

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

February 9, 2024 Volume 28 Number 3

# BREAKING BREAD

with broken people

Two lenten stories

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# Four tributes, two announcements

BY WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org



With this issue, we bid farewell to columnists Ed Olfert, Joshua Penfold and Joon Park. While we are excited to welcome new columnists, the end of existing columns is a

loss. Seasons change.

Ed has written about ordinary people, marginal people, broken people and beautiful people, all reflecting the image of God. He has written about welding, coffee shops, family funerals, driving truck and fishing with people who have been in prison. We will miss this combination of gospel and grit.

Joshua's column grew out of online posts about his five-year plan to read the Old Testament (now complete). His willingness to connect scripture to deeply personal matters—the haunt of immortality, confessed ill-contentment, doubt—has been a great gift to readers. His column on page 16 provides a particularly fitting conclusion.

Page 13 contains the last of Joon Park's 12 columns on intercultural church. With courage and spirit, he has offered a clear challenge: no church has an excuse not to integrate people of various cultures. And integration is not about quotas, quesadillas or appearances, but the profound spiritual coming together that is ultimately the work of the Spirit.

I have found Joon's words deeply challenging. He is opening new doors. May God grant us courage to enter.

Joon leaves us with a question: "Are

we a church in which visionaries, risk-takers and innovators are welcomed?"

A final farewell goes to our colleague Barb Draper, who is retiring after 23 years, and 549 issues, with *CM*.

In 2001, after about 10 years of teaching English as a second language, Barb said she was "ready for a change." She waited to "see what God would provide." Eventually, she saw *CM* was hiring a correspondent and an editorial assistant. She applied for the correspondent job and Ron Rempel, editor/publisher at the time, offered her the other position. She said yes, grateful for the "chance to work for the church."

Contributing to the church through work has always been important to her.

While Barb's work shifted over the years, the constants were proofreading and serving as books editor.

"A lot of what I did was structure, keeping things in order," Barb said. This included indexing magazine content and dipping into the database whenever required. Barb also provided a link to the more traditional Mennonite groups and the Mennonite historical organizations.

Barb wrote book reviews (97) and other articles from time to time, including "10 things to know about Mennonites in Canada," the most read article, by far, on our website.

Having read *CM* very closely all these years, Barb said, "What was always closest to my heart was stories about other congregations."

Her wish for *CM* is simple: "May it

continue for a long time."

Upon Barb's retirement, Ron Rempel, who hired her originally, said Barb was "definitely the right person for the job!"

Agreed. Thanks for your contribution to the church, Barb.

Finally, I'm eager to announce two upcoming online events. (The first may have passed by the time you get this, but you'll find a recording at the link below.)

On February 21, we'll be joined by Maoz Inon, an award-winning Israeli social entrepreneur and peace advocate whose initiatives include the Jesus Trail and Abraham Hostels. Since the murder of his parents by Hamas on October 7, Inon has become a leading voice for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Inon, whose message has drawn the attention of major news outlets, comes to us via his long-time connections to Mennonites. This event will include discussion of action opportunities.

A week later, February 28, you can hear from the authors of *The Wall Between: What Jews and Palestinians Don't Want to Know About Each Other*.

Raja Khouri is an Palestinian-Canadian and Jeffrey Wilkinson is an American Jew. They speak with uncommon candour and insight about the clash of narratives and the possibilities of change.

For more details, please see [canadianmennonite.org/events](http://canadianmennonite.org/events).

*Anabaptist World* and *Christian Courier* are sponsoring the events with us. ☸



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Photo by Jon Tyson/Unsplash.

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# What in the World



## Support for Ukraine drops

February 24 marks two years since Russia invaded Ukraine, and 25 percent of Canadians say our government is doing too much to help Ukraine's military efforts. Half as many said the same in May 2022. According to Angus Reid, 19 percent say Canada is not doing enough.

Photo: Oleksandr Rakushnyak



## Bible podcast tops the chart

The Bible Recap podcast rose to the top of Apple Podcasts' All Categories list last month. Over five years, 328 million people have downloaded the show, which is hosted by Tara-Leigh Cobble of Dallas. Cobble says the brief daily podcast leads listeners through the Bible in a "casual, easy to understand way."

Source: Baker Publishing Group, taraleighcobble.com



## Religion gets political in India

In January, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a new Hindu temple on the site where a mob demolished a mosque in 1992. Modi reportedly observed 11 days of purification rituals to prepare for his central role in the spectacular event. Critics accuse Modi of using the occasion for political ends, as his ruling party pursues the establishment Hindu supremacy.

Source: The Guardian  
Photo: wikipedia.org

## A moment from yesterday



In 1923, Cornelius Krause from the Steinbach area, in Manitoba, visited the new Mennonite community of Parritas, Mexico. He titled this photo "Here we show how we celebrate Christmas." Men and women stand outside showing off garden produce such as cucumbers and tomatoes. Fourth from left, standing next to the table, is Katharina Loewen, and next to her is her husband Johann Loewen.

Text: Conrad Stoesz  
Photo: Cornelius Krause photo collection/  
Mennonite Heritage Archives







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**Those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war.”**

– Martin Luther King Jr.

King has been so sanitized, and his work so watered down. . . King changed the country because he changed policies; he changed laws.

– Rev. Frederick D. Haynes III, pastor, Friendship-West Baptist Church, Oak Cliff, Texas

Source: Dallas Morning News

Photo: wikipedia.org



**Rudy Wiebe’s livelihood**

To conclude an online launch of a new book about Rudy Wiebe, the 89-year-old novelist quoted a poem by Robert Kroetsch:

*What do you do for a living? I asked.  
I remember, she replied.*



**One helluva prayer**

President Joe Biden concluded his comments at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. on February 1 with this: “We have really tough, tough differences. We really go at one another. But remember—let’s remember who the hell we—hell we are. We’re the United States of America. It’s all about dignity and respect, so let’s practice it.”

Photo: wikipedia.org

### Women’s ‘Self-Help Centers’ support relief and recycling

Altona, Man.—The woman looked tired, she had obviously worked hard all morning. In Altona, Manitoba, population 2,122, the sidewalks had been washed clean by a quick June thunderstorm. The 1972 influx of annual Indian beet hoers had taken over the town, the rain having interrupted the weeding, thinning, and whatever they do in the southern Manitoba beet fields.

I had been trying to get information on the beet workers who perform this work, and had heard some pretty wild stories about how the labourers get fleeced by exorbitant prices placed on groceries and other necessities when the seasonal hoers move in. But proof was hard to find, even though many whites claimed a two-price system prevailed in some of the stores, favouring the regular local customers.

I was looking for a bit of Mennonite sense of charity and fair play, when someone mentioned that a self help centre had recently been opened in the town. The woman I stopped had just come out of this store, and I wanted to find out how she had fared.

“Oh, it’s a good place,” she answered, and some of the tiredness seemed to drop from her shoulders. “It’s so hard to buy clothes for my children. And I bought enough for all of them for just a few dollars. Much cheaper than anywhere else.”



**50  
YEARS AGO**

MENNONITE REPORTER, FEBRUARY 4, 1974

**Be in Touch**

- Send letters to 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 or at 1-800-378-2524 ext 5.

✉ **History lesson**

**Will Braun’s editorial about Di Brandt (“The institution of messiness,” September 22, 2023) is a valuable piece that I hope many people will read.**

In the past two centuries, the arts have gone through an unprecedented transition in Western societies, and our institutions—including churches—have often been resistant to that change.

In previous centuries, artists worked on behalf of patrons such as the church, merchants or the aristocracy.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote about the shift to the independent artist and how it affected art. Artists were no longer beholden to their patrons for subject matter, styles or other expectations. Artists, according to Kant, became liberated and wrote about personal discovery and truth as well as private emotions.

These might be, as another philosopher, G. F. Hegel, noted, a challenge to commonly held beliefs and practices because the best art, in Hegel’s view, did not perpetuate the status quo or express a common orthodoxy.

Until recently, Mennonite churches and agencies assumed that they were the gatekeepers as to who is and who is not a Mennonite writer. The effect is often to exclude the dynamic writer who explores the fabric of life and the depth of their soul.

I have followed Brandt’s work since I first met her at a workshop on dramatic writing when she was a student at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. Since then, valuable work has flowed from her keyboard. Time and again, she has expressed emotions and insights that ring true, even if, at times, they shake the reader.

The sad truth is that Brandt isn’t the only artist who has been misunderstood by the church. Agencies inside and outside the church are often quick to judge before they seek understanding. Yet, Brandt’s life has not been sad; it’s been a brilliantly successful and, from my perspective, fun journey.

LAUREN FRIESEN, NORTH NEWTON, KANSAS

✉ **In praise of subversive voices**

**I really loved the testimony of Pastor Mezgebu Tucho (“One thing is necessary,” January 12). This kind of message is so important today for us North American Mennonites.**

I thank God for my brothers and sisters in the Global South who are leading the way in the 21st century church and teaching us how to pray. Who could have imagined 50 years ago that the Ethiopian church would be sending missionaries to our churches in Canada to re-evangelize us and remind us of that “one thing is necessary.” God bless them.

Thank you, Will Braun, for your ministry among us and the way you amplify these subversive voices that shatter so many of our prejudices, biases and blind spots.

DAVID DYCK, LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO (LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH)

CM **ONLINE COMMENTS**

✉ **The church has not been silent**

**It is unfortunate that Geraldine Balzer repeats the refrain, “the church is silent” (“The church cannot be silent,” December 15, 2023). It’s unfortunate because it’s not true.**

In various ways—from individual members to pastors to executive ministers; from church mission committees to regional and nationwide Palestine-Israel Networks; from Mennonite Church Canada folks in their roles within MC Canada to their roles in Mennonite Central Committee or elsewhere; in letters and at rallies and on social media and more—the church has been speaking out in solidarity with the suffering from October 7 on.

What Geraldine must mean, then, is that certain groups of church leaders have been silent. And this is true. Neither MC Canada’s Joint Council nor the regional executive ministers have, as a group, directly denounced either the horrific violence of Hamas or the horrific violence of Israel in Gaza.

Neither Doug Klassen, the executive minister of MC Canada, nor Geraldine as moderator, have publicly, formally done so either.

Geraldine and Will Braun are right to question this. We do need to do the work to allow our leaders greater freedom to speak—directly, formally and publicly—on matters of grave concern, especially as relates to our partners and friends around the world.

Nevertheless, may we remember our Anabaptist ecclesiology. The church is not its leaders. The church is the people of God together, the body of Christ with all its members. Yes, this includes its leaders. But as a priesthood of all believers, the church is not merely its leaders.

And the church has not been silent. Nor is it now, as together we pray and call and work for peace—in Gaza, for Israel and Palestine, in Ukraine, in Sudan, in Myanmar and around the world.

MICHAEL PAHL  
EXECUTIVE MINISTER, MENNONITE CHURCH MANITOBA

### I appreciate Michael's comments on my reflections.

In re-reading my article, I noted an editorial change that was made. I had very deliberately capitalized the word Church to refer to the denominational entity. I know well that the church (a collective of believers) has not been silent.

GERALDINE BALZER  
MODERATOR, MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

### ✉ Change is hard to make

Thank you, Ruth, for sharing your story (“Landing out of hot water,” January 12).

Change is hard to make, and your willingness to take alternative paths inspires me to look more closely at my life.

Am I willing to try new things and walk the extra mile (literally) to live more carefully? What can I forgo, and what is gained?

Your willingness to be vulnerable about the process you are taking with your family opens up conversations for us all.

CAROL PENNER

## CM MILESTONES

### Births/Adoptions

**Fisher**—Margot Bernadette (b. Jan. 18, 2024), to Susie Fisher and Shaun Dyck, Altona Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

### Deaths

**Erb**—Lyle, 65 (b. April 8, 1958; d. Dec. 4, 2023), Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.

**Martin**—Clarence B., 86 (b. Sept. 13, 1937; d. Dec. 30, 2023), Floradale Mennonite Church, Floradale, Ont.

**Neufeld**—John H., 95 (b. Jan. 21, 1928; d. Dec. 28, 2023), North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Ont.

**Peters**—Agnes (nee Koop), 94 (b. June 25, 1929; d. Jan. 15, 2024), Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.

**Steinman**—Vernetta, 92 (b. May 15, 1931; d. Dec. 29, 2023), Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont.

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.

# PEACE & POSSIBILITY

A PAIR OF ONLINE EVENTS

## Maoz Inon

FEBRUARY 21, 11:00 AM CT

Maoz Inon is an award-winning Israeli social entrepreneur and peace advocate whose initiatives include the Jesus Trail. Since the murder of his parents by Hamas in October, Inon has become a leading international voice for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

## The Wall Between

FEBRUARY 28, 7:30 PM CT

Hear the co-authors of *The Wall Between: What Jews and Palestinians Don't Want to Know About Each Other*. Raja Khouri, a Palestinian-Canadian, and Jeffrey Wilkinson, an American Jew, navigate the clash of narratives with candour, skill and grace.

See [canadianmennonite.org/events](https://canadianmennonite.org/events)





# BREAKING BREAD

with broken people

Two lenten stories

By Carol Penner

*Photo by William Krause/Unsplash.*



*Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. – Matthew 26:50*

**T**he disciples were shocked when Jesus said, "One of you will betray me." Judas's story is told in different ways in the gospels, giving us some insight into how the disciples and gospel writers came to terms with the betrayal of Judas.

In John's gospel, Judas is mentioned five times, and every single time the writer mentions that Judas is the one who betrayed Jesus. This gospel writer tells us that Satan "entered into" Judas (John 13:27). And we are told that when the woman pours the ointment on Jesus' feet, it is Judas who says this could have been sold for 300 denarii. John's gospel names Judas as a thief who only wanted the money for himself.

In Matthew's gospel, we hear the same story of the woman pouring the ointment, but Matthew doesn't single out Judas as objecting to the act. Matthew recounts that all the disciples said it was wasteful to use the ointment. Matthew does not name Judas as a thief. I wonder about this.

Perhaps Matthew, as a former tax collector, had some personal understanding of Judas's love of money. He decided not to name that in his story.

Matthew also adds a few important details to the story of Judas. Matthew remembers that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus calls Judas "friend." Significantly, Matthew also tells us that, before Judas died, he repented of betraying Jesus and gave back the 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 27:3–6).

John's gospel does not include that story, although he must have known it.

What's happening here? Matthew and John were both equally affected by

the betrayal of Judas, but Matthew paints a kinder picture. He says Judas betrayed Jesus, but he tells the story in a more merciful way than John's gospel. Neither gospel suggests that Judas be forgiven for his betrayal, but I think Matthew was taking some steps along that road.

### **Communion table**

Evan, a member in one of the churches I pastored, was arrested after

Sunday. I was officiating. As people came up to gather in groups around the altar table for communion, I saw Evan at the back, and I thought, "Don't come up for communion! Don't come!"

But sure enough, Evan came up for communion. I found myself having a fierce conversation in my head with God about whether I should serve this man. I stormed inwardly, "God, he doesn't deserve to be here!"

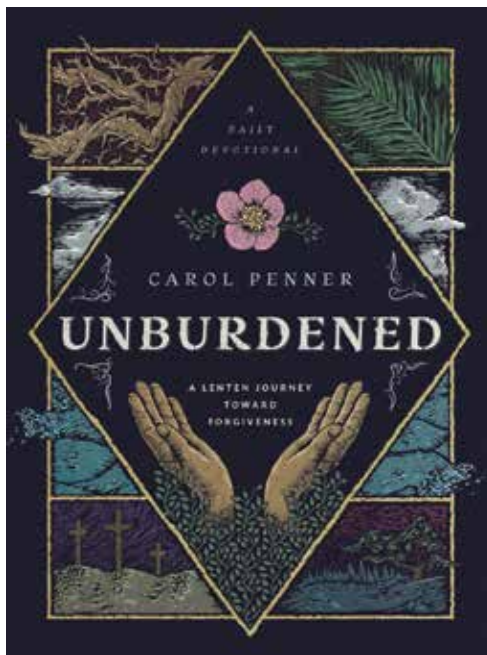
When I heard myself saying those words in my head, it was like something very heavy dropped on my foot. I could not ignore what I said—it was sharp and painful. Deserve communion? Who among us deserves to be at this table?

My deepest presuppositions about the communion table were suddenly revealed. Somehow, I felt I deserved to have the Lord's Supper because I did good things. Evan had done bad things, and I didn't think he qualified. This realization came to me in a flash, and I knew my thinking was wrong and needed to change.

We are loved simply because we are God's children. We don't earn God's love.

At the Last Supper, Jesus broke bread and served all his disciples with love, even though he knew that Judas would betray him, and Peter would deny him. The communion table in our church belongs to Jesus, and not to us. As Evan stood in the circle waiting to be served, I prayed that God would give me grace to grow into the ministerial shoes I was wearing. I came away from the communion table changed, unburdened of a theology that was distorted and corrupting.

The following months were



being caught sexually abusing a boy in our neighbourhood. Evan was released on bail awaiting trial; his only restriction was not being near the boy he abused. Evan wanted to attend our church, and we worked on how that could happen safely. He was always accompanied by a volunteer who never left his side.

The first time Evan was in church after his arrest, it was communion

challenging. Our church accompanied Evan to court, where we listened to the testimony of the boy he abused. The boy and his parents sat on one side of the courtroom with friends and supporters, and we sat on the other. I had a son at home the same age as this boy who was testifying. I wanted so badly to be on the boy's side of the courtroom. But I knew that, as Evan's pastor, I was called to support him.

We spoke with the boy's family, who had known Evan from the time he was young. This family knew we had deep feelings of support for their son, but they wanted Evan to have some support too.

Evan eventually pled guilty and received a suspended sentence. A few months later, he died of a heart attack.

At his funeral, someone from our congregation said, "We tried to support Evan. We didn't do that perfectly, but he knew we were trying."

Those events took place 20 years ago, and I am still unpacking what happened over those months. I have slowly found the words to tell that story and what it means to me.

Like the writers of the gospel of Matthew and John, we can choose how to tell our stories. When you think back to conflicts and hurts in your life, how

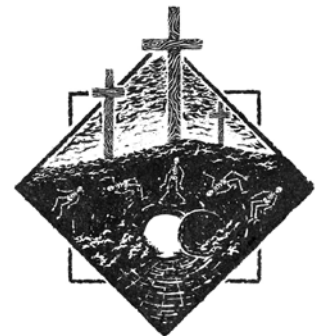
do you explain what happened? Telling our stories through the lens of the Last Supper, we can see more clearly what needs to be seen.

I saw Evan at the back,  
and I thought, "Don't come up  
for communion! Don't come!"

**Prayer:**

With basins and bread and wine that night,  
you told your story of love.  
We are still listening,  
still trying to absorb the meaning.  
As we tell our own stories of betrayal,  
tales of disappointment and heartache,  
we want to follow your example.  
Jesus, lover of us all, we want to join you on your knees in the garden.  
Amen. ☩

*The above is from Unburdened: A Lenten Journey Toward Forgiveness (A Daily Devotional) by Carol Penner. Used and adapted by permission of Herald Press. All rights reserved. Unburdened is available at commonword.ca. To join Carol's book club discussion of Unburdened during Lent, see facebook.com/groups/1282394419009210*



Art courtesy of Herald Press

**CM FOR DISCUSSION**

1. When you think of Judas, do you feel empathy, disdain, both or something else?
2. Have you ever recoiled at the sight of a particular person receiving communion? What did you, or God, do with that impulse?
3. What beliefs lead us to resist the extension of mercy, or communion, to certain people, perhaps even to ourselves?
4. What stories do you have of the communion table as a place of mercy?



Photo by Pro Church Media/Unsplash.

See related resources at [commonword.ca/go/3800](https://commonword.ca/go/3800)







Photo Thirdman/Pexels.

# Wilderness retreat

By Helen Boothroyd and Richard Moriarty, Iona Community

**W**hen we hear that someone is going on retreat, it often conjures up a picture in our mind of escaping from the busyness and stress of everyday life into a kind of pious otherness where we spend all our time talking with God and communing with nature. The very word retreat rather encourages us to this view, suggesting a backing off or getting away from the realities of everyday life.

But the nature of Jesus' wilderness experience challenges us to question and revisit this understanding. The time Jesus spent in the desert, away from the bustle of Galilean life, was far from quiet and serene. It was a period of challenge and temptation, of becoming more aware of God's will, enabling Jesus to counter the easy lure and seductive promises with which Satan tried so hard to snare him.

It is important in all our spiritual journeys to take time out from our everyday busyness to become aware of God's urging in the deepest parts of our being. For many people, spending time away from home in a community, retreat centre or house of welcome can

be a very helpful way of quieting our minds and making us receptive to the still small voice within.

But these times of spiritual searching are not periods of disengagement from the world; rather, they represent some of the deepest engagement of our lives, when we receive from God the gift of new awareness and learn to see the world around us through the eyes of God.

Once we learn to listen and to become aware, we will find that we continue to hear God's voice amidst life's busyness. Like Jesus, we begin to see everyday temptation for what it is and respond to it with the words of God.

So as the advertisement falls out of our morning post, offering the enticement of instant credit—"buy now, pay later"—we can resist the lure of mammon and of greed, the snare of debt in which so many are trapped for others' profit.

As we eat our breakfast, we stop taking our cheap and ready food for granted and begin to ask where it comes from, to think of those who

produced it, to see how our choices can make a difference to the lives of others. And so we decide perhaps to drink fair trade coffee and eat local produce; to let God in as we load our shopping trolleys as well as during times of prayer.

By setting aside time for God, we become more aware of the realities of God's world and the demands of God's justice. And so our heightened experience of an engaged spirituality gives us strength to resist the temptations of wealth, power and prestige and to stand for the way of God in the places and situations where we live and work,

love and relate.

Not to run away but to stand and be counted. Christ came out of the wilderness to begin his public

ministry. We must return from times of retreat to be his pilgrim people in the world. ❧

**We begin to see everyday  
temptation for what it is . . .**

*The above is excerpted from Lent & Easter Readings from Iona (Wild Goose Publications, 2001). Reprinted with permission through PLSclear. See [ionabooks.com](http://ionabooks.com).*

# Responding to God's call

Gary Peters

New Year's Day is often a time we reflect on the events and experiences of the past year. It is also the time we look forward to what might lie ahead.

At the beginning of 2023, I received an email from Terry Stefaniuk, who was then the moderator of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. Terry asked if I would consider serving as the regional church's executive minister. The position had been vacant for about a year.

I was confronted with the decision of whether or not to accept and serve in this role. I struggled with the question, "Is this God's call for me?"

The Bible contains many stories of God calling people into various leadership roles.

We don't know how the call was given to Abraham when God promised he would become the ancestor of a multitude of nations (Genesis 17). Samuel

heard God's call by a voice in the night and needed Eli's help to understand it was God's voice (1 Samuel 3).

Samuel was the voice through which God called David to be king of the Hebrew people (1 Samuel 16). The prophet Jeremiah experienced the hand of the Lord upon his mouth when he was called to speak to the nations (Jeremiah 1).

John the Baptist was called by God before his miraculous birth (Luke 1) and the Apostle Paul experienced God's call as a blinding light and a voice on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

Knowing that God's call takes many different forms didn't help me



Photo by Alexander Andrews/Unsplash.

determine if Terry's invitation was God calling me to the executive minister role. I needed other ways to aid my discernment.

Soon after Terry contacted me, I came up with a long list of reasons I would not do well as executive minister. Also, I had never had any desire to work in this role.

I have always considered that God's call has come to me through the voices of other people. It was Hanley Mennonite Church that called me to the role of congregational chairperson in the 1980s. It was the people of Hanley Mennonite who called me and Margaret, my spouse, to pastoral roles.

More recently, I experienced God's call to ministry at the Fiske and Herschel Mennonite churches.

As I thought and prayed about Terry's invitation, my mind settled. I began to see this call as an opportunity to become more closely involved with the broader church in Saskatchewan and Canada. I would have the opportunity to meet new people and get to know our ministries more fully.

I started getting excited. Was this God speaking to me?

I accepted the call on an interim, part-time basis, with hesitation and many questions. I have been fortunate to be part of a dedicated and energetic staff who are willing to guide and encourage me.

It has been, and continues to be, an honour for me to serve MC Saskatchewan.

It is a body in which we experience the salvation of

Christ. This takes place through forgiveness and belonging. We receive wisdom which directs our life both corporately and individually.

It is the body through which we proclaim God as creator and sustainer of this world and life upon it.

It is the body through which we offer ourselves to serve God. We share God's love to each other and to the world.

I will serve as executive minister until the end of May, at which time Len Rempel will take the role. I pray we will continue to follow faithfully through his leadership. ✎



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# Thoughts for our unfinished journey

Joon Park

**B**ecoming an intercultural church does not happen by accident or by wishful thinking.

It takes a lifetime to create space in which everyone can gather and be welcomed, celebrated, integrated and reconciled to God and one another.

This new humanity is neither European nor African, Mennonite nor Pentecostal, tradition-bound nor law-observant, but a redeemed community that transcends all ethnic, cultural and traditional differences.

What makes it possible to create such a new interethnic, intercultural humanity?

It is possible only when our cultural values, preferences and even our identities are ready to be bent, though not broken; only when we let the work of Christ regulate our ethnic pride, combatting ethnocentrism and cultural superiority and elitism; only when commitment to Christ supersedes other rankings, loyalties and beliefs; and only when the person and work of Christ become the anchor for a congregation's primary identity.

In order to succeed in becoming an intercultural church where all are welcome, any cultural and ethnic identity should be pliable. In anthropology, this is called "situational ethnicity."

Remember Paul's versatility in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some." His words do not speak of a compulsion to be like others but of freedom from his cultural preferences and values.

There is no permanently fixed

cultural and ethnic identity in Christ. It is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:19-20). We are now Christians whose lives are transformed, governed and directed only by Christ, not by any specific culture.

If you are rigid in preserving your own cultural and ethnic identities, values and traditions, and your ethnic and cultural pride is too strong to be negotiable, you will have difficulty creating an intercultural church.

An intercultural church is a place that challenges us to leave the comfort zones of our separate traditions and find a creative third way, fiercely and humbly, in which all nations and tribes are welcomed, respected and empowered.

Therefore, becoming an intercultural church is a new wine—new wineskins movement—a movement that is counter-cultural, counter-traditional and counter-ethnocentric.

It asks us to renew our minds and hearts, which are comfortable with the status quo of the institutionalized church, and retrieve and resume the zeal for evangelism and reconciling mission displayed by early churches.

It further challenges us to participate in God's ongoing ministry of peace and reconciliation for the world.

This movement cannot succeed by patching small bits and pieces from an old wineskin.

Unless we are transformed by the spirit of reformation, unless we hold on

to an unshakable vision to fulfil God's mandate regarding the unity and reconciliation of all nations, and unless we persistently pursue this vision at all costs, pursuing an intercultural church will be nothing more than a daydream.

Only visionaries, only those whose spirit is curious, venturesome and undaunted can achieve this eschatological vision that is prophesied by John of Patmos in Revelation 7:9-10: "There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, [was] standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Then and there, peace will finally prevail.

Dear Mennonite Church:

Where are we, and who are we?

Are we a church in which visionaries, risk-takers and innovators are welcomed, embraced and encouraged?

Who in the church dares to make this grandiose, reconciling and redeeming vision come true right here and now? Who can keep this banner flying?

Our journey is not finished. "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead," let us "press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Let's move forward, friends, lifting up our voices! The Lord is near.

This is the final instalment of "Riding the Waves of Intercultural Church."

Thank you to all readers, near and far, who have journeyed with me this far. ✎

Are we a church  
in which visionaries,  
risk-takers and  
innovators are  
welcomed?



Joon Park serves as intentional interim co-pastor at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton. He can be reached at [cwcfounder@gmail.com](mailto:cwcfounder@gmail.com).

# A different kind of yes-man

Ed Olfert

Since Will Braun's strong editorial in the December 1, 2023, issue ("What kind of peace church are we?"), the pages of *Canadian Mennonite* have included some passionate responses.

This is a good thing. Perhaps I'll add one more.

I begin with a story.

When I volunteered with Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), I belonged to a group of five core members (offenders) and eight or ten volunteer supporters.

I remember one specific meeting when the air was filled with intense conversation mixed with loud laughter and teasing. We had a visitor that evening from the national CoSA organization. When we invited him to address the group, he said, "I simply can't tell who's a core member and who's a volunteer."

We considered that the warmest affirmation we could receive. To this observer, we were as one.

Experiences such as this lead my thinking as I consider what it means to be a peace church.

When we hear strong calls to denounce violence, be it perpetrated by Hamas or Israel, that's okay, I guess.

My less-than-enthusiastic response to such denouncement is based on a rediscovered passion for the great commandment to centre my spirituality: Love God, neighbour and self.

Increasingly, I sense that our calls to denounce violence in large-scale situations align closely to the calls made by left-wing political voices.

I am seldom offended by left-wing political voices, but as a peace church, we are called to give our first and best energy to love—to love our neighbour,



Photo by Jez Timms/Unsplash.

and, to sharpen the edge, to love our enemy.

If that same first and best energy is given to denouncing, there will be diminished creativity left for love. Our best passion will have burned up.

Returning to the CoSA example: When I sit with offenders, most of whom have sexual violence in their story, continually denouncing that violence has no value. Rather, support entails love, appreciation, affirmation and the building of a relationship wherein hard subjects can be broached.

You may argue that Hamas and Israeli forces haven't shown that much interest in sitting down for a conversation over tea. I get that.

But how can our approach be adjusted to lead with something more hopeful than denouncement? How can we lead with love of God, neighbour and self?

I note comments that criticize our government for being slow to go on record against the violence. I suspect that this is connected to the incredible complexity of the conflict between

Israel and Palestine.

How can we as a peace church be heard as a peace church?

I think I've previously mentioned my desire to have the word "yes" tattooed on my arm. It hasn't happened yet, though the idea remains there in my mind.

So, I study that naked spot on my arm and challenge myself.

What does "yes" mean when people are dying in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Russia—in so many places within this creation?

What does "yes" mean when I consider the inquest into the killings of 11 people in two communities in Saskatchewan on September 4, 2022?

What does "yes" mean when I see the angry face of Benjamin Netanyahu on my screen? What does "yes" mean when I glimpse Vladimir Putin's stolid visage?

I need some creative energy; my energy to denounce has run its course.

This is my last column for *Canadian Mennonite*. There is a desire to explore new places, hear new voices, create new conversations.

I'm grateful for the opportunity I've had to express my rants and share a few visions of "yes."

I've enjoyed meeting many of you on my screen as you've offered both affirmation and challenge. I've been shown glimpses of spirituality as lived across our readership, and I am honoured.

Thank you, *Canadian Mennonite*. Thank you, readers. ☸



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# In due season

Troy Watson

**W**hen I first started working out at a CrossFit gym, my muscles ached constantly.

After a few months, I asked one of the trainers, “When does the pain go away?” After clarifying what kind of pain I was referring to, he said, “Oh, that never goes away. This is your new normal.”

This seems like a fitting analogy for the church post-pandemic lockdowns. Many churches are wondering, “Why does everything still feel different? Why does faith and being the church seem so complicated and hard?”

The truth is this season of struggle might not go away. Not any time soon. This might be our new normal.

To be clear, our North American struggles today pale in comparison to the struggles and suffering of the global church throughout history. Yet this doesn’t negate the fact that practicing our faith and being the church has never seemed so complicated and difficult, in our lifetime, in our cultural context.

Personally, I’ve hit more walls of discouragement in my ministry since March 2020 than the entirety of my 23 years prior. Yet I’m reminded of the adage, “No pain, no gain.”

According to the Bible, seasons of suffering, adversity and struggle are necessary and valuable.

I don’t understand how this applies to all suffering on planet Earth, but I’ve come to understand and appreciate how this applies to my life and ministry.

We need difficult seasons to grow.

Paul says, “we rejoice in our sufferings, because suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character” (Romans 5:3-4). James says, “we should consider it pure joy when we face trials and tribulations, because the testing of your faith produces



Photo by 성두 홍/Pexels.

perseverance” (James 1:2-3).

There are certain traits and qualities, like patience, resilience, perseverance and courage, that only grow in us through suffering, adversity and struggle.

If we prioritize growth, we not only value these tough seasons, we rejoice in them—not because our faith is masochistic, but because our faith enables us to see they are producing beneficial fruit in our lives.

Twenty years ago, a Zimbabwean pastor told me, “One thing I’ve learned about North American Christians: You don’t like to hurt. You don’t like to suffer or be uncomfortable.”

At the time I thought, “What a strange thing to say. Who likes to suffer?”

I’ve come to realize he was right.

Our North American mindset, obsessed with eliminating and avoiding suffering and hardship at all costs, has undermined our trust in the divine wisdom telling us suffering, adversity and trials are necessary and valuable.

We cannot grow and become the best versions of ourselves without them.

Fifteen years ago, I was going through a difficult time. I met with a mentor named Dave, who was a missionary in Zambia for

many years. I said, “Dave, I’m really struggling.”

His response surprised me.

“That’s good,” he said. “Struggle is a sign of life. When the fish on the end of your line is struggling, that means it wants to live and be set free. It’s the same with us. None of us are perfect. We all have stuff in our lives we’re struggling with. If we aren’t, we’re either spiritually asleep or we’ve given up.”

I’ve experienced a breakthrough recently, as I practice being grateful for adversity, struggle and suffering. I trust God is using them to produce growth in me—growth that can’t happen any other way.

Paul says, “Don’t grow weary in doing good and being faithful, for we will reap a harvest in due season, if we don’t lose heart” (Galatians 6:9).

There will be times in our lives when we put in the work but don’t see any results; when we’re faithful, but don’t reap the fruit of our labour.

This happens in all areas of our lives: our jobs, careers, marriages, parenting, friendships and in our work for peace and justice. It also happens in our faith development and spiritual journeys.

This can be discouraging. Human beings are designed to be fuelled by progress. It’s tempting to slack off or give up when we’re not seeing results.

Yet having faith means not only being faithful to God, even when (especially when) it’s hard, it means trusting God will be faithful as well; trusting that in due season, we will reap a harvest if we don’t give up. ☞



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# The unend of this story

Joshua Penfold

**H**ow many sermons do you remember from 25 years ago? Likely not many.

Even the most meaningful and formative sermons from long ago tend to fade and become less a specific memory and more an unrecalable influential moment; a ripple whose impact remains but becomes indistinguishable the further life goes beyond that moment.

I'm sure I have heard many sermons over the years that are impossible to recall yet influential. But there is one sermon from 25 years ago that I do recall with more clarity than any other.

My youth pastor was preaching one Sunday morning, and for his sermon illustration, he took a pair of scissors and cut the back cover off his Bible.

I had never seen anyone do such a thing!

It was surprising, shocking, possibly irreverent (I wasn't sure) and seemingly sacrilegious. Because of all those things, it was incredibly memorable.

I'm sure he did it for the shock factor, but more than that he did it because he was trying to visually drive home the point that the story of the Bible is not over. Our stories are the continuation of the Bible's story.

He wanted us to understand that the Bible is God's story, that our story is God's story, that they are inextricably connected and that God's story doesn't end on the last page of our Bibles; God's story is an unending story.

This sermon, consequently, influenced the titling of my column: "Tales from the Unending Story." My stories, my reflections, my wrestling with



Photo by Behnam Norouzi/Unsplash.

scripture become part of God's unending story that is told in the Bible.

Over the last number of years, I have journeyed through the Bible; reading, reflecting, and using everyday stories from my own life to help me, and hopefully you, connect with the Bible in simple but hopefully helpful ways.

Seldom have my musings required elaborate, in-depth study of the original language, or theological research, though I love delving into those things and employing them the best I can.

No, I have tried to model the reality that each of our stories are gifts that can help us understand the stories of God's people in scripture, if only we

take the time to stop, read, reflect, mull, ponder, wrestle and creatively imagine.

Yes, the Bible is full of complex and challenging writing, but it is also, paradoxically, full of simple and understandable realities that are not beyond the average reader's grasp.

Let your own stories, and the stories of others in your community of faith, aid you as you wrestle with scripture.

The Bible may be canonized and complete, but it is not finished. The story is as unending as God, and we have been invited to be contributors in this holy epic.

This is my final "Tales from the Unending Story" column, but my journey of reading and reflecting through the scriptures is not over. It too continues past this final page.

May you, dear reader, live your life with no back page, no "The End" anywhere to be seen.

Grab some scissors if you need help remembering that.

May we live as part of the weird, wild and wonderful ongoing and unending tale of God's love.

Even after we've breathed our last, our stories continue.

May you have eyes to see and ears to hear the most wonderful story.

And may you love to tell the story of Jesus and his love using both Bible stories and your own fantastic tales. ✎

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# Speaking in tongues: 5 responses to 2 key stats

By Kevin Barkowsky

*The following is adapted from a sermon that Kevin Barkowsky, pastor of Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver, preached on January 28. Reprinted with permission.*

**Key Stat #1:** Across the world, English Mennonite churches are shrinking, and non-English Mennonite churches are growing. At Sherbrooke, our prayer is to really let it sink in what God is doing with the growth of non-English churches across the world.

It doesn't make sense anymore to have an English-only worship service in Vancouver. Yes, English will always be our common language, but it only makes sense to pour significant resources into opening up new avenues for more non-English Anabaptists to join us in worship. No matter how small Sherbrooke is, we can still do this.

**Key stat #2:** Canada is opening its doors to 1 million immigrants a year. Our prayer at Sherbrooke is to see this immigration as a work of the Holy Spirit, and that our part in his work is to become a welcome mat for newcomers to Canada.

We already provide food, clothing, household items, immigration lawyers and a loving space for community to grow every Thursday morning. A few weeks ago, we had 70 people attend. These people have lost their community and their family. However, even more than that, they have lost their spiritual family, so how could we not pour resources into helping them engage spiritually with us and worship with us and have elements of their native language and worship style woven into our church?

If the Pentecostals can put up with each other speaking in tongues and see it as the highest level of Christian worship, we Anabaptists can have brothers and sisters at our church speak and sing in their own language (tongue) and see it as the same. This is the new wave of the Holy Spirit.



Photo Terren Hurst/Unsplash.

We must make every effort to open up our worship gatherings so that Sherbrooke feels like their spiritual home. No matter how small Sherbrooke is, we can still do this.

How can other Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church B.C. churches join in these two mighty moves of the Holy Spirit?

## Responses

**Level one:** Start participating once a year in MC Canada's International Witness Sunday. Start playing videos at the beginning of your service of Mennonite worship from different countries. Start envisioning what it would look like to embrace a non-English group into your church.

**Level two:** Ask what changes you would have to make in your service so that another group would fit in? Look

around your neighbourhood. If there is a group of 10 people of another culture, start inviting them to worship with you once or twice a year and sing half of the songs in their language. Get Jeanette Hanson of MC Canada to Zoom into your service and talk about what God is doing in Anabaptist churches in the country your neighbours come from.

**Level three:** Go to the country your neighbours are from and connect with the Anabaptist churches there. Become friends with all of them. Develop a church translation team and buy a translation system. Worship with the newcomer group 10 times a year.

Find ways to partner with them in Sunday School (they will likely want English Sunday School), summer kids outreach, outreach events throughout the year, prayer nights. Make them join you but give them freedom to worship in their way. Embrace the difference as a gift from God. Let them be their own group and do their own thing. Let them take over your kitchen. Invite them to the summer camp in your region with you.

**Level four:** This is where Sherbrooke is right now. Put leaders from the newcomer group on your board. Create a team to manage and integrate the church into one. Be a welcome mat, but not a door mat. Most non-English churches across the world are more conservative theologically. You will have to make room in your theology for their theology. Keep reminding yourselves that God is doing this and your job is to respond in worship and wonder.

**Level five:** Repeat. Go out and search your neighbourhood for another language group. ☸



# Poems and paintings mark 499th anniversary

By Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent

ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

The story of Anabaptist origins came to life on Sunday, January 21, as Gareth Brandt marked the 499th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement with a presentation of art and spoken word. The event was held in a portable gallery set up at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C., where Brandt serves as an interim member of the pastoral staff.

Brandt, who taught Anabaptist history and thought at Columbia Bible College for 17 years, has always been drawn to Anabaptist history. “The one date I made my students memorize was January 21, 1525, the beginning of the Anabaptist movement,” he told the audience at the recent event.

Visitors could stroll through the gallery gazing at Brandt’s watercolour paintings of buildings and places central to 16th century Anabaptist historical events. These included the street in Zurich, Switzerland, where the Anabaptist movement began; the

church where Menno Simons preached in Pingjum, Netherlands; and the cathedral in Münster, Germany, which was the site of the disastrous Anabaptist siege and rebellion in 1534-35.

Twice during the afternoon, Brandt also gave dramatic recitations of

original poems he’d written about the historical sites depicted.

Brandt’s interest in painting, which he had pursued in young adulthood, was revived several years ago when he needed a creative medium to relieve stress.

The watercolours in the current exhibit are based on photos Brandt took on travels to

Europe. He chose watercolour as a medium because of the symbolism of water as central to believer’s baptism. “The paintings are in a simple folk art style that is symbolic of the Anabaptist/Mennonite style of simplicity and non-adornment,” he said.

The poetry and paintings will be

included in a book to be released by Masthof Press later this year.

With the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism coming next year, Brandt hopes his artwork will spur people to ask, “What is worth dying for?” and “What is worth living for?” ❧



*The Rose window in the Strasbourg Cathedral. Watercolour by Gareth Brandt. Supplied image.*



*Gareth Brandt’s painting, “Baptism by Choice,” shows the fountain from which the water for the first Anabaptist baptism was taken. Supplied image.*

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# Of rentals and relationships

Three churches speak about sharing their buildings

By Emily Summach  
Saskatchewan Correspondent

**B**ig buildings; fewer people. It's a fact that many Mennonite churches have fewer people involved in church life than they did 20 years ago. Many churches across Canada were constructed or remodeled when attendance was higher; when the church was busy with events and programming every night of the week. In the current reality of quieter schedules, some Mennonite churches have begun sharing their spaces with other congregations.

Three Mennonite Church Saskatchewan congregations—Mount Royal, Wildwood and North Star—have similar stories of how they began sharing their buildings. In each case, a leader from another congregation appeared at the church and inquired about renting the space on Sunday afternoons for worship services. In all three cases, the interested congregations were very different from their Mennonite hosts in terms of ethnicity, theology and worship style. And in all three cases, the host churches decided to give it a try.

"We said yes, really, because we didn't have a good reason to say no," said Joe Heikman, pastor of Wildwood Mennonite in Saskatoon. "When I was pastor in British Columbia, I worked in a multi-congregational building, with lots of positive relationships and good shared experiences, and I liked the idea of something similar growing here."

Even though the renting congregations were technically "just renters" in the three cases, there was a desire on all sides to build connection and relationships, for the arrangement to be about more than

just a line in the budget or a slot on the weekly schedule. This desire became both a source of joy and a point of friction.

All three churches experimented with an occasional joint worship service or a shared meal, with varying degrees of

supplies not properly put away or messes left behind. Expectations had to be reiterated and rental agreements renegotiated. "We've decided to just say, 'it happens,' everyone is trying their best," said Andres. Martens Bartel echoed that sentiment:

"It's been good for us to be forced to bend a bit, and as the host church, I think you have to be gentle in how you approach building community, because there's a power differential."

For Wildwood, the differences in values and theological stances

became too great. Despite their best efforts, in 2022, Wildwood ended their rental arrangement with their tenants—a Filipino group—after six years.

The rental had created increased workload for church staff over the years, and the two congregations' approaches to "being the church" proved too different, explained Heikman. "We share our building with lots of different groups, and many of those aren't ministry groups. Our council came to a time of re-visioning and asking what it looked like to do God's work in the world, to help us determine our priorities in who uses this space. Out of that conversation we discerned that we didn't share the same values [with the renting congregation]; we weren't doing the same work, and, in some cases, it was actually oppositional."

Despite the difficult decision, Heikman said the church was grateful for what they had learned through the experience. "We're still very open to multicultural, multi-denominational ways of being the church; it's just that this one didn't blossom like we had hoped." ❧



North Star Mennonite Church and Prairie Light Christian Fellowship worship in the same building in Drake, Saskatchewan. Supplied photos.

success. North Star Mennonite Church in Drake has built a mutual relationship with their renters, Prairie Light Christian Fellowship, a Filipino Pentecostal church plant. "We've both tried . . . to be in community with each other and navigate those cultural differences," said Lisa Martens Bartel, pastor of North Star. "The Filipino population here is large enough that they could just stick to themselves, but they've really tried to be together with us and vice-versa."

The two congregations hold quarterly joint worship services and summer potluck picnics.

Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon has changed their Sunday worship service time so that the two congregations would be coming and going at the same time, according to Len Andres, the church's administration minister. "We're not in this to make money. We're both in the same business. We're in the same family," he said.

In most cases, the tensions that arose from sharing a space were things one might expect: doors left unlocked,





FOCUS ON

# CAMPS

*Camp Valaqua. Photo by Jon Olfert.*



Church camps offer the vital ministry of fun, fresh air and nurturing young people's faith. Each February, we highlight their work. As you read this section, consider how you can get involved.

## In but not of

By Nadya Langelotz, Camps with Meaning

While I'm new in my role as associate program director for Camps with Meaning, I am not new to this place, or rather, these places. What has always shimmered at camp is the particularly thin space they are between us and God.

The two scriptures that ring in my ears when I think about camp work are John 17: 16,18: "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. . . As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world;" and Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind."

Camp, for me, and from what I see, is a recognition of the world—hard and good and mysterious—and at the same time, an acknowledgment that we are called to live differently within it. This is what kept me coming back to camp.

Here are a few examples of the way Camps with Meaning fosters this thin space.

Retreat: Contrary to the way of our



Campers and staff run with laughter during recreation time. Photo by Darryl Neustaedter Barg.

world, camp exists without our constant communication lines. Campers and staff alike leave their phones at home, or in a designated area, and the only life is face-to-face, real-time relationship. It's simple, but it's profound.

Accountability: While camp is for fun and bountiful laughter, there is also a sense that the community relies on one another. The silliness of each day is possible because we know the balance

between stepping in and letting go. We are bound to each other, and it keeps camp safe and intentional. It creates a rich ground for vulnerability and trust.

Resilience: In our regular lives, we are not always asked to do new things each day, but at camp we are. Try the zipline? Pray out loud? Carry a canoe over our heads? Run around in the dark with the sounds of unknown animals around? Post COVID, our capacity for this newness, and courage to step into it, has somewhat diminished,

but camp works hard to be a place where this kind of resilience is encouraged and supported.

Especially after the tumult of the last few years, camp is poignant in the way it remains attuned to the needs of campers and staff and invites them into being transformed by the love of God, recognizing this as a powerful necessity for living well in the world with each other—in the world, but not of it. ❧

Photos by Andrew Neel/Pexels (left), Barna Kovacs/Unsplash



# Journey to unity

By Brent Musser, Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp



Campers at Hidden Acres. Photo by Ben Watson.

**H**idden Acres' "Narnia Closet" carries the adventurous explorer on an unexpected journey. What begins as an innocent cleaning closet winds through a maze of stored items, a section so low you must crawl and finally a floor covered with basketballs, before exiting into the ping pong room on the other side of Stonehouse. Just as the "Narnia Closet" leads a person to an unexpected place, camp can lead children (and adults) into unexpected encounters with God.

One place this happens is in nature.

exist *in* nature; our whole existence is bound up together *with* nature. It is easy to overlook this in our daily lives. I climb that tree. I pick that flower. I watch that squirrel. But the more time I spend paying attention to God's creation, the more difficult I find it to maintain these rigid distinctions. My life is woven together with the life of the tree, the flower and the squirrel.

One way of imagining this nature, in which we are all mixed up, is as the outpouring of Godself in a tactile,

God's creation surrounds us with structure and nourishment, providing a place to be and live. It also flows within our bodies: in our blood, through the nervous system, in our lungs and muscles and bones. It provides the stuff of our very being and life.

We do not just

perceptible, beautiful world. As young people, we learn the necessary skill of differentiating our "selves" from the things around us, navigating our way in God's world. But eventually we need a pathway to appreciate the ways we are connected to God and God's creation.

This is part of what camps like Hidden Acres offer children and adults: an opportunity to touch, smell, see, hear and experience nature. A family of screech owls perched on a branch during a nighttime walk might spark your curiosity. Perhaps the striking orange-red of a newt meandering along the mossy rocks will draw you in. Or maybe the towering yellow birch tree reaching for the sunlight in the forest will cause you to look beyond your normal horizons.

These encounters can lead us to see our "selves" not only in the world but as inextricably knit together with it. In that revelation we might begin a life-long journey of appreciating nature in all its complicated wonder, learning to respect the world and discovering God where we least expected. ❧



Photos by (left to right) Joshua J. Cotten/Unsplash, Anton Darius/Unsplash, Tyler Donaghy/Unsplash





Ontario Mennonite Music Camp. Supplied photo.

# OMMC grows musical leaders

Conrad Grebel University College

**O**ntario Mennonite Music Camp (OMMC) at Conrad Grebel University College is a small camp with a big impact. With a focus on communal music-making, campers receive exceptional instruction in voice or a variety of instruments, learn new musical techniques and explore church music and worship. Campers stretch their comfort zone and learn to be leaders in a congregational setting, starting with a daily chapel service.

During this two-week overnight camp in Waterloo, Ontario, campers prepare a church service, with readings and music, and then share it with a local congregation.

“We chose OMMC after hearing about the program from our pastor,” explained the Do family, who attend Grace Lao Mennonite Church in Kitchener. “What attracted us to the program was the variety of instruments and musical

ensembles.” Their son Daniel attended for the first time in 2023. “I knew that Daniel would be a good fit because he’s able to play multiple instruments, and he always wanted to join a band. What he enjoyed most at OMMC was the delicious food, fun activities, and the people. Everyone was so welcoming and energetic. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate last year and looking forward to it again this year.”

OMMC campers are a diverse group, with youth who have finished grade 6-12, coming from across Ontario and beyond, bringing a wide range of skill and interests. Some campers play many instruments with classical training; some campers prefer to play by ear and enjoy improvising; while some campers focus on vocal music and thrive in a choral environment. Whatever their musical background, they are welcome at OMMC. Bound by a mutual love of music, campers

meld together and become a community.

In addition to the core musical experience of small ensembles, choir and workshops, OMMC includes many of the usual camp activities, such as campfires, recreation games, silly theme days and tasty Grebel meals. Camp culminates in a final concert for family members and the community, which includes a choreographed and costumed musical, plus numerous ensemble and small group pieces by every camper.

OMMC’s dedicated staff return year after year and delight in seeing the growth of campers over the years, as campers progress from shy participants to talented performers, and then to confident role models in the Leader-In-Training program. OMMC takes place this year from August 11 to 23. Register on the Grebel website. Subsidies are available for campers who demonstrate financial need. ☞



Photos by OMMC staff (left) and Margaret Gissing



# Connected at camp

Silver Lake Mennonite Camp

Cam was working as a kitchen assistant at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp at the beginning of July 2022. It was his first-ever week on staff. He'd had a lot of experience cooking, but it doesn't take long for one to understand that the Silver Lake kitchen is a different beast.

Enter JP and Annika, third- and fourth-year staff members at the time, who grabbed aprons from the hooks, ready to preheat the ovens and give Cam a warm welcome. They had been counsellors back when Cam was still a camper, but they struck up conversations with him like he'd been on staff for years. Suddenly the kitchen wasn't so intimidating anymore.

"Immediately it was just, 'Oh, we both share a connection to the space,'" Cam said. "We're both here to have fun. We're both here for the kids. We're all here for the kids. We're all here to make delicious food. It just clicked."

Of the thousands who attend Silver Lake every year, no two people are ever the same. But there is one thing every person there has in common: they're connected to camp.

"Anybody that has a connection to Silver Lake, you can form a connection with them very easily," said Cam.

That simple, shared trait has built a sense of community strong enough to keep campers, staff and volunteers

returning every year.

The concept is not hard for new Silver Lakers to pick up on.

Nick, another staff member, was sitting with his young cabin in the front row of the last campfire this past August. Every final campfire is led by the fifth-year staff, most of whom don't return the following summer. Nick's campers had only been at Silver Lake for a week, but they already understood the importance of the night and the community the fifth years had built throughout their time on staff. Those campers were emotional, perhaps more so than the fifth years themselves.

"It was pretty special," Nick said of his campers.

Camp activities allow everyone to build and share experiences of community. Staff members Seth and Max are from Ghana and Ukraine, and Cam found common ground with them on the Silver Lake basketball court.

"Camp is just a space where you can very easily break the ice," he said. "You can very easily connect with people and find people that you want to connect with outside of camp."

With many common, densely populated areas across the property, community at



Campers bond in the field at Silver Lake in Sauble Beach, Ontario. Photo by Jessa Braun.

camp is inevitable, and something that many never take for granted.

"You just kind of have to appreciate the space for offering those things, for making it so easy in some ways," said Cam. "I think [community] is one of the things that always sticks out to me in the summer. I go, 'This is the best. I wish this could happen all the time.'" ❧



Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. Supplied photos..





Photos (left to right): Climbing at Valaqua. Archery at Valaqua. Supplied photos. Outdoor activities. Photo by Tsunami Green/Unsplash.

# Learning why

## Camp Valaqua

**W**hen campers first roll down our narrow road into the tall, tall trees, they are usually thinking about themselves: Will I have fun? Will I be scared?

When they return, they often begin to think about the people that surround them: Who will be my counsellor? Will the kids in my cabin be nice?

When they grow into staff roles, they begin thinking about the groups of kids they are looking after: Will my cabin group get along? Will they have fun?

When, eventually, they step into leadership roles they begin thinking about a portion of the camp community: Will the camp wide games work? Will the counsellor-in-training group learn from this devotional? Will this be the right amount of challenge for this out-trip group?

When, even more eventually, they step

into a director role, they begin reflecting on the church more broadly: Will these lessons go home with them? Will the staffers take on leadership in their churches?

I have long called this process “turning the corner,” and I look for it each summer in our young staff—that moment when they level up and look at camp from another perspective. It’s the difference of knowing how to do a J-stroke with a canoe paddle and *why* we teach J-strokes at camp. Every camper and staffer go through a period of how. How do I hit the target at archery? How do I get to the top of the climbing wall? But figuring out the why is deeper work.

Learning why is the big project. Fun is always part of the answer, but just the first part. Fun is the medium through which we steward growth.

We grow in all sorts of ways at camp.

Sometimes we grow physically, reaching new heights on the climbing wall or finally hitting the bullseye at the archery range. Sometimes we grow spiritually, getting a glimpse of God’s love in the world. Sometimes we grow together, sharing a moment in the thin place we create as we worship together around a campfire. At camp, we grow in self-understanding, in relation to one another and in relationship with God. Self, Community, God.

We hope you will come and learn why with us.

Whether you are learning how to hold the canoe paddle or contemplating the meaning of a climbing wall, come grow with us. Join a summer camp community for a week, for a summer, or for life. We are always welcoming new campers, staff and volunteers. ☘



Photos by (left to right): Joyful/Unsplash and Leon Contreras/Unsplash.



## CM TRANSITIONS



**Josh Willms** began as youth director at Mennonite Church B.C. on January 22. In this new, half-time role, Willms will work in close partnership with area church leadership and youth pastors to foster ministry in the next generation. He will also support MC B.C.'s efforts to cultivate an Anabaptist vision of faith in young people. "I am very excited about this new opportunity, and I am encouraged that MC B.C. is making next-generation ministry a priority by creating this paid position," Willms said. He continues as half-time youth pastor at Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, where he has served since 2014.

—By Amy Rinner Waddell



**Steve A. Brown** took over as president of Columbia Bible College (CBC) in Abbotsford, B.C., at the beginning of February. Brown holds a doctor of ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and previously worked with Arrow Leadership, an international organization that offers programs and resources for Christian leaders. He served with

the organization for 19 years, including 12 as president. Brown is also a speaker, leadership coach and the author of three books. "CBC has an incredibly strategic and important contribution to make in shaping and developing the next generation of leaders and everyday disciples to impact the church, our country and the world," Brown said in a release. He replaces J. Bryan Born, who served as CBC's president for 11 years.



**Darcy Bults** will be the next principal at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington, Ontario, starting this September. Bults has taught at UMEI for more than 12 years and served as vice principal for the past two years. In a news release, he expressed his commitment to creating an environment that challenges students academically. "On top of that, I'm committed to foster an environment that challenges our students to become doers of the Word, to welcome one another and to live in harmony, all for the glory of God," he said. Bults succeeds Sonya Bedal, who will retire in June after 14 years as principal.

Register online at [campswithmeaning.org](http://campswithmeaning.org)

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## CM ART BRIEF

### New book revives 'an almost-forgotten voice'

An unusual German-language poet from the Baroque period meets 21<sup>st</sup> century poet-translators in *Wonder-Work: Selected Sonnets of Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg*. Published by CMU Press, the book collects 65 sonnets from Greiffenberg's best-known work. Canadian poets Joanne Epp, Sally Ito and Sarah Klassen translated the devotional poems. "Although [Greiffenberg] is still recognized as an important voice in German literature, modern editions of her work are scarce. Our collaborative translation ... is an effort to revive an almost-forgotten voice, and to bring more of her poetry to English-speaking readers."

Source: CMU Press

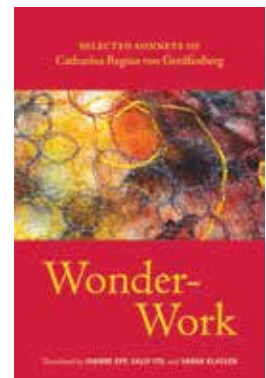




Photo by Pastor Sutchā Thipphawan.

### New Bible school opens in Thailand

The Friends of Grace Bible School opened in January 2024 in the Issan area of Thailand. This school, supported by Mennonite Church Canada, will hold classes in the Friends of Grace Roi Et church. A Bible school had long been a dream for Friends of Grace, a network of about 100 worshipping groups in Laos and Thailand.

Last fall, 20 pastors and lay leaders in Laos and Thailand started studying in Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary’s Journey program. This spurred on their dream of establishing a school.

MC Canada has walked alongside Friends of Grace and has been asked to provide teachers to supplement the Thai teachers for intensive courses in the new school.

Pastor Khampane, principal of the Bible school and President of Friends of Grace, will be visiting Canada together with his wife, Pastor Thipphawan, and International Witness workers Tom and Christine Poovong in April 2024.

Source: Mennonite Church Canada

### River East Church seeks resting place

On January 20, the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba (MBCM) voted to expel River East Church unless the Winnipeg congregation “returns to an active embrace of MBCM member church expectations by May 30, 2024.”

The point of contention is that River East Church invites everyone, including LGBTQ+ people, to join in the journey of discipleship. The implications of this invitation go farther than MBCM deems acceptable.

River East is seeking affiliate status with Mennonite Church Manitoba as a “resting place” during this time of healing, transition and discernment.

MC Manitoba will decide on River East’s request at its March 2 annual meeting.

### Government delays MAID expansion

The federal government will delay plans to offer medical assistance in dying (MAID) to people whose only medical condition is mental illness. Health minister Mark Holland says Canada’s medical system is not yet ready, echoing the conclusions of

the parliamentary committee convened to verify that there could be “a safe and adequate application” of the planned expansion.

The expanded criteria were set to come into force in March. At press time, the government had introduced a bill that would delay that decision until 2027.

The committee report said, “Many practitioners remain concerned, particularly regarding the challenges of assessing irremediability.”

Sources: Globe and Mail, CBC

### Communitas turns 50

Communitas Supportive Care Society, based in Abbotsford, B.C., celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Since starting as a small grassroots initiative, partnered with Mennonite Central Committee, in 1974, Communitas has grown into an organization that serves people living with developmental disabilities, mental health challenges and acquired brain injury in Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island. Open houses and celebration events are planned throughout the year. For more, see [CommunitasCare.com](http://CommunitasCare.com).

### Rally and disruption in Abbotsford

On January 20, 25 Mennonites joined a rally in Abbotsford, B.C., to call on the Canadian government to support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Organized by Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights Fraser Valley, the gathering in the city’s Jubilee Park included representatives of the Palestinian immigrant community, Mennonite Church B.C.’s Palestine Israel-Network and the United Church. Two counter-protesters claiming Mennonite heritage, and representing the international Christian Embassy Jerusalem, were also present in the park.

Source: MCBC PIN





Khan (Isaac) Gatkuoth (left) at Meserete Kristos Seminary. Photo by Joanne De Jong.

# Students dream of planting churches in South Sudan

By Joanne De Jong, Mennonite Church Canada International Witness

A recent article in *Anabaptist World* stated there were no known Anabaptist congregations in South Sudan. Praise God that that is no longer the case.

Gatjiak (Simon) Tongyik, one of the new students sponsored by Mennonite Church Alberta to attend the Meserete Kristos Seminary in Bishoftu, Ethiopia, says there is now one small Mennonite church in his village in Longchuok County Centre Mathiang. He hopes this is just the beginning of church planting efforts.

“There are eight South Sudanese Mennonite churches inside the refugee camps in Ethiopia, and as soon as peace comes to South Sudan, we expect each church will move back to their hometowns,” he said. “And even if there is no peace upon my graduation, I plan to be

a missionary and plant more Mennonite churches.”

Last year, the Edmonton South Sudanese Mennonite church requested help for their brothers and sisters in the refugee camps and surrounding areas in the Gambella region in West Ethiopia. MC Alberta responded by agreeing to their request to sponsor two or three South Sudanese students for a four-year theological degree program at the Meserete Kristos Seminary.

Two students were chosen and sent, but only one was able to return in fall 2023. The returning student was Khan (Isaac) Gatkuoth, an evangelist and father of three small children. This year, MC Alberta offered language and study support, which Gatkuoth was excited

to receive.

He is currently a leader at Lare Mennonite Church in Gambella, but hopes to return one day to South Sudan as a pastor.

The new student sponsored by MC Alberta was already a young leader in the regional South Sudanese Mennonite church in Ethiopia. He was chosen for sponsorship by the local church. Gatjik (Simon) Tongyik is a father of five, with children ranging in age from 3 to 13. His family lives in South Sudan on a small farm.

The students’ initial anxiety about how they would be treated by the Ethiopian students was quickly put to rest. “Everyone has received us. They help you even when they can’t understand you,”



Gatkuoth said.

South Sudan is one of the least developed countries in the world, with a literacy rate of only 35 percent. South Sudan has not known peace since it became an independent country in 2011. Endless war and famine create a sense of hopelessness, but Tongyik and Gatkuoth have great hope for the future. There is very little Anabaptist presence, and these students are the first South Sudanese students to attend the seminary.

“I will one day help the people with teaching,” says Tongyik. “God is good!”

In addition to being excited to plant Mennonite churches in South Sudan, Tongyik and Gatkuoth enthusiastically talked about opening a Mennonite church office in South Sudan and maybe a small school where they could offer a Bible diploma for local people. “We also want to care for the many orphans and widows,” said Tongyik.

Receiving a theological education

has allowed these students to imagine a beautiful future in their war-torn communities. ❧

*Joanne De Jong, and her husband Werner, of Edmonton, work at the Meserete Kristos Seminary as MC Canada International Witness workers. This article first appeared as the “Menno Minute” in the January 17 MCA Communiqué.*

*Reprinted with permission.*



Gatjiak (Simon) Tongyik, Werner & Joanne De Jong, and Khan (Isaac) Gatkuoth. Photo courtesy of Joanne De Jong.





## CALENDAR

### British Columbia

**Feb. 29:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at Fraserview MB church, Richmond. Information at [www.mcc.org/richmond](http://www.mcc.org/richmond).

**March 1:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at Sardis Community Church, Chilliwack. Information at [www.mcc.org/chilliwack](http://www.mcc.org/chilliwack).

**March 2:** MCC fundraiser

dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at South Abbotsford Church, Abbotsford. Information at [www.mcc.org/abbotsford](http://www.mcc.org/abbotsford).

**March 7:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at South Langley Church, Langley at 6 p.m. Information at [www.mcc.org/langley](http://www.mcc.org/langley).

**March 8:** MCC fundraiser dinner, "Vulnerable and Fierce" at Willow Park Church, Kelowna at 6 p.m. Information

at [www.mcc.org/kelowna](http://www.mcc.org/kelowna).

**Mar. 9 and 10:** LENTEN VESPERS with Abendmusik Choir. Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, 3386 Mount Lehman Road, Abbotsford (9). 7:30 p.m. at St. Philip's Anglican Church; and 3737 West 27th Avenue, Vancouver (10). Donations go to Menno Hall project at UBC ([pcda.bc.ca](http://pcda.bc.ca)).

**March 11-14:** Mennonite Camping Association is hosting its bi-national

gathering at Camp Squeah in Hope. Information at [mennonitecamping.org/mca-bi-national-gathering](http://mennonitecamping.org/mca-bi-national-gathering).

**April 19-21:** 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 8-9:** MC Saskatchewan Annual Delegate Sessions at North Star Mennonite Church, Drake. Theme: Rekindling Relationships.

### Manitoba

**March 1-2:** MC Manitoba Annual Gathering at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler. Worship and celebration (1) deliberations (2).

**March 8:** Discover Day at CMU for prospective students, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. or 1-3 p.m. Visit [www.cmu.ca/discover-days](http://www.cmu.ca/discover-days) to register.

**March 17:** Mennonite Community Orchestra concert for children and adults including "Peter and the Wolf" at Lutheran Church of the Cross, 560 Arlington St., Winnipeg at 3 p.m. For more information visit [www.mennonitecommunityorchestra.ca](http://www.mennonitecommunityorchestra.ca).

**March 29:** Soli Deo Gloria Choir presents "Lobgesang," a symphony-cantata by Mendelssohn on Good Friday at 7 p.m. at First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

**May 4-5:** Faith and Life Choirs Spring Concerts. First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg (4); Morden Mennonite Church, Morden (5).

**May 10-11:** Voices Together in Worship, a gathering to resource worship planners, pastors and musicians, hosted by MC Manitoba, sponsored by CMU. More information at [www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events](http://www.mennochurch.mb.ca/events).

**June 21-23:** 75...Already?! Save the date for Camp Assiniboia's 75th Anniversary. More details to come.

### Ontario

**Feb. 29:** Sawatzky Lecture at Conrad Grebel, "Is Reconciliation Possible" with Dr. Ray Aldred,

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## AN UNFORGETTABLE SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE

OMMC is an exciting summer opportunity for youth who have completed Gr 6-12, pairing exceptional musical instruction with traditional camp activities!

[grebel.ca/ommc](http://grebel.ca/ommc)



director of Indigenous Studies at Vancouver School of Theology, 7:30 a.m. More information at [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events).

**March 7:** MCEC Spiritual Retreat Day for Pastors.

**March 9:** Menno Singers concert, "At the Foot of the Cross" at 7:30 p.m. at Trillium Lutheran church, Waterloo. Cellist Ben Bolt-Martin and Menno Youth Ensemble join Menno Singers. Information at <https://mennosingers.com>.

**March 16:** Intercultural, intergenerational volleyball tournament at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Register at [mcec.ca/events](http://mcec.ca/events).

**March 21:** Bechtel Lecture at Conrad Grebel with John P. Eicher, "A Plot-Driven People: Mennonite Narratives in the Age of Nationalism (1870-1945)" at 7:30 p.m., focusing on two Mennonite groups who settled in Paraguay with very different national and religious identities. More information at [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events).

**March 22:** Living History of Low German-Speaking Mennonites at Aylmer-Malahide Museum and Archives in Aylmer at 8:30 a.m. or 12:45 p.m. Register at [mcc.org/events](http://mcc.org/events).

**Apr. 26-27:** MCEC Annual Church Gathering, "Transformed, Inspired, Called," at UMEI Christian High School in Leamington.

**June 21:** Aging and Spirituality seminar at Conrad Grebel.

More information at [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events).

**Aug. 11-23:** Ontario Mennonite Music Camp at Conrad Grebel.

A two-week overnight camp for students who have finished grades 6-12 to enrich faith, musicality and leadership. Register before April 15 for discounted price at [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/ontario-mennonite-music-camp](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/ontario-mennonite-music-camp).

### Online

**March 7, 14, 21, April 4, 11:** MC Canada hosts an online study with Jonathan Neufeld and Sandy Plett of *So We And Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis*, by Sarah Augustine and Sheri Hostetler. 7 p.m. CDT (8 ET / 6 MT / 5 PST). Registration deadline: March 3, 2024.

**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 salary ranges from 70K-95K (plus benefits and pension) for candidates with an MDiv and increases for those with previous pastoral experience.

**The position is open until filled.** For the full job description, visit [hmc.on.ca](http://hmc.on.ca). 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.



Employment Opportunity  
**Lead Pastor**

Emmanuel Mennonite Church is seeking a lead pastor to shepherd our congregation as we seek to grow and bless our community in Abbotsford, BC. Our church is grounded in an Anabaptist understanding of faith in Jesus Christ, expressed in discipleship, community, and peace witness. We have an active attendance on Sunday mornings of just over one hundred worshippers, from young families to wise elders. The lead pastor will work together with our staff team, supported by strong lay leadership, to initiate, animate, and enable a proactive plan for church development and growth. Visit our website to see a full job description and to learn more about who we are: [emmanuelmennonite.com](http://emmanuelmennonite.com).

Email [search@emmanuelmennonite.com](mailto:search@emmanuelmennonite.com) for more information or to send your resume.

### Upcoming Advertising Dates

Issue Date	Ads Due
February 23	Feb. 14
March 8	Feb. 28
March 29	Mar. 20

### Advertising Information

Contact Ben Thiessen  
1-800-378-2524 ext. 3  
[advert@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:advert@canadianmennonite.org)



I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.  
... and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.

John 6:35, 37



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*Photo by Lorie Shaull/flickr.*