

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

December 15, 2023 Volume 27 Number 25

## To thine own self be true?

Instagram, Jesus and the quest for the 'authentic self'

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# Survey says . . .

BY TOBI THIESSEN  
Publisher



Starting in April, this magazine will be printed 12 times per year instead of 22. Many

readers encouraged the change.

In the *Canadian Mennonite* (CM) survey, carried out from July to October, we heard from nearly 350 people.

In addition, CM board members and I spoke directly with pastors, church leaders and others across the country.

More than 50 percent of survey respondents suggested that CM reduce print frequency. “I ... don’t have time for all the issues even though I appreciate the content,” said one person. Another said “fewer issues with more focused content on a theme would be helpful.”

One pastor told us people feel they are wasting paper and resources if they don’t read everything.

Although some respondents like the current frequency, in some cases they see benefits to a slower schedule. “Fewer issues would be good if those issues were better quality,” one person said.

This is exactly our plan. We believe we can do a better job of writing, editing, photography and design if we take more time between issues. We will delve more deeply and give more consideration for how we foster dialogue.

Plenty of people encouraged CM to use more, and larger, photographs, but fully 55 percent of respondents were opposed to changing from newsprint to a higher quality paper. “I would save

the extra expense of glossy paper, however, larger photos would definitely be advantageous,” wrote one person.

Another said using newsprint is “good stewardship for a magazine that will be read and eventually disposed.”

We recognize the online survey risked overlooking the views of readers who are not online. “Don’t forget the seniors without computers,” said one respondent. Another wrote by email: “My opinion will not get recorded or included because I’m of the older crowd.” This person did eventually complete the survey.

Other readers, similarly, overcame the tech barrier by asking for help getting online to submit their feedback. A few picked up the phone and called in response to my August 25 editorial.

In addition to asking your opinion on print frequency and paper quality, we asked how CM can best serve the church family across Canada in this era. We have been publishing church news since 1953. Seventy years later, it’s worth asking what methods work best to connect our church community and to invite others to join our conversations about faith and life from an Anabaptist perspective.

For those who are disappointed about the reduction in number of issues per year, I want to say that we remain fully committed to a strong print magazine. We love print and we know many of you do too. We are even hopeful that prioritizing quality over

quantity will draw new readers to join us in the thoughtful dialogue for which this magazine is known.

We also need to be tech-savvy and offer church news in digital forms to engage the church community in the online sphere.

While the survey was underway, CM was also in conversation with Mennonite Church Canada and the regional churches about our publishing agreement. In place since 1998, the agreement allows anyone who attends a Mennonite Church Canada congregation to subscribe to CM at a cost paid collectively through the church. In October, the CM board and the Joint Council of Mennonite Church Canada agreed to a new three-year agreement that extends this Every Home Plan, as we call it, and includes support for some new initiatives that CM will start in 2024.

Watch this space in the new year for more details about our plans. Not only does the change involve a redesigned print magazine, we’ll also announce some new columnists and a residency program that will nurture gifts in the church and infuse new creativity into CM content in print and online.

Please note that the next issue of CM will be digital-only, emailed on December 29. If you are a subscriber and not on our email list, contact Lorna ([office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org)) to add digital delivery to your subscription. We will be back in print with the January 12, 2024, issue. ☺



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# What in the World



## Youth seek the sacred

A recent study found that young people are looking for sacred moments but often find them outside places of worship. Of the 4,500 people between 13 and 25 years of age polled, 55 percent said they have experienced sacred moments. Of those, 69 percent did so in nature, 68 percent at home and 55 percent at a place of worship.

Source: Springtide Research Institute

Photo: Pexels Kei Scampa

## 50 YEARS AGO

### Getting it together theologically

Our church has made great progress in many areas in the past 30 or 40 years. Some years ago the externals seemed to be great problems—television cutting of hair, wedding rings; I could go on and on.

We seem to have come through this, and our church is the better for it.

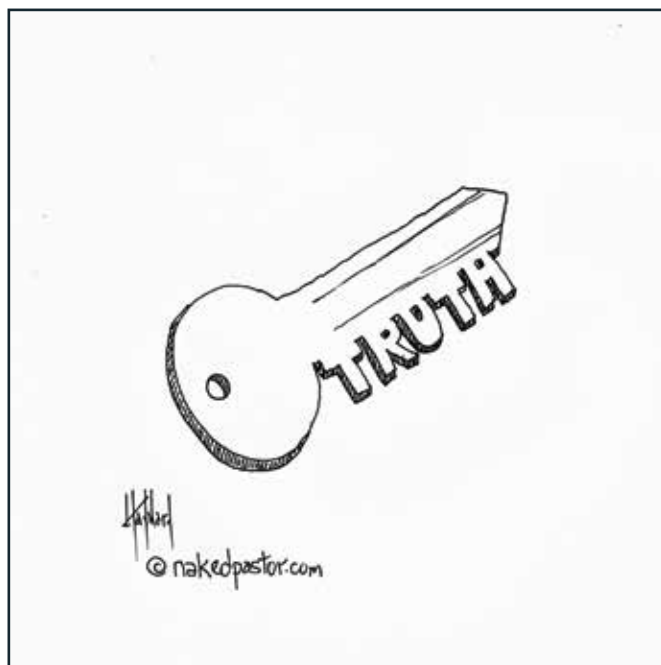
We now face a new problem, probably more serious than the above which is the question of theology.

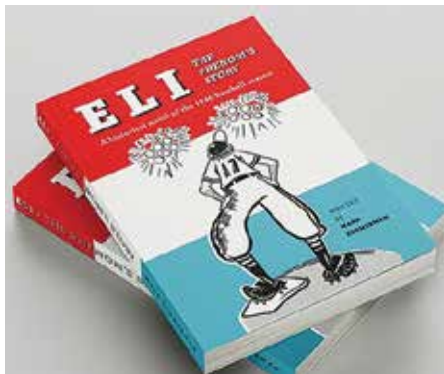
On one side we have people who are quite liberal, on the other side people who are very traditional, and perhaps a great many in between who are confused.

Our church has a long history of growing stronger through crisis. We will emerge a more mature church if we face this question honestly and continue to grapple with the problem.

—Irvin Brubacher, Bridgeport, Ont.

MENNONITE REPORTER, DEC. 24, 1973





**Amishman in the big league**

Eli Weaver was supposed to save the 1946 season for the Cleveland Indians when he was called up from Amish country, but would he stick it out? Mark Zimmerman's novel, *Eli: The Phenom's Story*, weaves the Amish character into historical records in a way Zimmerman says doesn't "destroy the space-time continuum."

Source: Anabaptist World  
 Photo: batsleftthrowsleft.com



**Russia ousts Catholics**

Russian authorities in Ukraine's occupied Zaporizhzhia region have banned the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Caritas, an international Catholic humanitarian agency. Russia has indicated it will confiscate church property.

Source: The Catholic Register  
 Photo: Wikimedia Commons, Mykola Swarnyk



**MAID tensions hit B.C.**

The B.C. government will provide medical assistance in dying services at a new facility to be built adjacent to St. Paul's Hospital, a Catholic-run Vancouver hospital that refuses to administer MAID. MAID advocates are preparing a legal challenge to the agreement that exempts religious institutions from administering MAID.

Source: Vancouver Sun  
 Photo: Unsplash, Marcelo Leal

**A moment from yesterday**



Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker Alice Snyder (right) shows needlework done by rural and refugee women in Jordan and the West Bank to Esther Weber at the MCC Ontario offices in Kitchener in 1964. The Overseas Needlepoint and Crafts Project would become Self-Help and later, Ten Thousand Villages.

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing with notes from gameo.org

Photo: The Canadian Mennonite/ Mennonite Archives of Ontario

## /// Readers write

### Be in Touch

- Send letters to [letters@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:letters@canadianmennonite.org). Our mailing address is on page 3.
- Please keep it concise and respectful. Any substantial edits to letters will be done in consultation with the writer.
- If you have feedback not intended for publication, please contact [editor@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:editor@canadianmennonite.org) or at 1-800-378-2524 ext 5.

### ✉ Advent in light of current events

**Will Braun's December 1 editorial ("What kind of peace church are we?") asks what Palestinian Christians would think of our various statements and actions related to the Gaza war. That question gets to the heart of what we as a church need to grapple with.**

It may be helpful for us to ask ourselves a related question: Whose voices are we listening to the most when it comes to Palestine and Israel?

Is it the voices of the strong—the soundbite quotes from Israeli military leaders and of our own political leaders who "stand with Israel"? Or is it the voices of grieving victims we hear quoted nightly in the news?

Are we resonating with North American preachers on the airwaves who believe that God sides with the state of Israel? Or can we hear the cries of Palestinian Christians, who experience Israel's actions as oppressive and an affront to God's way of justice and peace?

What roles do our racial, ethnic, class and religious biases play? How does our Christian discipleship influence what we hear?

The Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network, mandated to help implement our church's 2016 resolution on Palestine and Israel, is listening to the voices of occupied and suffering siblings in faith, and seeking to amplify them.

We are thrilled that *Canadian Mennonite* is doing the same during Advent. This is a season when we remind ourselves that God became flesh within a context of military occupation, siding with those on the margins. As pregnant Mary sang: *"He has shown strength with his arm . . . He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly"* (Luke 1:51-52).

We are singing and proclaiming that drama this season. Will we also live it in our prayers, our solidarity, our advocacy for a just peace in the land of Jesus' birth?

BYRON REMPEL-BURKHOLDER, CHAIR, MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA PALESTINE-ISRAEL NETWORK

### ✉ Four points

**Thank you for the article, "Attending to war" (November 3). It was helpful and clear.**

My perspective on the Palestine-Israel conflict consists of four key points:

1. The status quo in Palestine-Israel is that Israel's occupation of Palestinian land is a system of Apartheid (as declared by all major human rights organizations, including Israel's) and this occupation is a violation against Palestinians and against international law.

2. The state of Israel continues its Palestinian home evictions, stealing more and more land for Israeli settlements on land that was set aside for the Palestinian state. Also, there are hundreds of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons at any given time. The occupation continues to be a daily violence against the Palestinian people.

3. From time to time, some Palestinians (like Hamas) resort to violence to fight back against this system of oppression. I am not in agreement with this violence. However, let's remember that the small strip of land we call Gaza is internationally recognized as the largest open-air prison in the world. The people of Gaza are frustrated and act out.

4. Israel responds with more violence and destruction against all Gazan people. (This time around, Israel has cut off electricity, food and water.)

Western world leaders and media seem to go back to the third point and disregard the first two points.

The Canadian government's response is disappointing to say the least. Saying "Israel has a right to defend itself" doesn't address the root causes of the conflict.

We need to keep this in mind. Peace in the region will not come unless a just solution to these root causes is achieved.

ALVIN THIESSEN, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA (CHARLESWOOD MENNONITE CHURCH)

### Clarification

The December 1 editorial ("What kind of peace church are we?") stated that, of the regional churches, only Mennonite Church Alberta had taken an action such as sending a letter to the government about the Gaza war. That was based on information available on regional church websites. In fact, MC Manitoba also sent a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, on October 25, calling for a ceasefire. It sent two follow-up emails as well. MC Eastern Canada is part of a network in the Kitchener-Waterloo area that has organized events related to Gaza. It also actively supports the work of the MCEC Palestine-Israel Network. – Eds.



## ✉ Thirty-five years later

“Statement by Jack Sara, president of Bethlehem Bible College” (October 20) reminds me so strongly of the prayers requested by the Palestinian people that I met during a six-week study tour in Israel-Palestine in 1988.

I have a newspaper clipping from that year. It describes a session of Israel’s legislature called by a leftist faction, deploring Israel’s failure to seek dialogue with the Palestinians and its tough tactics in quelling an uprising in which at least 239 Palestinians and four Israelis died.

According to the article, the deposed mayor of Gaza said that people in the Gaza Strip had reached a point where they didn’t see much difference between life and death under the degrading conditions of military occupation.

Note that this is 1988—35 years ago!

The people voicing this despair, if still alive, have spent all of their lives frustrated by Israel’s restrictions. Today, their children and grandchildren are being called terrorists for having existed in the densely-populated land that is Gaza, which many call an open-air prison.

As I move about freely—choose my profession, buy a home, travel to visit friends and family—I often think of my Palestinian friends who are not free to live their lives. They are walled in.

How long would my patience last if my home was destroyed and my gardens taken away?

MARGOT FIEGUTH, WATERLOO, ONTARIO (WATERLOO NORTH MENNONITE CHURCH)

## /// Online comments

### ✉ A powerful story

Thank you for sharing this article on *Standing Together* (“Battle for the character of Israel,” December 1). This is a powerful story.

It demonstrates so clearly that the call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and for negotiations toward a just peace, is in the interests of Israelis as well as Palestinians.

Durable justice, peace and security cannot be achieved through hostage-taking, killing, genocide and ethnic cleansing; it can only be achieved through the difficult but necessary work of negotiations toward a reality of coexistence.

We, as Mennonites, know this. We need to be sharing this message much more widely and boldly.

Thank you, *Canadian Mennonite*, for urging us to do that.

ESTHER EPP-TIESSEN

## /// Milestones

### Births/Adoptions

**Booy**—Dylan Eleanor (b. Sept. 16, 2023) to Jason Booy and Daniel Engel, Toronto United Mennonite Church. Correction from Nov. 3, 2023.

### Deaths

**Driedger**—Harvey, 80 (b. May 7, 1943; d. Nov. 2, 2023), Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alta.

**Harms**—Jakob, 90 (b. April 25, 1933; d. Nov. 28, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Calgary, Alta.

**Lohrenz**—John Raymond, 85 (b. Oct. 29, 1938; d. Nov. 11, 2023), Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Man.

**Penner**—Lenora (Boese), 84 (b. Feb. 8, 1939; d. Dec. 7, 2023), North Star Mennonite Church, Drake, Sask.

**Schmidt**—Eckhard, 88 (b. June 9, 1935; d. Nov. 12, 2023), Niagara United Mennonite Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.



UNSLPASH PHOTO BY BARAA

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

# To thine own self be true?

Instagram, Jesus and the quest for the 'authentic self'

By Kyle Penner

**B**aptism rates among teenagers and young adults who grew up going to church have plummeted. Why?

In response to this drop-off in baptisms, I could talk about what faith formation is, the role of ritual or how to make baptism feel less like graduation, but I think that would just be rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Instead, I want to talk about a concept I came across a couple of years ago and haven't been able to get out of my mind. We, as a culture, are driven by what professor and author Andrew Root calls the "journey of authenticity."

*Psychology Today* magazine says the following about this journey: "Individuals considered authentic are those who strive to align their actions with their core values and beliefs with the hope of discovering, and then acting in sync with, their true selves."

The concept is not new, either. Willam Shakespeare said, "This above all; to thine own self be true."

Irish poet Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself. Everyone else is taken."

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do not follow where the

path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail."

More recently, Michael Jordan said, "Authenticity is about being true to who you are."

The assumption at play is that each person has their own right to define for themselves what it means to be human. The task of growing up is to find your authentic self.

This journey can be great for establishing our autonomy, setting boundaries, finding freedom in who we are and living with integrity, but the journey is complex. If our primary task as humans is to identify our authentic selves, how do we do that? If the younger generations are to go where there is no path, as Emerson said, where do they even start?

The path of identity formation is like trying on hats. People try on different hats to see which fits. Adolescents and young adults have been doing this for generations, and this is all good and normal and expected.

But it's harder today than it was for us who took the journey years ago, because now there are almost no guidelines.







PEXELS PHOTO BY RON LACH

There are no routes to follow—or there are infinite routes—to our authentic selves, because we are all supposedly making our own paths. Adolescents and young adults are not trying to conform to any one group's set of expectations, because conformity to someone else's path is not authentic.

### Ultimate performance

People seek feedback as they try on different hats, performing values and identity. Performing is a risky and exhausting endeavour, especially when you are performing nothing less than your potential authentic self. What if you are rejected?

It gets harder still because the audience is unclear. The audience is a bunch of other people trying to blaze their own trails to an unknown destination of selfhood. It's impossible to predict what they will affirm. The criteria are unknown.

Then throw in social media. Young people end up in their bedrooms on their phones, in full public view,

seeking the affirmation of an unknown audience with unknown values, and watching strangers doing the same, all of them seeking to be “liked.”

The journey of authenticity for teenagers and young adults is a remarkably difficult task, but that is not their fault; it's ours.



PEXELS PHOTO BY PAVEL DANILYUK

### Here come the parents

If we're raising kids, which I am, how do we help them find their way? How do we help them discover their wings? This question is ironic, because the

journey to authenticity, by definition, is individual. You have to find your own path; your parents can't do it for you. But we parents still try, oh do we try. And the grandparents are close behind.

What we do is we help our kids find their “thing.” It's usually an extra-curricular activity: hockey, dance, swimming, curling, choir, piano, axe throwing or sometimes even church, but rarely so. In the case of my own kids, it's piano, swimming, soccer and school sports.

We parents spend untold amounts of money, time and energy helping our kids find their “thing,” in the hope that this will help them thrive and find their true selves.

Yes, we hope it also teaches them teamwork and self-confidence and commitment, which are all good, but we parents also

move heaven and earth for our kids to excel, because we hope it will give them what we think they need.

Why else do we enlist our 3-year-olds in gymnastics? Why drive our kids an

hour, one way, for indoor soccer all winter? Why are both parents in different cities every other weekend for hockey tournaments, while paying a second mortgage to cover hockey fees? Why yell at refs who get in the way of our kids' journey?

We leave family gatherings early for the "thing." We skip school concerts for the "thing." We wake our kids up at 6 a.m. on weekends for the "thing." I've seen families plan funerals around "the thing."

By doing this, we risk teaching our children that their "thing" is the most important thing in the world.

And we call it good.

Lest we adults get smug, we, too, swim in the cultural waters of the "journey of authenticity." We, too, bend our schedules around our "things." We, too, perform our identity. Only we know that, at our age, we're never going to be great ballet dancers or axe throwing champions (although, at 40, I still have a chance at winning an Olympic medal in curling).

Our "things" look like recipes, recreation, renovations and resorts, to borrow phrasing from journalist George Monbiot. Our Instagrams may well be a mix of our kids' performances and our own.

No wonder the world can seem a bit wonky. Maybe even selfish. Because at any age, living and performing our authentic selves is a pretty individualistic pursuit, isn't it?

And if you're not thoroughly depressed yet, don't worry, it gets a little worse before it gets better.

Faith formation and church don't stand a chance in this mix. The journey of authenticity eats faith formation and church for breakfast. Here's why.

1) In our effort to be our true selves, we seek ideological purity. We identify those who are not like us and we define ourselves against them. We seek pure communities, either in person, or, more likely, online. We self-segregate.

On one hand, this is a move filled with integrity. I do this all the time. There are certain restaurants in my hometown from which I do not order

because I find their views abhorrent.

On the other hand, the quest for purity prevents us from participating in authentic community, such as church, in which the group includes people with a range of views and values.

2) For younger folks, the journey to authenticity involves trying on numerous hats over time. It is, by nature, an ongoing process. Baptism

own identity, and adopt someone else's identity that of Jesus.

"It is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). We as the body of Christ are supposed to give up part of our own journey of authenticity and follow another path.

And the message of Jesus does not always jibe. "Blessed are the poor" (who probably can't afford the "things" that



UNSPASH PHOTO BY KENNY ELIASON

does not fit. Committing fully and permanently to one hat is not the way of our culture.

In this context, not getting baptized is actually a move filled with integrity because it allows for the evolving, individualistic journey. It's a move that we've driven them to, literally, because we've driven them to their "thing," and it probably wasn't church.

3) The notion of identity in Jesus is another factor that puts the authenticity journey at odds with faith.

Following Jesus demands a lot of us. It demands that we spend time with people not like us. Harder still, it demands that we give up part of our

we think are vital to our own children's development).

"Pray for those who hate you."

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

"The first are last and the last are first."

"Consider others better than yourself."

These messages of Jesus do not fit a value system based on living our values through our "things." To say, "Jesus is Lord and thus I am giving Jesus the right to tell me how to live" is pretty much the opposite of the "journey of authenticity."

How can we be surprised if teenagers and young adults don't sign up to be baptized? We tell them to follow their own paths, and then wonder why they



don't follow the path of Jesus.

## Hope

To counter this, here are some things that give me hope.

I have hope in God and Jesus and Spirit.

I have hope that we in the church are a tradition that can talk about identity and true selves. It's part of our centuries-old lingo.

I have hope that we can provide a real-life in-person audience for our youth that's rooted in long-term, unconditional love and grace.

I have hope that we who follow Jesus can live a passionate life in the kingdom of God, giving back that which we have received, and modeling this to our kids.

And while hope is important, I want us to sit in a little bit of discomfort, in the hope that discomfort will lead us to ask good questions. Not questions like, "Why aren't Gen Z getting baptized?" and not questions that set up our "things" and faith as an "either-or" proposition, driven by guilt and shame.

Rather, I hope the discomfort leads us to ask questions like:

What is the good life?

What's the story we tell?

Are we intentional about the stories we tell and live?

Are we able to say yes to baptism, yes to faith, yes to Jesus, knowing that saying yes to these things means giving up part of our own journey of authenticity and choosing a path that is not our own?

If I'm honest, I'm not sure we can, because not pursuing the journey of authenticity through "the thing" is the one thing we teach our kids not to do. ❧

*Kyle Penner is associate pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach, Manitoba. The above is adapted from a sermon he preached there on January 8, 2023.*

## For discussion

1. What do you make of the drop in the rate of baptism in many Mennonite churches?
2. Kyle Penner says following the "journey of authenticity" is the opposite of saying "Jesus is Lord"; to what extent does this match your experience and observation?
3. Penner says that the message of Jesus does not fit our culture's value system. Is this new? How has the relationship between faith and the surrounding culture changed over time?
4. Do Penner's words about the "thing" make you feel challenged, defensive, stuck or something else?
5. As Penner asks, are you able to say yes to faith, knowing that means giving up part of your own journey of authenticity and choosing a path that is not your own?

– CM Staff

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## OPINION

## FROM OUR LEADERS

# The church cannot be silent

Geraldine Balzer

**W**e have entered the days of Advent. It's usually one of my favourite periods in the church calendar, but this year, the waiting is heavy.

The candle is a tiny flicker in a world of darkness, and Christmas music rings false with its promises of joy and celebration.

Advent hymns, like "Comfort, Comfort, O My People," recognize this time of waiting, this need for solace in dark times. As we ask "Oh, How Shall I Receive Thee," I'm confronted with online images of a nativity scene buried in the rubble.

October 7, 2023, was an explosive day that broke open political tensions that have been simmering for decades, if not millennia. We are drawn back into Old Testament narratives of promised land, conquest and retribu-

weeks as the lines between personal and corporate voice have been challenged.

Within my work context as a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, I have the right to voice my personal opinion—to offer criticism and dissent. Tenure and academic freedom offer protection, but as I watch academics being censored and student groups being defunded, those protections seem less secure.

Political and financial powerbrokers are evident. Corporate lines are held. As the cries for a ceasefire grow louder, the silence of our institutions becomes increasingly obvious.

And the church remains silent...

As moderator of Mennonite Church Canada, I take to heart Will Braun's assertion that our new structures have placed the dove in a cage ("What kind

are bombed and humanitarian aid is denied; and where rubble has become the norm, I can no longer be silent.

If we cannot condemn the violence of Hamas and the ensuing violent oppression of the Palestinians by the state of Israel and raise our voices and influence in calls for peace, we are complicit in the slaughter of innocents.

In times such as these, the church cannot remain silent.

This Advent season, when asked, "Oh, How Shall I Receive Thee," I need to answer with a breaking heart and a promise to work for peace. I need to weep for the lives lost and make my cries audible in the calls for ceasefire.

Many of us enter this season of Advent as a season of lament, praying for peace, signing petitions, marching in solidarity. But our individual voices need to unite as a collective voice.

Mennonite Church Canada identifies itself as a historic peace church. If that is who we are, and if we confess to serving the Christ child whose birth we celebrate—who came to free the oppressed and welcome the marginalized—we cannot wait for consensus: the structural impediments identified in my letter to the churches ("Adjusting our structures," November 17, page 27) and Will Braun's recent editorial ("What kind of peace church are we?" December 1, page 2) must be rectified.

The moderator or executive minister must have recourse to respond in a timely manner. Our sisters and brothers in Palestine needed to hear us on October 8, not in December.

I will no longer be silent. The church can no longer be silent. ☿

*Geraldine Balzer is the moderator of Mennonite Church Canada and a member of Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon.*

tion, and contemporary narratives of restoration and revelation. Sides are drawn and the killing continues; collateral damage takes on new meaning in Israel's quest to wrest power from Hamas.

And the church is silent...

As moderator of Mennonite Church Canada, I have struggled these last

of peace church are we?" December 1, page 2). I would contend that a caged bird can sing, but our dove has been silenced. As we wait for the regional churches to reach a consensus, weeks and months pass, and we say nothing.

In a world where children write their names on their bodies so they can be identified in the rubble; where hospitals



PEXELS PHOTO BY NOTHING AHEAD

## IN THE IMAGE

# The gift of Greg

Ed Olfert

It's that season where gifts are received, admired, beheld.

When thinking about gifts, my thoughts turn to my friend, "Greg." Greg is interesting for many reasons.

He has spent close to 30 years incarcerated and will be on parole for the remainder of his life. He lives with mental illness, which results in him being under the watchful eye of social services. He lives in a mental health-supported facility.

Greg's social skills are a bit rough. He doesn't trust easily. Greg has less than a handful of friends. But as long as he stays on his anti-psychotic medication, he will live well.

Greg is a significant friend. I'm reminded of that as we meet for a three-hour get-together over coffee. My life, my spirituality, is healthier when Greg is part of it.

Greg offers a sense of humour, a keen analytical mind and a love of stories. He can only afford a radio, and his worldview is shaped by CBC. Out of that comes profound opinions on happenings in the world.

I show Greg a letter that I received in response to my column on medical assistance in dying. He immediately comes to my defense. "What, does this person think that the more suffering we can wring out of our dying process, that's somehow desirable to God?"

He goes on: "I wonder how much time this person has spent feeding hungry folks, visiting in prisons, sitting with people who are sick. Do they just sit at home, making up theology, deciding what God wants?"

I giggle at his indignation and am astounded at his next observation. Greg is not a church attender.

"It seems to me that all the major

religions of the world are, at their core, about the Golden Rule: live toward others as you want them to live toward you. It's like a big tree. The trunk of that tree is solid, true, straight and perfect. It's in the branches where sin happens!"

I gape at that. Greg offers wisdom equivalent to that offered by spiritual leaders with terminal degrees.

The conversation swings towards politics, as it usually does.

"Your man, Trudeau, is done. There's really nothing that can change that anymore. Get ready for Poilievre to be your next prime minister!" (I don't argue with Greg, but a few days later, as he recounts this conversation to another friend, it has been adjusted a little to include that I wrestled Greg to the ground until we had to be separated by mall security.)

"And what about that time you rolled your car? All by yourself, not another car around you, driving along the highway, and you just rolled your little car into the ditch. I can't believe that they give you a Class 1 license—can't believe that they let you drive the biggest, heaviest vehicles on the road! What's that about?"

Despite the acerbic wit, which adds colour to our relationship, Greg also offers compassion beyond the norm.

His memories of events from our decades-long relationship, and his ability to remember every story I've told him that involves health struggle, astound me. He offers concern and compassion.

Part of the reason that our coffee time extends to three hours is that Greg is unable to quickly disengage. I'm required to plant the seed of ending the conversation a long while before it needs to happen.



UNSPASH PHOTO BY JOSH CARTER

Even then, Greg is still recalling more stories that he can tease me about, more political observations that he hopes will cause a reaction, more philosophical opinions that slide into spiritual directions. Greg knows I'm a sucker for those.

Like a saviour born in a manger, Greg is an unexpected gift for which I am thankful. ☸



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## MIND AND SOUL

# The best non-Christmas Christmas song

Randy Haluza-DeLay

Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation.

Christmas says that Jesus became a human; a baby who went through the terrible twos, puberty, the teen years and a carpenter's life.

In the words of what might be my favourite song about incarnation, "What if God was one of us?"

The song is a terribly catchy, chart-topping 1990s pop number from singer Joan Osborne and songwriter Eric Bazilian. It still gets airplay today: I heard it last week in one of the few stores *not* inundating us with run-of-



UNSPASH PHOTO BY DEBORA BACHESCHI

the-mill Christmas music.

The song is not a theological analysis. It queries what we might feel and wonder if God truly became one of us. Would he be, the refrain asks, "Just a slob like one of us? Just a stranger on the bus?"

The incarnate God as a slob? Seems perilously near sacrilege. The Lord, the Creator of all the universe, the Alpha *and* the Omega. A slob? Riding a bus? Oh, the humanity!

One of the questions asked in the song is, "If God had a face, what would it look like?" An unkempt, small-town working man, sweating in the heat and always dusty from walking everywhere. *A brown-skinned man.*

My first observation on the incarnation is that how Jesus is imagined shapes everything afterwards. Show Jesus as a brown-skinned Jewish-Palestinian and one is more historically accurate than earlier images, albeit highly political—especially right now.

My second observation is that God chose to be human for three full decades. In Jesus we see an example of what the holy life lived by the holiest of humans/God can be. Or, at least, we see the three years of his ministry.

That means the Apostle's Creed is faulty. Look: "...Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate..." The creed skips right past the life of Jesus, the cornerstone of Anabaptist praxis.

*The Black Christ* by Kelly Brown Douglas repeatedly insists that interpretations of Christianity focused on salvation or heaven, or that ignore Jesus's ministry, are grounds for versions of Christ that don't bring full liberation.

Anabaptist theologians' attention to practical theology includes peace and justice—oppressions and violence being part of the human life after all.

God's incarnated life was not just start and finish; it was about the fuller

journey as a human.

Therefore, my final observation is really a question: What if, in becoming a human, God also had things to learn?

Maybe that's why the old and new testaments read so differently. Maybe being human changed a somewhat remote, judgmental God into a grace-filled, loving and self-emptying God.

Back to that song. Please, don't focus on the slob part. What if God was one of us?

Let's socially position the Lord. Jesus is a refugee (the flight to Egypt), working-class, of dubious parentage ("Um, a virgin birth? Really?" the village asks), with little education, purporting to be a teacher, purporting to be *more* than a teacher, questioning authority, hanging out with other questionable people.

That is a load of socially low statuses for the God-of-all-Creation-become-human to experience.

The years I have lived on this earth have been a process of growth (or so I hope). My experiences—ups and downs, illnesses and surgeries, lost jobs, lost loves, joys ever-fleeting—have changed me.

Maybe being human changed God, too?

If Jesus was socially positioned as just described, if God-incarnate was one of us, maybe God learned about these facets of being human.

Christmas begins incarnation. ❧



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## TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

## A strange act of fealty

Joshua Penfold

I was on the cusp of starting a family, engaged to an honorable girl.

It is one of the commands of scripture to “*be fruitful and increase in number*,” so marriage and then children (in that order) are a critical part of being obedient to God and fulfilling my purpose.

But then, out of nowhere, this simple and perfect plan hit a wall and my life flipped upside down: my soon-to-be wife became pregnant. I knew for certain that it wasn’t mine, for we had never been together.

Another time and another place may not hold pregnancy out of wedlock as grievous, but in my culture, this is a serious offence. It is a sin. Everything I had hoped for, built my life toward, dreamed of, had suddenly come crashing down.

What to do next? What choice did I have?

According to the law, and according to some of my friends, stoning my fiancée was a legitimate option. Being with another man while betrothed to me could be punishable by death.

I was a whirlwind of emotions—sad, angry, overwhelmed and confused—but vengeful was not one of them. Despite the pain and hurt I felt when I thought of her shameful act, I still cared for her and didn’t wish her harm.

No, I could never invoke the harshest degree of the law’s justice against her. It would kill her, and really, it would kill me, too.

Instead, I took a softer, gentler approach: I decided to quietly break off the engagement without spectacle. It was already bad enough for both of us. Maybe if I laid low some other juicy piece of gossip would flood the town and my disgraceful situation would lose

the spotlight and fade into the background as old news.

That’s the best I could hope for, really: to forever be an old news disappointment.

But one night, after my restless mind and exhausted body finally fell asleep, I had a dream. An angel appeared to me. What the angel said remained so clear it was more real than if I’d been awake.

Unlike other dreams that fade the moment you try to recall them once awake, I remember this dream word for word.

The angel said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

It was more than just a strange dream. I can’t explain how I know, but I know. I can’t *not* follow the angel’s instructions.

Now the disgrace, the ridicule and the shame associated with this messed up marriage is comparatively inconsequential. Sure, no one will understand me—I don’t even understand me—but I understand what must be done.

This is a strange path of faithfulness to God.

Though, as I ponder my unusual path of obedience, I realize I’m not alone. God has asked many to walk the peculiar path of faithfulness.

Abraham was asked to sacrifice his miracle child, Hosea faithfully married unfaithful Gomer, Ezekiel obediently cooked food over his own excrement—these are but a few of the strange acts

of fealty done by God’s people.

So, I join their ranks, choosing a faithfulness that looks to others like foolishness, even faithlessness. Little do



UNSPASH PHOTO BY RANDY TARAMPI

I know that this is but the beginning of strange and wonderful things that will happen to my family.

I can only catch a dim glimmer of what exactly the angel meant by a child that will save the people. Though not my child, I will be his father. Could he really be the anticipated Messiah?

I take Mary to be my wife despite everyone’s better judgment. I become an illegitimate father to an illegitimate son, and it couldn’t feel more right. ✎



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 GOD'S STORY, OUR STORY
 

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# Part VI: Stories of hope

Kara Carter

**This six-part series draws on Kara Carter's PhD studies, for which she conducted five focus groups with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada pastors.**

**A**dvent celebrates the coming of light, the light of love that *"darkness cannot extinguish"* (John 1:5).

This light shines in our congregations amidst real and present challenges as well as fruitful and life-giving ministry opportunities.

Creative worship is inspired by the Spirit of God; community gardens are the rich soil of building friendships; the hungry are fed without starving the earth; lives are transformed; and collaborative relationships with community partners draw the circle of God's light of love wide.

Where do Mennonite Church Canada congregations identify divine light shimmering with hope in their midst?

When the ground beneath our feet feels like it has shifted, and narratives of scarcity, fear and despair abound, stories of hope serve as a powerful counter-narrative and reminder of God's faithful presence.

An MC Eastern Canada pastor commented that one thing he has heard with a sense of hope is shared from the older people in the congregation. Seniors have "seen a lot of change over the years." Hope is connected to the lived experience of adapting amidst a changing ministry and cultural context over decades.

Another pastor said, "We really do believe that we will have enough leadership to do things. We really do believe there will always be a new Christian [education] coordinator."

The pastor of an urban congregation surmised her congregation is hopeful, saying, "We're in a season of having lots more kids than the congregation remembers having." While this is not

the full story of what the congregation wants to be, this present reality gives people hope that the church might be here after they're gone.

Yet another pastor noted hope in their congregation, saying, "There is a realization that the future of the church is going to be different."

God's people are living into hope!

A new Canadian pastor commented that many global south congregations across Canada and the United States have problems with leadership. Within his context, however, unity and humble hearts abound, serving as a bright beacon of hope.

Hope is transformative not just for personal lives but for institutions as well. Pastors E and T have a close collegial relationship. The two meet regularly with a group of new Canadian pastors.

In response to concerns related to the lack of support for resettling East African refugees, T arranged a gathering of pastoral colleagues with a staff person from the denomination's international relief institution. The purpose of the meeting was to hear from the staff person about why the relief institution was not sponsoring East African refugees.

It made no sense to the new Canadian churches. While many refugees were being sponsored, why not their own literal brothers and sisters living in refugee camps?

T was excited to share, "That has changed. The relief agency changed its philosophy and policy regarding sponsorship, as did a local refugee committee."

Subsequently, dozens of friends and family have been sponsored.

The willingness to listen to one

another, work together and seek understanding bears witness to the Spirit's power unleashed in grassroots conversations leading to institutional change.

Congregations are facing the disorientation of ministry in uncharted territory. Structures that have been part of the church for decades are not working for us. The church that pastors have been trained to lead no longer exists.

While congregations are passionate about new initiatives, creative programming and experimentation, notably absent from conversation was the impulse to try harder to "fix present challenges."

Congregations are listening for God, adapting, responding, experimenting and learning. Joy abounds as congregations try new things.

Unanchored pews in historic sanctuaries create flexible and multi-purpose space. Some congregations have included a children's activity centre, puzzle tables, or knitting needles, wool and patterns for worshippers. Intergenerational Christian education and more has emerged.

God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer is actively authoring a grace-filled and redemptive story among God's people.

During Advent, we learn that God is the source of all hope. May we be attentive to the hope-filled stories and relationships within our communities, revealing the illuminating, disrupting, disturbing and inspiring presence of Divine Hope. ❧

*Kara Carter is a pastor in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.*

# Highlights from CM's online event with young pastors

By A.S. Compton, Editorial Assistant

On November 29, *Canadian Mennonite* hosted "Answering the Call," an online event featuring three young pastors: Curtis Wiens of Aberdeen Mennonite Church in Aberdeen, Saskatchewan; Kennedy Froese of Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg; and YElshaday Baraki of Meheret Evangelical Church in Kitchener, Ontario. The following highlights of the event have been edited for length and clarity.

**"I've heard lots of different stories of call to ministry,** and pretty much all of them include an element of reluctance. I think that's not universal, but nearly universal." – Wiens

**"I have a burden and a passion for young adults.** I feel frustrated when I see young adults leaving the church. It keeps me awake at night. And my prayer is always, 'God, why are they leaving?' My experience has been, they leave because they have a lot of questions, unanswered questions." – Baraki

**"I came back from this [Southern Baptist] Bible school saying women should be silent** in the church. I showed up to a church in [Winnipeg] and became very good friends with a female pastor there. And she graciously walked me through the understanding of women in leadership. She gave me a new way of unpacking my own faith and building back up. And it was through this work that I began to feel like a tug on my heart. Just like a small wish inside." – Froese

**"Your position might be part-time,** but your heart is not part-time, your dreams are not part-time." – Baraki

**"I think that some of the best [and] most life-giving ministry** conversations happen [when I'm] not wearing the pastor's hat. [There are] a lot of



SUPPLIED PHOTO

**YElshaday Baraki**

benefits to being only paid half-time and forcing you to go out and do some tent making." – Wiens

**"I do think there's something to this idea that we worship alongside anyone,** and everyone is welcome to be a faithful follower of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit moves and breathes in everything. And we just get to be witnesses and work alongside it." – Froese

**"Are we now gonna feel ourselves restricted denominationally** in our church? We have [the] opportunity to welcome different people in our doors who have different denominational backgrounds. And that's partially just because we're the only church in town at this point. So that's sort of been an opportunity, and it makes me wonder if it's a wider trend for church." – Wiens

**"In my community, we have a challenge** when it comes to intergenerational [interaction], and this is

similar to a lot of immigrant churches. There's a language barrier, culture barrier. For the parents, they would have their own language, their own culture, their own way of worshipping.

[The young people are] born and raised in Canada. They identify more with the Canadian culture. So then, even though the desire is to come together as an intergenerational [church], it becomes difficult. And that is where I try to fit in. A lot of my work is as a bridge for the young adults and the youth.

Most of the people that I work with identify as Canadian, but they are African, Mexican, Asian, whatever background that they are. And in each space that they go to, they don't fully feel like they belong. But then we don't have anybody above us because we are a first generation. How do you find fathers and mothers, grandparents, that they can pray over you, that they can share experience? How do you find some support, examples in the marriage [that] can be there for you. But it will get better as the second generation comes." – Baraki

**"I always felt** weird icky feelings when I would finally admit to someone [that] I am a pastor. [This last year,] I just decided that I'm going to own it. And I'm going to really confidently tell people that I'm a pastor and then go from there. And I've actually found it to be quite a gift. There's something very important for me that I have fully committed my life to this work. And I anticipate being in church work for as long as I am on this planet." – Froese

Watch a recording of the discussion at [canadianmennonite.org/atc](http://canadianmennonite.org/atc).



# LIFE IN THE 80s



PHOTO BY CYNDY BRANDT

## 'You can't keep everything you love'

### An interview with Ed and Louise Janzen

By Amy Rinner Waddell  
B.C. Correspondent

Welcome to "Life in the 80s," a semi-regular series in which we ask people in their 80s or 90s to share their wisdom.

**E**d (85) and Louise (84) Janzen met as students at Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) in Abbotsford, B.C. Both grew up in the Mennonite Brethren Church. Ed has worked in human resources and as executive director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) B.C. Louise taught private piano lessons and worked in music programming in care homes in Toronto and Abbotsford. The Janzens served three years with MCC in Jamaica. They are members of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford. Their answers below have been lightly edited for length and clarity.

#### What is your earliest/best memory of church?

**Ed:** I remember my mom taking us to Sunday school and pre-Sunday school in Coaldale, Alberta. We would have been 4 or 5 years old or so.

**Louise:** I grew up in the Clearbrook [Mennonite Brethren] Church. I recall singing all the old songs by the fire in the furnace room.

#### Any difficult memories?

**Ed:** During my university years, my [previous] beliefs seemed sort of old-fashioned and outdated. I didn't

see the value in church at that point.

**Louise:** We had evangelical revival meetings once a year, and I always found those difficult. You'd get all riled up for a week, then go back to normal life. I never liked them; they never really did anything for me.

#### Tell us about the people who influenced you the most.

**Ed:** My parents did the most, also young people's leaders, particularly Sunday school teachers. In Ottawa, when I was working for the federal government, there were people like Bill Dick, our pastor at that time, and his wife, who showed us friendship that lasted until their death.

**Louise:** My father was an influence. Also in Ottawa, Bill Dick's wife, Mary. I had never run into people like them. She didn't think she had to fill a role as a pastor's wife; she was just a woman who taught school. It was an eye-opener to see a different kind of church.

#### Can you share a favourite book, passage, poem or song?

**Ed:** As an English major, I remember Shakespeare, such as, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day. . . ." I also remember German poems from MEI. One verse I recall is: "Remember thy creator in the days of your youth," from Ecclesiastes 12. We learned that at MEI.

**Louise:** I remember William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. When our daughter

died at age 7, we had this poem put on her gravestone: "He who binds to himself a joy / Does the winged life destroy / He who kisses the joy as it flies / Lives in eternity's sunrise." I've learned through life that you can't keep everything you love. When you let go, you keep things. Even our son [who lives overseas]—we hardly see him, but he is a beloved son.

#### What do you wish young people knew about growing old?

**Ed:** That we just take more time to process things! They don't understand that.

**Louise:** The importance of friends. Also, realizing how precious our time is. I'd like to hold time back, but you can't hold onto it. When you're younger you don't think about being 80 or 85. Now it's very real.

#### What is the hardest thing about getting old? What is best?

**Ed:** The physical limitations. You don't walk as fast. You have to be careful where you walk.

**Louise:** I see a hill and I panic because of arthritic knees. Falling is my greatest fear.

#### What is best?

**Ed:** You have time to enjoy life, time to reflect and just enjoy others' company.

**Louise:** We're in a time where we say we are content. We don't have many worries. We have a good life.

#### What do you wish someone had

**told you about aging earlier in life?**

**Ed:** How limiting it can be. Before, you could turn on a dime; now it takes a lot longer. If you don't slow down, you fall! I wished I would have prepared a little more.

**Louise:** I was not an athlete as Ed was. I wish I had looked after myself more in terms of physical activity. If I had worked harder at it, I would have been in better shape. Walking was always a pleasure to me, but now it hurts.

**If you had one chance at a sermon, what would it be about?**

**Ed:** I think it would be to enjoy life while you can and particularly to treasure friendships. Concentrate on them and not on difficult things.

**Louise:** The small things aren't important enough to get upset about. Life is too short to bother with that. Try to see the positive and don't look at what isn't good. ☺

*If you know a wise senior, contact editor@canadianmennonite.org.*



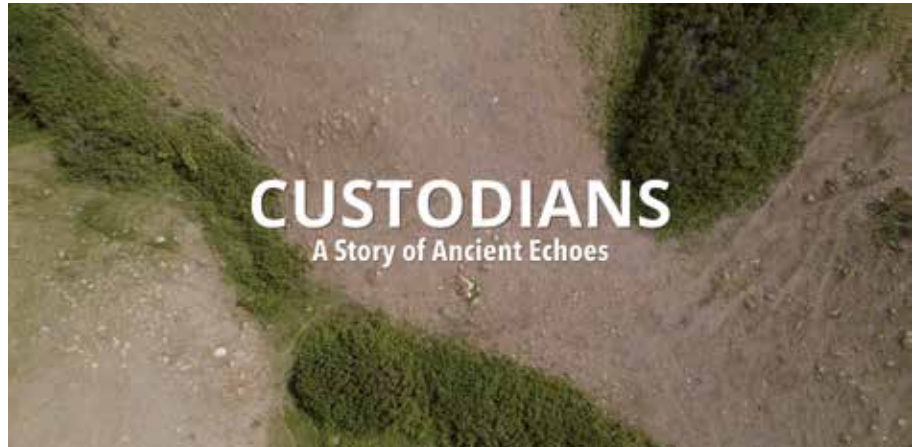
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## Custodians makes a clean sweep

*Documentary wins four awards at Saskatchewan festival*

By Emily Summach

Saskatchewan Correspondent

**T**he film *Custodians: A Story of Ancient Echoes* won big at the Saskatchewan International Film Fest (SIFF) in October. The documentary explores the work of local landowners, volunteers and municipal government officials in conserving the many signs of historic Indigenous presence in the Herschel, Saskatchewan, area.

The judges awarded *Custodians* top prize for Best Full-Length Documentary, Best Cinematography, Best Musical Score and Best Director. The film was commissioned by Walking the Path, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan's Indigenous-setter relations committee, and directed by Brad Langendoen.

Randy Klassen, a member of Walking the Path who attended the awards event, hopes the awards will bring the film a wider audience. "Being 'award-winning' helps to gather attention in certain circles, especially in urban and artistic circles," he said.

"Really, a lot of the places we'd like it to be shown are rural communities and First Nations communities," he added. "How can we get this to the place

where landowners and Indigenous people spark conversations in their communities? That's our hope."

Langendoen, who also directed *Reserve 107* and *For Love of a River*—which also arise from Mennonite connections with Indigenous people—spearheaded the work of entering *Custodians* into 24 film festivals around the world, said Klassen. Even if the film doesn't win an award at a festival, it's still an honour to be selected for a film fest. "It's okay to lose out at a place where Martin Scorsese has stuff entered," he said with a laugh.

Leanne Hynd, along with her partner, Jeff Wiens, are two of the landowners featured in the movie. Hynd praised the effort and passion that Langendoen brought to the project. "It's because of his heart and his talent that we have this story. For Brad to come in and capture the essence of this place is just so amazing," she said.

Hynd hopes that the film will help the Ancient Echoes Interpretative Centre to be able to do the "gentle dance" of "growing organically," while not becoming "too touristy." ☺

# Ambassadors of God's kingdom

*A Mennonite perspective on religious freedom  
Part 3 of 3*

By César García

**B**ut our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

These words of the apostle Paul are part of a letter addressing a church audience that likely included both Gentiles and Jews. Some were Roman citizens, and others were not. However, Paul identifies all of these Christians, regardless of their political nationality, as citizens of another kingdom—God's kingdom.

Once we decide to follow Christ, our supreme allegiance changes. We turn from anything else that demands our obedience and give loyalty to Jesus as our ultimate and unique Lord. We become part of a transnational community of others who also give their highest loyalty to Jesus and him alone.

That is one reason the Roman Empire sometimes persecuted Christians during the first centuries of the church. The church affirmed Jesus' supreme lordship, even over the emperor, which was an offence punishable by death.

Being citizens of God's kingdom makes us ambassadors and representatives of that kingdom to societies and governments where we live. Citizenship in God's kingdom grants us a new identity as members of a transnational community.

We see this same idea of heavenly citizenship and our role as kingdom ambassadors in 2 Corinthians 5:20 and Ephesians 6:20.

Do not get me wrong; I am not saying that there is something evil about loving your culture, land, customs, language and the people where you grew up. God does not ignore or suppress our cultural identity (see Revelation 7:9-10), but as ambassadors, our exclusive allegiance is to God's nation and its king, Jesus.

As God's kingdom ambassadors, we do not believe in political leaders who introduce themselves as saviours,

because our only saviour is Jesus.

We do not support the idea of "Christian" countries because the divine nation we represent includes citizens from all languages and cultures and has ambassadors in all the kingdoms of this world.

The tendency to confuse human political systems and empires with God's kingdom has been a tragic pattern in church history. Starting with the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century, Christians have too often identified God's kingdom with a political empire.

Because the emperor supported the church, people perceived Constantine as an anointed leader, a saviour who would enhance God's kingdom on earth. He learned to use Christian symbols to manipulate the faith of Jesus' followers for political purposes.

Since his reign, many other political leaders have governed in alliance with the church, using similar strategies. As a result, many of God's kingdom ambassadors have lost their proper role in society and ended up supporting imperial politics that contradict Jesus' teachings.

That was a painful lesson Mennonites learned right at their beginnings in the 16th century and through their history until today. Among the thousands of martyrs in our tradition, the vast majority have been persecuted and killed by governments of so-called Christian kingdoms or nations.

Very early in their history, Mennonites saw the need to separate church from state to guarantee the church's viability.

Unfortunately, in our history, we have not always kept that vision.

In contexts like Colombia, our churches need to recover this vision. We often

find people speaking about Colombia as a "Christian" country or promoting the approval of laws that reflect Christian values but are oppressive for people who do not share the same convictions.

Although Christians are called to promote general morality in society, this cannot be done by the imposition of specific Christian values on people who are not Christians, even if they are a minority.

Christian values are for Christians. Christian morals may be practiced by others only when that results from persuasion and honest conversation. The practice of Christian values always needs to be embraced voluntarily. Violence emerges as a natural response to oppression when that is not the case.

Religious freedom, in other words, is a condition for the possibility of peaceful convivence.

Peace, another key Mennonite value, is directly related to religious freedom.

Today, 500 years after our beginnings, religious freedom continues to be a crucial need in many countries. Religious freedom keeps being a call to Christians, who, in many places, like my country, end up oppressing minorities in their search for political power and privileges.

Working for religious liberty opens the door to creating new mosaics, new societies where people of each faith and no faith can offer their values. A new mosaic where, through honest conversation and consensus, peaceful coexistence is possible. ❧



*This three-part series is adapted from a speech Mennonite World Conference general secretary César García gave as a featured speaker at the 9th World Congress of International Religious Liberty Association. Reprinted with permission.*



# More camp questions

*MC Saskatchewan discerns future*

By Emily Summach  
Saskatchewan Correspondent



PHOTO BY EMILY SUMMACH

**Mackenzie Hildebrand (left) and Kirsten Hamm-Epp led worship at the Fall Leadership Assembly.**

**M**ennonite Church Saskatchewan continues to deliberate on the future of its camping ministry. The regional church operates Camp Elim, Youth Farm Bible Camp and Camp Shekinah. On November 25, over 40 people from across the province gathered at the Fall Leadership Assembly to hear an update on the future of the camps.

The challenge facing MC Saskatchewan and its camps governance and liability. On paper, MC Saskatchewan owns and operates all three camps, including the land and buildings. The delegate body elects representatives to sit on the camp boards. However, as the unique culture and management of each

camp grew over the years, MC Saskatchewan played less and less of an active role in the day-to-day operations. In addition, as the number of people attending MC Saskatchewan churches declines, there are fewer people to fill camp board positions.

The members of the regional church voted in 2022 to hire a consultant to study the camps and make recommendations for future action. The MC Saskatchewan council then created the Camps Review Subcommittee to spearhead communication between the council, the camps and the broader membership of MC Saskatchewan. “The question we’re facing is what do we do in regards to effective governance of the camps?” said Brent Guenther, a member of the subcommittee.

The committee took great pains to ensure that all stakeholders were listened to and all possible actions carefully considered. They also made it clear that they’re “not here to close camps.” At the meeting, the committee put forth four draft recommendations: 1) that MC Saskatchewan council require some or all camps to incorporate; 2) that MC Saskatchewan representation on the newly formed board of directors may or may not change; 3) that MC Saskatchewan lease land to camps that are newly incorporated; and 4) that MC

Saskatchewan will support each camp financially through the above processes.

After the recommendations were presented, those in attendance were invited to connect with leadership from each of the three camps to offer feedback. Responses were mixed. Some felt the changes were “not a big deal.” Since the three camps function well independently of the regional church, why not make that independence official on paper? Others worried about the loss of what they felt was an essential MC Saskatchewan ministry.

Later, attendees gathered in small table groups to answer questions about the proposal. “The way we structured the sessions by doing it around the table allowed people to look each other in the eye and provide their thoughts and opinions,” explained Guenther. “We didn’t want to do an open mic, where one or two voices might dominate.”

Next steps regarding the camps will be decided at the 2024 Annual Delegate Sessions in March. “We’re very interested in making sure everyone is along for the ride,” said Guenther. “We want our decisions to be supported by the larger delegate body.” ☿

*Shekinah Retreat Centre*  
[shekinahretreatcentre.org](http://shekinahretreatcentre.org)





UNSPLASH PHOTO BY FLORIN TOMOZEI

## Peace in the time of yellow butterflies

By Anna Vogt, Mennonite Central Committee

**M**y newsfeed has been filled with images of mothers cradling babies while surrounded by rubble, and old men with tear-stained faces, looking incredulously at the destruction around them. Protests and endless op-eds and debates dominate conversations. But before I get to that... a word about butterflies.

I was recently in a meeting with colleagues in Colombia. The conversation started to get tense as we talked about differences in approach. Suddenly, one of the team members lifted her hands, crossed her arms, linked her thumbs together and gently and rhythmically tapped her palms to her chest. Staff shared that they had learned about the motion, called a butterfly hug, during a trauma training. The butterfly hug helped calm down a flight-or-fight response, and nonverbally signaled to others in the room that the conversation or topic was generating anxiety.

The whole thing felt very fitting, because it was in Colombia, during the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC, that I learned to look for butterflies. A quote that circulated everywhere during

that time was from Gabriel Garcia Marquez: “Tell Mauricio Babilonia to let loose the yellow butterflies in Macondo; the war is over.”

The peace process wasn’t and still isn’t perfect. Armed conflict still exists in Colombia. Yet for me, those yellow butterflies became a call to “both/and.” To both work for the fullness of the arrival of the butterflies and to also celebrate, notice and honour the glimpses of peace that were already at play, even as conflict carried on. Searching for butterflies became a gesture of hope and action that provided space to continue the creative work of peace.

Once I started to look, I could see butterflies everywhere: in ultimate frisbee games played by young people coming together to learn dialogue skills with people from other communities who had been labelled as “enemies” during the conflict; in women engaging in trauma healing; in prisoners set free; in curiosity in polarized spaces; in armed groups coming together to try a new way of solving conflict by using words, rather than weapons; in people extending forgiveness and choosing to break the

cycle of violence.

And sitting in that meeting room, I was, once again, seeing those butterflies, just in a different way, as my colleague expressed her fears during a tense conversation.

As the news of Palestine and Israel fills my heart and my newsfeed, I wonder if the glimpse of that butterfly, an expression of our fears and anxieties and hopes and dreams, is where our call to be peacemakers is inviting us to show up.

In that meeting, the butterfly was a way to see beyond a disagreement and to notice and name the fear and anxiety, the humanness, in the underlying tension in the room. When I could see it, suddenly we could talk about it and address it. Being able to “see” the anxiety through the butterfly hand gestures completely changed the conversation. Instead of presenting ourselves as adversaries arguing facts about a situation, we became humans together, trying to hold multiple pieces of a conversation and work toward a shared goal. In fact, when I look back, it was exactly the moments of shared humanity that allowed me to notice the yellow butterflies of hope in Colombia.



The butterfly hug is a call to peacemaking, centred human dignity and individual peace. We believe and follow a God of restoration. An enemy-loving God who calls us to disarm our responses to one another and look for something more. It's a call to look for the butterflies, where we find both hope and anxiety.

Here at MCC, we are actively advocating for Canadian political leaders to urge an end to violence, including a ceasefire, in Palestine and Israel and work toward a sustainable and just peace, because we believe that every single life has value.

Yet, as we call for disarmament in the Middle East, I'm pondering how to disarm my response to my fellow Canadians. These neighbours are also deeply impacted by what they are seeing on the news or, also like me, may know friends or family members in the midst of the conflict.

Despite the urgency to respond, to do something, anything, I am learning to pause and ask where fear and anxiety and uncertainty are present, in myself and others. I'm trying to ask questions about where people are hurting and where they see hope, rather than starting a conversation with my facts in order to convince people to agree with me.

Can we lament together over violence because of a shared belief that each life is precious, and move forward from that space toward a call to end violence? Can we extend mercy because God first extended mercy to us? Can we remind ourselves that it is not about being pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli, but rather, pro-human?

Jesus' call for us to love our enemies is a call against dehumanization. It's also a call to flourishing. Seeing others as human, as reflections of the divine, and responding in kind, is an avenue to joy. There is nothing more beautiful than encountering difference and finding God, right there, already at work and inviting us to join in. ❧

*Anna Vogt serves as co-director of the Peace and Justice Office of Mennonite Central Committee Canada.*

## News briefs

### New group pushes for Mideast peace

A grassroots group called Mennonite Action is mobilizing Mennonites across North America to pressure elected officials to call for an end to violence in Palestine and Israel. The group is organized by Canadian, American and Palestinian activists with Mennonite connections. Over 800 people tuned in to the group's initial online event on November 28.

Mennonite Action, which is not affiliated with any church bodies, is organizing a "Day of Mennonite Action for a Ceasefire" on December 19.

### MBs name new national director

By unanimous decision of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches Executive Board, Cam Stuart has been appointed national director for the conference. Stuart leaves his position as lead pastor of Arnold Church in B.C. He had served on the CCMBC Executive Board for several years, including as interim moderator since January 2023.

**SOURCE: CCMBC**

### Schultz extends contract with MCEC

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada executive council and Ann L. Schultz have mutually agreed on a contract extension for Schultz. She will remain in her role as intentional interim executive team leader until December 31, 2024. MCEC has also formed a search committee to seek a new executive minister

**SOURCE: MCEC**

### CMU professors head to Indonesia

Wendy Kroeker and Gordon Zerbe will begin a short-term international resource worker volunteer assignment with Mennonite Church Canada in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in January 2024. Duta Wacana Christian University has requested their teaching in the master of divinity program and their assistance in establishing a centre for Mennonite studies. Kroeker is an associate professor at Canadian Mennonite University, while Zerbe concluded his teaching career at CMU in the spring of 2023.

**SOURCE: MC CANADA AND CMU**

### Resettlement giant dies

Hans von Niessen, a resettlement supervisor who helped organize the migration of more than 100,000 Mennonite Russian Germans out of the Soviet Union, died on October 20 in Neuwied, Germany, at age 94. A church leader and schoolteacher, Niessen established the Neuland settlement in Paraguay, then returned to Germany to be a resettlement supervisor from 1973 to 1999, contributing to 175 new communities.

**SOURCE: ANABAPTIST WORLD**

### Former MCC leader dies

John A. Lapp, an accomplished historian, seasoned administrator and leader who shaped the work of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as executive secretary from 1985 to 1996, died December 5 in Goshen, Indiana. He was 90 years old.

Another former MCC executive director, Ron Mathies, said Lapp "always saw the big picture, which not everybody did, then he made the big picture available for people. . . . He was deeply, deeply committed to the church. He was always asking, 'What impact does this have on the church? What can we learn from the church?'"

**SOURCE: MCC**





PHOTO BY VERNE EQUINOX/WIKIMEDIA

## From prison to pantry

*Vignettes from Petitcodiac Mennonite Church*

By Lisa Williams, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

**A**s the van drew closer to the building, the people in the vehicle could read the sign: “Petitcodiac Mennonite Church – All are welcome!”

The atmosphere in the van was almost palpable; it was one of great anxiety. A man in the back felt a tightness in his chest and couldn’t catch his breath. Was he having a heart attack?

“They know where we are from, right?” asked another passenger. The driver smiled and caught his eyes in the rear-view mirror, “Yeah,” he said reassuringly, “they know where you’re from.”

The driver was Gord Driedger, pastor at Petitcodiac Mennonite Church (PMC) in Petitcodiac, New Brunswick, and chaplain at Dorchester Penitentiary, a minimum-security prison in the area.

Because Dorchester is a “releasing institution,” it is a place that helps prepare people to leave institutional life and return to society. As a part of that process, Gord sets up “escorted temporary absences” so the men are able to go to places outside of the prison. Two Sundays a month, Gord brings a group to Petitcodiac Mennonite.

“The men aren’t used to being with people outside of the prison,” explains

Gord. “Often they are unsure if they can even talk to people. The church becomes the first idea of a safe place for some of them.”

Jim (not his real name), who had been in prison for 37 years, came to church with Gord on a potluck Sunday. Jim’s parents, who live a distance away from the prison, have been faithful visitors to the prison to see their son. They leapt at

the chance to see Jim in this supervised, escorted visit to Petitcodiac Mennonite.

“It was the first time Jim and his parents had been together outside of the prison in 37 years,” says Gord. “They shared a meal together in the church, and we felt so privileged to be there and share that experience with them.”

The church has a long history of relationship with Dorchester Penitentiary. Siegfried Janzen, who pastored at Petitcodiac from 1985 to 1995, volunteered at the prison alongside many in the congregation. Siegfried’s work at Dorchester not only set the stage for Gord to be involved there, but also provided a strong foundation for the church’s involvement.

### Food pantry

The church also has a long history of supporting the local community, including The Pantry, a community food hub organized by Petitcodiac. It is a place where local produce is sold for reasonable prices. The goal is to make organic food available to everyone. The Pantry includes a community table for which people bring produce to share.

“There are several guys who have amazing gardens in the yard at Dorchester [Penitentiary],” says Gord. During harvest time, Gord takes 150 to 200 pounds of vegetables each week from the prison to the community table.

“It is significant for the men to give back to society by sharing the bounty of their



THE PANTRY FOOD HUB/FACEBOOK

gardens with those who are in need,” says Gord. “The church is able to help facilitate that and also help people to see their worth and value in the world.”

Gord says that often the hardest thing for men in prison “is to be able to find some grace for themselves.” He recalls a story of a man who was serving a life sentence. The man was lying in bed one night, unable to sleep, and hating himself.

“There is no place that I belong except in prison,” he thought. “There is no place that will ever accept me.”

He shared with Gord that it was in that moment that he thought about Gord and the small church. He realized there was a place where he could go and people would love and accept him. He was then able to sleep.

“The people at PMC have really embraced the role of making these guys just feel at home,” says Gord.

“The congregation is remarkable. The people in the congregation walk alongside the men. They’re not trying to save them. They’re not trying to astound them.

They’re just walking with them.”

In Gord’s view, what makes the church work, “isn’t necessarily the good theology or the strong preaching; it’s the relationships that you have with people. It is the love that you have for each other, and from that, everything else flows.” ❧

*Lisa Williams serves as director of communications for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC). This article appeared first in the MCEC publication Sprout. Reprinted with permission.*



**Members from all five Mennonite Church Eastern Canada congregations in Essex County, Ontario, gathered in Kennedy Woods, near Kingsville, to pray for peace in the Middle East. The time of prayer was led by pastors of each of the congregations on the bright Sunday afternoon of November 12.**

PHOTO BY BARRY BERGEN.





# A cry of the heart

By Madalene Arias

*Palestinians at a makeshift tent camp on the grounds of a UN school in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza. October 20, 2023. Photo by Mohammed Zaanoun/Active Stills*

*Overwhelmed, distraught, touched and compelled by the stories and images from Gaza, Canadian Mennonite reporter Madalene Arias has interviewed many people—Palestinians and Jews—she found through various connections and means. Below are interviews with two people Arias has spoken with recently. We share this as a cry of the heart and a prayer for mercy.*

— Eds.

## **Ahmed Kouta** **Nursing on the run in Gaza**

**A**hmed Kouta is a 23-year-old Palestinian-Canadian who arrived in Gaza three weeks before the October 7 Hamas attack and has

remained there for the duration of Israel's bombardment.

Growing up in Canada, he and his family would frequently travel to Gaza. He went there to complete his bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing, returning in September to defend his thesis.

"Plans have changed," he said, speaking with *Canadian Mennonite* via Instagram voice notes on November 28 during the temporary truce. The truce gave him time to find a stable internet connection and respond to message requests.

After the attacks, Kouta was called to work in the emergency unit at Al-Shifa hospital, the largest medical

complex in Gaza.

"We were looking after everyone," he said, "but most of the people that were coming in were children."

Kouta said he witnessed a total of four attacks while serving at Al-Shifa, located in Gaza City. On November 10, the Israel Defense Forces surrounded Al-Shifa and forced an evacuation.

"I was lucky," says Kouta, explaining that his shift had ended just before the siege, and he was gone for the day.

Kouta has since moved north of Gaza City, while his family members have remained in the south.

With Al-Shifa closed, and no other hospital in the area where he was located, many people approached Kouta



for help once they learned he is a nurse.

When he spoke with *Canadian Mennonite*, he was spending five to six hours a day walking to different households to treat people with burns, fractures and other wounds.

Like many of those who survive bombardment, Kouta also spends his time looking for survivors or human remains buried under the rubble.

“By the time it’s 4 or 5 o’clock, the sun is out,” he says. At night, the noise of war makes sleep nearly impossible.

“Most of the time, during the day, I’ll be doing stuff to get myself tired so that at night I can fall asleep,” he says.

Using his phone, he takes pictures and videos documenting the destruction of Gaza, so that when he has a stable internet connection, he can share what he captures online. He has nearly 250,000 followers on Instagram, where he goes by Prince Kouta.

Initially, Kouta had asked to keep his identity concealed out of fear that he would become a target. However, after Israeli attacks resumed, he published the following statement to his

Instagram account on December 3: “*My name is Ahmed. I am a Canadian citizen. I came to Gaza to visit and defend my thesis. My family was forced to the south while I was volunteering at the hospital. I couldn’t leave people here in the north and head south. My heart never let me. Today, we can’t help. It’s do or die. We are running for our lives, just trying to stay alive. I even registered to leave back to Canada, but my name won’t come up. I can’t even make it to the south. I cannot make it anywhere safe. I have lost hope to reunite with my family and see anyone.*”

Kouta’s brother Abdel is in the south. On December 5, he published an update stating that he knew his brother was still alive but not safe.

During a glitchy live Instagram session on November 27, Kouta described how people use buckets of water to bathe when they can and then use the leftover water to wash their clothes. Since the only way to get around in Gaza is to walk, he says “finding a donkey is like finding a Mercedes.”

He says that in the most difficult

moments, Palestinians remind one another: “Allah put us in this situation. Allah will get us out.”

More recently, Kouta has appeared thinner, weaker and tired.

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### **Dr. Tarek Loubani** *Enough tears . . .*

**O**n November 25, thousands gathered on Parliament Hill for a rally organized by the Palestinian Youth Movement. Among the speakers was Dr. Tarek Loubani, a Palestinian-Canadian who was shot in both legs while treating protestors in Gaza in 2018.

He told the crowd that the day before the rally he’d watched a video of doctors treating a young girl with a head wound sustained in an airstrike. The hospital had run out of anesthesia, so doctors had to pin her arms and legs down to a bed as they sewed her wounded head.

“And I wondered to myself,” he told protestors, “Do they know that isn’t just



Displaced Palestinians living in the Tel al-Sultan area of Rafah in southern Gaza. December 8, 2023. Photo by Mohammed Zaanoun/Active Stills

during war? Do they know every time I was in Gaza, I sewed up children's heads in the same way, with no anesthetic?"

Hours before, Loubani spoke to his colleagues at Al-Shifa Hospital, who had been driven out of their stations and could no longer serve their patients. He had told them he would be attending a rally in the Canadian capital. One of them asked Loubani, "Is it true that the people of Canada cry for the people of Gaza?"

"Yes!" the crowd yelled back in unison. He continued his story in Arabic, and the crowd chanted back.

In a later phone conversation with *Canadian Mennonite*, he recounted the words of a colleague at Al-Shifa: "We are full of tears. We want a struggle. We want anger."

Loubani was born in a refugee camp in Kuwait and spent the first decade of his childhood in Palestine, before moving to Newfoundland with his family. He studied medicine at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia and completed his residency at McGill

University in Montreal.

He has travelled back to Gaza City several times over the last decade to assist patients and train medical staff there, facing detainment and weeks of incarceration in Israel and Egypt as a result of trying to enter the city.

The message that Loubani wanted to convey at the Ottawa rally was that healthcare in Gaza has been far below Canadian standards for a long time, not just since October 7. "This is a place that was always under deep occupation, where there were always terrible things happening," he said from his home in London, Ontario.

Loubani described the Israeli occupation of Gaza as a slow massacre, one in which the method was not bombs but choking and starvation by blocking aid and denying access to medical care.

The silver lining in the current crisis is that the "slow extermination" of Palestinians has come to light. "People didn't see it, and so it didn't sort of inflame the popular conscience," Loubani said. //

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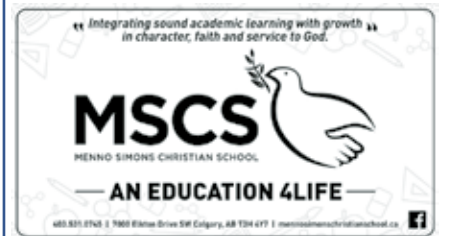
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# The 2023 German-English 'Academy Awards':

*Celebrating the legacy of musical theatre and the arts at RJC*

By Alex Tiessen, Director of Development

“This show we have tonight highlights the musical past of RJC, and celebrates the next generation of young people who are and will be attending RJC.” These words from emcees Thomas Driedger-Enns (RJC Grad 2008) and Michelle Cleland (RJC Grad 2008) helped to start the evening off at the RJC’s annual fundraising dinner on Oct. 28, 2023.

Taking inspiration from the Oscars award show, the 2023 German-English Academy Awards featured RJC students, alumni and friends performing various songs from RJC musicals of the past. The RJC Singers opened the program with “Seasons of Love” from the musical *Rent*. The program continued with

highlights from *All Shook Up* (performed in 2023), *Anastasia* (performed in 2022), *Mary Poppins* (performed in 2015), *Fiddler on the Roof* (performed in 1974 & 1992), *Pirates of Penzance* (performed in 1968, 1990 and 2008) and *Sound of Music* (performed in 1977, 1998 and 2014).

A special highlight of the evening was recognizing and celebrating Sandra Horst, who graduated from RJC in 1983. Sandra accompanied the performers for the evening and was recognized for her celebrated career in the performing arts. Sandra currently is the chorus master for the Canadian Opera Company and professor and head of opera at the University of Toronto.

In reflecting on her time at RJC, Sandra shared, “I’m honoured to be here tonight... My love for the stage, which has taken me around the world as a performer and educator, was nurtured at RJC through the dedicated talents of the teachers and supporters here who believed so strongly that making music together and telling stories not only forged friendships, but built community, gave us skills and created beautiful memories.”

Thanks to the generous support of the RJC community, The event exceeded the goal of raising \$45,000 for student bursaries. ☘



SUPPLIED PHOTO

**Sandra Horst was honoured at a recent RJC fundraiser. She is pictured with Duff Warkentin, former RJC music director.**





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# MC Manitoba partners with B.C. church

By Aaron Epp  
Associate Editor

One of the latest churches to affiliate with Mennonite Church Manitoba is outside the province—2,047 kilometers outside of Winnipeg, to be exact.

Estuary Church, an emerging congregation in Delta, B.C., is receiving guidance and support from MC Manitoba as it gets established and finds a denomination.

MC Manitoba signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in March. It outlines a two-year agreement that sees the regional church provide partnership in a shared ecclesiology and ethos; networking for shared wisdom in congregational ministry and mission; personal support for pastors if they require it; and church administration support such as human resources advice.

In turn, Estuary is providing MC Manitoba with insight as an emerging church, and donations “as deemed mutually agreeable.”

“Geography might be important, but it’s not the barrier to connection it once was,” says Lee Kosa, who co-pastors Estuary with Darren DeMelo. “We appreciate Michael’s willingness to be creative,” he adds, referring to MC Manitoba executive minister Michael Pahl.

According to Pahl, after MC Manitoba’s board discussed the possibility of partnering with Estuary, the decision was clear. “We don’t want to leave this congregation high and dry, without denominational support, while they look for a denominational home,” he says.

On its website, Estuary Church describes itself as “an affirming community actively pursuing the development of an inclusive, trauma-sensitive, decolonizing and creation-connected body of Christ.”

Estuary meets primarily at a United Church building. It also hosts Wild Church gatherings that make use of the beautiful landscape surrounding the church’s location at the convergence of the Fraser River and the Salish Sea.

Kosa and DeMelo were formerly pastors at Cedar Park Church, a congregation in Delta that belongs to the British Columbia Mennonite Brethren Conference.

They resigned in February 2022, along with a third pastor, Megan Simpson. One of the reasons for their departures was the conference’s requirement that all its pastors reaffirm the MB Confession of Faith, with a special focus on articles dealing with sexuality and marriage. Around that time, the pastors and their congregation were interested in exploring human sexuality and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

After the pastors resigned, about two-thirds of the congregation of about 250 left the church.

Some of those people started meeting for church in a barn, which led to Estuary’s formation. Kosa and DeMelo decided they weren’t finished with ministry and offered to be the church’s pastors.

The two pastors describe themselves as convinced Anabaptists. When Estuary started seeking denominational support, it was important to look for that support in the Anabaptist church.

They looked at a few different options, including a conference in the U.S. and Mennonite Church B.C. The latter’s stance on LGBTQ+ inclusion made partnering there not an option.

MC Manitoba’s website states that “the core” of the church’s doctrine is articulated in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, which says, “God intends marriage to be a

covenant between one man and one woman for life.” At the same time, the regional church encourages congregations “to discern the spirit’s leading for themselves regarding their welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ+ people.”

Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg has been a formative place for Kosa, who has studied at the university’s Canadian School of Peacebuilding, which added to MC Manitoba’s appeal. Kosa and DeMelo also appreciate Pahl’s writing and online presence.

Since formalizing the affiliation, MC Manitoba and some of its member congregations have offered Estuary wisdom on things like co-pastoring, consensus decision making, and abuse prevention and reporting policies.

Connecting with MC Manitoba has also provided Estuary with “a quicker bridge” to Anabaptist organizations like In This Together and the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, DeMelo says.

“This tether to the Anabaptist stream is, I think, really helpful,” he says.

The agreement between Estuary and MC Manitoba lasts until February 28, 2025. If mutually agreed upon, it can be extended.

Both parties hope that by, or before, the end of this term, Estuary will have found a permanent denominational home.

“We’re not anxious about having a denomination,” DeMelo says. “We’re just really thankful for this official friendship with Mennonite Church Manitoba.”

The relationship is working well so far, according to Pahl.

“It’s pretty low-key and I think we both just appreciate kind of the walking alongside each other that can happen, even from a distance,” he says. ❧

## Calendar

### British Columbia

- Feb. 23:** LEAD Conference at Emmanuel Mennonite Church.
- Feb. 24:** MCBC AGM at Emmanuel Mennonite Church.
- March 11-14:** Mennonite Camping Association is hosting its bi-national gathering at Camp Squeah in Hope. More information to come.
- April 7-9:** Youth Impact Retreat at Camp Squeah.
- June 7-9:** Young Adult (18-35) Anabaptist Conference, "Faith, Activism, and Church: Building an Active Future" at Camp Squeah.

### Alberta

- March 15, 16:** MC Alberta Annual Delegate Sessions at Holyrood Mennonite Church.

### Saskatchewan

- March 11:** MC Saskatchewan Annual Delegate Sessions at Bethany Manor, Saskatoon.

### Manitoba

- Feb. 2-4:** MC Manitoba Winter Retreat for ages 22-30 at Camp Assiniboia.
- Feb. 23-25:** MC Manitoba Youth Winter Retreat at Camp Assiniboia. For more information contact Kathy at kgiesbrecht@mennochurch.mb.ca.
- March 1-2:** MC Manitoba Annual Gathering at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler. Worship and celebration (1) deliberations (2). More information to come.
- May 4-5:** Faith and Life Choirs Spring Concerts. First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg (4); Morden Mennonite Church, Morden (5).
- June 21-23:** 75...Already?! Save the date for Camp Assiniboia's 75th Anniversary. More details to come.

### Ontario

- Jan. 21:** Junior Youth Gathering (Grades 5-8) from 1-5 p.m. at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. All junior youth across MCEC invited to come for an afternoon including the Rockway House Band, interactive games and more.
- March 7:** MCEC Spiritual Retreat Day for Pastors.
- Mar. 16:** Intercultural intergenerational volleyball tournament at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Registration for congregations will open soon.
- Apr. 26-27:** MCEC Annual Church Gathering, "Transformed, Inspired, Called," at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington.

### Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
January 12	Jan. 3
January 26	Jan. 17
Dec. 29 <i>Digital Issue</i>	Dec. 18

### Advertising Information

Contact Ben Thiessen  
 1-800-378-2524 ext. 3  
 advert@canadianmennonite.org

### Online

**Tuesdays until Feb. 13:** Climate Pollinators, a webinar series on creation care at 2 p.m. UTC. This webinar is jointly organized by the Creation Care Task Force and Anabaptist Climate Collaborative. Register at [mwc-cmm.org/en/resources/climate-pollinators-webinar-series](http://mwc-cmm.org/en/resources/climate-pollinators-webinar-series).

**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 Opportunities



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 position is open until filled.** Visit at our website at [hmc.on.ca](http://hmc.on.ca) to see the full job description. learn more. Email [search@hmc.on.ca](mailto:search@hmc.on.ca) or [pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca](mailto:pastoraltransitions@mcec.ca) for a link to join in our hybrid worship services.

Shekinah Retreat Centre ([www.shekinahretreatcentre.org](http://www.shekinahretreatcentre.org)) has an opening for the Executive Director position. We are seeking a high energy person to grow our camping and facility rental programs. The preferred candidate will have a commitment to the Anabaptist tradition, an entrepreneurial spirit, non profit leadership experience and excellent communication skills. Position starts as soon as possible. Most salary and benefits follow MC Canada guidelines. For further information contact Board chair, Phyllis Goertz: 306 242 8367 or [p.goertz@sasktel.net](mailto:p.goertz@sasktel.net).



YOU  
DID NOT  
CHOOSE ME,  
BUT  
I CHOSE YOU

John 15:16

CANADIAN  
MENNONITE

UNSPLASH PHOTO BY BECCA TAPERT



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