church were also on display, as representatives from the pastoral leadership and Indigenous Relations commissions, and the newly formed Climate Emergency Response Team reported. Leaders spoke about the recent work their groups had undertaken, as well as some of their plans for the future, and then opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Eric Olfert and Phyllis Goertz, of the Walking the Path Indigenous Relations Committee, shared about the plan to make the new documentary, *Custodians*, available to MC Saskatchewan congregations as well as a new initiative to highlight the Saskatchewan government's recent sales of Crown Land.

Ike Epp, a representative from Fields of Hope/Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church in Glenbush, shared the impact that rural crime has on local perceptions of Indigenous communities, and how deeply prejudices can run.

Kevin Koop, pastor of Carrot River Mennonite Church, wanted to know how MC Canada and MC Saskatchewan decide which issues to advocate for. He noted this has been a live question for Mennonite denominations in recent history.

Klassen replied that MC Canada has been considering this same question: "Where does our responsibility as a denomination overlap with Mennonite Central Committee? Where do we decide to advocate?"

The climate emergency team made its first official presentation to the regional church constituency. Leaders Mark Bigland-Pritchard and Len Rempel shared a lively object lesson on the theological foundations for their work as well as the team's five mandates. Their presentation was met with some skepticism, highlighting some of the potential fault lines between urban and rural churches.

Said Epp: "This message is going to be hard to swallow with the rural church. The rural church is dying, and that is consuming our energy. Are we, all of us, prepared to make the changes that [the team] is calling for?"

The discussion served as a reminder of the diversity that is found within

Saskatchewan congregations.

Kirsten Hamm-Epp, MC Saskatchewan's regional church minister, said: "We are a very diverse body here in Saskatchewan! All of our groups, and the MC Saskatchewan office staff need to recognize that what we put out there has to engage everyone. Events like the one we're having today are important to challenge ourselves, and how good it is to hear and connect with all the diverse people that make up our churches. Let's hold that on to that; these days are so good and important."

In the final session, Klassen answered questions about the health of the regional churches in light of the three regional church executive minister vacancies in Ontario, British Columbia\* and Saskatchewan. He responded that MC Canada

is considering how much "freight" was passed on to regional executive ministers in the restructuring and how the nationwide branch can better support the regional church staff.

In spite of these challenges, Klassen affirmed that his recent visits with members of the global Anabaptist church showed him that the future of the church in Canada is hyper-local. The global church can teach us that all things are in, and addressed in, local churches, he said. The change comes in and through the local congregation, which is anchored in the households or neighbourhoods." ✎

\*MC B.C. has since filled its executive ministerial position. See page 16.

## /// Staff changes

### Pastoral transitions in Ontario

**Louise Wideman** was installed as pastor of worship and care at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, on Aug. 28, 2022. She previously served at Vineland United Mennonite Church for eight years, and before that at Mennonite churches in Kansas and Ohio. She is a graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

**Kathryn Cressman** began serving as pastor of Hillcrest Mennonite Church in New Hamburg on Oct. 1, 2022. She replaced Jan Steckley, who was pastor of Hillcrest for many years. Cressman originally trained as a teacher and spent some years as a stay-at-home mom on the family dairy farm, but recently graduated with a master of theological studies degree from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont.

**Scott Brubaker-Zehr** was installed as transformational pastor of Erb Street Mennonite Church, Waterloo, on Oct. 30, 2022, replacing Myrna Miller Dyck, who served as supply pastor since September 2021. Brubaker-Zehr was ordained to ministry at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, in 1998, where he served from 1995 to 2000. Prior to that, he and his wife Mary served with the Commission on Overseas Mission in Colombia. Brubaker-Zehr was pastor of Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, from 2000 until 2022.

**Sandra Baez** was installed as pastor of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, on April 17, 2022, replacing Nancy Brubaker Bauman, who served at the church from 2012 to 2022. Baez served as a pastor in Colombia for more than 13 years and has a master's degree in peacemaking and conflict resolution studies from Fresno Pacific University in California. She also serves as the executive assistant to Mennonite World Conference (MWC), and is married to César García, MWC's general secretary.

—BY BARB DRAPER



# Museum curator brings Mennonite identity and research to role

Story and Photos by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG

As Roland Sawatzky gives a tour through The Manitoba Museum, his eyes light up and his hands animatedly point out the highlights and features of each gallery. It's clear he's passionate about his work.

Sawatzky is the curator of history at The Manitoba Museum, a human and natural history museum in Winnipeg that is the province's largest, not-for-profit centre for heritage and science education. He has worked at the museum since 2011, where he researches, handles acquisitions, and develops exhibits. In the last few years, he has played a key role in creating two brand-new exhibits: the Winnipeg Gallery and the Prairies Gallery.

From 2003 to 2014, he served as curator at the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach, Man. His main goal there was to introduce thorough academic scholarship to the interpretation in the open-air and indoor museum. His leadership generated numerous exhibits on topics like the windmill industry, Mennonite funeral customs, a music and Mennonites concert series and a reinterpreted outdoor area. "Basically the first day there, I realized I wanted to do this for the rest of my life," he says. "I felt like I found my work home."

Sawatzky is a member of First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg and his kids are students and alumni of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, where he also sits on the board. Born in Winnipeg to Paraguayan Mennonites, he grew up in southwestern Ontario where his father was a pastor, and he eventually settled permanently back in Winnipeg.

He was eight years old when he figured out his passion and career path. He was flipping through *National Geographic* magazines from his parents' subscription, when he came across an archaeology article and realized that's what he wanted to pursue.

Sawatzky earned a BA in anthropology from the University of Winnipeg, an MA in anthropology from the University of South Carolina and a PhD in archaeology from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C. "I'm very interested in what people are actually doing on the ground, how people are actually living their lives," he says.

He's contributed significantly to the field of Mennonite research. He wrote his dissertation and did considerable post-graduate research on the social use of space in Mennonite house-barns in southern Manitoba between 1874 and 1930. He is part of the Mennonite Historic Arts Committee that produced the book, *Mennonite Village Photography*, and he recently wrote a paper on Mennonites and alcohol, based on a bottle collection at MHV.

"I think Mennonite material culture has particular historical significance because it

connects you to their physical and creative lives. In order to understand Mennonites more fully, it's important to understand this," Sawatzky says. "There's this notion that Mennonites are people of the word—but they're human beings, they're people of the earth, too. If you even just scratch the surface of history you can see that."

Mennonites show up in The Manitoba Museum's new Prairies Gallery, which he had an important part in developing. The gallery focuses on the history of the southern Manitoba prairies through time, from the plants and animals to the human connections—the different Indigenous people groups, including the Metis nation, and the settlers, of which Mennonites were one of the biggest early groups.

Sawatzky was the lead curator for the Winnipeg Gallery, another new addition to the museum. He says that while the majority of Manitobans live in Winnipeg, there was no exhibit specifically about



Roland Sawatzky at The Manitoba Museum, where he works.



**Roland Sawatzky by the Prairies Gallery section on Mennonite settlement.**

Winnipeg history in the museum or anywhere else in the province. He and a team of two Indigenous curators and two non-Indigenous curators transformed a neglected area of the museum to fill this gap. “That’s a once-in-a-career experience and I was very excited about it,” he says.

The Winnipeg Gallery features a photo wall of notable Winnipeggers, audio stories from newcomers, an interactive digital map showing the city’s evolution through the years and an artifact wall in seven themes, such as City of Water and City of Contrasts.

Modern immigration and Indigenous history were themes he prioritized in these new galleries, which were created with the guidance of an Indigenous advisory circle and a community engagement team of newcomers to Manitoba. “It was just a great team effort,” Sawatzky says.

When asked how his Mennonite identity intersects with his work, he says, “First and foremost, my Christian beliefs affect how I relate to my colleagues and the public... trying to be a source of something positive for other people.”

It also means he doesn’t stop looking for meaning at a superficial level. “I wouldn’t say I interpret history through a Christian lens, but it affects the way I look for meaning—I dig deeper all the time.” ❧

## /// Staff changes

### Pastoral transitions in Manitoba

**Erika Enns Rodine** became the lead minister of Altona Mennonite Church on Feb. 21. She concluded her role as associate minister of First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg on Feb. 5. She served in the position, doing youth ministry, for more than 12 years, beginning part-time and transitioning to full-time in 2022, when she was also ordained for congregational ministry. Enns Rodine holds a bachelor of arts degree in Anabaptist history and biblical and theological studies from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), and is continuing her studies towards a master’s degree in CMU’s Graduate School of Theology and Ministry.

**Ken Warkentin** completed his term as intentional interim pastor of Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg on Jan. 29. He served in the part-time position for two-and-a-half years. Prior to pastoring at Jubilee, he was the executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba for nine-and-a-half years. He has worked in ministry since 1981, pastoring in four different congregations, including Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg and Niverville Mennonite Church (now Niverville Community Fellowship). Warkentin and his wife have moved to Whitehorse, Yukon, to be close to children and grandchildren. He hopes to work in the religious community there.

**Ken Quiring** concluded 17 years of ministry as the pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Brandon on Dec. 25, 2022. The congregation’s declining numbers and finances made it unfeasible for him to continue in the position. Prior to serving at Grace, he pastored in Drake, Sask., for six years. On Jan. 3, he started in the role of spiritual health practitioner at Deer Lodge Centre, a rehabilitation and long-term-care facility in Winnipeg. He earned a master of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

**Terrell Wiebe** began as Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church’s associate pastor of youth ministry on Jan. 8. The position focuses on youth programming, pastoral care and faith formation for all ages. He is replacing Josh Janzen, who left the role in August 2022. Wiebe has more than a decade of ministry experience, previously as co-pastor of Gretna Bergthaler Mennonite Church and associate pastor of youth ministry at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Most recently, he served as interim pastor of Whitewater Mennonite Church in Boissevain for five months, while Wes Goerzen, the congregation’s pastor, was on sabbatical. Wiebe earned a master of arts degree in Christian ministry from CMU.

**Elizabeth Brasier** started serving as the full-time minister of Pinawa (Man.) Christian Fellowship on Jan. 23. Before joining the ecumenical congregation that includes Anglican, Presbyterian, Mennonite and United Church members, she spent the last 12 years as a chaplain at Parkview Home, a long-term-care home in Stouffville, Ont. She also served as associate pastor of Rouge Valley Mennonite Church in Markham, Ont., from 2010 to 2016. Brasier was ordained by MC Eastern Canada in August 2021 and has been a licensed pastor since 2010. She earned a master of divinity degree from Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE



# A local, hospitable family of God

*Yarrow church grows with more families, children*

By Amy Rinner Waddell  
B.C. Correspondent

Some churches have been struggling with reduced attendance during and since the pandemic, but Yarrow United Mennonite, a small congregation with attendance of around 60, has been steadily growing.

Families of all ages have been inviting others into the church body for Sunday worship, weekly coffee groups and moms groups as they meet together, pray together and support each other.

“We ask God to help us see those who are seeking him and invite them into our Christian family,” says Pastor Darnell Barkman.

When the Barkman family—Darnell, Christina and their four young children—came from a service term in the Philippines in 2018 to pastor the Yarrow church, only two other families with children were attending.

Gradually, some congregants from the past started coming again to “test the



PHOTO BY DARNELL BARKMAN

**Children enjoy fun and games at the Yarrow United Mennonite Church picnic last summer.**

waters,” exploring participation in a congregation led by a family with cross-cultural experience. Although not all who visited stayed, some became active in the congregation. Even when COVID-19 came with its restrictions, he says the church found

itself not shrinking, but growing “by ones and twos.”

Trust-building with the community is key to growth, according to Barkman, as church folks engage with their neighbours. Members serve in a variety of local organizations, including the school, a volunteer society, community choir and the local Mennonite Central Committee thrift shop. Many of them volunteered in response to the 2021 Fraser Valley flood.

Barkman credits the long-term congregants and faithful, committed leadership with keeping the congregation going throughout the years.

“There have been faithful core families who’ve been praying, worshipping, serving locally and caring for one another all that time,” he says. “Those families have nurtured the congregation and care deeply about being a local, hospitable and welcoming family of God.”

While the Sunday school program in the church has expanded, there isn’t yet a lot of capacity for more formal programs. Instead, says Barkman, they focus on contemporary versions of the core activities of the early church:

- **Fellowship and community building;**
- **Communion and eating together;** and
- **Meeting together for prayer and worship.**

“The early church and global church in history has always had these core activities,” he says. “This centres us in our core identity as God’s children and family who are following in Jesus’ way.” ❧

## Prayer request

### Myanmar



Jehu Lian

Sisters and brothers in Myanmar request our prayer. “Today is a sad and dark day for our country,” writes Amos Chin, leader of Bible Missionary Church, a Mennonite World Conference member in Myanmar. “Our country is under military regime again and we are under fear. We ask for your concern and prayer for our country and for our missionary work.”

“We worry for our political leaders who have been imprisoned,” says Jehu Lian (pictured), an MCEC pastor in Kitchener, Ont., and assistant director of Myanmar Missions International. “This creates a very uncertain future. We need to lift our prayers to God. . . .

Concern is growing about the possibility of civil war.”

—MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

## BOOK REVIEW

# Tips for foster and adoptive parents

Thriving Families: A Trauma-Informed Guidebook for the Foster and Adoptive Journey.  
Jenn Ranter Hook and Joshua N. Hook. Herald Press, 2023, 248 pages.

Reviewed by Barb Draper

BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

While parenting can be a struggle, parenting through foster care or adoption has extra challenges, says Jenn Hook in *Thriving Families*. Her experience as a counsellor with a foster-care agency, and as the founder of a non-profit organization that supports foster and adoptive families gives her a solid understanding of these challenges.

Although the book is written from Hook's perspective, her husband, who is a clinical psychologist, also had a hand in it. A professor of psychology at the University of North Texas, Joshua Hook is aware of the latest research on how to help families do well.

Written specifically to help adoptive and foster parents, the book is also for those who are considering becoming foster or adoptive parents, and to help churches and other groups provide better support to these parents. Insights into the unique realities of children affected by adoption and foster care is important for those who care for them.

"Parenting through adoption and foster care is holy work, work that is so close to the heart of God," say the authors. At the same time, they recognize that parenting can be very difficult and, when children have experienced significant trauma, there are no easy fixes.

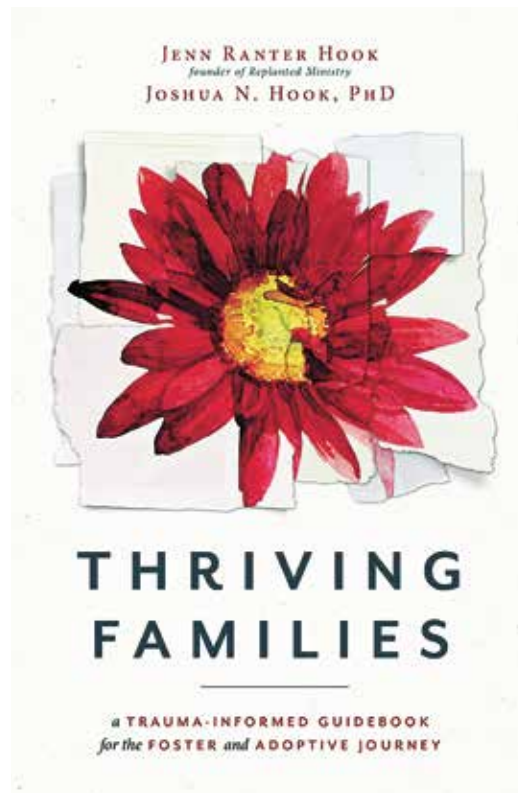
Using lots of personal examples and case studies, the book provides valuable information about the complex situations that may be affecting children in foster care. As well as the struggle for self-identity, they may have experienced trauma or never had a trusting relationship with a dependable caregiver. There are many other issues that can make it difficult for children to relate to a new family situation, including medical or mental-health concerns, or unfamiliar social or cultural expectations.

A large section of this book provides suggestions for how to make children feel safe, how to connect with them and help them regulate their emotions. There is also a chapter on how to navigate relationships with birth families.

"Telling children they are safe isn't going to automatically make them feel they are safe," writes Jenn. "Telling children they are safe and then being a safe person, consistently, day after day, is what will move the needle over time."

She writes in an encouraging way, recognizing that consistent parenting through adoption and foster care can be challenging.

Although it is a kind of how-to book, the personal stories and case studies provide interesting reading. Meanwhile, the suggestions for foster and adoptive parents offer helpful guidance for anyone dealing with children. ❧



## News brief

### Online dialogues connect Mennonites globally

On February 15, a live webcast event presented a dialogue between Doug Klassen, executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada, and Desalegn Abebe, president of Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia. Abebe shared about how MKC is growing by 7 percent annually, shy of their goal of 10 percent. He talked about the growth strategies they use and the centrality of prayer.

Klassen shared perspectives from Canada. The event concluded with Klassen and Abebe praying for each other's churches. To watch a recording of the event see <http://bit.ly/3YgxWJP>.

A similar event on March 22 will allow Mennonites to hear from Amos Chin, an Anabaptist leader in Myanmar, and Jehu Lian, pastor of Chin Christian Church in Kitchener, Ont. To register, see [mcec.ca/events](http://mcec.ca/events).

—STAFF

## OBITUARY

# An ambassador of Christ's peace

Eastern Mennonite Missions  
LANCASTER, PA.

**D**avid W. Shenk, 85, of Lititz, Pa., went to be with the Lord on Jan. 31, 2023. He was an ambassador of Christ's peace who devoted his life to serving God through missions and the church.

In his memoir, *A Gentle Boldness*, he concluded by reflecting on Paul's words in II Corinthians 5:20. He wrote that he and his wife Grace "were seeking to celebrate the peace of Jesus. . . . Jesus commissions us to be his ambassadors of peace."

"David's legacy will continue to have a profound impact on me and the work of Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) for years to come," said Marvin Lorenzana, president of Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM). "His commitment to Christ—and his gentle and bold approach to relationships—modelled a spirit-empowered life that effectively ministered across numerous cultural and religious landscapes."

Shenk had a life-long passion for relating lovingly and respectfully to Muslims while confessing Christ as Lord, which led to the founding of the EMM Christian-Muslim Relations Team in 2012. Current team leader Jonathan Bornman said: "David's legacy is the people he has impacted and connected with over his lifetime. His life and the materials he has written have blazed a trail for helping the church and all Christ followers to share a Jesus-centred faith in a multifaith world."

Shenk grew up in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) as a child of EMM missionaries Clyde and Alta Shenk. From 1959 to 1961, he served as a youth worker in New York City. In 1963, he returned to Africa, along with his wife Grace and their two daughters, to Somalia, where he taught and developed curriculum along with



UNESCO and the Somali Department of Education.

In 1973, Shenk and his wife relocated, with their two daughters and two sons, to Nairobi, Kenya, where he served as pastor of the Nairobi Mennonite Church and professor at Kenyatta University College. His vision for supporting the majority-Muslim suburb

community in Eastleigh, Nairobi, led to the formation of the Eastleigh Fellowship Center, which provided library services and English lessons for Muslims. Today, Eastleigh Fellowship Center is a thriving hub of dialogue and friendship between

Muslims and Christians, and offers numerous education and sports programs.

A time of transition in Shenk's career and family brought him back to the United States, where he served as director of EMM's Home Ministries, based in Salunga, Pa., from 1980 to 1986, and as director of Overseas Ministries from 1987 to 1998. He went on to become dean of Lithuania Christian College (now LCC International University) from 1998 to 2002. Beginning in 2003, he served worldwide as a global consultant for EMM with a focus on Muslim ministries.

Shenk was the author or co-author of 18 books, including *Global Gods* and *Christian. Muslim. Friend.* ❧

## News brief

### Music, dessert at fundraiser event

Toe-tapping music and delicious desserts drew 120 people to Cedar Valley Church in Mission, B.C., on Feb. 18, for a fundraiser coffeehouse sponsored by Mennonite Church B.C. More than \$6,000 was raised in support of the regional church's Indigenous Relations program, with donations totalling approximately \$5,200 and silent auction items netting some \$800. Volunteers from Cedar Valley Church prepared desserts ranging from fresh fruit and cookies, to cream puffs and cheesecake. J D Miner, a trio that describes its music as "highbrow hillbilly" performed. Band member Darryl Klassen previously served as Aboriginal Neighbours coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee B.C. "I was encouraged by the turnout to the coffeehouse fundraiser and the donations that came in," said, Henry Krause of the MC B.C. Indigenous Relations Task Group. "This work is an important part of the larger mission of MC B.C., and it is good to see support in this way."



**Musical group JD Miner performed at a fundraiser for MC B.C. Indigenous relations work.**

—AMY RINNER WADDELL



# Testimonies of peace from Ethiopia

By Mekonnen Gemedo

Director, Peacebuilding Department, Meserete Kristos Church, Ethiopia

One of the projects carried out by the [Meserete Kristos Church (MKC)] Department of Peace Building is to train and empower believers in peace building. After acquiring relevant knowledge and skills, we want them to become ambassadors of peace in their churches and communities. The church has been training church leaders on peacebuilding for the past three years.

In February, we went to some of the project sites to monitor what they have been doing with the knowledge they obtained from the various training and

in their local villages. These local peace committees meet regularly and address conflicts in their community. They reconcile disputing parties using the skills they learned during the training.

Local people come to them seeking their wisdom to resolve conflicts. Couples come to them when they cannot solve marital/family problems. People who usually fight on boundaries and grazing land come to them to help them address the conflict.

The peace committee shared with us testimonies of people they have helped. They restored broken marriages. Some

people usually go to court to settle disputes. They used to spend a lot of time and money. Now, they go to the peace committee to help them settle their disputes.

As the peace committee members are mostly Christians, the work they do brings them in contact with people from various backgrounds. They can listen to the problems of people beyond addressing their presenting problem. That gives them an opportunity to share the gospel with them. As a result, three young men and 12 adults came to faith in Christ in the area.

We bring glory to God for the work that



SUPPLIED PHOTO.

*Peace committee members in the Shone region of Ethiopia.*

workshops. One of the places we visited was the Shone MKC region. A total of 61 church leaders were trained in peacebuilding in the region.

After receiving the training, many of them shared what they learned with other church leaders, members and their neighbours. They used community events to disseminate peace messages. They went further and formed peace committees

of the family issues they addressed were deep rooted. The community appreciated the efforts of the peace committee for maintaining peaceful relationships in the families.

In Siraro Woreda, a diverse group of people live together. It is one of the drought-prone areas and people usually fight on scarce resources in the community. Before the formation of the peace committee,

has been done so far. We would also like to express our gratitude to donors who supported the project. ❧

*This article is reprinted, with permission, from the February 2023 issue of MKC News. MKC is the Anabaptist conference in Ethiopia.*



# MC Canada climate action update

By Aaron Epp  
Senior Writer

In a meeting on Jan. 30, 2022, Mennonite Church Canada's governing body, Joint Council, affirmed climate action as a nationwide ministry emphasis.

Eight days later, MC Canada published a document prepared by the executive ministers entitled, "Taking Action on Climate Change: The Eco-Mission of the Church in a Critical Time." The document outlines six initiatives that reflect MC

Canada's "working commitments as a nationwide church." This action followed the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference and the "7 Calls to Climate Action" initiative, a grassroots push by Canadian Mennonites for bold action.

More than a year after that document was published, what action has MC Canada taken?

## Initiative #1: Broaden the mandate of MC Canada's Sustainability Leadership Group.

The Sustainability Leadership Group (SLG) is appointed by Joint Council. The group now has representation from all regions except Saskatchewan. Members include Marta Bunnett Wiebe, Ian Funk, Joanne Moyer, John Reimer, Tim Wiebe-Neufeld and Andre Wiederkehr. They meet every two to three months.

Leading up to the annual MC Canada gathering in Edmonton last summer, the group set up a carbon levy so that registrants could offset greenhouse gas emissions from their travel. This generated \$1,178, which included offsets related to the Edmonton gathering as well as other travel. About half the money came from MC Manitoba.

Using MC Canada's suggested calculations, the amount contributed to the offset fund would cover 24 flights from Toronto to Edmonton.

Joint Council shifted \$100,000 out of an older "church building" reserve fund into the creation care fund. The offset money also goes to this fund.

Eventually, MC Canada congregations will be able to apply to the creation care fund for grants for carbon reduction projects at their churches. MC Canada staff are currently mapping out a grant application process.

## Initiative #2: Create space for our youth to engage on the climate crisis.

MC Manitoba is organizing a climate-focused gathering for youth and young adults ages 16-25 in April. Other regions are invited to send representatives.

## Initiative #3: Open discernment about "simple living."

In the February 2022 document, MC Canada leadership encouraged individuals, families, congregations and regional churches to "grapple with Jesus' teachings"

### ✉ Dear friends and family in the Mennonite community:

**We've got a life-threatening money problem, and we desperately need your help.**

We are in a climate emergency. The science clearly says we need to draw down carbon emissions 50 percent by 2030 if we're to have a chance at not crossing the planetary boundary of 1.5-degree warming. But since the 2016 Paris Climate Accords, the world's biggest banks have put over \$4.6 trillion toward fossil fuels. Five Canadian banks alone—RBC, Scotia, TD, BMO and CIBC—have invested over \$911 billion in new coal, oil and gas developments since 2016. Imagine where we'd be if these banks had instead invested that money in clean energy.

To continue to fund new fossil fuel projects at a time like this is violence to the earth, to all of the planet's living species, to our poorest global neighbours, and to our own communities. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has said fossil firms and the banks that finance them "have humanity by the throat."

But we can stop them. A global divestment movement is rising up and calling faith communities, schools, businesses and individuals to move our money away from these banks.

Does your church bank at RBC, Scotia, TD, BMO or CIBC? Do you? We, the Justice Team at Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg are humbly calling on you, as we call on ourselves, to follow Jesus into the temple and "cleanse" our accounts so that we can all bank on a better future.

March 21 is an international "Move Your Money" day of action. We need churches to step up and join the life-saving work of others—to move our money, and to let the banks and the world know why we are doing so.

In December, Europe's largest bank, HSBC, responded to this kind of pressure and announced it will stop financing new oil and gas developments.

Members of our congregation and others have moved their money from these five banks to other financial institutions. Our church and many others have chosen to bank with local credit unions. We invite you to join this movement. If you want to share your story with us or are curious to learn more, contact us at [justiceteam@hopemennonite.ca](mailto:justiceteam@hopemennonite.ca). For more info on the steps you can take, check out [bankingonabetterfuture.org](http://bankingonabetterfuture.org), a beautiful website created by student groups across Canada.

**In friendship,**

THE JUSTICE TEAM OF HOPE MENNONITE CHURCH (WINNIPEG)

and consider how they might do things like reduce consumption, streamline their possessions and minimize use of fossil fuels.

Because this is to happen on the local level, it's difficult to gauge progress.

In Manitoba, a grassroots group is organizing around the notion of a "More-with-Less Revival." As an initial step, the group is inviting Manitobans to redirect their provincial "carbon tax relief" cheques (\$225 for individuals, \$375 for households) to Mennonite Central Committee. While not initiated by church leaders, the revival group includes three members of the MC Manitoba Climate Action Working Group.

#### **Initiative #4: Explore divestment/ investment options related to mitigating climate change.**

To date, MC Canada has not produced a clear summary statement of how it is making investment choices that align with its values, and it has not focused on investing in "instruments that have a positive impact on climate change."

Doug Klassen, MC Canada executive minister, cites changes in the church's accounting department as the reason and adds that MC Canada still plans to do these things.

Shortly after "Taking Action on Climate Change" was published, MC Manitoba's general accountant took over responsibility for MC Canada's accounting from MC Eastern Canada's financial manager, a transition that took months to organize, Klassen said.

"We're so understaffed that just getting the day-to-day stuff done is sometimes very taxing," he said. "It sounds lame to say we didn't have time... [but] we didn't anticipate a significant change in our accounting department, either."

Klassen reported, however, that the majority of MC Canada pastors and staff have chosen pension fund portfolios that do not invest in fossil fuel projects.

After a long history with a credit union, MC Canada currently banks with TD, which invests in new coal, oil and gas developments. The church moved its business to TD because the credit union was not able to accommodate out-of-town signing authorities, which was necessary

after staff downsizing.

Klassen said that when MC Canada's treasurer is in Winnipeg for meetings in the spring, they will explore moving to a banking institution that does not invest in fossil fuel projects.

"Another significant factor for us will be the ability to send money [to Witness workers] overseas seamlessly," he said. "That can't falter."

The world of investments is a complex one, Klassen said, and "there's just no such thing as untainted money." MC Canada wants to do the right thing, but at the same time, "It's impossible to stay free of everything that causes us ethical concerns."

#### **Initiative #5: Set up a Mennonite Church Canada web page to provide . . . resources for congregations and working groups.**

MC Canada has not yet created a central hub for the work of the regional and nationwide working groups. The church's website does include resources ([mennonitechurch.ca/climate-action](http://mennonitechurch.ca/climate-action)).

#### **Initiative #6: Commit funds to support Mennonite Church Canada's climate actions.**

MC Canada hired Sandy Plett as half-time climate action coordinator. She started on Nov. 28.

This was a specific action pushed for by the "7 Calls" group.

Funds have also been made available as per #1 above.

#### **Reflections**

Plett is struck by the different names chosen by the regional working groups related to climate. Four of the five regions have such groups, which are made up of volunteers. Eastern Canada has the "Creation Care Resource Team," Manitoba has the "Climate Action Working Group," Saskatchewan has the "Climate Emergency Response Team" and B.C. has the "Creation Care Task Group."

The different names indicate different perspectives and priorities, Plett says.

"It paints a picture of the diversity of angles that people are approaching the climate crisis with," she says. "What I also notice is a sensitivity to what language will

mobilize the people in that region."

The working groups are all less than two years old and still in formative stages, Plett says. An Alberta group is expected to be established soon.

Plett recently produced a "lay of the land" document outlining what each working group is up to.

Mark Bigland-Pritchard, a member of the "7 Calls" campaign and chair of MC Saskatchewan's working group, says the nationwide church is making progress and he's confident in Plett's ability to move things forward.

Still, he wonders what things would look like today if MC Canada had taken bolder action 10 years ago. "We're up against an emergency," he says. "Just what we can call for in an emergency, at a time when some people recognize it's an emergency and some people don't, is going to be a challenge."

He notes that the world's poorest countries bear the brunt of climate change, and that responding to climate change is, in the end, a spiritual issue.

"How do we actually relate to the world that God has put us in and therefore to the creator?" he asks. "How do we relate to our fellow human beings who are suffering as a result of our excess?"

"[Taking climate action is] a deeply relational thing, which is so easy to lose when we're just looking at it in terms of planned policy," he added. "So as with all relationships, there is going to be struggle [and] there is going to be joy as well as we go into the process." ❧



# Invitation to freedom: A lenten practice

Photos and story by Carol Penner

**W**ho wants to talk about sin? Not me, that's for sure. Most people I know are pretty stressed out; they want good news, not something that makes them feel worse.

As I write this my autocorrect keeps changing the word "sin" to "sun." My computer can't even believe I want to talk about it.

In fact, I used "freedom" in the title, instead of "sin," so as not to drive readers away. And I will talk about freedom, so keep reading.



Lent is traditionally a time to talk about sin, in order to encourage repentance. We are looking towards Jesus' passion and death on the cross, which was the result of sin.

People typically give up chocolate, desserts or alcohol for Lent but it's not usually because they think those things are sinful; it's more about practicing self-discipline, which is a good thing to practice. But

Lent can also be a time to confess our sins.

Sin that we have not confessed affects us. Is there something bad you've done that you've never told anyone about? For some it can lead to a nagging feeling that we are bad, and this can manifest in physical ways.

## The ache of sin

Long ago our 7-year-old daughter was playing in my husband's office while we were working just outside. We were surprised when two fire trucks and an

said. It was a mistake, but by covering it up she made it worse for herself.

Sin also happens when we fail to do something we should do. Years ago I saw that my neighbour's young son had a terrible bruise on his leg. I asked him what happened and he said: "My dad kicked me because I wouldn't get off the couch." I thought of reporting this to Children's Aid but I was intimidated by my neighbour who was a fan of martial arts and had a big dog. I rationalized that this boy's mother should report it.

I had no idea at the time how that decision would fill me with years of regret—how for the rest of my life I would wonder what happened to that boy.

Our sins can haunt us. Talking about what we've done wrong and repenting can help. In my work as a pastor I've had many people confess things they've done long ago. By telling someone we are seeking release and freedom.

Together we can pray for God's forgiveness, and we can talk about giving repentance feet. What does true repentance do? It usually means making things right and apologizing to the people you've hurt.

Sadly I have talked to people who had no remorse for obviously bad things they'd done. They had an excuse for everything, or they blamed others. Or they justified their actions, just like I did after not helping the neighbour boy. When you fail to confess, and sin gets heaped upon sin you can lose your moral compass, or at least bury it so deep it's very hard to find.

## Precise confession

In the past Mennonites have gone overboard on delineating sins. Churches divided over the sinfulness of different types of head coverings. When people committed sins, there was often more condemnation than grace.

I think we are overcompensating now;

ambulance came rolling up with sirens and lights. We explained there was no emergency. My daughter insisted she had not called 911. That night she went to bed early because she said she had a stomach ache.

I went and talked to her, and in the dark she confessed she had called 911, but had hung up immediately. "I didn't know they would come if I didn't talk to them," she



we rarely talk about sin. In a class I teach on worship, I see a tendency to talk about sin in broad, generic terms, like “forgive us our sins.” But sometimes we benefit from more particular prayers: “For all who could have been generous this week, but hoarded their money....” “For times we have looked down on someone because of the colour of their skin.....” “For those here who have been violent in

word or deed towards family members....” “For things we are addicted to, that harm our lives and relationships....”

Confessional prayers can be overwhelming if we list too many things, but in the course of a year have your worship leaders specifically named abuse, racism, pride or greed? If they haven’t, is it because we think no one sitting in church struggles with those sins?



Confessing specific sins is difficult, but the alternative is to create the impression that we are all extremely good, blameless people sitting in the pews.

We are all loved and embraced by God, but we are not blameless. Confessing our sins comes when we invite Jesus to walk with us in our daily lives. With Jesus at our side, we will be more likely to see what we need to confess.

### Communal grace

But even there, we need the church, we need the larger community to give course corrections on this journey with Jesus. We need to be called to confess. We need to examine together the systemic, multi-generational sins related to global economics and treatment of Indigenous peoples.

Confession is an exercise in community. Is there someone in the church with whom you’ve exchanged harsh words? Is there a family member you can’t tolerate? The healthiest communities are ones in which we can admit our mistakes and try to make things right. Taking time in Lent to start mending broken relationships, with a card, a conversation or a casserole is taking our repentance prayers and making them visible.

Martin Luther wrote the following about temptation: “You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair.” I would apply that image to sin. It is a burden we carry, which we may not think about, but which sometimes is visible to others and impacts how we live in the world.

John the Baptist cried out, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” It’s actually a good news message. We don’t have to live in misery with guilty consciences. Jesus offers us salvation from all that. Confession of sin and repentance is ultimately about freedom. It’s clearing our head, its shedding the weight of sin. Lent is a good time to ask, “Do we want to be truly free?” Jesus shows us the way. ✎

*Carol Penner teaches practical theology at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo. She is posting Lenten confessional prayers at [leadingworship.com](http://leadingworship.com).*





GREBEL PHOTO BY ADEN WORTON

**Poland Parables, a musical work composed by Carol Ann Weaver, was performed in Waterloo on March 1. The work, which is set to poetic texts by Connie T. Braun, chronicles events in Poland and Eastern Europe prior to the Second World War as seen through the eyes of children. It was performed at Conrad Grebel University College by Ben-Bolt Martin (cello), left, Weaver (piano), and Mary-Catherine Pazzano (vocals). Poland Parables commemorates the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II.**

## Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service seeks candidates to be on our board.

If you can see yourself volunteering your perspective and experience to one of Canada's most successful independent church publications, let us know. Or, if you can think of someone else who could contribute, encourage that person to apply! A broad and diverse spectrum of perspectives stimulates good discussion and creativity.

Skills in journalism, small business or communication technologies, for example, would be particularly valuable to us.

To learn more, please email Art Koop at [arturos.treasure@gmail.com](mailto:arturos.treasure@gmail.com) or Karen Heese at [jandkbarber@gmail.com](mailto:jandkbarber@gmail.com)



## News brief

### New art exhibits consider home

Two new exhibits at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg explore fraught ideas of home. One is Margaret Shaw-MacKinnon's exhibit, "Ukraine: Close to Home," a visual song to her grandparents, who immigrated to Canada from Ukraine in the 1880s. The work links hardships past and present.

The other exhibit is "Leaving Canada: The Mennonite Migration to Mexico." This travelling exhibit tells the story of the nearly 8,000 Mennonites who left Canada in the 1920s to start new lives in Mexico and Paraguay.

These exhibits will be on display from March 10 until April 29 at 610 Shaftesbury Blvd.

—MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE GALLERY



"Baba Yaga Coming Through A Portal," by Margaret Shaw-MacKinnon.

SUPPLIED IMAGE.

## Calendar

### British Columbia

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

**May 6:** MC B.C. women's day.

**May 21:** MC B.C. arts fundraiser for Indigenous relations, at Heritage Hall, Vancouver.

### Alberta

**April 22:** MC Alberta all-committee meeting, at Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury.

### Manitoba

**March 28:** CMU open house at 10:00 a.m. with come-and-go guided tours at the campus. Register at [cmu.ca/future/experience](http://cmu.ca/future/experience).

**March 29:** CMU virtual open house, online at 6:00 p.m. Register at [cmu.ca/future/experience](http://cmu.ca/future/experience).

**April 7:** The choir of First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, and orchestra, under the direction of Yuri Klaz, present's Faure's "Requiem," at the church, at 7 p.m.

**April 26:** CMU virtual open house, online at 6:00 p.m. Register at [cmu.ca/future/experience](http://cmu.ca/future/experience).

**July 14-15:** The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies and the University of Manitoba present "The Russlaender Mennonites: War dislocation and new beginnings" centenary conference to mark the arrival of Russlaender from the Soviet Union to Canada.

**July 15:** "Singing our Journey: Sangerfest 2023," at the Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall. Sign up to sing in the mass choir celebrating the centenary of the Russlaender immigration to Canada. For more information, visit [mhsc.ca/soj](http://mhsc.ca/soj).

### Ontario

**March 18:** Conrad Grebel University College and the University of Waterloo March break open house for prospective students. Learn more at [grebel.ca/events](http://grebel.ca/events).

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

visit [www.mennosingers.com](http://www.mennosingers.com).

**April 18:** MC Eastern Canada presents "Living the Gospel as a diverse group of believers," an online workshop on cultural integration, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Learn more at [mcec.ca/events](http://mcec.ca/events).

**April 26:** Soli Deo Gloria Singers present a concert at Leamington United Mennonite Church, at 3 p.m.

**April 28-29:** MC Eastern Canada annual church gathering, at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, in English and French. Learn more at [mcec.ca/events](http://mcec.ca/events).

**May 5:** Menno Singers presents its "Spring Concert," at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit [www.mennosingers.com](http://www.mennosingers.com).

**May 5-7:** Theatre of the Beat presents "I Love You and it Hurts," three short plays on elder abuse, healthy masculinity, and intimate-partner violence, at the Kitchener Public Library; (5,6) at 7 p.m., and (6,7) at 2 p.m. For more information about tickets, email [cedric@theatreofthebeat.ca](mailto:cedric@theatreofthebeat.ca).

**May 11:** MC Eastern Canada presents "Becoming a restorative church: Embodying our safe church policy." A hybrid event, in English and French, at 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, and on Zoom, from 7 to 9 p.m. Learn more at [mcec.ca/events](http://mcec.ca/events).

**June 3:** MC Eastern Canada presents "Being a restorative church: Creating brave and accessible space." A hybrid event, at Shantz Mennonite Church, Baden, with French on Zoom, from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Learn more at [mcec.ca/events](http://mcec.ca/events).

### Online

**March 17:** Mennonite World Conference online prayer hour, 10 a.m. EST. Register at [mwc-cmm.org/OPHmar23](http://mwc-cmm.org/OPHmar23).

**To ensure timely publication of upcoming events, please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to [calendar@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:calendar@canadianmennonite.org).**

**For more Calendar listings visit, [canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar](http://canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar).**



## Classifieds

### Employment Opportunity



### Employment Opportunity Pastor

Hamilton Mennonite Church (HMC) invites applications for a full-time pastor who embraces the Anabaptist vision of peace. Located near McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, HMC has just over 100 members and 40 participants under the age of 18.

Our love for Jesus calls us to inclusion and we seek candidates who are fully LGBTQ+ affirming. The pastor will provide spiritual and pastoral leadership, supported by strong lay leadership.

The base salary starts at \$70,000 (plus benefits and pension) for candidates with an MDiv and increases for those with previous pastoral experience.

**The application deadline is April 15, 2023. Our ideal candidate will start in September 2023. The timeline reflects our desire for continuity for the many children and young families in our congregation.**

Visit at our website at [hmc.on.ca](http://hmc.on.ca) to learn more. Email [pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca](mailto:pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca) for a full job description or for a link to join in our hybrid worship services.

### Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
April 10	March 27
April 24 <i>Focus on Books &amp; Resources</i>	April 10
May 8	April 24
May 22 <i>Focus on Mental Health</i>	May 8
June 5	May 18
June 19	June 5
July 3	June 19
July 17 <i>Digital Issue</i>	July 3
July 31	July 17
Aug. 14 <i>Digital Issue</i>	July 31
Aug. 28	Aug. 14
Sept. 11 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Aug. 28
Sept. 25	Sept. 11
Oct. 9	Sept. 25
Oct. 23 <i>Focus on Education</i>	Oct. 6

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J. Howard

