

## A struggle for blessing

One woman, four countries and a winding path to peace, pg. 19



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# Countering intuition

WILL BRAUN

editor@canadianmennonite.org



I'm not certain this is a good idea, but I'm going to tell you about four things in this issue of the magazine that don't sit well with me. If that seems counterintuitive to you, it does to me too. Some intuitions are worth countering.

I'll circle round at the end to dial back the tension.

First, I feel uneasy about articles written in a way that might sideline readers who do not share the "progressive" assumptions of the writer. Josiah Neufeld's feature (starting on page 6) feels too much like this to me, though he does mention the Wet'suwet'en leaders who want activists to butt out. Writing that overlooks non-"progressive" readers is not uncommon in these pages. It feels like a missed opportunity.

Second, in the Readers Write section, Harold Jantz, a Mennonite Brethren elder, questions the value of focusing on the Doctrine of Discovery as a road to improved Indigenous futures (page 9). He says immigration to this continent would have happened even without any doctrine per se, and technological advantage rather than a sense of superiority allowed settlers to "flourish." I don't argue these points but I feel his argument avoids the ways in which the doctrine impedes change.

Thirdly, in the From Our Leaders column (page 11), William Loewen writes about how he moved from thinking that neutrality was godly to believing that "God hates neutrality." He says, "Jesus chooses sides."

Though I've spent much of my life

taking sides, I resist the urge to be that categorical. I worry about the ways I see Mennonites drifting in that direction. Many of the best change makers did something more nuanced than declaring a side. Jesus chooses sides but he also sides with a tax collector and a Roman centurion.

Finally, Mennonite Church Canada's announcement of funding for energy efficiency improvements to church buildings (page 30) leaves me wondering if we should celebrate this initiative or lament that it has taken us 15 to 20 years to catch up with government and utility actions. And I must acknowledge those among us who do not believe climate should be a church priority, like the respected church member who recently sent me an article critiquing Al Gore's climate work.

Parenthetically, I also struggle with the notion of buying french fries and tea balls to address global hunger (see the relief sale news item on page 23), but I surely would have purchased a tea ball or two if I had been at the sale so I'll let that one rest.

Ironically—here's the turn—the items that do not sit well with me also contain some of the nuggets I value most. Neufeld's finely crafted piece provides an intimate glimpse of his quest for meaning in a world that seems headed off the rails.

"I want to know how to pray," he writes. The images he then weaves—from a front-yard family ritual to a pipeline hymn based on the Song of Mary—paint a picture of spirit.

Jantz's letter raises important, though rarely mentioned, questions about the

role of European/Western technology in cross-cultural interactions. Western tech has both overpowered and seduced people around the world, past and present, Mennonites included. He also implicitly challenges us to not wallow abstractly in our shortcomings when we might do as well to support on-the-ground Indigenous initiatives.

As for Loewen's piece about the idol of neutrality, it forces me to think further about how to stand with the oppressed while still loving enemies, seeking the light of Christ in all and maintaining relationships with a broad range of people. I appreciate Loewen writing about his own journey with vulnerability and specificity.

Finally, in the article about the MC Canada energy efficiency grants, MC Canada's Doug Klassen says that the climate crisis is at its heart a matter of spirit. I'm glad when the church can bring perspectives distinct from secular thinkers. Then Klassen challenges churches to take seriously the views of youth when making decisions about climate response. My kids would agree.

My intuition is to turn away from people who say things that bug me. My intuition is to lump people into simple categories of good and bad, but rose bushes have thorns, the rainbow follows the storm and the body has many parts.

So grab a tea ball and read on.

## Awards

Is it counter-Mennonite to mention awards we have won? What if we just mention them near the back of the magazine? See page 29. ☘



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PHOTO COURTESY OF ANITA SHEVCHUK

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## The Pope and the purse dog

Pope Francis told an Italian crowd in May that in some families pets are replacing children. He told of a woman who opened her bag and asked him to “bless her baby.” The Pope was not impressed to see a dog in the bag.

“I lost my patience and told her off,” he recounted. “There are many children who are hungry and you bring me a dog?”

Source: BBC News



PHOTO BY SIMON MORRIS, FLICKR

## Spiritual care afloat

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. Navy is looking to increase the size of its Chaplain Corps, but it can't find the chaplains. According to Rear Admiral Gregory N. Todd, chief of Navy Chaplains, the Navy needs 70 new chaplains this year but has only found 18.

“I am appealing to America's religious organizations and their leaders,” he said, “to prioritize ministry to the Americans who have chosen to serve our nation.”

Source: Religion News Service



PHOTO: U.S. NAVY/JACKSON ADKINS

## Faith-friendliest workplace

Intel has been named the most faith-friendly workplace in America. For its rankings, the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation used measures such as whether companies sponsor faith-based employee resource groups, whether religion is clearly addressed in diversity training and whether companies match employee donations to religious charities.

Other big names in the top 10 include PayPal, Dell, Google and Ford.

Source: NPR



## 50 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

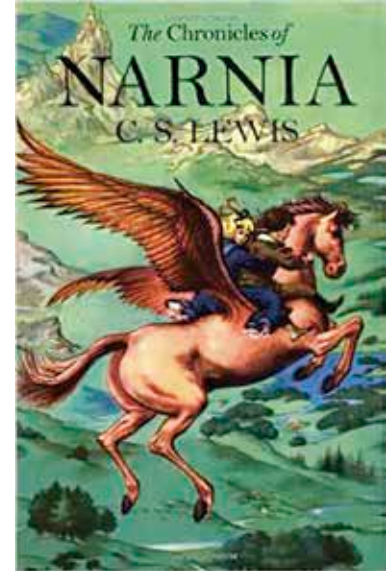
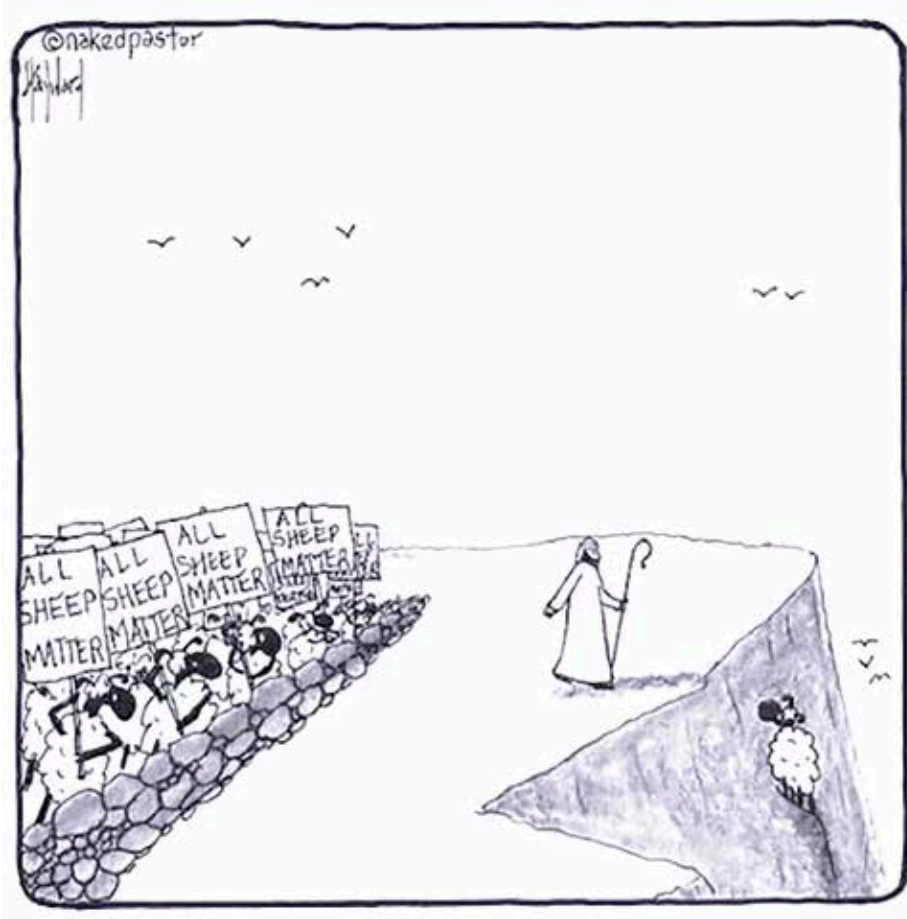
### Will grant exemption

Ottawa, Ont.-A bill which would allow exemptions from the Canada Pension Plan to such groups as Mennonites and Hutterites was given first reading in the Commons Monday, June 4.

The bill would allow exemptions, retroactive to January 1, 1972, to religious groups that were in existence before January 1, 1966, when collections under the plan began.

The Welfare minister would need to be satisfied that the teachings and convictions of the group indeed opposed public or private insurance and that dependents were supported by the group.

*Mennonite Reporter*, June 11, 1973



**Narnia makes the BBC list**  
*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* hit number 7 on the BBC's recent list of the "100 Greatest Children's Books." Written by C.S. Lewis in 1949, it is the first book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series highly popular with Christians and considered to contain biblical teachings.

At the top of the BBC list are *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Pippi Longstocking*.

Soure: BBC

**A moment from yesterday**



Menno House was formed by a group of young Mennonite students and recent graduates living in Toronto in 1956. The aim was to provide support and community to Mennonite students in the city. The group became involved in youth leadership at Toronto United Mennonite Church. Young Mennonite women attended events, though the residence remained open only to men. One resident estimated that "hundreds of people" lived at Menno House during its lifetime; in addition to the core group, some came for short-term courses or the MCC "Students-in-Industry" summer work-study program.

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing

Photo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario



## FEATURE



# In the current of wavering defiance

By Josiah Neufeld

FLICKR PHOTO BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

I want to know how to pray. It's December 2021. Advent. A season of waiting. Everything is waiting. Waiting for the pandemic to be over. Waiting for our leaders to start acting like we're in a climate emergency. Waiting for our hemisphere to tilt back into the light. We are hunkered down for our second COVID Christmas, separated from what we need most: each other.

Meanwhile, in British Columbia, the city of Abbotsford is under water. The town of Merritt has been evacuated. Fifteen thousand people across British Columbia have fled their homes. 628,000 chickens have drowned. 420 dairy cows and 12,000 pigs are dead. One hundred and ten beehives are swamped. Mere months ago a heat wave killed more than 600 humans and cooked a billion sea creatures. Then came the wildfires that incinerated towns and turned forests into thickets of blackened pencils and baked spongy soils into hardened surfaces that now funnel the rain in torrents.

Heat, fire and flood. Climate calamities come in threes now. And still our leaders bicker over diluted promises,

unlikely to be kept and wholly inadequate for the emergency at hand. And still our government finds the resources to send a plane full of RCMP to invade Wet'suwet'en territory and arrest land defenders blocking a fossil fuel pipeline being built across their sovereign territory.

Earlier in the year I travelled to Wet'suwet'en territory to lend my support to the pipeline resisters. I chopped wood, washed dishes, and listened to Wet'suwet'en elders talk about their spiritual relationship with the land. Now I'm watching news footage of RCMP in battle gear forcing unarmed Wet'suwet'en women off their land at gunpoint. I join a handful of friends who carry banners to the RCMP headquarters in Winnipeg. We block traffic for an hour and a half in a bitter wind. "Indigenous sovereignty is climate action," our banners declare. "RCMP off the Yintah." Truckers curse us. A bus driver mutters to his passengers that he wishes he could run us down, his words later reported to me by a friend who happened to be on the bus.

Back at home I warm up with a bowl of soup. I read an

op-ed in the *National Post* by a group of Wet'suwet'en people who disagree with the land defenders. "Militant actions" are not the Wet'suwet'en way, they say. They want outsiders like me to stay out of their affairs. Suddenly my energy is gone. I'm deflated, like an inner tube gone slack, floored by a wave of doubt. If I can have only one thing, I want it to be the assurance that I am doing the right thing. If the world crumbles, I want to know that at least I did what I was called to do. Now, even that small certainty seems out of reach.

I need a light, something to guide me. I ask my spiritual director for a practice or a teaching. Something to help me when despair washes over me at unexpected moments. Look for Spirit, she reminds me. "There's a mystery bigger than we can know with our human senses. You're part of that mystery, I fully believe that." She tells

me to walk in the forest. Read a poem. Light a candle. Keep trying. It takes work. There are no shortcuts.

My partner, Mona, and I hang a star in our window. We tramp a spiral in the snow in our front yard and walk the labyrinth with our children, placing candles in jars on stumps as we sing: "Hope before us, hope behind us, hope under our feet." Our neighbour comes out to smoke on his front porch and watches our ritual with puzzled amusement. "I know you got your whole environmental thing going on," he says, leaning over the fence. "You should try sprinkling diesel fuel around your foundation. Keeps the mice from getting in. Old farm trick."

We go cross-country skiing in the forest. Our daughter cries because her hands are cold, and I offer her pieces of gingerbread to keep her moving until she warms up. I watch her struggle up a

hill between shaggy spruces, her snowsuited legs soldiering on. The sun lays bars of smoke blue and lemon yellow across our path. My chest hurts with love for her and for the bewitching, fragile world she inhabits. We're still here, I tell myself. We're alive. The earth is alive. I cannot let myself forget it. Hope before us, hope behind us, hope under our feet.

I watch a video on YouTube, footage from an event livestreamed almost two years ago, on February 4, 2019. Four Catholic activists trudge through knee-deep snow toward a fenced-in valve shut-off site along the Line 3 pipeline that runs parallel to the highway about 80 kilometres west of Duluth. They carry a pair of bolt cutters and an orange Home Depot bucket full of rosaries, prayer flags, tobacco ties, and other sacred objects people have sent them from all over the country.



They snip the padlock on the fence, enter the valve site, and attempt to shut off the flow of oil, but they are missing the right size of Allen wrench to turn a screw that will give them access to the valve. They try to fashion a tool from a tiny metal crucifix, asking Christ for forgiveness as they remove his tiny suffering body from the metal cross. They hang rosaries on the fence and on the pipe itself. They call on saints to help them, saints who also broke the law for the greater good: Franz Jägerstätter, executed in 1943 for refusing to join the Nazi army, and Philip Berrigan, arrested more than one hundred times for acts of civil disobedience protesting nuclear weapons.

As I watch these four strangers fumble with inadequate tools and faltering faith, something ignites in me. These disobedient saints are swimming in a current I cannot see but can surely feel. Their wavering voices join together in a hymn. It's a song I've heard before but only in church. Here at the scene of a crime against the powers of fossil fuel capitalism, the words have a new meaning:

*From the halls of power to the fortress tower, not a stone will be left on stone.*

*Let the king beware for your justice tears every tyrant from his throne.*

*The hungry poor shall weep no more for the food they can never earn.*

*There are tables spread, every mouth be fed, for the world is about to turn.*

Could the world be about to turn?

The song brings tears to my eyes. The melody is an old Irish folk tune, the words adapted from a song attributed to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Single, pregnant, poor, a member of an occupied people, she has just learned her child will defy an empire. She doesn't know it will cost him his life. Through my computer speakers I can hear the police sirens coming. ❧

*Josiah Neufeld is a writer living in Winnipeg, where he attends Hope Mennonite Church. The above is*



PHOTO BY JOSIAH NEUFELD

*excerpted and adapted from The Temple at the End of the Universe: A Search for Spirituality in the*

*Anthropocene, published by House of Anansi Press in June 2023. Reprinted and adapted with permission.*

### /// For discussion

1. What are the circumstances that bring you to the brink of despair?
2. Josiah Neufeld discovers glimmers of hope while cross-country skiing in the forest. Where or how do you find hope when life seems full of tragedy?
3. Can you think of situations in which saintly people deliberately broke the law for the greater good? If you had been there at the time, would you have joined them?
4. What are the songs or hymns that bring tears to your eyes? How much passion do you have for social justice?
5. What are some traditional ways that Christians can offer hope to each other? Are there other ways that our faith can support optimism for the future?

—By Barb Draper

See related resources at  
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## /// Readers write

### ✉ Puff

U2's "One Tree Hill" is a hymn that is both grief-laden and hope-filled, a hope shaped by Christological themes ("U2's Mennonite string section," May 5). I was looking forward to reflections on the intersections between the faith and spirituality of U2 and Mennonite faith and spirituality. That would have been rich.

What I experienced instead was a puff piece touting that Russian Mennonites are no longer locked into a cultural backwater. We have made it. Some of us have played with what many consider the greatest rock and roll band in the world.

It was a piece more suited to a magazine focused on Russian Mennonite culture.

KEITH REGEHR, KITCHENER, ONTARIO (FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH)

### ✉ Dandelions in heaven

I appreciated Randy Haluza-DeLay's column entitled "Dandelions for the Gospel" (April 21). My mom loved dandelions, and one of her memories was looking out on a field of yellow dandelion flowers and blue sky and thinking of heaven. Let it be so.

LEN BLOCK, DELTA, B.C. (PEACE MENNONITE, RICHMOND, B.C.)

### ✉ National church scouts

Some time ago, our paper, *Canadian Mennonite*, published a feature about the Canadian government's purchase of fighter jets ("Conscientious," Jan. 30). We are thankful for this.

Which one of our provincial boards or committees would have lifted their eyes beyond their own backyards, their own terms of reference, to consider a question like this? If there had been a desire or need for Mennonite Church Canada discussion or action on this, it would have been a long wait before our current structure could respond.

Who would flag such a national question for attention by provinces or congregations? Do we have any scouts?

I think also of climate. There are church climate statements, but it is hard to move. I'm guessing that MC Canada and regional staff could point to other instances of structural hindrances.

Our national agenda, our national structure, is mostly a compilation of provincial agendas, a gathering of provincial representatives. That is a strange way to shape national agenda.

We in MC Canada have spent too much time in our own backyards. Now with the latest round of restructuring we

have closed the gate and painted ourselves into corners. We have a wonderful diagram of our structures and (theoretical) participation, but we have soft spots in important places.

If we want to be aware or involved, we need better ways of initiating, of acting.

RAY & MARILYN HAMM, ALTONA, MANITOBA (ALTONA MENNONITE CHURCH)

### ✉ Neighbourliness

Jonathan Neufeld's editorial ("A centuries-old offer of peace," April 21) renews the discussion for the dismantling of the Doctrine of Discovery. He prays that "God so inspire and lead us beyond repudiation." Yes, moving to less performative words will lead many of us into asking the question: What is my role in working together with our Indigenous neighbours? This is where the real challenge comes.

I may be comfortable thinking how none of us are at the same level of awareness. This thought will not lead to action. Dialogue needs to happen not only within our communities but with our neighbours as well in order to seek ways of supporting Indigenous communities. Indigenous Peoples face enough resistance and government foot-dragging in their lives. Consider the boil-water advisories and lack of resolve with good or adequate housing, along with many other issues.

Unity is required in our spiritual circles for growth in a critical mass of concerned people and for moving beyond our comfort zones. This requires education and awareness of our social position, which continues to come at a cost for our more disadvantaged neighbours.

GEORGE BEST, MADOC, ONTARIO (WIDEMAN MENNONITE)

### ✉ Salvation via doctrine?

While it is possible to appreciate that Indigenous communities want to use the Doctrine of Discovery ("An assumption of grace," April 21) to make a moral argument for various kinds of restitution, I doubt that it will ultimately bring satisfaction.

In the first place, even if there had never been a doctrine such as this, once the Americas had been discovered by Europeans, people would have begun migrating there. People in places of higher population density and living costs will always look for places that offer opportunity for new starts and economic advantage. At the time Mennonites moved east into the Russian empire in the 18th century, other Europeans also moved there. The east also offered space and no doctrine of discovery was needed to entice Germans, Swedes, Greeks and Jews to move there.

It happens now too. All across the prairies, Dutch, German and British families have converted small holdings in their

homelands into much larger holdings here. No doctrine is needed.

It should be remembered that, while they arrived many centuries earlier, Indigenous people too moved from a presumably more populated place.

While it may be difficult to accept, the immigrants that came to this continent from 1500 on, came with great advantages, especially in technology. It might seem as though it meant a “colonizing” imposition, but the reality was unavoidable. The article speaks about a sense of a “superiority of race.” This doubtless existed, else the failed residential schools would not have been attempted. Indigenous communities have every bit the gifted leaders any community has. Yet it was the technology that the newcomers brought that in many cases allowed them to flourish quickly. Racial superiority wasn’t at the heart of their advantage.

We can encourage Indigenous communities to embrace the challenge of finding solutions to the needs they know exist within their communities. As they do, churches can and must come alongside.

HAROLD JANTZ, WINNIPEG (CROSSROADS MENNONITE BROTHERS)

## ✉ **CM better with age**

For most of my working life, I was employed by various Mennonite organizations, including Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) and Canadian Mennonite University. I felt strongly that reading every issue of *Canadian Mennonite* (CM) was part of my job. I needed to be aware of the activities and attitudes of our national denomination. (While at MDS I also read the other denominational periodicals, since they were also part of MDS.)

Much of the time, reading CM felt like a chore. I wondered what would happen after I retired. I thought I would take a sabbatical and not read CM for a time. But a wonderful thing happened instead. With time slowing down and few “have-to’s” in my life now, I am loving CM. I look forward to each issue and often reading it the day it arrives. I’m delighted with this surprise and look forward to continued reading of CM’s great denominational journalism. Thank you!

LOIS NICKEL, WINNIPEG (HOPE MENNONITE CHURCH)

## ✉ **Did Jesus collaborate or confront?**

Upon first glance at the title of Ann L. Schultz’s column, “Jesus and the 4 Cs” (April 21), I thought she was giving Jesus a C grade as an evaluation of his ministry. Knowing that Schultz was a teacher and school principal, I assumed that she was giving him a passing grade.

I appreciate the alliteration and her attempt to apply the current thinking about the “4 Cs.” Indeed Jesus was a critical thinker, a creative speaker and a convincing communicator. I

dare to differ from the author, however, on her claim that Jesus was a collaborator.

Jesus did delegate authority and responsibilities to his disciples, but he never collaborated with them in their ideas or suggestions.

From his rebuke to Peter—“get behind me, Satan”—to all who attempted to lower the bar to qualify as disciples, Christ refused to consider or collaborate with their suggestions. The term collaborator also carries with it the inference of consensus. Christ never led by consensus.

Collaboration is a term that promotes equality, plurality and diversity, but in essence, the bar of acceptance is determined by those who write the rules. The attitude of collaboration seeks to avoid confrontation. With Christ, confrontation was central in his ministry.

For Christ, the letter C stood for the cross. Christ was a cross carrier, and he requires nothing less of us.

DAVID SHANTZ, MONTREAL (ONLINE COMMENT)

## /// **Milestones**

### **Births/Adoptions**

**Friesen**—Redden Walker and Piper Malia (twins b. Feb. 23, 2023), to Mike and Nicole Friesen, Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Man.

### **Deaths**

**Beneteau**—Marilyn (d. May 5, 2023), Faith Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

**Epp**—Edward, 71 (b. June 18, 1951; d. May 17, 2023), Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont.

**Enns**—Bill (d. May 2, 2023), Faith Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

**Pankratz**—Florence (nee Isaac), 85 (b. Sept. 3, 1937; d. April 23, 2023), Grace Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

**Parei**—Maria (nee Janzen), 93 (b. May 24, 1929; d. April 28, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Penner**—Don, 85 (b. May 30, 1937; d. May 10, 2023), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

**Sawatzky**—Anne, 90 (b. June 20, 1932; d. May 8, 2023), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

**Shantz**—Lyll, 87 (d. April 27, 2023), Community Mennonite Fellowship, Drayton, Ont.

**Toews**—Shirley, 85 (b. March 13, 1937; d. Feb. 28, 2023), Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man.

**Unrau**—Leonora Helen (nee Brown), 94 (b. Nov. 7, 1928; d. April 23, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Wiebe**—Irene (nee Neufeld), 79 (b. Sept. 16, 1943; d. April 29, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Wiebe**—Martha (nee Wiens), 91 (b. Feb. 13, 1932; d. March 12, 2023), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Woodsit**—Gene (d. April 21, 2023), Faith Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

## FROM OUR LEADERS

# The idol of neutrality

William Loewen

**D**uring a Mennonite Church gathering in Charlotte, North Carolina, some years ago, I decided to go to a local restaurant for lunch. I left my name tag and swag bag behind so that I would look less vulnerable to thieves, but I was so successful at hiding my foreign identity that I attracted another kind of unwanted attention. As I walked back, I was approached by two people, one holding a video camera and one with a microphone. They had a question about local politics and were canvassing regular people on the streets for their opinions. They were disappointed to find that I had no opinions. I'm vain enough that I liked the idea of being on TV, but I couldn't even pretend to have something worthwhile to say.

For a long time that largely described my approach to politics. While I grew up with an interest in politics, even buying a membership in my party of choice, the more I learned about the Kingdom of Heaven and the church's place in the world, the less I was interested in partisan loyalties. I would go on, in my travels and studies, to cross paths with Christians with more liberal politics than mine and Christians with more conservative politics than mine. That Kingdom mindset allowed me to value these people, admire their faith, and learn from them. Another win for neutrality.

But then, as I observed and experienced injustice, and learned from victim advocates, I started to see a broader picture. I know that neutrality is a high virtue for many peace-minded Mennonite Christians, so if anyone reading feels that way, allow me to offer

the following challenges:

**God hates neutrality.** The prohibition against being lukewarm (Rev. 3:16) can apply to justice and inter-personal conflict just as much as evangelistic fervour.



**Neutrality is lazy.** It is easy to wash our hands of a conflict and assume the best intentions of everyone involved. It is hard work to discover which rights are being violated, which power is being abused, and which vulnerabilities are being exposed, but that work is necessary.

**Jesus wasn't neutral.** Despite all the things Jesus said about peace and love, he never stepped into a conflict situation and preached neutrality. He didn't always choose the side we would choose or the one we would expect him to pick, but Jesus chose sides.

**Only monsters appreciate neutrality.** Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim." Many of us like to be thanked for our work, but if your involvement

largely constitutes being neutral, the only one who will ever thank you is someone whose unjust actions are hidden or validated by your neutral stance.

**Neutrality is a privilege.** Neutrality is a choice available to the unaffected, the unafflicted and the uninvested. Victims and the people closest to them don't have the luxury of choosing to be neutral.

My new friends with the TV camera and microphone didn't have time to explain the issue of the day to me, and I had to get back to my conference. I'm sure if I had studied the relevant information, I would have formulated an opinion, maybe even one worthy of a TV interview. My experiences and convictions (like we all have) would have led me to choose a side. Yes, we can hold those loyalties lightly. Yes, we can defend our side without resorting to violence. But injustices, big

and small, are happening all around us. Our neutrality serves no one's interests but our own. ❧



*William Loewen is pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary.*

## THE CHURCH HERE AND THERE

## Communal prayers

Arli Klassen

I recall sitting through church services as a child, being even more bored with the pastor's long prayer than I was by the sermon. During the sermon I could look around at people and out the windows, but during the prayer I had to sit even more still, with my head down, looking only at the floor.

As a young adult learning about worship in the Anglican church, I was initially surprised by the reverence given to the *Book of Common Prayer*, which sat right beside the Bible and the hymnal in the pew racks and was used more often than the other books during worship. With time, I learned to appreciate the value of praying on one's knees, out loud together as well as listening to the leader, using prepared words shared by many churches all over the world. There is depth of meaning in those words.

As an adult, living in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, for a number of years, I heard the stories of the Amish way of forgiveness made public by the violent deaths of school girls at the Nickel Mines schoolhouse. The Amish communal prayer tradition includes silent prayer and written prayers from the past, with a strong emphasis on the Lord's Prayer. The Amish response to their tragedy was grounded in the Lord's Prayer, the same words spoken every day, day in and day out, for their whole lives: "*Forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" Their prayers shape their spirituality.

These days I am involved in two forms of communal prayer. I continue to grow in my understanding of prayer in these settings.

First is the Online Prayer Hour organized by Mennonite World Conference. This is one hour of organized communal prayer on the third Friday of every second month. About 100 people gather online, from many countries and



PHOTO BY ROSIE SUN, UNSPLASH

continents, hearing prayer points collected from all over the world, spending time in break-out rooms in five languages, praying together for these items shared by our brothers and sisters. It is an astonishing online gathering, with a bit of chaos every time, where the Holy Spirit binds us together as we pray, out loud, silently, in multiple styles. These prayers shape who we are as Christians belonging to a global Anabaptist communion.

Secondly, as a new elder in my local congregation, I am encouraged to be one of those who offers the spoken congregational prayer during worship every now and then. This brings me full circle to my childhood, as I wonder about the content and value of spoken communal prayers for the whole congregation. Who is paying attention? Who is bored? How do the words shape our spirituality? How does the communal nature of this prayer shape our identity together? How is the Holy Spirit at work in our midst through these prayers?

I remember saying to someone at a different congregation some years ago that it is important that the congregational prayer be offered by more people than just the pastors, that it be more than a pastoral prayer but the prayers of the people. I said that too many people think that only pastors really know how to pray, and we all need role models of a variety of people who are willing to pray in public. Now I get to live into that understanding.

Online Prayer Hour brings together an incredible diversity of people, many of whom pray in very different ways. Written prayers carry deep meaning. Congregational prayers bring us together in worship. Communal prayers shape our spirituality and our identity. ✎



*Arli Klassen is a member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario, and can be reached at [klassenarli@gmail.com](mailto:klassenarli@gmail.com).*

## RIDING THE WAVES OF INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

## The witness of heterogeneity

Joon Park

The world has become heterogeneous. We live in an era of cultural boundarilessness. Go to the nearest McDonald's and see who is sitting there. Tune into CBC's *My Farmland*, in which a Chinese immigrant family move to rural Saskatchewan. (I also know a Korean Mennonite family, farming in the barren land of New Brunswick.) In this cross-cultural context, I see no excuse for a church not to be culturally heterogeneous. To say, "No, our church is in a rural area or, no, our community is so small," seems a bit thin.

Thom S. Rainer, the founder of Church Answers and author of *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, shares his first-hand experience with homogeneity on his blog, churchanswers.com. On December 4, 2017, he wrote:

"I grew up in the racist world of the Deep South. We whites had our own churches, places of business and country clubs. No one else was allowed. If you went to the doctor, there were separate waiting rooms for whites and African Americans ("Coloreds"). It was abysmal. It was sickening. I know racism is not gone. But I am grateful that my children and grandchildren don't even know why a person of a different colour should not be their friend or colleague. The culture has changed. We are living in a heterogeneous culture. But not all churches have changed. Those that haven't will die."

Seeing homogeneity as a form of segregation, he prophetically warned that it is not gospel-centric.

But when it comes to the Mennonite church, another theory is heard, or at least seen in practice: Homogeneity is not absolute but is necessary in order to maintain a 500-year-old Mennonite identity. Too often, worship styles, pew arrangements, potluck menus and church politics rigidly reflect

homogeneity. It is a lamentable fact that there are still many Mennonite churches in the 21st century where the spirit of homogeneity is living and active, preserving Mennonite identity.

Do we have to return to Daniel Kaufman's *Manual of Bible Doctrines*, published in 1898, which formulates Mennonite faith in all possible aspects, including uniform dress and deportment?

In the 1970s, the word *homogeneity* went viral among North American evangelical churches struggling to adjust to the changing, multicultural demographic that asked for accommodation and integration. Racial integration was very limited. It was resisted. Many people held a fear rooted in the assumption that heterogeneity would lead to disunity.

In this context, a new homogeneous church model was birthed. It proclaimed: It is okay not to necessarily mingle with other cultural or racial groups at church. We know people like to gather with those who look, talk, think and act like them. Church is a place for the similar or likeminded. Its goal is to make disciples first, not take a risk to integrate, making people uncomfortable.

"People understand the gospel better when expounded by their own kind of people," wrote Donald McGavran in his popular 1970 book, *Understanding Church Growth*.

McGavran was a pioneer of this movement. A third-generation missionary to India, he spent more than three decades prioritizing his missional focus on the Great Commission, converting over 1,000 people without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers, focusing only on the Satnamis caste. He later turned his experience into a new church growth theory called the "homogenous unit principle" (HUP).

Thirsty for church growth and stuck

with growing multiculturalism in the 1970s, North American churches welcomed this expedient and practical theory with great enthusiasm, regardless of its weak biblical foundation. The example and teachings of Jesus do not support isolation, stratification and separation as a path to church growth or preservation of Mennonite identity.

A half century has passed and there have been countless critiques of the homogeneity model. Today, it seems that no one defends it. It is regarded as a cold reality rather than an ideal for growth. Now, the unfulfilled space it left is being filled with the success and faithfulness of many emerging heterogeneous churches, whose ultimate goal is to "anticipate on earth the life of heaven," breaking down any walls through "cultural richness and heterogeneous fellowship" among all people, in contrary to building walls up, as stated in a document called the Pasadena Statement, which came out of the Lausanne Movement.

The old belief that heterogeneity is impractical and unachievable is wrong. The HUP is long gone. We now enjoy an era in which heterogeneity is the norm, the new hope—biblically right and ecclesiastically hopeful.

To adapt Song of Solomon 4:16: "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; Blow upon my [Mennonite] garden, that the [heterogeneous] spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." ❧



Joon Park serves as intentional interim co-pastor at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

## NEWS &amp; PEOPLE

# Gallery curator aims to explore the world, share stories

By Aaron Epp  
Senior Writer

**S**arah Hodges-Kolisnyk approaches art through the lens of storytelling.

“My journey as an artist and a curator has always been linked to exploring the world and sharing stories with others,” she says. “I approach everything with a questioning and a searching for the story, and hoping those stories bring people together.”

Since April 2022, Hodges-Kolisnyk has served as director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) Gallery at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg. She is the gallery’s second-ever director, following the retirement of founder Ray Dirks in July 2021.

Born and raised in Winnipeg, Hodges-Kolisnyk brings a diverse skillset to her role.

In addition to pursuing her own photographic art practice, the 41-year-old has worked for the Winnipeg Art Council giving free walking and biking tours of public art. She was also a photography instructor and workshop leader at Willis College (formerly PrairieView School of Photography) for 13 years.

Hodges-Kolisnyk holds a master’s degree in cultural studies with a specialization in curatorial practices, and a communications degree with a minor in art history.

She was drawn to photography at a young age. She recalls wanting to go outside and take photos one foggy night when she was around 10 years old. Her father set her up with an old Canon and gave her a brief tutorial and off she went.

When the pictures returned from the developer a few days later, she was pleased



PHOTO BY AARON EPP

*‘It’s always been about making space to listen,’ says Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk, director at MHC Gallery.*

ARTWORK BY SARAH HODGES-KOLINSKY

*Two photographic works by Hodges-Kolisnyk: Prairie Dance (left) and Fairies.*



to find that a number of them had turned out.

“That’s the first memory I have of being excited about photography and playing with the camera,” she says.

The MHC Gallery was founded under Mennonite Church Canada in 1998 with two primary goals: to offer Anabaptist artists and artists with roots in Mennonite communities opportunities to exhibit their art in an institution of the church; and to offer artists of all faith and spiritual traditions a place where they can exhibit their work freely and without interference or agenda from the gallery.

MC Canada transferred ownership of the gallery to CMU in 2017. While rooted in the Christian tradition, the gallery is open to all artists and communities, regardless of ethnic or faith background. It aims to promote trust, respect, understanding and acceptance.

It’s a vision that resonates with Hodges-Kolisnyk, who attends St. Benedict’s Table, an Anglican church.

“I think at the gallery and as a curator and in my art as well, it’s always been about making space to listen to everyone [and] to hear other people’s stories, whether we have the same viewpoints or not,” says the married mother of three. “That’s really what attracted me to the gallery—it had this reputation of working with artists of all faiths or no faith, and making this a place where we can make space for each other’s stories and listen to each other.”

Hodges-Kolisnyk stood out when the gallery was hiring a new director because of her many strengths, along with her commitment to both the church and the visual arts community, says Sue Sorensen, an English professor at CMU who sits on the gallery’s advisory committee.

“She’s sort of stunningly competent in all sorts of areas,” Sorensen says, naming Hodges-Kolisnyk’s strong planning and organizational capabilities, her calm demeanour and her “beautiful artistic eye.” “I’m just basically impressed overall by her ... There’s a real kindness in the way she approaches people and allows them to approach her.”

The MHC Gallery is currently displaying work by Rhonda Spivak, a Jewish artist from Winnipeg. In the summer,

## Six questions for Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk

**Canadian Mennonite: How does your faith play into your art practice?**

**Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk:** I feel like my art is a gift that God has given me to pause a moment in time or to have a different lens on the world... It’s a blessing to be able to have my camera with me and enjoy the world around me, but also find ways to express that joy and that interest and maybe sometimes share it with others.

**CM: What is a public work of art in Winnipeg that you recommend people check out?**

**SHK:** The BLUE rapid transit line, which is kind of a cheater answer because it’s a few works of art. It’s a great, amazing run, walk [or] bike—whatever you fancy—and the narrative between the pieces brings together so many voices. It also shares unique perspectives of Winnipeg’s and Manitoba’s history in a fascinating and visual way.

**CM: Who is your favourite artist?**

**SHK:** [American photographer] Sally Mann. There’s not a topic that’s off limits, and she also makes art about her home and about her family.

**CM: What is your favourite camera?**

**SHK:** Whatever camera I have on me.

**CM: What is one tip you have for aspiring photographers?**

**SHK:** Get closer.

**CM: What tips do you have for art makers in general?**

**SHK:** Stay curious. Keep going. Keep making.

Hodges-Kolisnyk will mount exhibits featuring quilts by Textile and Fibre Artists Manitoba and landscape paintings and drawings by John Blosser, emeritus art professor at Goshen College in Indiana.

The gallery’s fall exhibit will focus on settler-Indigenous relations in Paraguay’s Chaco region, with work by Paraguayan-born Winnipegger Miriam Rudolph and a collective of Indigenous Chaco artists. The final exhibit of the year will explore gendered identity, featuring the work of the Drawn Together artist collective and Tom Lovatt.

The gallery just wrapped up its call for proposals for 2024, which garnered a record number of applications, and Hodges-Kolisnyk and the advisory committee are making plans to commemorate the gallery’s 25th anniversary.



*Kinetic by Sarah Hodges-Kolisnyk*

“I hope people will feel welcome to come to the gallery and I hope we continue to feature exhibits that break down lingering misconceptions about art,” Hodges-Kolisnyk says, “especially in divisive times when we need to explore each other’s ideas.” ❧

# Fire temporarily shuts down furniture thrift store

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe  
Manitoba Correspondent  
WINNIPEG

A recent fire forced the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Furniture Thrift Store in Winnipeg to temporarily close its doors due to smoke and water damage. A vacant house beside the shop went up in flames on May 11, just after 1 a.m., with the cause of the fire still under investigation.

Laurie Goetz, store manager, told *Canadian Mennonite* the store will be closed for approximately a month. Their stock was not severely affected, as the furniture and fabric appear in good condition and Goetz's team is working on

assessments and repairs as needed.

The blaze had more of an impact on the building. The wall of the thrift shop closest to the fire contained all the electrical wiring, which melted from the heat and then became soaked.

"We just completed our first best quarter ever in our 20 years there," Goetz said. "We were on a really good healthy streak, and a lot of the Ukrainian newcomers were coming in and supporting us and getting some good-quality furniture. It's been a real stinker for a lot of people."

While insurance will compensate

for most losses, she is still determining whether that includes loss of sales while the store remains closed. It's a significant contribution—the furniture thrift store brought in \$400,000 in sales throughout 2022. After operating costs were paid, \$140,000 of those funds went directly to MCC projects in developing countries and in Manitoba. The loss of that income "would be a big loss for our community," Goetz said.

The Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service had the fire under control within 90 minutes and reported no injuries. ❧



PHOTO BY AARON EPP

When this vacant home was destroyed by fire, the MCC Furniture Thrift Store next door was forced to close for a month.



# Project explores legacy of 1920s trauma on Mennonite women

By Sherry Sawatzky-Dyck  
Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

Nearly 100 years have passed since 21,000 Mennonites fled disease, starvation and violence in some of the same areas now experiencing war in Ukraine. Many came to Southern Manitoba, and their trauma quietly came with them.

In the last year, I took a sabbatical from my work as a counselling therapist at Brandon University in Brandon, Manitoba, to interview Mennonite women about the intergenerational impact of the trauma experienced in southern Russia in the 1920s.

The people who migrated are gone, but their daughters and granddaughters, who

I interviewed, carry stories of horror far beyond what I had been aware of. The more we read about history, particularly history from the perspective of those who suffered, as opposed to those who conquered, we see that suffering is something we all share. However, the impact of suffering is not the same from one community to another or from one person to another.

I asked the women I interviewed to reflect on the impact the experiences of the previous generation(s) have had on them. A common theme they were all taught was of God's deliverance and their ancestors' deep

thankfulness. The 1920s women did not teach that the terrible experiences were a punishment by God, nor was there a sense of vengeance or anger. These daughters and granddaughters learned to be positive and thankful.

One daughter expressed the intergenerational impact well when she said her mother's story "adds to the big burden of sadness of life." Her mother came to Canada as a widow with a young child. As a woman she had few prospects except to work as a domestic or marry again. As was typical, her mother lived in a culture where her



PHOTO BY ARTHUR SLAGEL, COURTESY OF MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES

*Mennonites in a train car en route from Russia to Canada in 1923.*

gender offered few opportunities to express gifts and talents or contribute a significant sense of meaning to her life outside her role as wife, mother and caregiver. This daughter's family of origin did not discuss topics of gender equality, feminism or sexualized violence, and she often felt her mother's almost intangible melancholy or sadness related to these issues, which has had a lifelong impact on her.

Too often the generational impact of trauma takes the form of addiction, violence and/or general anti-social behavior; refugee families often struggle to keep their children out of gangs or criminal involvement. Although none of the women in my study expressed concern that the trauma had resulted in these issues, they did indicate that their physical and psychological health may be paying a price for the untold stories. Their family culture impressed upon them the need to keep negative sentiments to themselves, as the painful stories needed to stay in the past. I see this symbolized in one family's description of their home growing up. In this home, there was a photo in a drawer of a loved one lost to the chaos in southern Russia. The family had a concept of who was in the photo, but the stories related to that photo, like the photo itself,

remained in the drawer, untold.

A daughter whose mother came to Canada as a toddler relayed how she learned it was due to God's faithfulness that the family settled in a new land. Her mother's family stressed how fortunate they were to have found freedom and that they should be ever thankful to God for "being delivered." Her method of showing this thankfulness was "making use of the opportunities in this place and by living a good example."

The women spoke of an ethic passed down where a positive example, and being faithful, both to their God and to their family legacy of loving kindness, was important. The daughters and granddaughters all mentioned that their families did not explicitly teach Christian faith in their homes, except for table grace and the odd scripture passage read on special occasions. However, most (not all) attended church growing up. They all learned a steadfast work ethic of care and compassion.

In my work as a therapist, clients often wonder why we talk about their past, given that it seems easier and less painful to just manage symptoms in the here and now. However, I believe that sorting out our history gives us tools, language and

information that helps us make sense of why we act the way we do and why we feel the way we do. This helps us manage our mental health.

As researchers understand trauma better, we are learning that trauma is transmitted through the generations through both nurture—via family systems, culture and language—and nature, through physical illness, chronic pain and mental health issues. No person is immune to the trauma experienced by their ancestors.

My father's family were among the 21,000 Mennonites who made the trek to Canada 100 years ago. Given this emerging knowledge about trauma and its impact on us through time, I decided to explore how my own history has impacted women like me, generations later.

I am finding as I pursue this project that the more I discover, the more there is to discover. Generational grief and trauma are complicated and multifaceted issues. Among other topics to explore, I would like to interview more women and better understand the impact of their perception of God's role in their suffering and the impact their peace theology had on trauma recovery through the generations. ❧

## Books and borscht at Mennonite Museum

By Amy Rinner Waddell  
B.C. Correspondent  
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

**A**serving of soup, with book discussion for dessert, are on the menu every Thursday in May and June as part of the Books and Borscht series at the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, B.C.

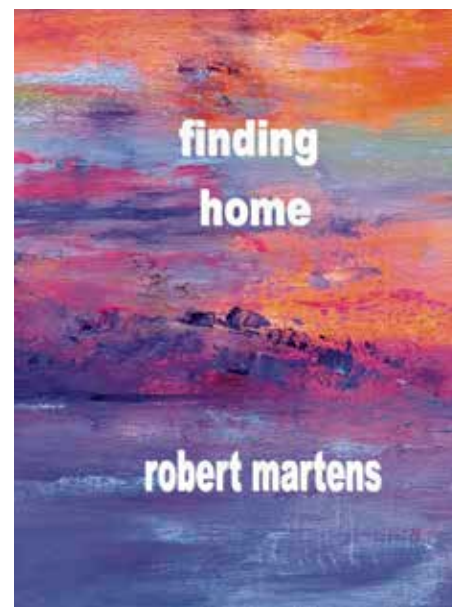
"Over the past few years, we have had a number of authors publish books connected to the Mennonite story, but they were unable to have in-person book launches due to COVID," says museum educator Jenny Bergen. "As the books are now a few years old, they aren't book launches per se, so we are doing a Books

and Borscht series where the public is invited to buy lunch in the café before joining various authors in our theatre for a book talk."

On May 4, the theatre was nearly full to hear about Robert Martens' book, *Finding Home*, and host Peter Andres remarked, "I am shocked to see a full house for telling about a book of poetry."

Martens replied, "So am I!"

"Home means different things to different people," said Martens, as he reflected on his Mennonite ancestors



leaving their Russian homeland and how he found home growing up in the village of Yarrow.

An audience member commented that it is more meaningful to hear writers read their own work. Martens agreed that poetry is interactive, saying, “If you’re going to write poetry, you’re going to have

to read it.”

More information on the Books and Borscht series can be found at [menno-nitemuseum.org/news](http://menno-nitemuseum.org/news). Attendees are asked to register beforehand. Those who register

for the book talk will receive a free coffee when they purchase lunch and a 10 percent off voucher for the featured book. ☘

## A struggle for blessing

*One woman, four countries and a winding path to peace*

By Madalene Arias  
Eastern Canada Correspondent

**W**hen 19-year-old Anita Shevchuk found herself in the streets of downtown Toronto in the summer of 2022, she held onto her faith in God and her then-husband’s promise that everything would be okay.

They had flown to Toronto and converted their savings from pesos to Canadian dollars, which gave them little more than \$800. To their surprise, immigration officials at the airport told them they were free to enter the country but did not provide them with a place to stay.

They would spend the first eight hours in the country hauling their luggage through the city streets, contacting numerous shelters, to no avail, before deciding to pause inside the Eaton Centre.

“I remember we were sitting near the Apple Store,” Shevchuk says. “I was almost crying. I was so scared.”

Two years before her arrival to Canada, Shevchuk had left her home in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, for Mexico with a plan to marry a Mexican man she had met through Instagram.

Shevchuk, the eldest of six children, shared a two-bedroom apartment with her parents and siblings for most of her life in Zhytomyr before the family settled into a larger home. She described her mother as a kind woman whom she never feared, not even when she became angry. But her father was a hard man.

He believed the first child should face harsher “discipline,” so Shevchuk’s father physically abused her. Her mom almost left him because of it.

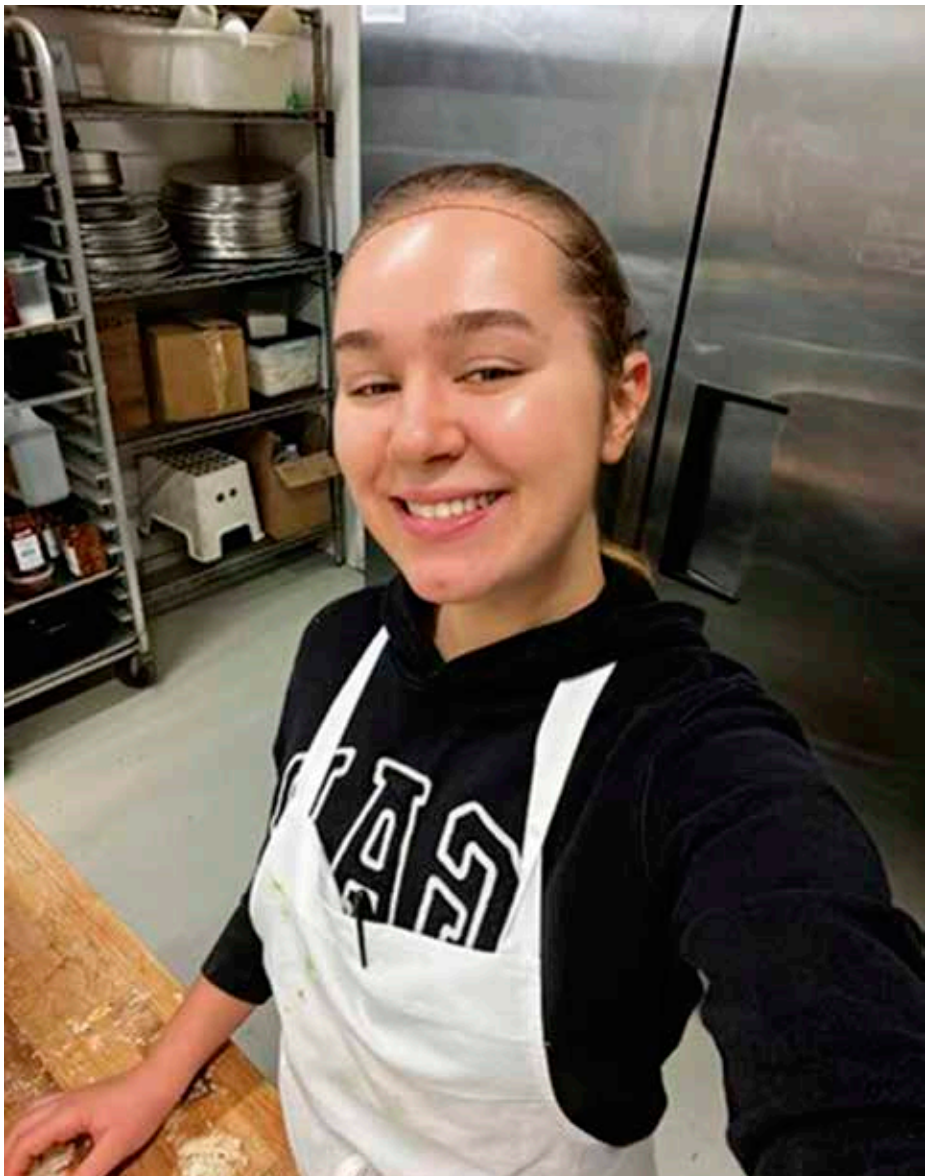


PHOTO COURTESY OF ANITA SHEVCHUK

*Anita Shevchuk is eager for a new future.*

During one beating, Shevchuk suffered two broken ribs.

"I got married so early because I wanted to escape my father," she says.

Soon after turning 18, Shevchuk packed

a suitcase with a wedding dress her mother had prepared for her and flew to Mexico, where she got married.

Two years later the couple sat in the downtown Toronto shopping centre

offering prayers as they contemplated their next move. After some time, Shevchuk noticed a tall, burly security guard. He stood before the Michael Kors shop with his hands loosely tucked into the sides of his bullet-proof vest. She caught a glimpse of a tiny Ukrainian flag pinned to the side of his chest and immediately stood up to approach him.

"He told me, 'I stand with Ukraine,'" recalls Shevchuk.

The security guard made several phone calls, then provided the couple with an address for a house in Toronto's Chinatown. Although the house was terribly run down, she was grateful to have finally found a place to spend the night. She would eventually return to the mall to properly thank the guard for his help but would not find him. Employees of the Michael Kors shop told her that mall security does not typically stand where she had found him that day.

Twenty hours of lodging in Chinatown cost the couple \$300. It was time to move on. They packed their belongings and headed out into a rainy Sunday morning. They pushed their suitcases down Yonge Street until coming upon Hillsong Church, where the service was about to start.

"[My husband] told me that we would stay for two services until the end, and then we would ask for help."

Not long after the couple shared their circumstances with the congregation, Hillsong's pastoral committee began to work on finding a place for the couple to stay. Finally, a member of the church helped them find new hosts with Mennonite farmers Bob and Sheryl Wideman in Stouffville.

"They became like my family," says Shevchuk. "They became my friends, grandparents, parents."

Shevchuk's transition into her life in Canada began to pick up pace. She spent three days with the Widemans on their farm before landing a job as prep cook at Sugo, an Italian restaurant in Toronto's west end.

"It was really interesting how God helped me to be hired," says Shevchuk.

The manager at the restaurant was originally from Mexico and felt impressed with Shevchuk's fluency in Spanish as well as



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANITA SHEVCHUK

Anita Shevchuk (left), Cheryl & Bob Wideman.

her cooking ability. Shevchuk had picked up the language while working in the kitchen of a restaurant in Mexico, a place she says was the best school for cooking and learning Spanish.

Sugo's manager invited her to stay at his house with his wife to reduce her commute to the restaurant.

Unlike Shevchuk, the Canadian government did not grant her husband a work permit upon arrival to the country. He took a job in construction and continued to live with the Widemans until he could afford a place for himself and his wife. In the meantime, the couple had joined Hillsong Church and formed many friendships with members there. Shevchuk's coworkers had grown fond of her and found ways to support her at work.

Before leaving Mexico, the couple's marriage had been marked with conflict. After settling in Canada, they had stopped fighting.

"That time it was a really happy marriage," recalls Shevchuk. "And then something happened. Something went so wrong."

They had moved into a comfortable studio apartment in downtown Toronto. Their fights recommenced, and Shevchuk found herself feeling afraid, heartbroken and wanting to separate. Her husband brought his brother to live with them in the small apartment. By December, she made up her mind to leave.

In the months that Shevchuk worked in Sugo's kitchen, she had become friends with another Ukrainian newcomer. The young woman had walked into the restaurant looking for work but did not speak English. Shevchuk served as her interpreter. Though she was not hired, she and Shevchuk remained connected.

"She told me that God brought me there to find a friend in you"

At no charge and without conditions, the young woman opened her home to Shevchuk after she left her marriage.

Two months later, Shevchuk learned that she had been approved for a U.S. visa as a Ukrainian with relatives in the United States. She moved out of her friend's apartment, quit her job and closed her bank accounts. She was prepared for a new life in the U.S., but things took an unexpected turn when she arrived at U.S. immigration.

Because Shevchuk was married to a Mexican, she could not enter the U.S.

Shevchuk explained that she and her husband had separated and that the government had already approved her visa. The officer replied that even though the government had approved her visa, the decision to grant entry into the country rested with her. She refused Shevchuk entry.

Shevchuk began to cry. The officer said, "Don't manipulate me; if you don't like Canada, you can go back to Ukraine."

Shevchuk tried to understand what God was doing.

"God closed doors so loud and so painful," she says.

"But I know that God is not done until it's good."

Also on her mind is her family back home. As result of nighttime bombardments, her sister suffered PTSD to the extent that she stopped eating and talking for a time. Shevchuk says her sister is now recovering, though her family still lives in fear, with recent bombs falling close enough to shake the family home.

Meanwhile, Shevchuk is settling back into life in Toronto. Before heading to the U.S., she had begun working at Rooster Coffee House in downtown Toronto. When she resumed her life in Canada, her old boss was thrilled to have her back and gave her a raise. She and her Ukrainian friend became roommates. They now share an apartment where Shevchuk's bedroom faces the lake. The Widemans provided her with a new bed. More recently, she received an offer to work at the Royal Bank.

Ultimately, Shevchuk would like to be able to sponsor missionaries and support churches. She feels God is preparing her for this role.

"God has been blessing me so much," she says. "My dream is not to be rich, but to be able to bless people." ❧



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**MEDA**

# Donations sought for Malipayon Peace Hub

Mennonite Church Canada Release

**M**ennonite Church Canada's International Witness ministry is inviting donations to complete the construction of the Malipayon Peace Hub in Mindanao, Philippines. The aim is to raise \$235,000 by March 2024.

The completion of the project includes a new peace and reconciliation training centre for Peacebuilders Community Inc. (PBCI), an upgraded processing and farmer training centre for Coffee for Peace (CFP), a new staff house and guest house, and a delivery vehicle.

PBCI and CFP founders Dann and Joji Pantoja, who will transition into retirement in 2026, will lead the project in the Philippines. Jeanette Hanson, Director of Witness International Ministry, will coordinate fundraising efforts in Canada.

The Pantojas were sent by MC Canada to Mindanao, Philippines, in 2006. Their peace building work in an often-violent context led to the development of the not-for-profit PBCI, resulting in a community of pastors, academics, and indigenous leaders who collaborate to provide training in peace and reconciliation for organizations, churches, community groups, Indigenous communities, and even military leaders.

Peace and reconciliation training in communities and social enterprise activities makes up most of the work of PBCI, but there is a growing demand for this type of training from companies, government entities, and even the military. These are sources of revenue for PBCI.

CFP, an outgrowth of the Pantojas' initial peacebuilding work, is a for-profit economic justice initiative that helps impoverished farmers who were driven up into the mountains by violence resulting from inter-tribal, religious, and military conflicts.

CFP has formed a coffee producers' cooperative, assists framers with research,

development, processing, packaging, and marketing, and aids in finding domestic and international markets for their multi-award-winning product. Importantly, the new facilities will enable FDA approval of the coffee processing operations, a necessary requirement for export markets. CFP revenues help in part to fund the peace and reconciliation work of PBCI.

## Brief history

similar centre.

PBCI has received 25 to 35 percent of its budget from MC Canada over the past five years. This funding would be replaced by the increased capacity and profits from the new and upgraded post-harvest processing operations.

Completion of the centre in 2023 will give PBCI the footing it needs to fully complete its leadership transition by



MC CANADA PHOTO

**Projected plan for the Malipayon Peace Hub, including a new peace and reconciliation training centre for Peacebuilders Community Inc. (PBCI), an upgraded processing and farmer training centre for Coffee for Peace (CFP), a new staff house and guest house.**

With the Malipayon Peace Hub, the Pantojas are preparing to pass on their work to a younger team of Indigenous leaders. The construction and completion of the Malipayon Peace Hub will provide much needed, sheltered facilities for the future work of PBCI and CFP.

The model of PBCI training and CFP's coffee production expertise has already proven sustainable in Bukidnon, where an Indigenous group has developed a

the projected 2026 date of the Pantojas' retirement. At that point the annual funding for PBCI from MC Canada will also come to an end. ☘

## News briefs

### MCC New Hamburg sale

The May 26-27 relief sale in New Hamburg, Ontario, raised over \$333,000 for the work of Mennonite Central Committee. Kendall Jongejan Harder (right)—pastor of Shantz Mennonite Church—cut french fries for sale, while Spencer Towns (bottom right) learned the art of sugaring tea balls. Floradale Mennonite Church made about 13,000 tea balls that raised over \$17,000.

### MDS opportunities

Mennonite Disaster Service offers summer volunteer opportunities in Nova Scotia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota and Virginia. Assignments, which range from four days to three months, are available for general volunteers, cooks, office managers, crew leaders, project directors and families. Contact Rose Klassen at 866-261-1274/ [rklassen@mds.org](mailto:rklassen@mds.org). Or visit [mds.org](http://mds.org).



### CPT opportunity

Community Peacemaker Teams is planning an August delegation to Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek (Grassy Narrows First Nation) in Northwestern Ontario. CPT's connection with Grassy Narrows goes back to 2002, when the community invited CPT to accompany them on a logging blockade. The community continues to resist mining and logging proposals as it also works toward reparations for mercury poisoning. The August 14-25 delegation is open to the public. The cost is \$1,000 (sliding scale).

### AMBS grad

Twenty people graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary at the April 29 commencement service in Elkhart, Indiana. Graduates included 12 men and 8 women from Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and the U.S. Seven of the graduates were Ethiopian and completed their studies entirely from their home country. One graduate—Ian Funk of Langley, B.C.—was Canadian.

Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, who is from Puerto Rico and Pennsylvania—the first Latina to serve as moderator of MC USA—gave the commencement address. “Don’t stay in the four walls of the church,” she said. “Make the church move.”



PHOTOS BY BARB DRAPER



# Following brutalities of 2017, Congolese churches build a new future

By Linda Espenshade  
Mennonite Central Committee

**E**ver since survivors of brutal fighting in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo fled to the city of Kikwit in 2017, the Mennonite Brethren Church has been ministering to them with faith and action.

The survivors came with burns, wounds from machetes, and babies about to be born. They were exhausted from walking for weeks or months from various regions of neighbouring Kasai Province with little food or water. They carried emotional wounds from watching their family members and neighbours massacred.

The Communauté des Eglises de Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC; Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo), which is based in Kikwit, saw the need. Individuals with CEFMC took people into their homes and provided clothing and food. The CEFMC hospital staff provided medical care, and their churches became temporary shelters.

Of the more than 24,000 people who had fled to Kikwit by the end of 2017, CEFMC supported nearly 3,000 the following year with the support of Anabaptist organizations around the world. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worked with CEFMC, training them to carry out equitable food distribution and development programs, brought in Canadian Foodgrains Bank for food distributions and continues to fund ongoing programming today.

## Trauma training

The arrival of displaced people in the community caused conflict, says Jacqueline Kafuti, who was the first CEFMC elder to invite people to live in her home. Other neighbors hosted people from Kasai too, she says, but there were those who pushed the newcomers aside because resources were already limited.

In addition, some displaced people acted out because of the trauma they

had experienced, says Kufutama Kafaire, a member of the CEFMC local committee who handles finances.

“Someone who is displaced because of war—his head is troubled. It looks as if the war has been following him even where he is,” Kafaire says.

Providing equal education was one way that CEFMC helped to strengthen the connection between locals and the new arrivals. By giving school supplies to primary school students and paying secondary school fees for displaced teens, the burden on host families was lifted. CEFMC also provided trauma training for teachers.

Colette Koy Mazao, whose sixth-grade class doubled in size with the arrival of displaced children, said she struggled at first because displaced children self-segregated in the back of the classroom and did not speak the local language of Kikongo or the academic language of French.

Some displaced children were violent. Others would sometimes cry when she called on them. When she asked why, they said: “We are thinking about the situation that we have passed through.”

The training has shown Mazao and other teachers the importance of mixing students together in the classroom instead of allowing them to sit in separate groups. Teachers organize outside activities so that students from both groups are on the same teams together.

In the classroom, Mazao says she has learned to pay more attention to the emotional needs of the displaced children by drawing them aside when they look upset. If a student is absent often or sick, she visits the student’s family to see if there is a problem she can help to resolve.

Mazao also has learned to be less serious in the classroom and joke with the children, she says. “It has helped not only the displaced children, but all the



JUSTIN MAKANGARA/MCC/FAIRPICTURE

*People visit outside following a service at a Mennonite Brethren church in Kikwit, Democratic Republic of Congo.*





JUSTIN MAKANGARA/MCC/FAIRPICTURE

*Antoine Kimbila, general secretary of CEFMC, speaks at a church in Kikwit, Democratic Republic of Congo, in February.*

pupils to live in peace with everybody.”

She’s happy that one of the displaced children in her classroom is at the top of the class academically this year. He also helps her monitor the classroom behaviour when she is absent.

“Things didn’t change so quickly,” Mazao says. “We worked progressively. Now there is a change.”

### Complexity of help

At the CEFMC hospital in Kanzombi, staff struggled initially with the behaviour of people who were displaced. Dr. Jacques Tangudiki, a member of the CEFMC local committee who is responsible for health care, said displaced people demanded to be treated first and tended to be violent and noncompliant with treatment. This created tension.

“Imagine your father was murdered in front of you; your mother was raped in front of you. They were living with all of this,” says Tangudiki. Sometimes they would express that anger when there didn’t seem to be a reason for it.

Tangudiki says the nurses have learned from trauma training to understand people’s trauma responses and how to help people deal with their emotions. The hospital also provides primary care

to displaced people for free, including disease prevention and medication for common ailments such as malaria and waterborne diseases.

CEFMC has also worked with MCC to lower the rate of waterborne diseases, which cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, by drilling two boreholes (deep wells). Potable water from a borehole drilled in Kanzombi in 2021 has significantly reduced waterborne diseases treated at the hospital.

Clean water has improved the health of thousands of people in Kikwit. It also reduces the fighting that commonly took place at remote springs where people used to get their water, even though it wasn’t potable. Youth, whose parents expected them to get water multiple times a day, would fight over who could access the single water pipe first.

Now that the boreholes are located near where people live, adults can get water throughout the day. They have time to get water and work together in the fields that CEFMC provided to the most vulnerable displaced people and their host families.

Kimbila compared CEFMC’s holistic work with the people who were hungry and tired while listening to Jesus preach. He fed them by distributing one boy’s fish

and bread to the crowd.

“That man (Jesus) came,” Kimbila says, “not just to save the soul, but the body. Salvation is total, and salvation is holistic. God takes care of us, not just spiritually, but physically, too. For this reason, we as the church work with partners to save people holistically.” He adds, “it’s difficult to bring someone who is hungry to peace.”

### Interchurch peace

In the city of Tshikapa, a 10-hour drive from Kikwit, Communauté Mennonite au Congo (Mennonite Church of Congo; CMCo) has also supported displaced people since 2017. In the next three years CMCo’s work will focus on building classrooms and providing health care in Mennonite hospitals as refugees return to Kasai from Angola.

In Kabwela, Communauté Evangélique Mennonite (Evangelical Mennonite Church) carried out projects with MCC in the first two to three years following the Kasai massacres.

All of MCC’s work in the country is done through churches, church organizations or local partners who assess the need, propose a plan, carry it out and assess its effectiveness. MCC relies on its partners’ knowledge of the community needs, resources and people most in need of support.

Once-strained relationships among the churches and with MCC have been resolved as the groups worked together to respond to the needs of the displaced people and their hosts. With MCC training, and with the conflict resolution skills of former MCC representative Mulanda Juma, local committees within each denomination are better equipped to respond to crises.

Women from CMCo and CEFMC also have trained together to create Women Situation Rooms. Through these local organizations, women are actively using the peacebuilding skills they learned to resolve conflicts among their family, friends and community.

As a result of all the peacemaking work, both humanitarian and spiritual in nature, displaced people are gradually settling into life in Kikwit.

“Since they came here, they completely

lacked a lot of things, but now they have first the joy, because many have become members of our church, an important step,” Kimbila says. “Because they are at our side, they feel there are people who love them, with whom they can live.”

Today, CEFMC—in collaboration with MCC—still provides various programs for about 2,450 of the roughly 7,500 displaced people remaining in Kitkwi. ☞

*Linda Espenshade is MCC U.S. news coordinator. She travelled to the Democratic Republic of Congo in February.*



PHOTO BY BETTY AVERY

*Map of the conflict zone in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

## Soup enterprise invites new partners

By Diane Talbot-Schoenhoff

A simple job creation project that started with two women's concern for a young church member is now seeking new church partners to expand beyond its four current locations.

It started with Amanda, a 13-year-old who loved to play with kids and volunteer in the church nursery. She was loyal, punctual and reliable. She also had a mild intellectual disability and couldn't read past a grade 3 level. It seemed she was headed straight into the social services system, like her parents.

When Amanda was completing high school, Rebecca Sherbino, a concerned adult mentor at Paris Presbyterian Church in Paris, Ontario, looked into an employment training agency that offered job readiness skills. Rebecca drove Amanda to the program twice a week for six months. At the end of the program, Amanda had three interviews but no job.

Amanda was one of a number of people at her church who were marginalized because of poverty, mental health challenges or disabilities. Some accessed the church crisis intervention fund to make ends meet. While these people had the potential to work and a desire to so, they faced multiple employment barriers in the traditional workplace.

Motivated by the need they saw and by



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RAW CARROT

*Amanda has worked at The Raw Carrot since its inception nine years ago.*

the love of Jesus, Sherbino and Colleen Graham, another member of Paris Presbyterian, talked often about how they could realistically fill the employment gap left by government programs. They felt called to administer justice, not just provide hand-outs and then pat themselves on the back. They were frustrated with band-aid solutions to poverty and marginalization.

Sherbino has a master's degree in international development and had spent five

years working with marginalized communities in Sudan and Malawi. Graham has a degree in nursing science and experience in health administration. She believes in combining science and business with care and compassion.

Based in a belief that God values people and wants to see them thrive in all aspects of life, the two women launched the Raw Carrot Soup Enterprise. They hired staff, including Amanda, to make handcrafted



*Leah Cober serves as kitchen manager for the MCC/Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church branch of The Raw Carrot.*

gourmet soup in their church's commercial kitchen. They sold frozen, handcrafted soup pouches in local stores, markets and online.

Raw Carrot is now in its ninth year, having expanded from Paris Presbyterian to three other production/ministry locations: Innerkip Presbyterian, Mount Forest United Church and Mennonite Central Committee Ontario/Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

The organization provides permanent, dignified, part-time employment to 32 people living with disabilities and mental illness. Drawing on a loyal customer base, sales reached \$200,000 last year.

#### **MCC**

Since 2017, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario has operated a Raw Carrot location in partnership with Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

The location produces 400 to 500 bags of soup per month.

Jennifer Klassen, who was the first kitchen manager in that location, talks about the challenges faced by some of their staff. "In their lives, some have been mocked because of their disabilities or made to feel they aren't good enough, or have nothing to offer"

The global pandemic compounded the challenges for many people with disabilities. Fear of illness, loss of income and social isolation amplified their barriers. But for The Raw Carrot staff, the pandemic brought a renewed sense of significance and belonging. "Because of the pandemic, they were told that they are essential workers so were able to work. Can you imagine what that message can do for someone?" says Klassen.

As part of a recent staff evaluation process, staff shared what their work experience has meant to them. One person said: "It's a safe space and place for you to make friends. It helps me stay focused on my job and my daily routines. I just love being here."

Another said: "The work environment at The Raw Carrot is inclusive and welcoming . . . I have been able to learn and develop my community-based skills."

As for current kitchen manager Leah Cober, she says, "It's incredibly meaningful and rewarding work!"



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## Justice leadership

By taking the initiative to show compassion and promote inclusion, the church can play a vital role in creating a more equitable and just society. Aside from providing accessible parking, ramps and washrooms, churches can provide dignified employment.

Sherbino has a vision for people in all communities in Canada to be meaningfully employed and able to meet their basic needs. She questions whether we can continue to afford not to care if our current interventions are actually “working.” She challenges churches to take action.

“Do you feel like the depth of need in people’s lives is actually too great to meet with a food card or community meal? Has crisis intervention turned into ongoing support instead of just surviving a crisis?” she asks. “If so, I want to ask you: Is Christ calling you to a deeper ministry? One that actually meets people’s needs for the future?”

One option is to join the churches embracing the Raw Carrot model. While the pandemic did slow growth, a new Raw Carrot site is expected to open in Guelph this year, and more are in the works.

Sherbino invites others to consider joining. “We’d welcome anyone to reach out to us for further conversation,” she says. “Churches are able to start a site on their own, but there could be opportunities for growth together with MCC Ontario, and we would welcome those conversations.”

About 75-80 percent of the costs of each site are covered through product sales, with the remaining 20-25 percent from grants, donations or a subsidy from a partner church or organization. Sherbino says often the church helps to pay a portion of the expenses, which are about \$10,000 annually. This investment creates employment for 8 to 12 people in permanent, part-time work. Staff earn 15-25 percent over social assistance rates.

A partner church requires:



- a **desire** to provide a sustainable hand up for people in need;
- a **commitment** to justice for the poor and those on the margins;
- a **kitchen** that is public health certified and available two to three days per week;
- a **willingness** to fundraise to get the site off the ground and then continued commitment to yearly costs; and
- a **champion** as well as leadership that is on board to bring the ministry to life.

Back in the kitchen at Paris Presbyterian,

Amanda is in her ninth year working at The Raw Carrot. She likes the job. “It’s pretty happy in The Raw Carrot kitchen,” she says. Being able to work has changed her life by giving her money to help with bills, food, pets, groceries and buying things for her mom.

*Diane Talbot-Schoenhoff serves as director of communications and outreach for The Raw Carrot. For more information, contact Rebecca Sherbino at [rebecca@therawcarrot.com](mailto:rebecca@therawcarrot.com).*



# Three cheers for us

CM Staff

**C**anadian Mennonite received seven awards from the Canadian Christian Communicators Association in May.

Troy Watson received first place in the Column category for Life in the Postmodern Shift. In the Editorial category, retired editor Virginia Hostetler received second for “Two things not up for debate.” Yael, a Grade 7 student from Calgary, won third in the Original Artwork category for her piece, “The story of Christmas.” Will Braun’s piece, “The sweet solace of polarization,” received second in the Feature Series category and won the A.C. Forrest Memorial Award.

Canadian Mennonite received third in the E-newsletter and General Excellence categories.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MENNO SIMONS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

This paper collage of 'The story of Christmas' was created by Yael, a Grade 7 student at Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary.



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# MC Canada launches Emissions Reduction Grant

CM Staff

**M**ennonite Church Canada will provide grants to congregations that wish to upgrade their facilities in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Grants will cover 50 percent of project costs, to a maximum of \$6,000.

Eligible projects include upgrades to insulation, lighting, windows or doors, as well as energy efficient heating, cooling and appliances. Installation of solar panels is also on the list.

MC Canada will approve grants totaling \$20,000 this year, with the annual total rising to \$25,000 next year if donations to the fund increase.

Funds will come from MC Canada's Creation Care Fund. The bulk of the roughly \$100,000 in that fund comes from a dormant church building fund.

The deadline for the first round of applications is September 30. Qualifying grants will be announced by November 4. Grants are open to MC Canada congregations and can cover hardware costs and installation as well as costs of an energy audit.

A subcommittee of MC Canada's Joint Council will determine which applications are approved, based on recommendations from MC Canada's Sustainability Leadership Group. The aim is to balance small and large projects, as well as considering regional representation.

According to the MC Canada website, "The ideal applicants will be working in multiple ways to reduce their building's carbon footprint, with the goal of being able to reduce energy usage or generate renewable energy equivalent to or greater

than the energy they need for electricity, heating and cooling."

Governments and utilities in various jurisdictions have provided incentives for similar projects for many years. Greening Sacred Spaces, an ecumenical initiative, has been promoting the greening of church facilities since 2003.

The United Church of Canada's Faithful Footprints program is currently working with 260 congregations to make their buildings more energy efficient. To date, 56 projects have been completed with annual emission savings equivalent to 628 tonnes.

MC Canada will launch its own initiative with a webinar on energy efficiency of faith buildings on June 14.

The success and future of the program depend on the response at ground level. Congregations need to engage and people and congregations need to donate to the Creation Care Fund.

MC Canada executive minister Doug Klassen notes that amid the discussion of insulation and kilowatt-hours lies a deeper dimension. Drawing on the teachings of Cree elder Stan McKay, he says "the climate crisis is primarily a spiritual problem." Climate damage is the effect of a spiritual crisis that we need to face, he says.

To congregations wondering whether to engage in climate response, Klassen has simple counsel: "Ask your youth and young adults what they think." ❧

For more information about the webinar or the grant, or to donate to the climate fund, see [mennonitechurch.ca/climate-action](http://mennonitechurch.ca/climate-action) or contact MC Canada's climate action coordinator Sandy Plett at [splett@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:splett@mennonitechurch.ca).



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## Calendar

### International

**Oct. 22–Nov. 1, 2023:** Join Mennonite Central Committee Colombia on a 10-day learning tour to discover the peace and development work in Bogota and the countryside. For more information, please contact Rosie Steinmann at [rosiesteinmann@mccc.ca](mailto:rosiesteinmann@mccc.ca), or fill out the form.

### British Columbia

**Oct. 20-22:** MC B.C. women's retreat.  
**March 11-14, 2024:** Mennonite Camping Association is hosting its bi-national gathering at Camp Squeah in Hope. More information to come.

### Alberta

**June 10-11:** Camp Valaqua hike-a-thon and garden party.

### Saskatchewan

**June 17:** MCC Saskatchewan relief sale, at Forest Grove Community Church, Saskatoon, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Activities for all ages.  
**June 22:** RJC High School presents the musical "Red Carpet Open House" RSVP to [admissions@rjc.sk.ca](mailto:admissions@rjc.sk.ca)  
**Sept. 17:** Shekinah Retreat Centre move-a-thon.

### Manitoba

**June 24:** Steinbach in Fiction at 7 p.m. at The Public Brewhouse and Gallery, Steinbach, MB. Three authors with Steinbach roots and books out or launching soon get together to discuss their work and that of others. Admission is free.  
**July 14-15:** The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies and the University of Manitoba present "The Russlaender Mennonites: War dislocation and new beginnings," a centenary conference to mark the arrival of Russlaender from the Soviet Union to Canada.  
**July 15:** "Singing our Journey: Sangerfest 2023," at the Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall. Sign up to sing in the mass choir celebrating the centenary of the Russlaender immigration to Canada. For more information, visit [mhsc.ca/soj](http://mhsc.ca/soj)

### Ontario

**June 8:** "To Antoine": Conversation with Author E.J. Wiens, at Conrad Grebel University College from p.m. to 8 p.m. Hosted by the institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies. Books will be available for purchase, at a discount, including other titles from Gelassenheit Publications. To learn more, visit [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/to-antoine-talk](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/to-antoine-talk).

**June 10:** "To Antoine": Conversation with author E.J. Wiens, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Simpson room at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre. Includes a 'readers theatre' performance of scenes from the novel and books available for purchase.

**June 14:** Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario annual meeting, with Len Friesen speaking on "Questions asked and answered: On writing the history of Mennonites in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union," at 7 p.m. at W-K United Mennonite Church, 16 George St., Waterloo.

**July 10:** "The Place of Memory: Reflections on the Russlaender Centenary," at Knox Presbyterian Church, Waterloo; at 7:30 p.m. The program of music, singing, reading and reflection features the premiere of "The Place of Memory" composed by Leonard Enns and performed by the DaCapo Choir. For more information, visit [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/place-of-memory](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/place-of-memory).

**July 14:** Cheryl Denise will read her plainspoken and often humorous poetry at RiverSong, on Hawkesville Road west of St. Jacobs, at 7 p.m. Her readings will be complemented with singing by Jim and Charlie Bauman. Doors open at 6 p.m. for food and beverages.

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).



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# CONFORM

## THE MENNONITE MIGRATION TO MEXICO OF THE 1920s

**C**onform is a new film that tells the story of the largest group migration out of Canada in the country's history. In the 1920s, 8,000 Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan for northern Mexico.

"They left Canada," Royden Loewen says in the film, "because they felt Canada betrayed them."

With a lively play of images and clips of interviews with noted historians, the 55-minute film starts with the story of the origins of Anabaptism and then tells the story of, as Loewen puts it, the "almost endless migration" of Mennonites.

This backstory skillfully sets the context for the story of the migration to Mexico while also exploring the essence of Mennonite faith, with the continual interplay between faith, education, politics and geography—the interplay between conviction and conformity.

The film is directed and written by Winnipeg filmmaker Andrew Wall of Refuge 31 Films, and jointly produced by Refuge 31 and the Plett Foundation. To watch the film, search "Conform: The Mennonite Migration to Mexico" on YouTube. ✎

SUPPLIED PHOTOS

