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# CANADIAN MENNONITE

AUGUST 2024

SUFFOCATED BY  
**STUFF**

# In praise of restraint

WILL BRAUN



I have too much stuff and it's not good for my soul.

But let's barge through whatever guilt we may lug around about material excess and look deeper. At a winter

meeting of the More-with-Less Revival group I'm part of, one person said she could feel the "less" but not the "more." Another person echoed that.

I struggled to formulate an adequate response, so I decided to experiment with restraint—the opposite of what advertisers and algorithms would want—in hopes of finding the "more."

At that time, I read Gandhi's autobiography. I found his conviction and intensely practical spirituality motivating. Particularly compelling were his beliefs that "all self-restraint is good for the soul" and that attaining a deeper spiritual life is not possible if you put no constraints on what you eat.

I'm prone to vanity so it would be unwise to say much about the minor deprivations I have undertaken but I have cut some things from my diet, taken on a routine of small-time fasting and enacted restrictions on digital distraction. I sold a few belongings too.

There's something good about walking past a plate of doughnuts, which I love, and not taking one—for spiritual reasons. There's something fairly deep inside that shifts and softens when I feel hunger, and then stop to recite simple versus: Seek first the kingdom of God, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, we do not live by bread alone, deny

yourself . . ."

I'm not Gandhi in a loincloth eating only bananas, peanuts, lemons and olive oil, but in those moments when I seek first something other than the nearest hit of consumption, I feel incremental transformation. I touch the "more."

Admittedly, it's just little league practice—practice for being a more present, humble and loving person, and hopefully practice for some big league, or medium-sized-league downsizing. Ultimately, the world demands major restraint.

In any case, my motivation is not ethical compulsion so much as the prospect of spiritual enrichment and connection.

It makes sense that I need to put in some effort in order to see some gain. You gotta climb the mountain to get the view. I hold that in tension with the belief that, ultimately, it is not we who draw near to God, but God who draws near to us. At most, our efforts crack open the door so grace can rush in.

Restraint invites grace. It welcomes transformation of heart and world.

It may sound odd but to me this element of inner transformation relates directly to Zach Rempel's incisive critique of the economic growth model (page 16). He says humans are consuming too much stuff, and that the "sustainable development" framework, which tries to dramatically reduce carbon emissions without questioning the pervasive doctrine of perpetual economic growth, might not be the best path.

He says restraint, of the

more-with-less nature, is good for individuals and economies. In my mind, it's all the same quest—the pursuit of love, humility, oneness, God.

Not all will agree with Zach. You might say economic degrowth would cause suffering or that electric vehicles are the answer. Fair enough. Send us a letter. Debate is good. That's the point: the doctrine of endless economic growth should be debated, something astoundingly rare. In such debate, the church could actually contribute something of broad, unique value to society.

As our family drove away for the first More-with-Less Revival meeting, our son said, "So, what are we going to give up?" It's a question full of promise.

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We want to welcome Susan Fish of Waterloo, Ontario, as associate editor and senior writer. Susan has extensive experience editing books, articles and other materials. In addition to three novels, her writing has appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *Rhubarb* magazine, the *MB Herald* and elsewhere. She earned a Master of Theological Studies from the University of Waterloo in 2022.

Susan grew up Presbyterian, landed in the Mennonite Brethren Church, then migrated to Mennonite Church Eastern Canada where she now attends Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church.

On behalf of the CM team, "Welcome, Susan!" ●



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**ABOUT THE COVER** For many people, automated parcel depots are a handy, and theft-proof, alternative to front door delivery. Photo: David Pisnoy/Unsplash

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# What in the World



### Off with her head

A controversial sculpture of the Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus was beheaded by vandals on July 1 at the St. Mary Cathedral in Linz, Austria. The sculpture, designed by Esther Strauss, was part of an exhibit on women's roles, family images and gender equality. *Source: The Guardian*

Photo: Grant Whitty/Unsplash



### Tragic pilgrimage

Unprecedented heatwaves, overcrowding and issues with sanitation and transportation led to the deaths of more than 1300 of the 1.8 million Muslims on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, this year. Many Muslims consider it a blessing to die on this pilgrimage and to be buried in Mecca. *Source: BBC, The Guardian*

Photo: Dimasnaufalf/Pexels



### Laughing with God

Pope Francis met more than 100 leading comedians, urging them to unite people using smiles rather than offending religious feelings or laughing at the poor. He suggested it's not blasphemous to "laugh at God," in the same way we "play and joke with the people we love." *Source: The Guardian*

Photo: Suvan Chowdhury/Pexels

# 50 YEARS AGO

MENNONITE REPORTER, AUGUST 5, 1974





### Thou shalt

The Louisiana state government has passed a law requiring a poster-sized display of the 10 Commandments in every public classroom from kindergarten to state-funded universities. "If you want to respect the rule of law, you've got to start from the original lawgiver, which was Moses," said Governor Jeff Landry. *Source: AP*

Photo: Thank You (24 Millions ) views/Flickr



### Defensive spending

Sixty percent of Canadians believe Canada should meet its NATO commitment to spend two percent of GDP on defence (up from the current 1.33 percent). Twenty-two percent say government should do so by cutting social program spending. Twenty-six percent say Canada should not increase military spending, with 13 percent unsure. *Source: Nanos*

Photo: Master Sgt. Becky Vanshur



### Christian billionaire guilty

In one of the biggest cases of Wall Street fraud, a U.S. jury convicted Christian investor and philanthropist Bill Hwang of defrauding banks of \$10 billion. Hwang's faith was woven into the trial. Hwang's Grace and Mercy Foundation hosted lunchtime Bible readings in space shared by his capital management firm. *Source: Christianity Today*

Photo: Wesley Tingey/Unsplash

*Like other news sources, we present information because we deem it worthy of consideration, not because we necessarily agree with it. – Eds.*

## A moment from yesterday



**Waldo Schulz conducts the Altona Mennonite Youth Fellowship band at an Easter sunrise service in 1955. Other events that morning included a fellowship breakfast and singing Easter hymns at local homes.**

Text: Lauren Harder-Gissing  
Photo: The Canadian Mennonite/  
Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

## Responses to ‘Involuntary’

### ✉ From resigned MCC’ers

**For 17 of the past 32-plus years, we worked with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in four countries. MCC was instrumental in forming the values we try to live by today. We are grateful for this.**

On our last assignment, during which Dave served as an interim representative (overseeing programing in a country), he was informed that a termination without cause of a local staff person who had worked with MCC for 27 years would take place.

We never expected to witness MCC taking what we considered a non-restorative approach to a Human Resources (HR) situation. We felt it did not value “right relationship with God [and] one another,” as MCC proclaims. We felt so betrayed that Dave refused to carry out the termination and resigned.

Two years later, alarmed by the stories in the open letter from former MCC workers (as reported in “Involuntary: Terminated MCC workers call for accountability and change,” July 2024), we signed the “MCC, stop harming your workers and partners now!” petition, to hold MCC accountable.

We were given an ear by senior MCC staff after Dave’s resignation. Sadly, it appears Anicka Fast and John Clarke were not.

When we challenged MCC, saying we did not observe restorative justice principles included in their HR policies, MCC eventually acknowledged this and wrote to us privately, stating they were committed to taking this omission into account, though the review would take time.

MCC’s practice of limited access to their HR policies is also problematic. Except for their Ethical and Professional Standards, and Whistleblower Policy, their policies are not accessible to a potential employee prior to signing an offer of employment or after termination, and they are not available to the constituency.

Ironically, in the Whistleblower Policy, MCC professes “the highest standards of transparency, integrity and accountability.”

Other secular organizations find their way. Doctors Without Borders provides a quantitative annual account on their website of reports of abuse and misconduct and their response. Just Outcomes works with organizations to align their HR policies with a restorative approach.

For many of our years with MCC, we were in leadership. Reflecting on our full participation in MCC systems gives us pause to consider how we may have caused harm.

We pray MCC’s leadership will find it possible to immediately and transparently respond to petitioners’ questions.

We expect public reports on how restorative justice principles are incorporated into HR policies.

– DAVE AND MARY LOU KLASSEN, KITCHENER, ONTARIO  
(STIRLING AVENUE MENNONITE CHURCH)

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### ✉ Pendulum

**I appreciated the article about Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and HR concerns (“Involuntary,” June 2024). In my time with MCC, I did not have any negative experiences, but I and other colleagues noticed that MCC was becoming more “professional.” While there were positives in this, workers noticed a reduction in personalization.**

I felt validated in these concerns as I read the “Involuntary” article and heard my thoughts echoed by Tim Lind.

An organization such as MCC needs to be critical when adopting what I would call colonialist, hierarchical business practices in which people do not come first.

I wonder if the pendulum needs to swing back and MCC needs to question the inherent power dynamics at play in business-modelled HR departments.

I also agree with the warning in the article about MCC becoming an “idol.” An organization must allow itself to be legitimately critiqued.

– TINA FEHR KEHLER, WINKLER, MANITOBA  
(EMMANUEL MENNONITE CHURCH)

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### ✉ Transparency

**I believe that MCC management and their dealing with employees need to be transparent to the constituency to whom MCC belongs.**

The endowment funds that MCC have received seem to me to have had the effect that MCC management is less responsible to the Mennonite Church. I have also experienced what felt like a shunning from management when asking questions about management and Human Resources.

– WALTER QUIRING, COQUITLAM, B.C.

#### Be in Touch

• Send letters to [letters@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:letters@canadianmennonite.org). Our mailing address is on page 3.

## ✉ Accountability

**I had the immense joy of serving as director of Victim Offender Ministries with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada from 1989 to 1998. This work became an ideal vehicle for my newfound peacemaking commitments.**

My wife, Esther, and I have been supporters of MCC for many years. During our decade-plus of retirement, we have been greatly privileged to continue work under MCC B.C.'s End Abuse program.

However, things changed when the End Abuse program coordinator Elsie Goerzen retired last year. She embodied what we see as the classic MCC leadership style: respectful, embodying “power with” not “power over,” inclusive and collaborative. In our observation, much of that has now gone. The longstanding Advisory Committee disbanded, joint decision-making seems gone and Elsie’s leadership style seems a foreign concept.

Given this experience, Esther and I find ourselves at once grieved and gobsmacked by the alleged mistreatment of the former MCC workers mentioned in “Involuntary: Terminated MCC workers call for accountability and change” (July 2024). These sources appear credible to us.

In Esther Epp-Tiessen’s 2013 history of MCC Canada, she acknowledged that professionalization of its operation was on an increased mission creep. Perhaps this is not unlike the way early church pacifism was slowly displaced by *Realpolitik* (pragmatism over values) under Constantine. And of course, the mistreatment that has been alleged is power and control over: *Realpolitik* violence.

Will the MCC leadership, if and/or where it is deemed needed, rise to the challenge and repent, ask for forgiveness, make amends and commit to do no more harm?

– WAYNE NORTHEY AGASSIZ, B.C.  
(LANGLEY MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP)

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## ✉ Disclosure

**Recent investigative reporting by *Canadian Mennonite* has generated some internal distress for me.**

Without the term being specifically named, it appears to me that MCC uses non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) as a tool for resolving personnel and/or Human Resources issues. While I understand the use of NDAs to protect sensitive product information generated within companies, the MCC circumstances are different.

I, and many others, have seen over recent years how NDAs have been used as tools by people or organizations with power to make people with less power be quiet and go away.

As a long-time supporter of MCC, and as a former two-term board member of MCC Ontario, I find myself chagrined by the current situation. My wife and I have decided that the bequest to MCC which is in our wills will be held in abeyance until such time as MCC repudiates the use of NDAs to “resolve” personnel or HR issues.

– JOHN FINLAY, WALKERTON, ONTARIO  
(HANOVER MENNONITE CHURCH)

*This is adapted and excerpted from a letter sent to the executive directors of MCC Canada and MCC U.S., and copied to Canadian Mennonite. - Eds.*

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## ✉ A good, brutal people

**In the '90s, I was a manager for MCC B.C. I have also observed many friends and family who have served with the agency across the planet. I started a doctorate in organizational behaviour and completed a doctorate in Mennonite history and ethics. With all of that background, I find myself conflicted over the current situation.**

I have observed instances in which MCC treated people in ways that I considered brutal. In my view, they were using people. I watched that happen to people I cared about.

As a manager, I experienced what felt to me like brutality and, much as it pains me to admit it, I contributed to it.

From what I know of MCC’s history, it was probably always that way and, to my dismay, I observed MCC making moves that in my view reinforced that approach to its staff, managers, volunteers and associates during my time with the agency.

However, as a Mennonite historian and ethicist, it’s also obvious that Euro-descended Mennonites are a relatively brutal people who combine high ideals with strong discipline and intolerance for difference or failure. Why should the organization be different from the people?

Like all such organizational cultures, it tends to take its participants and either turn them into replicants or eject them.

On the other side, MCC does amazing work. The culture promotes high ideals, innovation and outcomes competence. I’m proud of the work I did for MCC, even though at the time I could feel and see the brutality. I don’t like the cost-benefit equation—the human costs are very high. On the other hand, there might not be an alternative if we want Mennonites to do good works.

– BRUCE HIEBERT, ABBOTSFORD, B.C.  
(LANGLEY MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP)

## ✉ Preparing for post-collapse limits

In a recent article, Miles Wiederkehr notices that it is only after you start doing experiments in sustainability that you learn about certain laws that stand in the way of an energy-and nature-conserving culture (“The long road to freedom,” June 2024). Miles wrote about the legal obstacles to bringing multiple families together to do small-scale agriculture on a single title of farmland. I am reminded of farmer-author Joel Salatin’s book, *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal*.

I have recently returned from Weierhof, Germany, a village that Mennonites were invited to settle after the devastation of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). There, farm “hofs” (farmhouse, courtyard and barn combos) are convivially clustered together within walking distance of outlying fields. Today those fields are worked by very few farmers with large machines. Most of the villagers have non-agrarian livelihoods. But when the present cheap energy bonanza burns itself out, I imagine that this village will have an easier time of re-organizing a land-based culture than the places that were designed around the car and the Costco store.

A time comes when things that can’t go on don’t. Empires collapse. Our faith contemplates the plagues of Egypt, the fall of Babylon, the end of Rome. How many of us will make an exodus into real sustainability voluntarily? Who knows. But we will all hit limits. And those who had the moral courage to renounce the promises of empire pre-collapse will have a way of seeing and a way of living in its ruins that will help many of their neighbours find their way back to a culture that lives within limits. It so happens that “Wiederkehr” means Return. How apt.

MARCUS REMPEL, BEAUSEJOUR, MANITOBA  
(ST. JULIAN’S TABLE)

### Corrections

In “‘Stuck together’ at MCBC AGM” (March 8), we called Tom Miller, Tim Miller and Josh Willms, John Willms.

In “Windsor church addresses toxic drug crisis” (July 2024), we said Rick (last name withheld) did not attend Windsor Mennonite Fellowship at the time of his daughter’s death. That was incorrect; he did.

“Ninety-two-year-old artist publishes children’s book” (July 2024) should have said that sales of the book raised \$2,000.

We apologize for the errors.

## ✉ Palestinian prisoners

I was heartened to read that Mennonites in Winnipeg had organized a service on Nakba Day to lament and pray for the people suffering in Gaza (“Winnipeg churches hold Nakba Day service,” June 2024). Palestinian Christians and Muslims have suffered tremendously with numerous forcible displacements since 1948. We do well to show our solidarity and our hope for a just peace for both Palestine and Israel.

In the last paragraph, Mennonite Church Manitoba executive minister Michael Pahl’s statement appealed for “an immediate ceasefire and the immediate and safe return of all remaining hostages,” but what I felt was missing was a call to also release the estimated 9500 Palestinians in Israeli jails, many of whom have been held for many years under brutal conditions.

Have we, like much of the press, also made these Palestinian prisoners invisible?

BARBARA MARTENS, LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO  
(NORTH LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH)



# Share your important moments!

Announce births, adoptions, baptisms, marriages, deaths, arrival of sponsored newcomers, reunifications of newcomer families or suggest a new category.

Church administrators: Submit announcements within four months of the event to [milestones@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:milestones@canadianmennonite.org)



## CM MILESTONES

### Births/Adoptions

**Cheng**—Noah Bennett (b. May 19, 2024) to Jim Cheng and Valerie Alipova, Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Fitchett-Climenhaga**—William Merlin, (b. April 3, 2024) to Nevin & Alison (Fitchett) Climenhaga, Steinbach Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

**Granzow**—Sullivan Morley James (b. March 1, 2024) to Sarah and Danny Granzow, Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

### Baptisms

**Kathryn Weber**—Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, July 6, 2024.

**Annika Durksen**—Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man. May 19, 2024.

**Mikayla Sawatzky**—Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man. May 19, 2024.

### Weddings

**Kuepfer/Mirasola**—Greg Kuepfer and Amanda Mirasola, Poole Mennonite Church, May 17, 2024, at Ancaster Mills in Ancaster, Ont.

**Pathmanathan/Sulenvrarajah**—Johnathan Pathmanathan and Suwetha Sulenvrarajah, Wideman Mennonite Church, June 21, 2024, Markham, Ont.

**Li/Zambri**—Juan (Jen) Li and Pasquale Zambri, Wideman Mennonite Church, June 22, 2024, Markham, Ont.

### Deaths

**Braun**—Elsa, 95 (b. Dec. 6, 1928; d. July 8, 2024) North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Dyck**—Martha, 89 (b. Jan 30, 1935; d. June 13, 2024), Aberdeen Mennonite Church, Aberdeen, Sask.

**Enns**—Harold, 91 (b. March 2, 1933; d. June 22, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

**Epp**—Sara, 90 (b. May 20, 1934; d. June 27, 2024) North Kildonan Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Frey**—Doris (nee Cober), 90 (b. May 26, 1934; d. June 18, 2024), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira, Ont.

**Friesen**—Martin, 89 (b. April 7, 1935; d. June 5, 2024), Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Harder**—Edgar (Ed) Arthur, 80 (b. Jan. 22, 1944; d. June 10, 2024), Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

**Jantzi**—Lyle James, 61 (b. Sept. 10, 1962; d. May 19, 2024), Poole Mennonite Church, Poole, Ontario

**Janzen**—Helen (nee Nickel), 92 (b. August 18, 1931; d. June 11, 2024), Steinbach Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

**Janzen**—Henry Gerhard, 78 (b. June 20, 1945; d. May 31, 2024), St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, St. Jacobs, Ont.

**Kehler**—Tina (Katharina), 94, (b. Sept. 10, 1929; d. April 28, 2024) Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.



**Kendra Whitfield Ellis**, (1978-2024), minister for pastoral care and youth ministries at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, died suddenly of a heart attack on July 13 at age 46. She leaves behind her husband, Peter, and their children, Kyana and Ollie, as well as a congregation in grief and shock. In a 2022 interview, Whitfield Ellis reflected on her ministry: “The most rewarding aspect of church ministry, for me, is witnessing spiritual growth and wisdom in youth and young adults. Simply being in their company and ‘hanging out’ together can move from the hilarious to holy.”

**Klassen**—Harvey, 87 (b. Nov. 8, 1936; d. June 14, 2024), Aberdeen Mennonite Church, Aberdeen, Sask.

**Martin**—Ina (nee Snyder), 98 (b. Sept. 23, 1925; d. June 9, 2024), Elmira Mennonite Church, Elmira, Ont.

**Penner**—Darrel, 66 (b. June 8, 1958; d. June 25, 2024), Grace Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

**Penner**—Henry, 97 (b. Sept 17, 1926; d. June 15, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

**Peters**—Paul Frank, 95 (b. Oct. 12, 1928; d. June 15, 2024), Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Man.

**Reimer**—Helena, 85 (b. July 16, 1938; d. June 18, 2024), Steinbach Mennonite Church, Steinbach, Man.

**Snider**—John Merle, 90 (b. Feb. 22, 1934; d. May 9, 2024), Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont.

**Unger**—Elsie (nee Redman), 94 (b. Jan. 14, 1930; d. June 21, 2024), First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Williams**—Rob, 81 (b. June 27, 1943; d. June 29, 2024), Wideman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont.

**Willms**—William E., 87 (b. Jan. 15, 1937; d. June 26, 2024), North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

# MCC executive directors respond to concerns of former workers

By Rick Cober Bauman and Ann Graber Hershberger

*The following opinion piece is an additional response by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to serious concerns raised in our “Involuntary” article (July 2024) as well as in the online petition and open letter referenced in that article and posted online by a group of seven former MCC workers. – Eds.*

As the executive directors of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada and MCC U.S., we want you to know that we are listening to the concerns recently raised by alumni, staff and others, and are holding them with humility and compassion. We are practicing prayerful discernment that will allow us to work with wisdom and grace toward resolution and healing.

MCC is an organization made up of people of faith, committed to sharing God’s love and compassion with all in the name of Christ. We seek to build an internal culture that reflects our faith and mission. We want to learn where MCC can, and *must*, make some important changes.

As we have read and reviewed the materials online, we know MCC can do better in our ongoing work. In the past decades, we have grown more complex in our efforts to meet urgent needs and work for peace and justice, all in an ever-changing world reeling under the weight of war, conflict and heart-wrenching disaster.

We acknowledge that our processes and systems have not always kept pace with our own growth and the increasing complexities of service across 40 countries. Even before the online petition and open letter were posted, MCC had identified three areas that need attention:

MCC will continue to expand our Human Resources (HR) capacity as part of what it means to be a faith-based organization living out our values and ensuring we meet legal requirements and best practices. We recognize the growing needs of the organization, especially internationally. We are committed to moving more fully toward racial equity and inclusion; we are building processes to ensure that every MCC

worker is treated equitably and fairly. We are strengthening our reporting and safeguarding requirements; increasing training around anti-bias and safety; and improving worker care.

MCC will continue to explore ways to integrate additional restorative justice principles into our HR processes, including terminations.

MCC will conduct a deeper review of our policies around conflict, harassment, grievance and abuse of power. We want to ensure that our services and responses around reporting, such as how we conduct case management, are streamlined and easier to engage. This includes a review of the Speak Up Service, which was launched in spring 2023.

People have asked why we haven’t replied to concerns on social media. Please do not interpret our online silence to mean we do not care or want to engage. When it comes to social media, there are legal limits to what an employer can say, particularly when there is active litigation. No matter how strong the calls, we do not believe it is right or appropriate for MCC to engage in public discussions related to confidential personnel matters.

Yes, there is work to be done. We also believe there is a difference between workplace abuse and organizational conflict. Individuals citing organizational abuse may not have all the facts and can easily make assumptions without all the evidence. Conflict, by nature, is multifaceted and includes more than one perspective.

We do want you to know that, when employee transitions occur, MCC does not, as a matter of practice, use non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) or non-disparagement clauses. In almost all cases, these types of agreements are

unnecessary. In the rare occasion when there is potential for a lawsuit, our legal counsel provides us with templated agreements in which both sides agree to not pursue further litigation or disparage the other side.

MCC does engage mediators or legal counsel to reach a settlement when disagreements cannot be resolved through shared problem-solving.

When MCC staff who serve outside their home countries complete their terms, or if they separate early from MCC, it’s common practice for MCC to provide a financial amount to help them transition back to their home country. This is a monetary amount offered with care, compassion and generosity. We want to help them re-establish themselves in new settings.

Having placed thousands of people of all ages in often difficult and complex situations, MCC has a good overall track record for success. MCC’s annual turnover rate is 14 percent, which is below the U.S. nonprofit national average of 19 percent (based upon 2022 data).

MCC cares about its workforce. We invest deeply in preparing workers as they enter a new context. We engage in vigorous and ongoing support throughout a worker’s service term.

Risk and uncertainty are inherent to MCC’s work. In the challenging and changing locations in which we serve, nothing any organization or individual can do will guarantee that an assignment, context or country is or will remain the right fit for a particular person or family. In some cases, there will be situations in which staff disagree with decisions made by supervisors or leaders—especially when staff are working in contexts of volatility or crisis. Our goal is to work



through disagreements in a fashion that respects all individuals involved.

Yes, there is work to be done. As an organization, MCC is composed of imperfect people trying to do difficult and compassionate work. We must listen. We must learn. We must do better. We will continue to seek healing and resolution with those who have experienced situations where MCC has not lived up to our values and mission.

At the same time, our commitment to the mission of sharing God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ will not waver. Thank you for your continued prayers and ongoing support as we walk this journey together. ●

*Ann Graber Hershberger is executive director for MCC U.S., and Rick Cober Bauman is executive director for MCC Canada. For more, see [mcc.org/our-stories/journey-service-mennonite-central-committee](http://mcc.org/our-stories/journey-service-mennonite-central-committee).*

Mennonite Church Canada  
GATHERING  
**2025**  
JULY 2-5

**Each Gift**

1 PETER 4:10

...EACH ONE HAS RECEIVED A GIFT, USE IT TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE VARIED GRACE OF GOD. 1 PETER 4:10

**2025 national gathering in Kitchener**

Mennonite Church Canada’s next national gathering will take place at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario, on July 2-5, 2025. The theme, “Each has a Gift,” draws on 1 Peter 4:10 and was proposed by MC Canada’s Intercultural Steering Committee. MC Canada says the theme “highlights that each person, whether from a Eurocentric background or from another place in the global church, has gifts to bring to the ministry of the church.”

Unlike the last national gathering, congregations will be able to send delegates to Kitchener next year. This was the case prior to the 2017 restructuring, when both regional churches and congregations sent delegates. Following 2017, only regional churches appointed delegates, but the MC Canada Joint Council decided at its last meeting to invite congregations to send delegates. Specifics have yet to be determined.

The 2017 restructuring envisioned regional churches acting as discernment bodies both for themselves and the national church, but regional church gatherings have been full enough with their own business and not suited to national agenda.

Given this dynamic, the desire of Joint Council now is that congregations be able to speak directly to nationwide church directions.

In keeping with MC Canada bylaws, delegates at the national gathering will serve to guide and offer discernment to Joint Council, which serves as the decision-making body. – *CM Staff*

# Making connections

Keith Retzlaff

**H**ello to everyone from the new Mennonite Church Alberta moderator.

I believe that who I am influences my approach to serving as moderator, so let me introduce myself. I am, first and foremost, a follower of Christ. Beyond that, I am son, husband, father, brother, uncle, engineer, manager and now, moderator.

I grew up on a farm in Rosemary, Alberta, and attended the Rosemary Mennonite Church, where I was baptized and first began to serve in the church. After high school I attended Columbia Bible College for two years and then went to the big city of Calgary to study engineering in university. There, I met my wife, Krista.

After graduation, I started my career with ATCO Gas and have just completed my 25<sup>th</sup> year of working there. My work has taken me across Alberta and beyond—from living in Lethbridge for five years to travelling to Indigenous communities near Peace River and into the territories.

Since taking on the role as MC Alberta moderator in March, I have attended several MC Alberta meetings, a Mennonite Church Canada Joint Council meeting in Waterloo, Ontario, and many online meetings. Common themes in these meetings have been how we all connect with each other, and how we tell the stories of why that matters.

Over the last few years, we have seen that connections to others are vital. We



form connections in our congregations, each individual congregation comes together to form the regional church, and then the five regional churches come together to form the national church.

Our stories are one piece of the puzzle that helps to make and keep these connections. Reading the May issue of *Canadian Mennonite*, it struck me how the Mennonite story is often told more effectively by those who have come to the Mennonite church from elsewhere—whether churched or unchurched—than by those of us who have grown up in the Mennonite church.

How is it that those who come into

the church recognize the value of the story so much better? Maybe when you have been part of something for an extended period, it is easier to concentrate on what isn't working or to see the grass as greener on the other side. The stories in the April issue made me excited for the ways in which God is using the Mennonite church to impact people's lives. It reminds me that we are part of something bigger—bigger than the local church, the regional church and even the national church.

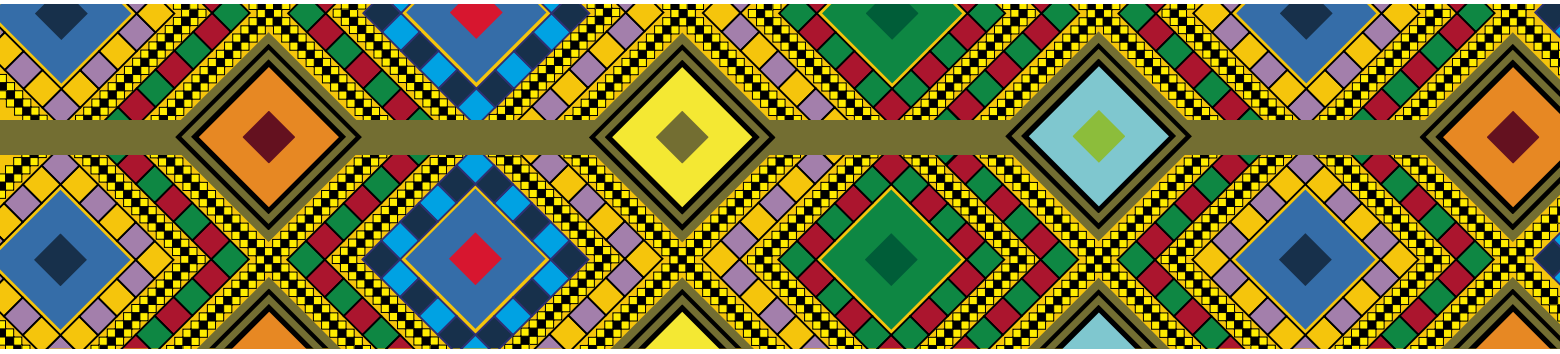
Thank you to those who are telling their stories. They remind us of what is working and how we as the Mennonite church are impacting the world. I look forward to hearing and helping to tell these stories in my role as moderator.

The worship song *Together* by Nathan Grieser (#389 in *Voices Together*) prays that God would bring us together as the church. The words found in the second verse reflect my approach to being moderator: "My words will be imperfect, but I'll try. Bringing my assumptions to the light, I'll pray, God, I'll surrender. Bring us together, bring us together."

May God bring us together as congregations, regional churches, MC Canada and beyond. ●



Keith Retzlaff lives in Calgary and serves as moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta. He can be reached at [moderator@mcab.ca](mailto:moderator@mcab.ca).



# Living in peculiarity, embracing Anabaptism

Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle

In the history of Ethiopia, Christianity was first introduced into the royal court around the 4th century, gradually spreading among the common people from there. Unlike the spread of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, which remained confined to the lower levels for three centuries, the introduction of Christianity as a state religion marked a significant turning point in Ethiopian history during the 13th to 15th centuries.

Christianity in Ethiopia is not merely a religious phenomenon but something that plays an integral role in all aspects of national life. The church has served as the repository of the cultural, political and social life of the people, profoundly influencing the essence of Habesha identity.

Ethiopian culture is deeply rooted in the marriage of history and the collective memory of its people, closely tied to the church and its state affirmation. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church's teachings and activities have shaped the country's religiosity since its establishment. The culture is closely associated with the Creator-creation relationship, which is celebrated in the Ethiopian Qene philosophy.

Qene employs the *Samna-worq* (wax and gold) way of thinking, a special

wisdom that allows one to perceive profound truths (gold) through a metaphorical eyeglass (wax). This method of understanding the mystery of the Creator through creation is central to Ethiopian thought. *Samna-worq* refers to poetic figures with dual meanings, known as *HiberKal*.

The leaders of the country historically played a significant role in shaping the culture, moral values, and thinking patterns by merging church and state affairs. This process produced a culture and tradition deeply associated with the divine. Traditional schools also played a crucial role in forming societal values and shared memory, fostering a religiously dominated culture that revered both creation and the Creator.

The influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church on the cultural, societal, moral, spiritual, economic and political life of the country underscores the deeply religious nature of Ethiopian society. The church's teachings, practices and values have significantly shaped the shared memories and history of the Ethiopian people, forming the foundation of the nation's culture.

Our history and culture have a significant influence on the way we live, the way we interpret things such as the

Bible and the way we engage with other cultures. Our Anabaptist tradition that we inherited from the missionaries, at some point colluded with the existing culture and tradition. This collusion also created a big gap between the two churches—Anabaptist and Orthodox—and led to persecution of Anabaptists, as well as evangelicals.

Yet embracing our culture, our tradition that is founded in the Creator and creation relationships, has to be maintained along with our Anabaptist identity. Such peculiarity is partly the greatest contribution we can bring to the global church. I think it's high time that the current and coming generations embrace our Anabaptist beliefs and the tradition that is our peculiarity. And it's also high time for the global church to be able to accept our peculiar tradition and embrace us as part of the global Anabaptist family. ●



*Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle lives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and serves as secretary of the Mennonite World Conference Deacons Commission. She is also the founder and director of The Spark Valley, an educational NGO.*



JUSTIN SUN



## A view to worldly culture

**“Y**ou’ve given in to the culture.”

I’ve heard this plenty as a Christian—in churches, schools, on social media. From what I can make of it, it is ultimately an allegation of compromise or failure. One Christian party charges another with abandoning the faith to embrace “cultural” (“worldly”) ways.

Accusations of giving in often arise from Christian people and communities that are navigating shifts in community and circumstance, and these allegations often serve to imply the “other” has fallen away while the “I/we” have remained steadfast. Think of recent elections and conversations around feminism, race or sex and gender.

Amid the talk of “us,” “them” and God, what is being worked out is the identity of a community, how to deal with differences and how God works. In this, the definition of the other serves as a tool of self-definition.

To me, accusations of “giving in to the culture” have never sat well. I get where people come from—dualities and ideas of us and them are not unfounded in Christian traditions. The Bible is replete with stories of God’s reign and of God’s people fighting evil empires (from Babylon to the spiritual forces of evil).

Us-versus-them dynamics also play out in church history, including early Christian relations with Judaism and the Roman Empire. The Reformation and Radical Reformation also drew very clear lines.

As Christianity made its way to the

corners of the earth, Christian faith necessitated (forced) a sifting of ways. Converts had to figure out how Christianity harmonized with existing ways and how it did not.

I am suspicious of how these dualities continue to serve people who want a convenient way to delineate between those who are in and out, Christian or un-Christian.

Take the Bible again, for even in all its bifurcations of the godly and the human, it is also a deeply cultural product, coming out of and speaking into the specific circumstances and cultures of ancient Near Eastern peoples.

And take church history also: for all the effort expended by Jesus followers to define in/out or Christian/not, we can also see uninterrogated marriages to nation states, languages and economic systems readily accepted under the banner of Christendom.

In all this, I don’t think it’s easy to draw simplistic lines. I believe deeper reflection shows Christians have always lived in a complicated emulsification of “the faith” and “the culture.” In one sense, it is impossible to live without giving in to culture.

Living with real bodies in real places is inherently complex. And if we define culture as “ways of life shared by people,” it is an inescapable reality. Everyone, including those in the Bible, has customs, behaviours and beliefs based in a time and place—and so must our faith be.

The question, therefore, may not be merely whether something is “Christian” or “cultural” but how God might be working in and through the

cultures we inhabit, and, as a people who claim a transcendent God, how we might hear God speaking through the wider cultures of all people.

Instead of haphazardly and combatively labeling certain things as “culture,” what if Christians listened to what the music, film or literature of surrounding cultures have to say about faith and tradition?

Personally, the music of Brandi Carlile, the films of Christopher Nolan and the books of N. K. Jemisin have taught me that faith often defies easy ins and outs and in fact sometimes *intentionally* defies easy ins and outs, challenging us to think bigger.

The elements of culture that particular Christians consider intrusions on the faith, and the elements they accept, say much about them. Consider how your church might react to extravagant displays of wealth, increased policing budgets or new fossil fuel investments in comparison to cussing, clothing choices or someone’s use of recreational drugs.

In my experience, a readiness to see God beyond the confines of traditional binaries has helped me reimagine my faith. I’m continually challenged to reconsider how God is at work all around me, challenging my sensibilities and inviting me to ever-greater visions. ●

*Justin Sun serves as youth pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond, B.C. He graduated from Columbia Bible College in 2020. He can be reached at [justin@peacemennonite.ca](mailto:justin@peacemennonite.ca) or on Instagram @PsJustinSun.*



### Breathe

Like Justin, I enjoy Brandi Carlile’s music. Lately, one of her songs has been playing frequently in my home. “I build my house up on this rock, baby, every day with you,” the chorus goes. “I don’t need their money, baby, just you and me on the rock.” It’s a love song to Brandi’s wife. It’s also a song about building a life on a foundation of faith.

Beyond its catchy tune—reminiscent of Joni Mitchell’s “Big Yellow Taxi”—it’s the vision of life the song creates that grabs me. It’s a vision of an ever-expanding sense of what love means, while remaining steadfast in faith traditions that help to navigate a stormy world. This steadfastness defies easy definition.

I hear this song as an invitation to what Cindy speaks of as cultural discernment. What parts of our faith traditions offer the foundations for shared lives of belonging and safety? What parts of our faith traditions risk causing harm to those who may not “fit”? For me, these questions are about participation in shared life. They are about culture. They are also a commitment to a faith tradition that is given space to breathe, expand and change. ●

– Anika Reynar, recent graduate, Yale University



### Set apart

I’ve been thinking a lot about the concept of holiness lately. I grew up in a church context where we were urged to avoid culture in some of the ways Justin describes. I mostly chafed against this.

I didn’t want to be separate from the culture. I didn’t want to stand out or be thought of as some odd “religious” person. I wanted to have fun and fit in.

“Holiness,” at least as defined by those around me and their interpretations of Scripture, seemed both impossible and undesirable.

To be “holy” means, at least on some level, to be “set apart.” From “the world.” From culture. From the unique time and place in which God has called us to proclaim and embody the gospel.

Increasingly, I find myself wanting to be set apart from a culture that seems profoundly unhealthy. Without wholly embracing the “sky-is-falling” narratives that abound, it seems undeniable that Western culture is not well. It is characterized by pervasive loneliness, addictions of all kinds, depression, anxiety, purposelessness, enslavement to technology and disconnection from the created world and its Creator. In this context, I *want* to resist the culture. I want to be an oddly religious holy fool. ●

– Ryan Dueck, pastor, Lethbridge (Alberta) Mennonite Church



### Sifting

Culture is the way we make meaning together in community—our traditions, our norms, our sense of beauty. It’s a gift to be rooted in a thriving culture, and it’s a gift to experience healthy cross-cultural exchange. It’s a gift to have my grandma’s recipe cards, and it’s a gift to read the newest novel by Katherena Vermette or listen to a song that cracks me open.

But we devolve so often into culture wars. We accuse each other of capitulating to certain aspects of “the culture,” as Justin says, but this is often just a way of claiming power or an expression of fear.

There *are* parts of our culture that are sick. As a Christian, I am called to holiness, but I am not called to a fear of difference. What we need, I think, is discernment.

I learn about discernment from the Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s practice of “cultural hermeneutics.” She invites us to honestly survey our cultural traditions—local, national, religious—and sift them to keep what gives life, letting go of the death-dealing parts. This takes work. It takes conversation and trust. And I think it’s an essential part of being the church together. ●

– Cindy Wallace, professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan



# A RECIPE TO REVERSE THE ECONOMY

Degrowth, Doris Janzen Longacre and the fading allure of net-zero

By Zach Rempel



**T**he Mennonite more-with-less ethic is something I have always connected with. Shopping for clothes at the thrift store, commuting by bicycle and eating simple, tasty food are practices that have defined my life in the Mennonite community. These values ultimately steered me toward work in environmental policy, and today I work at one of the largest environmental research organizations in the world.

In my mind, simple living aligns with what I see as an urgent need to address environmental destruction. But, ironically, in the realm of mainstream climate policy, more-with-less could hardly be more foreign.

In my day job, the assumed economic context for our work is limitless growth and endless consumption. Though this overconsumption of material resources is driving environmental destruction, it is not questioned.

### Gross domestic production

Most governments aim to have their economies grow by approximately two to three percent each year. This is relentless growth, and it means that the size of the economy doubles every 20 years.

## The current plan is for this economic growth to continue, without stopping, forever.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure of the total value of goods and services produced in a country or region. In 2020, global GDP was twice as large as it was in 2000. And in 2000, it was twice as large as it was in 1980, and so on.

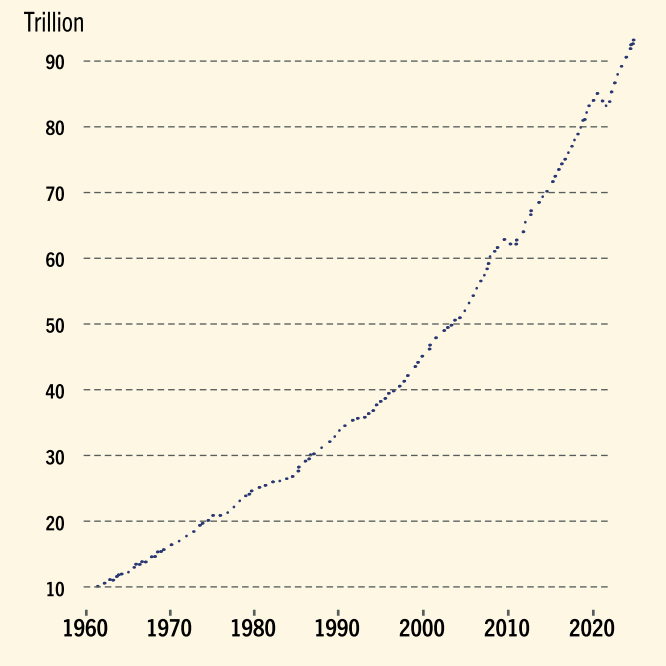
The current plan is for this economic growth to continue, without stopping, forever.

Every time the economy doubles, the quantity of resources we consume more or less doubles as well. Since 1900, the amount of material resources we produce—mostly plastic, concrete, bricks and metals—has doubled every 20 years.

It's a more-with-less nightmare.

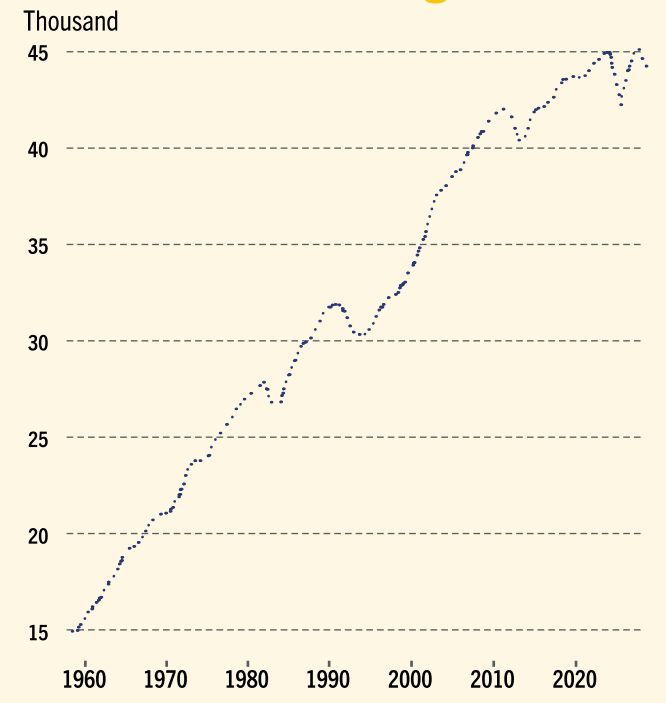
This has implications for the climate. The relevant question

### Global economic growth



The global economy, measured in gross domestic product (the value of all goods and services produced, in trillions of U.S. dollars) is headed for the sky. Data source: World Bank

### Canadian economic growth



Canadian per capita GDP in thousands of U.S. dollars. Data source: World Bank

is whether we can keep doubling the size of the economy and also dramatically reduce our emissions. Can we maintain economic growth and still hit net-zero emissions by 2050?

The answer is clearly “no.”

Using the federal government’s definition, net-zero emissions is the point at which “our economy either emits no greenhouse gas emissions or offsets its emissions, for example, through actions such as tree planting or employing technologies that can capture carbon

consistent with this. Doris Janzen Longacre’s *Living More with Less*, written in cooperation with Mennonite Central Committee and published in 1980, expressed serious concerns about the impact of economic development on our global community. While Janzen Longacre’s well-known *More-with-Less Cookbook* provided many simple recipes for families interested in eating ethically and minimizing waste, *Living More with Less* served as a kind of philosophical text that reflected on scripture and global

development to offer suggestions on how to live out Christ’s call in an unjust world.

The book encouraged North American Mennonites to embrace a philosophy of simple living in response to resource inequality. “To live as most of us do in North America, then to study world poverty and our role in it, and to come away without seeing a need for forgiveness and change—that is unthinkable,” she wrote. The book argued that we as a church should live in a way that reflects a concern about global issues and thus reduce our consumption.

The book discusses local food production, reusing materials when

before it is released into the air. This is essential to keeping the world safe and livable. . . .”

More than 140 countries have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

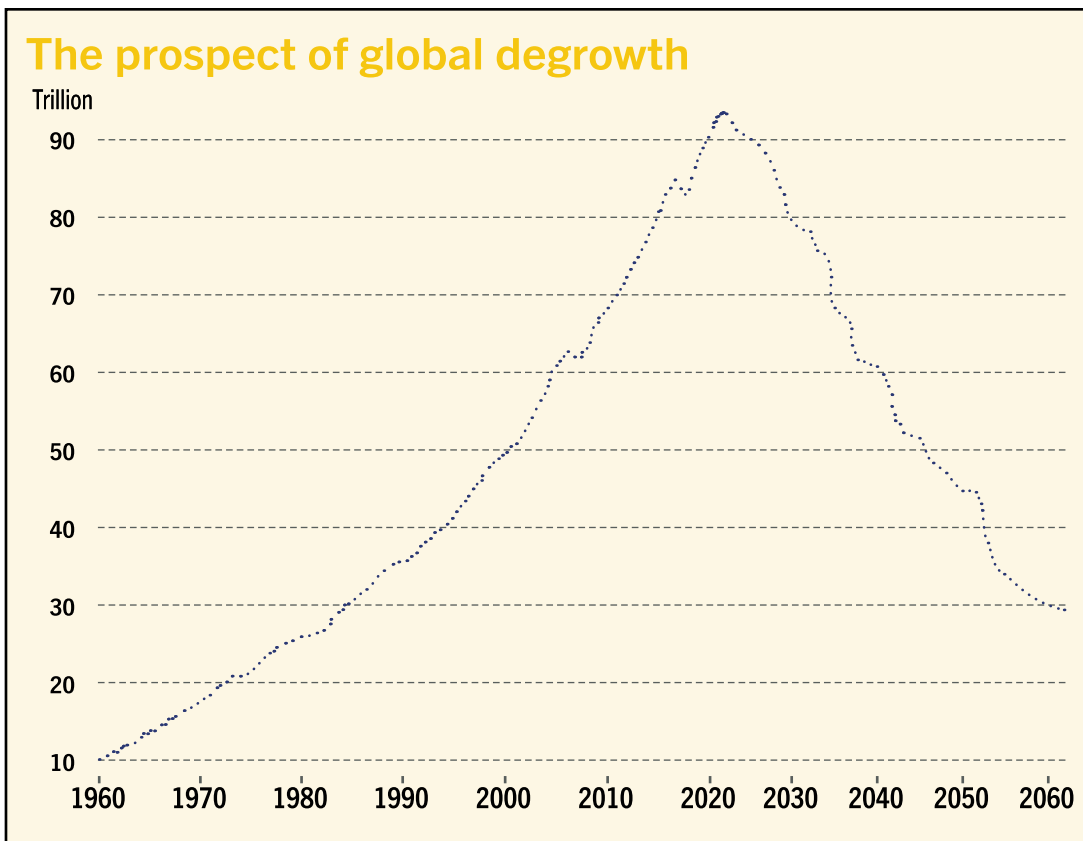
### Limits

To avoid environmental destruction, we need to think differently about economic growth.

In fact, we need to think about degrowth. The more-with-less ethic that organically grew out of Mennonite involvement around the world is

possible and slowing down to enjoy time with family. Janzen Longacre explained in clear and common-sense language that the thoughtless consumerism promoted in our economies hurts the environment, exploits people living in poorer countries and negatively impacts our own lives. The book’s title captures the idea nicely—we can live more fulfilling lives by consuming less.

The more-with-less ethos shows that Mennonites had been educating themselves and responding to the difficult political and environmental



injustices created by the global economy. More-with-less fit with the original school of environmental thought and, in some ways, Mennonites were ahead of their time.

Mennonite discussion around reducing consumption reflected many of the ideas of the early environmental movement. *The Limits to Growth*, published by a team of prominent researchers in 1972, warned of the impact of unchecked economic growth on the planet. The UN's 1987 Brundtland Commission encouraged humanity to separate our needs from our felt wants and scale back consumption among the rich. Janzen Longacre's book fit with these themes.

### Sustainable growth?

However, over the years, the idea of reducing consumption fell out of fashion in the environmental movement. In its place, innovation and technology have taken over mainstream environmental policy. The concept of sustainable development has become the world's major environmental policy framework. This approach seeks to accommodate rather than confront the concept of endless economic expansion.

Most climate policy today is invested in the narrative that we don't have to change our lifestyles in order to reach our climate targets. We are not told to buy less but to buy carbon offsets. Instead of driving less, we can purchase new electric vehicles. Instead of re-thinking our lifestyles, we can wait for scientists to invent carbon capture technology.

Technology will solve all our problems, we are told. We do not need to shrink our economies or lifestyles. This has

produced some serious problems.

What is concerning about our path away from more-with-less environmentalism is that our techno-solutions have not been effective: carbon offset programs have consistently revealed themselves to be scams, electric vehicles may reduce some emissions but depend on other kinds of environmental damage, and carbon capture technology literally does not work.

A quote from John Kerry, the U.S. special presidential envoy for climate



*This octopus, made entirely of plastic debris collected on beaches, is part of an exhibit called, "Washed Ashore: Art to Save the Sea," presented by the Smithsonian's National Zoo.*

from 2021 to March 2024, reveals how far down the wrong path our environmental policy has wandered: "I am told by scientists that 50 percent of the reductions we have to make to get to net-zero are going to come from technologies that we don't yet have."

Far too many of the solutions proposed by environmental policy leaders amount to saying: "scientists will figure this out later."

The idea of simply consuming fewer

resources appears to be unthinkable.

Given that we've gasified 2 trillion tons of carbon, literally changed the chemical composition of the sky, and set ourselves on track to kill the only planet known to sustain life, it would be nice to see one sentence in a net-zero report about how we've gotten into such a terrible crisis.

### Renewable problems

Even though new renewable energy technology can be exciting, there are still many issues with the clean energy transition that do not receive the attention they require. Mining of clean energy minerals, for example, disproportionately hurts marginalized communities, can

using more energy because costs are reduced. For example, people tend to buy an excess of energy-efficient light bulbs.

At the end of the day, more advanced renewable technology is not relevant if we constantly keep using more and more.

### The economic climate

Many people probably don't understand that climate change policy is not written by climate change scientists or environmentalists. Instead, governments generally get economists to craft their climate policies.

Economists do not generally spend their time envisioning a more just and sustainable world. Instead, they create

### The beauty of degrowth

Degrowth provides another way to think about these big questions. Degrowth is about building an economy that respects natural limits while investing in human well-being.

The climate policy ideas I find most exciting comes from people who imagine a beautiful future. This is something *Living More with Less* shares with the most impressive environmental literature today. For example, there are many different ways we can produce large amounts of food without conventional fossil fuel agriculture. Ideas from permaculture and smallscale farming show much potential but are rarely taken seriously in mainstream environmental policy.

We can also think more creatively about urban design. Instead of creating isolated suburbs, we could design comfortable neighbourhoods that are integrated with local food systems, walkable spaces and super-efficient buildings. Many countries around the world have designed communities like this. Such places produce fewer emissions, foster healthy communities and are nicer places to live. This is a more-with-less kind of world, where we are happier and healthier as we use less of the world's resources.

The more-with-less ethic is more relevant today than it ever has been. Spiritually, we must consider our responsibility as Christians living in an unjust world. Our world is sacred and we have a responsibility to care for it.

From an environmental perspective, it is clear that the overconsumption of resources promoted in mainstream society is not compatible with our climate targets. It turns out that using fewer resources is not just spiritually important, it's the only way to prevent environmental catastrophe! More-with-less could be the key to digging ourselves out of crisis. ●

*Zach Rempel works as a climate researcher in Winnipeg. He earned a master's degree in natural resources management from the University of Manitoba in 2019.*

# Why does the flourishing of human economies depend on the annihilation of the living world?

be destructive for biodiversity, and also uses a lot of fossil fuels. The International Energy Agency's analysis indicates that we need six times more mineral inputs compared to today in order to reach net-zero by 2050.

Demand for lithium, for example, is expected to grow to more than 40 times the current level. This will require a stunning increase in mining. Many intelligent researchers question whether it is actually possible to mine that quantity of minerals.

Mining is not the only problem. Questions around energy efficiency also need to be taken far more seriously. It is often assumed that making things more efficient will reduce energy demand but energy efficiency often leads to people

climate change policy by mathematically switching over our current energy system to one based on renewables. For example, they use computer models to determine how much mining is required to reach specified targets but not how realistic or damaging the required mining might be.

These models sidestep the downsides of new technologies. They use calculations that assume endless economic growth is both possible and desirable.

There's a broader philosophical question here: why does the flourishing of human economies depend on the annihilation of the living world?

And, as Janzen Longacre might ask, does all the growth and consumption in the developed world actually lead to meaningful life?



DATA FILE

# Resolution on World Food Crisis

Approved by the Mennonite Central Committee

Annual Meeting  
Hillsboro, Kansas  
January 17-19, 1974

Mennonite Central Committee, an agency of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches of Canada and the United States, in plenary session at Hillsboro, Kansas, from January 17-19, 1974, has taken note of:

1. The need for food, family planning and agricultural development assistance in the less developed countries of the world and the likelihood that the acute problems of both food and population will intensify greatly in the next decade.
2. The growing population of the world has cut the available food resources to the lowest level in years with the very real prospect of worldwide famine because of severe shortages of food.
3. Our responsibility for responding to the needs of our neighbors around the world either in meeting emergency hunger needs or in helping to prevent it insofar as possible.
4. The resources of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ people are considerable and there is a growing awareness on the part of our people that more heroic efforts must be made to respect technical always n Mennonit
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THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT:

The Mennonite Central Committee give priority to the world food crisis in the next five to ten years by:

1. Broadening and strengthening rural development and family planning programs in developing countries, particularly where Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions or churches are located though not limited to those areas. Though developing countries will receive special attention, we commit ourselves to social programs in North American rural and urban areas where poverty and diet deficiencies are widespread.
2. Recruiting and training personnel from both the developing countries and North America for service in rural development and family planning; this might mean providing educational assistance for persons who have had one term of service abroad and who wish to return in rural development.
3. In cooperation with constituent groups encourage each Mennonite and Brethren in Christ household to examine its lifestyle, particularly expenditures for food. A goal should be established to reduce consumption and expenditures by 10 percent and contribute this to meet food needs of others.
4. Calling for much greater financial and material resources for development during the next five to ten

## Hillsboro revisited

Five years after the Hillsboro Resolution, Paul Longacre wrote a status update for MCC. The following is from that document.

Longacre, who was married to Doris Janzen Longacre until her death in 1979, served as MCC's hunger concerns secretary.

"The resolutions we passed in 1974 were good. They were comprehensive... We must adopt a new standard of consumption. Too long and in too many ways the society around us has set our standard. We know our persistent

indulgences are depriving others of the resources God has given to us all. . . .

"Except for a few persons among us, there has been no drastic cutback in our consumption. Mennonite and Brethren in Christ living and consumption patterns are little different from neighbors with similar income, professional or vocational experience. . . .

"Big changes come with seemingly small activities. When we begin more responsible living patterns, God will lead us on to greater faithfulness." ●

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# A slow, simple obedience

By Susan Fish

**M**y introduction to Anabaptism began with fire.

Let me explain. I grew up in a Presbyterian household, but when I went off to the University of Toronto, a roommate introduced me to the *Living More With Less* book and its companion, the *More-with-Less Cookbook*. To say I devoured them would be an understatement. In fact, a new world was unlocked.

In her foreword to *Living More with Less*, author Doris Janzen Longacre began, “This is a book for people who know something is wrong with the way North Americans live and are ready to talk about change. This is a book about rediscovering what is good and true. This is a book about beauty, healing and hope, a book about getting more, not less.”

I hadn’t known. It was the ’80s and greed was good, said Gordon Gekko in the movie *Wall Street*. I didn’t buy into that way of thinking, but in my experience of church, faith did not inform matters of transportation, food, justice or all the other things that make up a daily life.

It was also the time of the first Band Aid concert, so I knew the world was in trouble. We were told that, “in our world of plenty we can spread a smile of joy. . . . Say a prayer, pray for the other ones.”

*Living More With Less* found me right when I was on the cusp of adulthood, thinking about how I wanted to live. I repurposed the index cards I usually used to study, scribbling down tips for avoiding waste, the composition of a whole protein, stories of choosing solidarity and hospitality.

One winter weekend, I brought my

chicken soup to a boil on a hot plate, then wrapped it in newspaper and blankets so that by the time my friend and I returned from church, the noodles were cooked. We had conserved energy and could enjoy a delicious Sabbath meal with friends.

What I appreciate most about the books are their practicality and emphasis

professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, commented, “If you consider the theological teaching and witness of this cookbook, its impact far outweighs that of most Mennonite writings in theology and ethics.”

That influence doesn’t stop with simple household tips. If these ideas take root,

we end up closer to my husband’s experience teaching environmental science. When students would despair at the state of the world, his response was always: do something, and then add another something, and so on. Janzen Longacre says, “The message here is mainly one of first steps. . . . Yet in that process we invariably move on to economic and political issues.”

This makes a new way of living both clear and joyful through

small acts that are seemingly unimportant but are a realistic place to start.

And so, the fire. During that first flurry of excitement about this better way to live, I began making my own bread—Pilgrim’s Bread from page 58 of the cookbook. I would mix ingredients, let the dough rise, go to class, return to punch it down, go to the library and then come back to bake it.

One cold day, I put the Tupperware dough bowl in the oven for the rise and left for class. A roommate arrived home, turned on the oven to preheat, took a shower and returned to find the oven on fire. Afterwards, the racks dripped with plastic and bread. Hours of scraping followed.

Janzen Longacre reminded me then and now: “There is no fast, easy way. . . but one voice still speaks in the silence. For Christians it is the call to obedience.” ●



on joy; that this is a better way to live. Janzen Longacre was quick, however, to dismiss a cheap joy: “How-to books. . . do not look fondly upon feeling guilty or raising those feelings in anyone else. But what if you *are* guilty?” And we are.

In response, Janzen Longacre demonstrates the steps of repentance and new living. John the Baptist’s answer to the similarly convicted crowd is one Janzen Longacre says “could hardly be more contemporary”: to share our surplus coats and food with those who have none. She adds, “Then on to the more complicated issues. . . exploitation, respectable robbery, greed with violence.”

And that’s how it has gone. I jokingly describe the *More-with-Less Cookbook* as my gateway drug into the Mennonite world, and I know I am not alone. At the time of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the cookbook, Gayle Gerber Kooz,

## Enough already

**“E**vidence suggests that avoiding something only makes one’s appetite for it sharper. And likewise, indulgence can dull the desire for some things. Deprivation is also a poor motivator for change.

“For example, it’s difficult to convince poor people to live simply, for simple living is really available only to those who have the choice not to do so. The difference between poverty and simple living is just that: choice. . . . Having enough does not mean gritting your teeth or putting up with what you have. ‘Doing without’ is not a spiritual virtue any more than ‘doing well’ is. But defining what something means in terms of its inherent usefulness and then deciding what ‘enough’ means by using that definition gives you the ‘power of enough’ and the satisfied feeling that comes with having neither too little or too much. It’s like being neither hungry nor stuffed, but pleasantly full. And that is power.” ●

—From *The Power Of Enough: Finding Contentment By Putting Stuff In Its Place* by Lynn A. Miller. Herald Press, 2003.

# Your Stories

We asked online readers to share how more-with-less shaped them in the past and in the past year.

## Bonded

The first gift exchange I shared with my boyfriend, now husband, was Christmas 1980. When he handed me a box, I gingerly opened it to find a copy of the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, alongside Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*. I was mildly disappointed. Not very romantic, I thought, but I treasured those two volumes, reading them and keeping them on my bedside table.

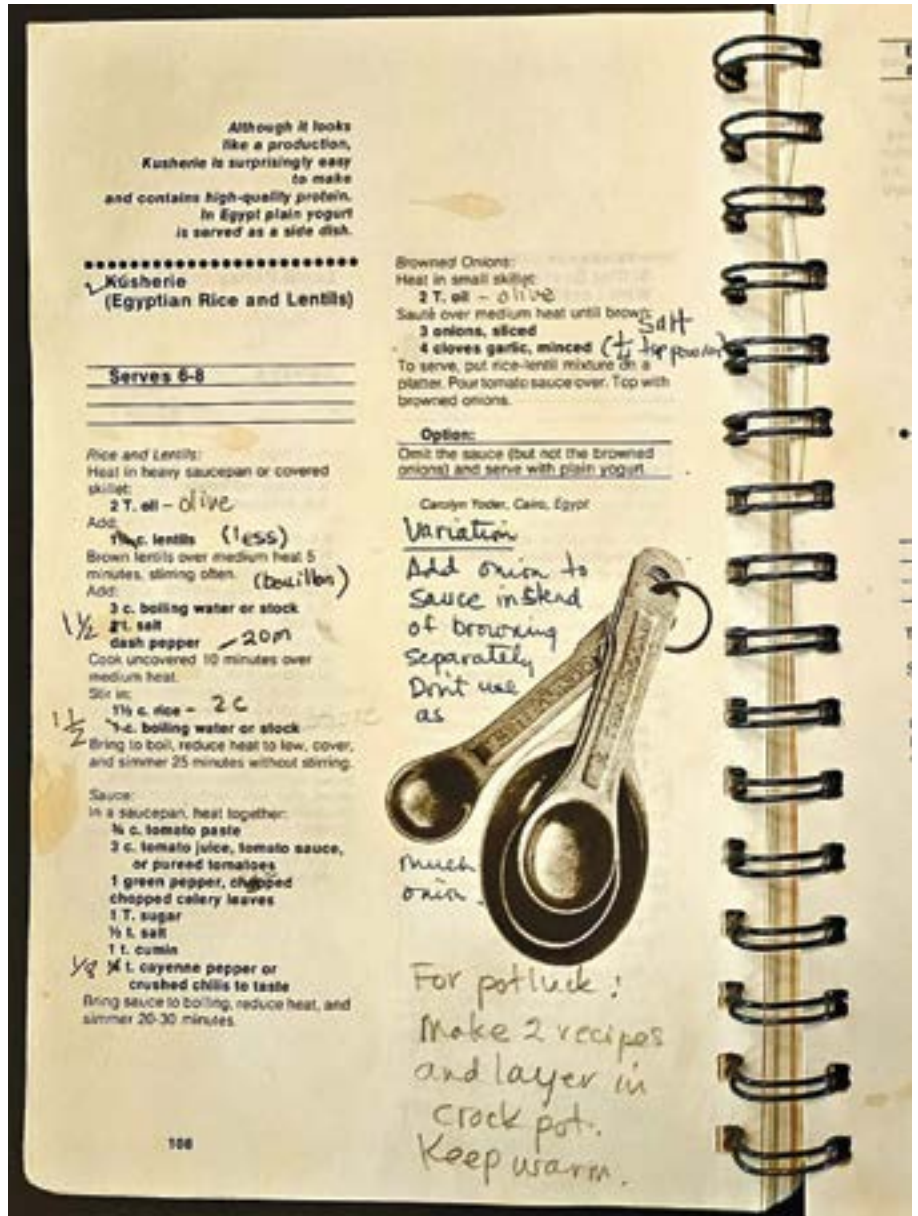
What I later understood was that he was telling me what mattered to him. Freshly graduated with a biology degree and on his way to graduate work in theology, he was asking: "Are you coming with me?"

My husband is of Mennonite descent. *Zwiebach*, sauerkraut soup and *rollkuchen* were staples on his family table, and he might have been hoping I would recreate these dishes, though I was more inclined toward Irish Soda Bread and Welsh Tea Cakes.

When I pick the cookbook up today, stained with spills and its cover coming away from the binding, I detect a modern message of eating better while consuming less, a now-familiar call in these days of climate change and food insecurity.

This cookbook is now a metaphor of our life together, shaped by values of respect for the created world and informed by a deep love for its Creator. ●

– Helen Kroeker, Holy Saviour Anglican Church, Waterloo, Ontario



## Modest one percent

In 1983, when my husband and I were moving from Sudbury, Ontario, to Hamilton, my brother and sister-in-law gave us a copy of the *More-with-Less Cookbook*. I would love to tell you that it changed my life, but honestly, it was more of an affirmation and life companion as my hubs and I were already used to living simply and poorly, out of necessity.

We never made the upgrade to having newer, faster, bigger, better things. It would have been too much work. Most everything we have ever had has been secondhand.

Even still, what we consider a modest life is anything but on the world scale. We are part of the crazy-rich one percent. That's all the more reason to tithe time, talent and treasure.

My copy of *More-with-Less* disappeared at some point, but one of these days it will show up at our MCC Thrift shop. And, having some disposable income, I'll buy it. ●

– Jan Carrie Steven, Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ontario





## Annotated

The *More-with-Less Cookbook* arrived in our home in 1976, in our second year of marriage. It taught me about bringing one's values into the kitchen, and it helped build the repertoire of dishes that would feed our family and many guests over the next 40-plus years. I learned that a big plate of meat is not essential for a nutritious and tasty meal.

The cookbook encouraged me to make economical food choices that honoured the earth. It reminded me of people elsewhere who had their own unique recipes and food stories, helping me feel solidarity with cooks who couldn't just pop into a grocery store to pick up a boxed mix for a quick meal.

That cookbook lasted 18 years. When its cover wore off and its splattered pages started detaching from the spiral binding, I transferred my annotations into a second copy which travelled with our family to the Middle East, where fresh fruits and vegetables abounded and new flavours enhanced our palate. Now it's time to transfer the accumulated notes into copy number 3. ●

– Virginia A. Hostetler, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario

## Soup

Around 1976, our friends opened a deli selling fresh meals. I made sandwiches but, as the deli got busier, I was asked if I would be willing to make two pots of soup daily. I only really knew how to make Mennonite cabbage borscht, but I was willing to take on the challenge.

My mother had recently given me her copy of the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, saying it was really of no use to her. I dived into the book, relishing every page, completely taken by the idea of thrift and nourishment at the same time. I discovered that there were some

easy-to-understand soup recipes I could make for the deli, using ingredients we already had. I became the “soup chef.”

I also used the cookbook to start making protein-rich, meatless meals for my young family. In fact, it inspired me to cook meatless for almost a year. The lessons I learned using *More-with-Less* during that time have been invaluable over the years as we eat more and more plant-based meals. ●

– Charlotte Matthies Boychuk, Ponoka (Alberta) United Church

## CM FOR DISCUSSION

1. When you hear news about the economy growing or the Dow Jones Industrial Average rising, what is your gut-level response?
2. How do you grapple spiritually with the incomprehensible inequality in the world?
3. How possible do you think it is that Canada or the world will achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 or by any other date?
4. In 1974, MCC encouraged North American Mennonite households to “reduce consumption and expenditures by 10 percent”; are you up for it? If so, what steps can you take this month? If not, why not?

–Staff

Find resources on “Consumerism”  
at [commonword.ca/go/1860](http://commonword.ca/go/1860)

**CommonWord**  
Bookstore and Resource Centre



## From fresh cabbage to ‘shovel-ready industrial land’

*Farmland expropriation up-close*

By A.S. Compton

**O**n an average day, approximately 320 acres of Ontario farmland are lost to development and, apparently, now it’s our turn.

This spring, the farmers across the road from the 100-acre farm where I grew up, a 20-minute drive west of Kitchener, received a visit from an employee of an American company that handles farmland expropriations. This visitor instructed our neighbours to sell their farms, for less than the recognized market value, to the Region of Waterloo or face expropriation in August. Six farms were approached, along with six residential homes, totalling a 770-acre parcel of land.

That was in March.

With August 1 approaching as I write, the authorities have still not said what the land is to be used for, or why a parcel of land well outside the city should be developed in this way. The neighbours have certainly not sold their

farms. None of us know what harvest season will look like this year.



*A sign next to land slated for expropriate between Baden and New Hamburg, Ontario.*

This farmland was well protected from development until a change in provincial

land conservation laws this spring. The Township and Regional Councils have been silenced under protocol, and the only clear message is a need for “shovel-ready industrial land.” The lack of transparency from the Region has been consistent and disheartening. In July, they rejected 18 of 21 of the Freedom of Information requests submitted by the group that has organized to resist the expropriation, with statements of “no record” for the remaining three.

A close friend bought my parents’ farm operation two years ago when my parents retired. My parents still live in the house I grew up in, and I work on the farm seasonally. I was raised on this farm. I spent summers and after-school hours in the fields or making sauerkraut, and Saturdays selling our fresh vegetables at the St Jacobs Farmers Market. I now live in Waterloo with my young family, but the farm remains home. It has always been



defined by rich soil and rows of cabbages and carrots.

Our home farm and the 770-acre parcel are categorized as prime farmland, meaning there are very few limits to what can be grown there. Approximately one percent of the world's land is prime farmland. It's a finite and precious resource. Once turned into a factory, there is no going back to this high-quality soil.

Speculation from business associations and our Chamber of Commerce (which support the expropriation) indicate the parcel may be used for an Electric Vehicle (EV) battery factory.

Ontario has 11 auto-manufacturing facilities. Another four were announced this past spring. At this rate of growth, will we have nearly 30 such facilities in 20 years?

There's plenty to be debated over EVs, but how is a massive factory a responsible use of prime farmland?

Conservationists argue that at current development and population growth rates, in approximately 40 years we will run out of sufficient land to feed the

global population.

The changes in land conservation that the provincial government made this past



*Cabbages on the farm where A.S. Compton grew up and still works.*

spring mean that any farm in Ontario could be next.

### Different perspectives

I can't write about land and ownership and expropriation without addressing our

Indigenous neighbours, the same people my Mennonite ancestors displaced in order to settle here. How can we call this land ours, and fight the government not to take it, when we are only a footnote, and a beneficiary, in the theft of this land already?

A portion of this same 770-acre parcel was set to become a new landfill for the Region in the 1980s. But the community fought back—a coordinated effort from city folks as well as the farmers and nearby towns. Instead of a new landfill, the Region piloted the first blue box recycling program, altering how our waste was disposed of, reducing the need for landfill space, and ultimately setting a new standard in environmental responsibility across the country.

Agriculture, the environment and urban development were prioritized together, instead of in opposition. That innovation took people with different skills and areas of expertise coming together to create a new idea.

That's the cooperative innovation we need now. ●



# Strawberry communion at Six Nations

*Event explores tangible steps toward land justice*

By Susan Fish

On July 6, more than 160 people from a variety of denominations and organizations gathered in Ohsweken, Ontario, for a Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion hosted by Six Nations Polytechnic and co-organized by Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCCO) and Adrian Jacobs, also known as Ganosono, of the Turtle Clan, Cayuga Nation of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Grand River Territory, Ontario.

Following a ceremony of welcome, the event explored Indigenous land claims on the Haldimand Tract and the church's possible response. It ended with the sharing of communion and a lunch with strawberries.

The Haldimand Tract includes the land six miles (9.7 kilometres) to either side of the Grand River, from Dundalk, Ontario, to Lake Erie, including the Kitchener-Waterloo area. The 1874 Haldimand Treaty set aside this land for Six Nations people "to enjoy for ever." Six Nations was to receive lease payments from those who came to reside on the land.

Today Six Nations land comprises less than five percent of the land allotted in the Haldimand Treaty.

Public attention was drawn to longstanding Six Nations land

issues in 2006, when a planned subdivision on the Haldimand Tract in Caledonia, Ontario, sparked major protests.

Jacobs was among the protestors on the 2006 Victoria Day weekend when tensions between protestors, settlers and

police escalated. Jacobs, who heads the Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation program of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, referred to that day during his opening address at the July 6 event: "When a backhoe raised a piece of Plank Road/Argyle Street pavement, I thought, 'We are finally saying no to the ongoing abuse and theft we have been suffering.'"

During that time, Jacobs, then working for MCC Ontario's Aboriginal Neighbours South Program, developed a plan to educate churches about Six Nations lands. In March 2007, Jacobs met with the Haudenosaunee Council at Onondaga Longhouse to explain these education plans. Artist and Haudenosaunee knowledge keeper Rick Hill suggested a

framework for a spiritual covenant between the churches and Six Nations, one that would see churches acknowledge Six Nations' jurisdiction over their lands, make a token lease payment, and include provision that if a church were ever de-commissioned, the land would revert to Six Nations.



*Those gathered at Six Nations Polytechnic on July 6 partook of strawberry juice for communion.*



Speaking at the July 6 event, Scott Morton Ninomiya of MCC Ontario's Indigenous Neighbours program noted that the spiritual covenant proposed by Jacobs and Hill in 2007 expresses the same spirit as the Two-Row Wampum Treaty.

In a subsequent phone interview, Morton Ninomiya noted that the first two Strawberry Thanksgiving gatherings took place in 2008 and 2009, with the third this year. He described this year's event as a joyful one in which worship and action went hand in hand.

One of the first churches to respond to the covenant was Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario. Josie Winterfeld, now retired after 16 years as missions, peace and justice outreach worker at Stirling Mennonite, was among those who were immediately excited about the covenant. In an interview, Winterfeld spoke about the long, slow process Stirling has undertaken to educate themselves on Indigenous history, land history, covenant theology, treaties and the specific Six Nations spiritual covenant.

While Stirling is not yet ready to sign the full covenant, they decided to move forward with a lease commitment. In March 2024, the church committed to paying one percent of their annual operating budget, as suggested in the covenant.

"[What Stirling has done represents] a tangible step that other churches can consider," said Winterfeld. "It's important to realize that we don't have to have everything figured out. We can go

ahead and take one small step, not knowing exactly where this is leading but trusting that this is what's right and knowing that there's more to do and being committed to continuing on that journey."

At the July 6 event, Pam Albrecht, who is part of Stirling's Spiritual Covenant Working Group, delivered Stirling's first annual cheque for \$4,000 to Rebecca Jamieson, president of Six Nations Polytechnic, to be put in a spiritual covenant fund that will be directed by and used for the benefit of the community.

Jacobs said in an email to *Canadian Mennonite*, "I hope Mennonite folk see the example of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church and are encouraged to know that there are tangible answers to the Six Nations call to land justice in the Spiritual Covenant with Churches. Churches claim to be the conscience of Canada, so here is an opportunity to lead the way."

Three other Mennonite churches, all in Manitoba, have recently started making annual payments to Indigenous organizations. They are Charleswood Mennonite Church, Home Street Mennonite Church and Hope Mennonite Church.

Though Stirling has taken a first step, to date, no church has yet signed on to the full covenant.

Jacobs said, "We are disappointed that it has taken 17 years from the first movement towards the Spiritual Covenant with Churches, but that is minor compared (Continued on page 29)



**Top photo: Adrian Jacobs (centre) with Cindy Stover and Victoria Veenstra of the Christian Reformed Church. Bottom photo: Scott Morton Ninomiya (right) of MCC Ontario speaks at the Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion event.**



Ji-gaabiikwe Campeau addresses kids at an iEmergence camp in Saskatchewan. Right, a boy works on a hide at an iEmergence camp.

## iEmergence Saskatchewan creates space for healing

Recipient of Jubilee Fund grant focuses on youth and community

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

Ji-gaabiikwe Campeau greets me in Saulteaux, which she is relearning, at the beginning of our interview:

*“Ahniin, kahkina ni-ti-nah-wēmākanak.* (Hello, All my Relations.) *Ji-gaabiikwe nitsinihkās.* (My name is Where the Land and Water Meet Woman.) *Kawiin ni’gik-enimaasii n’doodem.* (I do not know my clan.) *Nitōnci Yellow Quill iškonikanink.* (I am a member of Yellow Quill First Nation.) *Mēkaā okanan kā-ahsatēkin n’day-āh.* (I currently live in Regina.). “I am a Saulteaux, Cree and Métis woman from Treaty 4 Territory. I’m also a Sixties Scoop survivor and a mother to a 16-year-old daughter named Kenadee.”

Campeau is program director of iEmergence Saskatchewan, the 2024 recipient of the \$5000 Jubilee Fund grant, which is administered by Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Central Committee.

Campeau is a registered social worker who runs two programs through Moccasin Lodge, an initiative rooted in a vision she has for reconnecting Indigenous youth with their culture and the Creator. “I want our Indigenous youth,

when they look in the mirror, to not only like themselves but ultimately love who Creator has created them to be. That encompasses the different programs that I create,” Campeau said.

The first program, *Oskiskwewak* (Cree for “young women helpers”), gathers female and non-binary youth for cultural activities and other programming. In May, the group of 14 youth learned rattle-making from two older women.

The program also includes retreats that offer youth a safe place to sleep and eat good food. Campeau noted the importance of these “basic needs that many take for granted.”

*Oskiskwewak* is also about creating space for healing. “[These youth] are the first generation who didn’t go to residential school or [through] the Sixties Scoop, but they’re the ones that are also experiencing that intergenerational trauma that nobody talks about,” she said.

The second program, *Tāpākōmitowin*, (Cree for “Adopting as Kin”), is a camp for Indigenous and non-Indigenous families. Campeau says it “embodies the vision of rebuilding a community out on the

land, where all nations come together as one family.” The group makes camp with tipis and tents, and families take part in cultural and community-building activities. Youth from *Oskiskwewak* are often campers and helpers at the gathering.

“Everybody has a part to play in order for camp to be successful,” said Campeau.

Over the years, the group has camped on lands owned by Christian youth camps. This summer a group of around 70 will gather at Salvation Army Beaver Creek Camp, south of Saskatoon, in Treaty 6 territory.

iEmergence Saskatchewan is part of the larger iEmergence organization, co-founded by director Matt LeBlanc in 2008. iEmergence works with Indigenous communities around the world on community-led development initiatives. In Canada, LeBlanc works with youth and families from Mishkeegogamang First Nation in northern Ontario, some of whom joined *Tāpākōmitowin* in Saskatchewan last summer.

“When Ji-gaabiikwe came on with Moccasin Lodge and her dreams, it was a natural fit. It made sense to work



together,” said LeBlanc.

Both Campeau and LeBlanc noted that the voices of today’s Indigenous youth are stronger than older generations because there are more safe spaces for them to gather and learn about their identity.

But they still yearn to have their own healing journeys, Campeau said. “It’s those intimate circles where a lot comes up for them.”

iEmergence Saskatchewan will use the Jubilee grant to spruce up camp amenities, like replacing tipi poles, and for crafting activities that have to do with this year’s camp theme, which is Wisdom.

“Being on the land is really essential for intergenerational knowledge communication and teaching,” said Jonathan Neufeld, Indigenous Relations coordinator for MC Canada. “We were excited that iEmergence’s work in Saskatchewan specifically relates to land and land justice,” he said.

“I hope churches know that ... they are collectively supporting these kinds of initiatives, which are building capacities and strength for tomorrow,” said Neufeld.

“If we want to manifest our own vision of relief, development and peacebuilding in the name of Christ, then we need to be part of the work of reconciliation in the land in which we are based,” said Ruth Plett, senior director for MCC Canada. ●

*Visit [mennonitechurch.ca/jubilee-fund](http://mennonitechurch.ca/jubilee-fund) for more information on the Jubilee Fund.*



**More than 160 people gathered in Ohsweken, Ontario for lunch, communion and discussion of Indigenous land justice.**

*(Continued from page 27)* to the long history of injustice.”

Winterfeld said, “Whatever the intentions of Mennonites coming onto the land—they may have been well-intentioned—in the end there are these injustices that have taken place, and so it feels important to acknowledge that to make repairs. We want to hold our government to account, but as churches we don’t need to wait for that. We can start to live into repairing.”

“This was a time of healing and hope that was not divorced from a recognition of harm,” said Morton Ninomiya. Accordingly, the July 6 gathering ended with communion of strawberry juice and bread baked by Six Nations members.

It also ended with the possibility of new beginnings and next steps. “We knew people would feel implicated and wonder what they could do next to make reparations,” said Morton Ninomiya. More than 100 of the attendees signed up to attend one of three online “Organizing Our Collective Action” gatherings in late July.

The next Strawberry Thanksgiving is being planned for Saturday June 14, 2025, with hopes that during the year, more people will begin working together with their Indigenous neighbours to commit to real change and healing. ●



# Pressed into the ground

By Theo Wiederkehr

“It’s nice to get to choose our humility,” my father reflected recently. Sometimes, however, we don’t get to. What do we do when we feel forced to be humble—what we often call humiliated?

Our dictionary says the words humble, humility, humiliate, human, homage and humus all share a common etymological root relating to earth and our species. Interesting.

Is being humbled or humiliated about us humans being pressed into the earth again? Is it about remembering that God originally formed us from the soil, and that we still come from soil and return to it?

I don’t like being humbled. Too often it hurts and leaves me vulnerable, aware of how much I can abruptly lose. Five years ago, I was just beginning to lead our family’s gardening effort. I had grand

plans. We were going to grow far more crops, including a bunch we’d never tried before. It was our first season working with dry beans and dry corn, two crops that excite me. We tripled our garden area and planted everything.

Simultaneously, we were beginning to test our ability to use bicycles as a more serious form of transportation. Both were small ways I chose to humble myself.

I knew that my food and transportation depended on fossil fuels, and that fossil fuel extraction was harming people. Thanks in part to the coverage of pipeline issues in this magazine the year before, I felt that if I wanted to seriously engage in the discussion about fossil fuel use, I had to give up some of the enlargement of my life which fossil fuels were allowing. I had to humble myself.

So, I gardened and I biked. But on July 8 of that summer, my efforts toward

humility were taken out of my hands.

After a visit and supper with friends 40 kilometres away, my brother and I left their house and headed our bikes down a hill in the cool summer evening. I shifted gears and abruptly threw the chain, which then jammed. I lost control, somersaulted off, landed on the back of my right shoulder and slid along the pavement. Not good for my T-shirt.

Our friends drove us to the hospital. My mother arrived (my father was baling hay), and they all sat with me in Emergency taking turns supporting my arm to ease the pain until eventually the doctor sedated me and treated my dislocated shoulder.

The whole thing was humiliating: the vehicle transport, my utter helplessness due to pain and the disposable plastics the medical team used. Going under the anaesthetic, my last thought was: “Look



at all the resources your little effort to live righteously has wasted, Theo.”

I may tend to be a little hard on myself.

Over the following weeks of slow recovery and needing the help of others, I became acutely aware of how much I rely on community and on God to care for me and heal me. We get to choose only so far, and beyond that we are vulnerable, whether we like it or not. The shoulder still aches a couple times per week to remind me of my vulnerability, though I still have a stubborn tendency to forget.

While temporarily out of commission that summer, I read Carol Deppe’s book, *The Resilient Gardener*. In it, she talks about gardening for hard times, whether regional or personal hard times. In her writing about gardening (and life), she talks about choosing crops, practicing techniques and selecting seeds for resilience through these hard times. Since then, learning from her writing and others, our household has managed to substantially increase the share of our food which we grow, but we are by no means self-sufficient.

As Deppe says, “It isn’t normal, natural or healthy for us to be ‘independent.’ What is healthy is interdependence. . . . [W]e don’t really seek true independence, but rather, enough knowledge and skills so that we can build and hold up our end of honorable interdependence.”

But what does that look like? A transformational understanding I received from Deppe was to see seeds as a focal point in honorable interdependence. On its own, a bean seed is not much. It needs a human to prepare a good place for it and press it into the ground at the right depth, time of year and distance from other plants. It needs critters and pathogens to not demolish it prematurely. It needs enough rain and sun and moderate temperatures, and no untimely frosts. If it gets all of that, it produces roughly 40 seeds, which can repeat the process next year. Or be eaten.

To multiply from one to 40, the bean must go through the vulnerable time in

the garden. A seed is sort of self-sufficient and stable, but the growing plant is in a web of interdependence with many others.

Thanks to Deppe and my dogmatism, I don’t water beans anymore, because that wouldn’t be selecting for drought resil-



**Top to bottom: The Wiederkehr garden; Ruth, Miles, Andre and Theo Wiederkehr in the corn patch; Theo Wiederkehr’s seed bank**

ience. Instead, I plant, worry, watch the forecast and pray that God will send rain (when God sees fit, of course, I usually remember to add—and preferably within 24 hours of seeding).

But this spring we had a stretch of extremely dry weather. Times like that help me appreciate what is at stake in Old Testament accounts of the people of God wavering between worship of God and worship of idols such as Baal. As I see it,

the tension was between relying on God for a good harvest or making offerings to a fertility god in hopes of food security.

The more our harvests make up an increasing portion of our diet, the more I feel tension between relying on God and others, versus relying on my own efforts.

Our God, the one who wanted to be the sole God of the Israelites, wouldn’t promise earthly security. If the Old Testament Israelites stayed with God, it would involve a perpetual humbling of themselves—a recognition of interdependence.

The same goes for us. Now.

But I don’t think humbling has to be humiliation. It only is humiliation if we fool ourselves that we are independent. This world is too complex for that.

Instead, humility is to give homage to the one Creator of all, and to recognize the smallness of us creatures in comparison. We all have moments when we are pressed into the ground, whether it’s by a gardener’s careful hand or by the implacable power of gravity and the other forces that decide what happens when you come off a bicycle.

In those moments we can live out our interdependence, which I think is where the church, ideally, can show up at its best. In the end, we’re dependent on God, who doesn’t always show up in 24 hours or before we hit the pavement hard.

Rereading what I’ve written, I realize I have avoided a theological question: is God interdependent with us creatures? If so, what does that mean, especially when God showed up humbly walking around on this humus as a human with humanity?

I don’t know. I’ll need to think about that.

I do know that the beans came up beautifully. We shall see what happens next. ●

*Theo Wiederkehr is part of a household of subsistence farmers near Mildmay, Ontario. He can be reached at [rumithan@gmail.com](mailto:rumithan@gmail.com).*

# Pruning the trees

An excerpt from the novel *Renaissance*

By Susan Fish

*The main character is pruning olive trees in Italy as she sorts out what it will take for her to return to her family after a rift. The novel explores polarizing beliefs and events, challenging the reader to consider how we deal with such divisions.*

As we finished our breakfast, the little Nun, Salvia, came into the dining room. She took the basket of bread from our table and shyly gestured to signal to Honey and to me to follow her out to the terrace.

It was chilly but dazzling sunlight. Salvia opened a small door built into on the low stone wall surrounding the terrace and took out a metal oil can. She passed the basket around, offering bread to us. I didn't think we could refuse so I took a slice as though it was a very large piece of communion bread.

Then, in the early morning light, she poured olive oil over the bread we held.

"This," she said. "Here we produce this. It is good to know what it will be before you start. *Mangia*," she said, and we did. The oil was green and fresh and peppery. My hands were covered in olive oil but I rubbed them together, letting the oil make my hands soft and ready.

"To prune the trees it takes five weeks," she explained. "If we have no rain. We plant the gardens when the frost is no more."

As we ate, an elderly man came out of the convent carrying a box of medieval-looking implements. From his clothes—a long, brown habit tied at the waist with rope—it was clear he was a monk.

"This is *Fra Niccolò*," Salvia said by way of introduction, and Niccolò gave quick

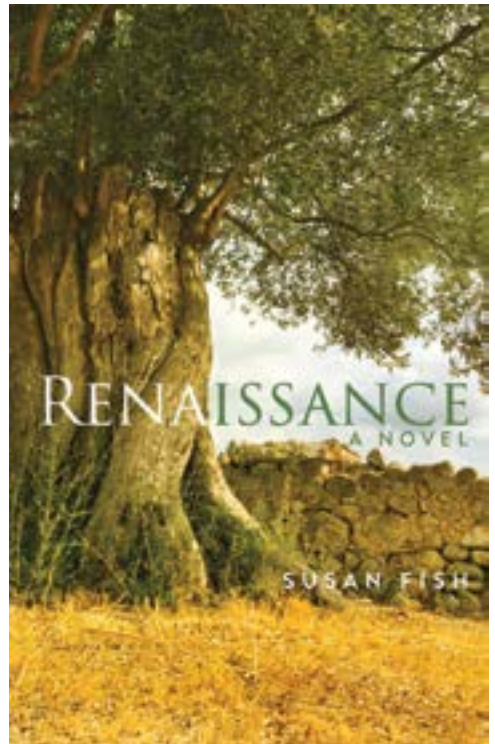
bows of his head to each of us. I felt an urge to curtsy, but I suppressed it. "This is Elizabetta. She is just arrived." A second time he bowed his head to me and this time I bowed mine in return. "Each year Niccolò come to help the pruning of the trees and to deliver the olives for the pressing."

"Good morning," he said in careful, accented English.

He requires *ferrite egregia*—the large, egregious wounds—to grow the fruit.

Niccolò was tall and vigorous, but I suspected he was over sixty and possibly over seventy. With shaky hands he poured green olive oil from Salvia's jug into a small shot glass he took from somewhere in his robe. He drank it down and then raised an arm to the true-blue sky and swept his hand across the grove of trees with a nod of his head. He smacked his lips, returned his glass to the intricate secret recesses of his robe, and handed the oil back to Salvia. She put the oil can into the cupboard door in the wall and closed it. Then she gave us a wave and wished us a good morning, and then left us to return into the house.

"*Allora*," Niccolò said, handing each of us a small hatchet before shouldering his own. Mine was lighter than I had expected. "This is my 47 year tending the olives. *Se Dio vuole*, I will have 50 years.



We begin?"

We followed him, guessing at some of his Italian words, descending into the early morning shadows of the olive grove where the grass was wet and cold.

Niccolò looked at a small slip of a tree and shook his head. He found another tree that was large and lush and full, and lifted his hatchet and began hacking away at the branches in the center of the tree. His movements looked violent and almost haphazard. I had to stamp my feet to keep them warm as he cut away at the tree while we watched. Twenty minutes

later, he had cleaned out the entire lower center of the tree, while leaving the outer branches virtually untouched.

I hated to say it, but the tree had looked far better and healthier before he started. Cautiously I told him so and asked the reason for the extreme pruning.

“No oil from a beautiful tree,” he said, chopping away at the remaining small branches that had grown out of the main trunk.

Niccolò moved on to the next tree, which was gnarled and ancient and taller than the first one. There was a small stepladder under this tree. He handed Honey his hatchet while he mounted the stool and climbed into the branches in the center of the tree. I held my breath as he rose.

Before taking his hatchet back from Honey, he turned as if on a stage, to face us, his audience of two. “You hack and chop an old tree. Is very good,” he said, making a chopping motion with his right hand as if to remove his left arm at the

inner elbow. “He will crescendo again from the energy in the roots and trunk. A young tree will not.

“He requires *ferrite egregia*—the large, egregious wounds—to grow the fruit. “If not—” Here he waved his fingers as if making jazz hands—“he becomes chaos.”

I didn’t even know what the word “egregious” meant but there was something satisfying about saying the words under my breath—*large egregious wounds*.

We were to walk up to a perfectly healthy, lush, full olive tree and slash away at it until it looked spindly and bare. The important thing, Niccolò told us, was getting light to the center of the tree, lopping off all the vigorous young shoots that filled its core, only leaving a few to grow. The energy of the tree could then go into producing olives rather than leaves. “A bird, he can fly through the center of a well-pruned olive tree,” he explained.

It was not what I’d expected but it felt satisfying. Still, at first, I was

over-cautious. Niccolò had to call me back three times to my first tree. “Good to be careful,” he said. “This tree is probably five hundred years old, and you no want to kill him, but he can accept the pruning.”

His words fell into a deep place in me, like olive oil finding every hole in a piece of bread, saturating it. He meant the trees. Of course he did. It was I who read into his words.

It wasn’t hard to see it all as pure metaphor, as promise, as hope. It felt patently obvious to me—it wasn’t a stretch at all—that sometimes an olive tree was more than an olive tree. ●

*Susan Fish is the new associate editor and senior writer with Canadian Mennonite magazine. The above is excerpted from her 2023 novel, Renaissance, published by Paraclete Press (paracletepress.com). Reprinted with permission.*



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# LIFE IN THE 80s

## There's a gift in each day

An interview with Erv and  
Marian Wiens

By Susan Fish

**E**rv and Marian Wiens, both 82, have been married for 60 years. Raised in the Mennonite Brethren Church, they worked with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Kenya, Zambia, and Ontario.

Erv also pastored in Breslau, Ontario; Windsor, Ontario; Calgary, Alberta; and in South Korea, before serving as an interim pastor in several congregations.

Marian's first career was as a mother to their six children. Later, she returned to school to become a counsellor, serving as director for Shalom Counselling in Leamington, Ontario, before training as a spiritual director.

Erv and Marian live in Waterloo, Ontario, where they attend Elevation Church.

### What is your best memory of church?

**Erv:** The Jesus Village Church in Korea. These people had such generosity to welcome us from a totally different culture. They wanted to be part of the Anabaptist tradition and to have a sense of community, and they asked us to teach about that. The peace position has also become very significant in Korean Anabaptist churches. They have compulsory military service, and hundreds of



Marion and Erv Wiens during their daily morning walk.

people in the churches work for peace.

This past October, 12 years after we left, they invited us back for a trip. It was at the top of my bucket list. It was a prime church experience

**Marion:** We attended and pastored Mennonite churches, but during our MCC experiences, we met amazing people of all different denominations who gave us a wider sense of church. Being Mennonite was a significant faith expression and we always enjoyed Mennonite churches, but we had a broader and freer sense of identity as Christ-followers.

### What is your most difficult memory of church?

**Erv:** In my young adult years in the '60s, I spent a lot of time criticizing and being angry at the church I had come from. A friend eventually told me I had to stop. I recognized that church had also changed, and that I had to let it be what it was and be what I was.

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

**Marion:** When I was growing up, everything was black and white, and that felt comfortable. When we lived in Zambia, I remember having a conversation with a man named Jake Loewen who was an anthropologist, who taught me that some things were grey.

I was so upset and anxious; how would I ever know what was right and wrong? Eventually that developed into freedom.

There are certain basics—love is right, hate is wrong—but beyond that, I've learned to let go of that which is hurtful and take on that which is good.

**Erv:** My grade 6 teacher, Mrs. Frazer, and my grade 11 teacher, Mr. Bruce, inspired me to become a teacher just like them.

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

**Marion:** What was significant to me as a young woman is different than what formed me later. Right now, I would choose Richard Rohr.

**Erv:** I've read, reread and preached about the poem "Ulysses" by Tennyson.



I would also say *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

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

**Erv:** I have Parkinson's so living with health issues is one of the hardest things for me to deal with. Sometimes I think it's more frustrating for Marian. I didn't want to get a walker, and it took me a while to appreciate our Parkinson's support group. We are longtime walkers, but now it is medicinal.

Parkinson's has made me more introverted than I was.

**Marion:** The best thing is being able to say, "I don't know, don't want to and don't have the energy." That and the children. It has always been about children and grandchildren.

### **What do you wish someone had told you about ageing earlier in life?**

**Marion:** I probably wouldn't have believed them! But I would say to young people that life is to be enjoyed as long as you have it.

What gives me joy and keeps me from just sitting in a rocking chair and giving up on life is keeping active in my body, having a few good friends, meditating to get a word from God, family, interacting with children. I don't want to be an unhappy person. There's always a gift in each day and season.

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

**Erv:** I think the story of the Prodigal Son is the best parable Jesus told, and it does more to teach us about who God is than anything else in scripture. I have preached on it before and would gladly do so again. ●

## **CM NEWS BRIEFS**

### **Mennonites blocked by Suriname court**

A court in Suriname has halted development on hundreds of thousands of hectares of Amazon rainforest, much of it occupied by local and Indigenous people. The development in question would have included projects carried out by Mennonites, the Ministry of Agriculture and others.

The landmark ruling could give new autonomy to Indigenous communities. Despite the ruling, there are new efforts to bring Mennonite communities from other parts of the region to develop Suriname's agricultural industry. *Source: Mongabay News*

### **MWC welcomes members**

Mennonite World Conference's Executive Committee welcomed new member churches from Tanzania and Ukraine at meetings in Curitiba, Brazil, April 8-11. This brings MWC to over 1.5 million baptized members in more than 10,000 congregations in 110 member churches in 60 countries. The Executive Committee also approved funding for theological education scholarships, particularly in the Global South, where Anabaptist theological education is difficult to find. *Source: Anabaptist World*

### **Wild Church Network holds retreat in Ontario**

From June 13-16, 70 participants from across North America met for "Sacred Conversations," a Wild Church Network retreat, held at Five Oaks Retreat Centre in Paris, Ontario. The gathering was planned by a team of six including Wendy Janzen, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's eco-minister and pastor of Burning Bush Forest Church. MCEC was one of the sponsors.

Participants participated in workshops and five different styles of Wild Church gatherings. Janzen was delighted by the networking and by the fact that for a third of participants this was an introduction to the movement.

### **Bill Janzen honoured**

William (Bill) Janzen, founding director of Mennonite Central Committee Canada's Ottawa Office, has been appointed a member of the Order of Canada. According to the website of the Governor General, Janzen was honoured for contributions to refugee resettlement, development and peace building. "He was instrumental in the creation of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, which mobilized Canadians to support incoming refugees... and marked a turning point in Canada's immigration policy."

Janzen led the MCC Ottawa Office from 1975 to 2008. *Sources: MCC, gg.ca*

### **New AMBS project for congregations**

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) received a USD\$1.2 million Lilly Endowment grant to establish Anabaptist Thriving Congregations, a five-year project designed to equip congregations in the U.S. and Canada to read and interpret both the Bible and their sociocultural context for the purpose of being witnesses to the gospel in their local communities.

At the heart of the project is Confessional Bible Study, a method developed at AMBS.

The project emerged from a 2021 listening process AMBS conducted with church leaders, who said the best way AMBS could support them would be to help in understanding their social contexts, leading congregational discernment processes and teaching biblical stories to engage the present context. *Source: AMBS*



Resonate youth and leaders attend a filmmaking workshop at the Toronto Public Library.

## Young asylum seekers showcase art

By Madalene Arias

“I’m always amazed at how quickly people dismiss the arts,” says Steve Norton, a pastor and film critic at Connect City Ministries, which is part of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

He joined young artists from families seeking asylum for the Resonate Art Exhibition at The Don on Danforth in Toronto on June 23.

A group of more than 40 gathered to view paintings, print photography, collages, film and musical performances. The art came out of a program run by Connect City at the Radisson Hotel Toronto East, a facility that has housed hundreds of asylum seekers since 2018.

During the six-month program at the hotel, young people between 12 and 16 years of age gathered between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Saturdays to make art.

Connect City develops young leaders to serve the poor and forgotten as Jesus did. This has resulted in the birthing of unique expressions of church.

Connect City obtained government funding for the program. Colin McCartney, co-founder and director of Connect City, says the organization is used to doing things on very tight budgets. “But wow! When you get a government grant, it’s like we have money to actually do some amazing stuff,” he says.

“We proposed to do an arts program to empower the kids to share their voice, their experiences,” says McCartney, as he described the work involved in obtaining the government grant.

Connect City wanted to create a program that would recognize the voices and inherent value of people who come

to Canada seeking refuge, especially the young people. “They’re important to us,” he adds. “That’s why [the program] is called Resonate.”

The extra money made it possible for the organizers to hire professional artists to teach the youth. It also made it possible to take the participants on field trips to the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Ed Mirvish Theatre for a live theatrical performance of *Aladdin*.

Norton, who has worked with youth for more than 30 years, says the particular group that was part of the program was the best he has ever worked with.

“It was just phenomenal.”

Between 15 and 20 youths participate on a typical Saturday. Some had to drop out of the program as housing became available to their families and they moved

out of the hotel, often with little notice.

Despite the transitory nature of the lives of many of these youth, Norton says the program was full every Saturday since it began in January. Connect City staff modified the program so that it would run on a monthly basis instead of a six-month period.

Funding for the program runs out in early fall.

“We didn’t want kids to feel like they had to over-commit,” says Norton. Even if kids could only participate for one or two months, they got a “complete package.”

The exhibit included two short films that the young people wrote, filmed, edited and acted in. Both films—*Clean up with Lazy Brother* and *Enough is Enough*—drew laughter and applause from the audience at The Don.

When Connect City first introduced Resonate to the youth at the Radisson, Josiah Cheltenham went knocking door to door to tell families about the new initiative. He also met regularly with Norton and other staff to plan the arts program.

Cheltenham, 20, directs Connect City’s Unity Youth program. Two years ago, he arrived in Canada and began living at the Radisson with his mother.

They’d left Barbados so that his mother could escape domestic violence.

“When I first came to Canada, I was suffering from a little depression. I was trying to find an outlet,” says Cheltenham.

He began to work for Connect City as a volunteer in the summer of 2022. Once he obtained the necessary paperwork to gain employment in Canada, Connect City invited him to work full-time as a program director.

“I believe that because of my experience



with the shelter [hotel], I have a unique sense of sight in terms of what the kids want and how they feel,” he says.

Cheltenham noticed that resources were lacking at the Radisson. Moreover, people who have been working to help asylum seekers for a long time suffer from exhaustion, especially when they’re not seeing desired results.

He took it upon himself to ensure Unity Youth would be a program where kids felt they could be themselves and “really be free.”

During the exhibit, Cheltenham rallied the program participants to perform a couple of songs they’d created themselves.

“They feel comfortable and excited to share their story with other people,” says Norton of the youth and their art exhibit. He says art is too easily dismissed as mere entertainment, when it is empowerment.

“You can’t put a price tag on that.” ●

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Rebecca Amok Marial is a school kit recipient in South Sudan.

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MCC



Young adults gathered at B.C.'s Camp Squeah in June to discuss an active future in the church.

## Spurring action with deep reflection

*Young adult retreat envisions the future*

By Amy Rinner Waddell

Two dozen young adults came together at Camp Squeah in Hope, B.C., for a weekend of listening, conversation, reflection and music to envision their future and that of the Anabaptist church. The June 7-9 “Young Adult Anabaptist Conference For An Active Future” involved participants from across Canada and the state of Washington, with most coming from B.C.

Retreat organizer Zachary Shields, leader of Mennonite Church B.C.'s Young Adult Task Force, said, “There is a real yearning among my peers for more tangible action to be taken by their local churches.” He said many of those peers are disenfranchised because they don't feel the church is living up to its reputation for peacemaking.

The event opened on Friday night, with David Cramer of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary speaking on Anabaptist identity. Saturday speakers included Bridget Findlay, Indigenous Neighbours program coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee B.C., who led the group in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise; Ian Funk, pastor of Langley Mennonite Fellowship, who spoke on Christian

responsibility for creation care and climate change; and Tim Kuepfer, who described new trends in affordable housing in the Vancouver neighbourhood where he pastored.

On Sunday morning, Beth Carlson-Malena, pastor of Open Way Community Church of Vancouver, spoke about including those who are marginalized in the church.

Outside the sessions, participants got acquainted with each other while exploring the campgrounds, singing around the campfire and playing games. Many described the hymn-sing prior to Sunday morning's worship service as a highlight.

Ryan Abbott of Langley, B.C., who had left the church although not his Anabaptist faith, had been asking why young people are leaving the church and whether the only response of most Mennonites to climate change was to consider recycling. After the weekend, Abbott said, “[This] was a real strong base to build on. There's wisdom in sitting down, looking around and having frank discussion about why things are the way they are.”

Beck Talon of New Westminster, B.C., expressed concern about how members of the LGBTQ community are treated by the church. “One primary reason people leave [the church] is because they look at Christians and all they see are hateful people. It was great to find Christians I trust who actually care.”

Ashley Rempel of Chilliwack, B.C., said: “The sessions were informative. I liked the different topics, the cross-Canada participation, the chill time around the campfire and good conversations.”

Caleb Yang of Vancouver said he would like to see broader representation of different perspectives. “It felt like there was a lot of agreement—[the question is] how do we get those who disagree in on the conversations?” asked Yang.

The group is looking at ways to continue the discussion in the future, including book studies, potlucks, murder mystery parties and online chats to discuss various issues. “We're looking for more participatory community-building,” said Shields. “We also want to develop a presence on social media and perhaps a website. We want to spur action [and] make space for deep reflection.” ●





Participants at a July 6 event surround the first Treaty Land Sharing Network sign in Alberta, east of Camrose.

## Land sharing network expands into Alberta

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

On July 6, the Treaty Land Sharing Network, a grassroots organization that started in Saskatchewan, held an event officially expanding its reach into the part of Treaty 6 territory that

stretches into Alberta.

The network connects farmers and other landholders with First Nation and Métis people who need safe access to land for cultural activities.

The event, which took place on a farm east of Camrose, began with a pipe ceremony. Sixty landholders are currently part of the network across lands covered by Treaties 4 and 6. ●



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# Living my land acknowledgement

By Heather Block

I was nervous the first time I offered a land acknowledgement in church, wondering how people would respond. Afterwards, one person thanked me while another questioned whether a land acknowledgement had any place in a worship service. I took the question at face value and considered why I believe it has a place in a church setting.

The next time I gave one, I spoke about both gratitude for God's creation and recognition of the church's role in colonization of this land's first peoples. This was and is my answer to the question; other individuals and churches may consider it differently.

Over the last number of years, land acknowledgements have become mainstream. Public events often begin with the emcee reading carefully constructed statements about the Indigenous people who first inhabited the territory, along with vague overarching commitments to Reconciliation. Those crafted statements make me uncomfortable. They feel formulaic rather than tied to concrete change.

Lately, I've also heard more and more Indigenous people express discomfort with land acknowledgements. The acknowledgements often paint Indigenous people as historic rather than present neighbours and kin who continue to be affected by colonization. Such words can seem hollow without specific examples of the action people are taking toward Reconciliation.

As land acknowledgements become mainstream, they lose their power to be disruptive. Some elders and Indigenous leaders are encouraging people to stop giving land acknowledgements until our society protects Indigenous women and girls as well as land rights.

Other Indigenous leaders suggest a third way: personalized land acknowledgements. On the advice of some local Indigenous community leaders, my workplace has adopted that practice. I've shared my personal acknowledgement a

few times and each time it's a bit different. This approach moves the land acknowledgement from being a quick band-aid on a large wound to a reflection that inspires consideration. Writing an acknowledgement requires time and effort. It means



Heather Block enjoying Treaty 1 Territory.

considering my relationship with the land and looking at my current relationship with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. It also asks me to consider the concrete actions I am taking and will take toward right relationships.

I don't know if my land acknowledgements have affected other people's perspectives, but I know they have changed mine. In addition to thinking about my relationships with Indigenous peoples here on Treaty 1 Territory, I've begun thinking much more about my relationship with the land itself. I've started wondering what my life and my relationship with the land would look like if I lived out the values behind a land acknowledgement. I ask myself what it would look like if, in a manner of

speaking, I considered my land acknowledgement to be a way of living in relation to the land and those on it—something lived out rather than merely verbalized.

Traditional Indigenous worldviews do not consider land as a commodity to be owned; rather land is a part of the whole creation in which we are in relationship. Indigenous teachers encourage the rest of us to think differently than we're used to. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer says:

"[O]ne thing our people could not surrender was the meaning of land. In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold."

This shift to a focus on how I live my life is new to me, and I'm still figuring out what it means, but I know it is important.

While land acknowledgements without specific actions that lead to change are problematic, authentic land acknowledgements have been a part of my journey to be a partner in Reconciliation. They have prompted me to learn of those who originally lived in the places I have lived, to explore the impacts of colonization on Indigenous neighbours—or relatives, as I've learned to refer to us all—and to change my relationship with the land. I strive to live into Kimmerer's exhortation: "To become naturalized [to place] is to live as if your children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do." ●

*Heather Block attends Aberdeen Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, on Treaty 1 Territory.*



## Signs of peace

A new exhibit at Conrad Grebel University College features more than 50 peace posters produced over the decades by organizations and initiatives with ties to the college. “Signs of Peace: A Retrospective of Peace Posters” will be in the college’s Centre for Peace Advancement until October 31.

Members of the public are invited to suggest additional posters that can be added to the exhibit’s expansion wall. To do so, please contact the exhibit curator Paul Heidebrecht at [paul.heidebrecht@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:paul.heidebrecht@uwaterloo.ca).

-Staff



Dave Scott of Swan Lake First Nation on a road near Neuberghthal, Manitoba.

## Secret Treaty tour and book launch

The group gathered on a gravel mile road in a part of southern Manitoba settled by Mennonites in the 1870s to hear Dave Scott speak about who was there before the Mennonites or the shelterbelts or the roads.

It was one of two stops on a tour of the Mennonite West Reserve that formed part of the June 29 launch of *The Secret Treaty*, the book form of the comic that appeared in the February 23 issue of *Canadian Mennonite*. The book recounts the Ojibwe oral history of a handshake treaty between the Ojibwe and early Mennonite settlers.

The tour was followed by a fasma meal at the Commons Barn—a restored

housebarn in the village of Neuberghthal—as well as music and presentations by illustrator Jonathan Dyck and Ojibwe knowledge-keeper Dave Scott, co-creators of the book.

Fifty people joined the tour with another 50 coming for fasma and presentations.

The book is being distributed to churches, schools and the public.

To learn about upcoming Secret Treaty events in Winkler, Winnipeg and Steinbach, contact Jonathan Dyck at [jandrewdyck@gmail.com](mailto:jandrewdyck@gmail.com).

The *Secret Treaty* is available at [commonword.ca](http://commonword.ca).

# Jewish author proposes one-state solution

By A.S. Compton



Israeli Jew Jeff Halper speaking at an MCEC lunch event.

Israeli-Jewish author and organizer Jeff Halper spoke at a June 25 lunch gathering organized by the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) Palestine-Israel Network (PIN). Halper heads the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and is the author of *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and the Case for One Democratic State*.

Halper said that while it is vitally important to keep attention on the violence in Gaza and continue to pressure authorities for a ceasefire and the return of the hostages and prisoners, it is also important to “multi-task” by offering viable political options for the future.

Halper said that when the situation in Israel and Palestine is framed as a conflict, there cannot be proper problem-solving because, at its core, this isn't a disagreement of sides. Instead, Halper speaks about “an anti-colonial struggle against Zionist settler colonialism.”

Halper advocates for a single democratic state under which everyone has equal rights. Cultural groups such as Jews or Arabs would be full, equal citizens, but those identities would not trump citizenship. A two-state solution, Halper says, is “apartheid,” and legitimizes that apartheid.

In response to an audience question about how Mennonites can help, Halper suggested that the church, perhaps in partnership with the UN, could create physically safe spaces for Palestinians to organize and develop their own leadership. Palestinians are dispersed and fragmented, and anyone seen as a potential leader is eliminated by Israel. Halper wondered about the possibility of a church and UN coalition whose job it was to protect Palestinian people, to give them space to think and organize. ●



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## CM CALENDAR

### Nationwide

**Oct. 27:** International Witness Sunday. Details and resources to come.

### International

#### British Columbia

**Aug. 3-5:** North American Vietnamese Evangelical Fellowship Conference, Vietnamese Mennonite Church will be hosting at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver.

**Aug. 10:** Lao Church Worship and Celebration, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Lao Church Hosting at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church, Abbotsford.

**Oct. 18-20:** MCBC Ladies Retreat at Camp Squeah. Linda Todd guest speaker, details to come.

**Nov. 1-3:** MCBC Pastor/Family Retreat at Camp Squeah. Details to come.

#### Saskatchewan

**Aug 7-8:** Peace Summer Camp for all ages. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. at MCC office, 600 45th St. West, Saskatoon. Register at [mcc.org/events/practice-peace-summer-camp](http://mcc.org/events/practice-peace-summer-camp)

**Sept. 8:** Celebrate Shekinah's 45th Anniversary, 2-6 p.m. More details to come.

**Nov. 11-15:** MC Sask and CMU present Healing Haunted Histories: Decolonizing discipleship, available for credit or audit, register at [mcsask.ca](http://mcsask.ca)

#### Manitoba

**Sept. 9:** Activ8 is a new 8-month program for young adults combining a learning community, a service experience and the freedom to stay at home, work and save for future study. Now accepting applicants. This pilot program is a partnership between MCM and Peace & Justice Initiatives. More at [mennochurch.mb.ca/activ8](http://mennochurch.mb.ca/activ8)

#### Ontario

**Aug. 22-24:** Theatre of the Beat arts festival at Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto. Details at [theatreofthebeat.ca/emerging-producers-festival](http://theatreofthebeat.ca/emerging-producers-festival)

**Aug. 25:** Saengerfest: A centenary Mennonite song festival at 3 p.m., St. Matthews Lutheran Church, Kitchener.

**Sept 1:** Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission Co-Executive Coordinator John Fumana at Listowel Mennonite Church, 10 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. with updates from ministries with African

churches in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa.

**Sept 18:** Walk with Grassy Narrows youth and community members in Toronto in solidarity on their path to achieve mercury justice and freedom. More at [freegrassy.net](http://freegrassy.net)

**Sept. 21:** Toronto (GTA) Mennonite Festival at Willowgrove farm, Stouffville.

**Oct. 21-25:** MCC Learning Tour: Travelling Together Through Truth, engaging with First Nations communities and partners of MCC Ontario's Indigenous Neighbours program in Timmins.

#### Online

**Sept. 20:** Mennonite World Conference international hour of prayer, 14:00 UTC. Register at [mwc-cmm.org/en](http://mwc-cmm.org/en)

**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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# FaithStory

## Never forgotten or forsaken

By Aklilu Zere

**W**hen I was five years old, two forces shook my world to its core. Before this, I had a loving family, a good school and a beautiful country. But that year, 1960, thousands of Ethiopian troops invaded my country of Eritrea. A dark cloud of fear hung over the land and the people. People spoke in hushed tones, afraid of being overheard by spies or enemies. I started to think this was the end of the world.

What broke my heart, during that chaos, was the death of my father. The agonizing cry of my mother over my father's coffin pierced my soul.

I owe my survival to the Capuchin Friars at St. Anthony Elementary School in Asmara, Eritrea, who had taught me before this time. They were strict, kind and diligent in teaching the fear of God and love of Christ through daily Bible classes and church attendance. What I

learned through them was engraved in my heart and my mind. It was enough to sustain me through years of hardship and chaos that followed.

After my father's death, my eldest sister decided I should go and live with her in the village where her husband had started a new school. Numb to everything, I did not resist, believing it would be a relief for my widowed mother to have one less mouth to feed.

My sister lived in a remote village located on a high mountain plateau, almost 2500 metres above sea level. Travel there was only possible by foot or mule. I had been a city boy, but now I suddenly became a mountain boy.

While living with my sister, I stumbled upon three books that belonged to my brother-in-law: *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Pilgrim's Progress*. I believe these books were there by the loving intervention of the almighty God, who saw my loneliness and sorrow. The characters in these books had to endure hardships similar to mine, and I found solace in their stories. I learned I was not the only one suffering and that God was always with me.

The villagers were kind and gentle people who spoke little. They felt sorry for me because they knew I was an orphan. They didn't know that I felt pity for them too. Though everything in that village was blessed, the villagers were too busy to enjoy the beauty of the land. I had it to myself. I enjoyed the beautiful lizards that wagged their tails and bowed their heads in greeting, and the ample fruits on the trees.

My lonely wanderings in and around the village made me a pain-feeler, easily moved by any tears. The most haunting sounds were the screams of young girls in their first childbirth. The village women would wail, praying to God for mercy, their melodious despair echoing from hills and valleys. Then, a miracle would happen, and I would hear joyful ululations from the same women.

I hadn't even known my sister was pregnant when she went into labour. For three days and nights, I heard her agony while the village women wailed. I gave up hope of her survival, but she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl who she named Bisirat, which means "good news."

Two illnesses struck me during the first weeks of living in the village. I was left for dead by migraines more than a

thousand times, and every time I had a migraine that lasted for hours, I would wake up feeling reborn. The joy I felt was like touching heaven.

I was also tormented by intense stomach pain. I fought it with self-talk and prayers. It was later diagnosed as a chronic duodenal ulcer.

This pain continued as I grew up. I quit many good jobs because I couldn't stand the pain. Doctors tried everything to help me, but nothing worked.

The next part of my story is one of deliverance. It is like those in the Bible, so I tell it in that way.

And it came to pass, after many years of wandering and wasting, that the Lord sent me a nomadic messenger with a word in the year of our Lord 1988. For those days were evil for me, and my health was failing due to the wicked duodenum ulcer, and I was fleeing from my Father, Saviour and Comforter.

And there came unto me a nomad friend from the days of my youth, who had journeyed to Toronto, and he abided with us for three days. And on the first day of the week, when we had broken bread, he asked me of my purpose for the day, and I answered him that I had none. And he looked upon me with a stern countenance, and he charged me to seek a church and to go there speedily for my wife and children's sake. And he commended unto me a Mennonite church, for reasons I know not. And I said unto him, "yea," as a nomad who trusts only another nomad, and he departed from us on the morrow.

And I was constrained and hastened to search for a Mennonite church, and on the fourth day I found one: Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC). And I called them straightaway, and an angel said unto me, "Hello, how may I help you?"

And the angel told me that I was welcome to come to the church. And I told the good tidings to my wife and

two daughters, and they showed an uncommon zeal. And when the day came, we went to TUMC. And at the entrance we were greeted by more angels, and our fears and our shyness melted away.

The name of my friend is Asmerom, which means "the one who makes straight the way." And verily I followed the way and was embraced, honoured, loved after a long life of waywardness, wastefulness, dangers and sinfulness. I had never been forgotten or forsaken by the Almighty God.

But I was still tormented by my ulcer. One Saturday afternoon, my wife and my children persuaded me to go to the library, hoping that reading magazines in a quiet place might alleviate my misery.

I rarely read *Scientific American*, but my eyes caught a headline about duodenal ulcers. I turned to the page and God showed me my cure. I went straight to a nearby walk-in clinic. When I told the doctor about my condition, he started writing a prescription. I told him I had a cupboard full of such useless medications. I also told him what I had read—that an Australian doctor had discovered such ulcers were caused by *H. pylori* infections, but that the treatment was not yet validated in North America. I asked if he could prescribe it anyway. I saw something in his face that lasted only for a second—it had eternity in it. He prescribed the medicines.

On the fourth day of taking the cocktail of medications, I felt so good. When my wife came home from work, I saw her face as though for the first time. I realized the ulcer had blinded my inner eye. Through the medications, God touched me, and I was able to see. ●

*Aklilu Zere lives in Toronto, where he worked in the automotive industry before his retirement. He and his wife attend Toronto United Mennonite Church.*



Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2

ART: NICK SCHUURMAN (THERAINTHESNOWTHESEED.CA)

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