

# CANADIAN MENNONITE

OCTOBER 2024

**SUCH AS THESE**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL IN 2024**

What  
about  
the kids?

# The kingdom of idealism

WILL BRAUN



I recall being young and idealistic, and I recall my mom telling me, at the time, that people in the church should

listen to the youth precisely because they are young and idealistic.

The comment landed firmly in my heart because I was used to people sidestepping idealism with the paternalism of those defending institutional or personal turf.

My mom's words come to mind often, such as when my kids point out inconsistencies in my life, which they do with blistering precision. Or when I read Danika Warkentin's words about the church "bending to the youth" (page 28).

I want my default impulse to be one of openness to kids and youth.

Indeed, the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these who are too young, and perhaps too idealistic, to serve as treasurer or editor or executive anything.

In our feature section we explore the possibilities of kids and youth (pages 14-28).

Also in this issue, we follow-up on

our July report of former Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) workers ("Involuntary") with an article about an alleged rape case in Mozambique (page 30).

This year I have spoken with 14 former MCC workers who were either terminated or resigned due to serious concerns with MCC HR practices. As part of our ongoing coverage of this matter, I note that a group called MCC Abuse Survivors Together (MAST) announced its launch on September 5. The group includes some of the people behind the May 3 open letter to MCC constituents and the related online petition that now has 1,400-plus signatures.

In a press release—available at [tinyurl.com/mpawruer](https://tinyurl.com/mpawruer) MAST says it seeks justice, accountability and transparency. It will also support those who come forward with stories of harm.

Given the prominence of MCC within the Mennonite community, the serious nature of the allegations being made and the number of allegations, CM continues to follow these matters closely. Public accountability and discussion are important. Our hope is that this coverage will serve the

community.

Our overarching questions are about how MCC and other organizations handle contentious and conflictual situations. Why are a significant number of people coming out of MCC expressing so much pain? When conflicts arise, are core issues dealt with in ways that are direct, compassionate and restorative?

We expect to provide an update on the case of Anicka Fast and John Clarke on our website in the near future.

Finally, we have staff transitions to announce. Graham Aberdein, who handled finances for us on a part-time basis since 2021, retired in August. Audrey Montag has taken his place.

Many thanks to Graham for his solid work, Scottish cheer and heartfelt contributions to staff meetings. And a big welcome to Audrey.

In addition to these changes, Tobi Thiessen will be stepping down as publisher at the end of May. A big change! Tobi has been in that position since 2017, following nine years on the board of Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service. The board is now seeking a replacement, as per the ad below. ●

## Are you our next Publisher?

Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS), which publishes this magazine, is searching for its next Publisher to work in collaboration with staff and publishing partners to "educate, inspire, inform and foster dialogue on issues facing Mennonites in Canada, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ from an Anabaptist perspective."

As the organizational leader, accountable to the Board, the Publisher has overall responsibility for print and digital publishing activities, fundraising, staff supervision and operations, while providing a vision and strategy for how CMPS contributes to the church as a source of information, inspiration and interconnectedness.

For more on what a successful candidate might bring to the role and its responsibilities, visit: [canadianmennonite.org/employment](https://canadianmennonite.org/employment).

Submit cover letter and resume to Kathryn Lymburner, Board Chair: [board@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:board@canadianmennonite.org) by November 15, 2024.

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We explore faith formation among kids and youth with pieces by Derek Suderman, Julia Mathies, Maurice Martin, Danika Warkentin and others.



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CM continues its coverage of concerns about MCC HR practices with a report on an alleged sexual assault case in Mozambique.



**40 Focus on schools**

Read about the latest from CMU, Rockway, Grebel and RJC.

**About the cover** Photo: Tima Miroshnichenko/Pexels adapted by Anne Boese. See masthead on page 47.





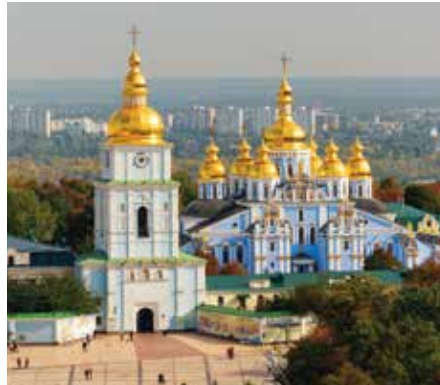
# What in the World



## Who would Francis vote for?

The Pope said American Catholics must choose “the lesser evil” in the presidential election. “Whether it is the one who is chasing away migrants, or the one who kills children [abortion]... both are against life,” he said, without directing people which evil to choose. *Source: Globe & Mail*

Photo: Class V/WikiCommons



## Ukraine seeks ‘spiritual independence’

With Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaking about the need to “guarantee Ukrainian spiritual independence,” the national parliament passed a law banning activities of the Moscow-linked Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. A majority of Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians, divided between the Russian Orthodox Church and a breakaway branch with Ukrainian loyalties. *Source: RNS*

Photo: Rbrechko



## Taxing the tithe

The Nicaraguan government, which has acted in recent years to keep religion in check, recently announced a tax on tithes and offerings. Some estimate the tax will reach 30 percent. The government of Daniel Ortega also cancelled the legal status of 1,500 organizations, including many evangelical churches and ministries. *Source: Christianity Today*

Photo: Cancillería Ecuador

# 50 YEARS AGO

MENNONITE REPORTER, OCTOBER 14, 1974

## Legislation to halt CO discussion

**South Africa** — South Africa’s Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, has introduced new legislation which provides a fine of up to R10,000 (\$14,560) or 10 years’ imprisonment or both for anyone convicted of trying to persuade another person to avoid military service. The bill seeks to counter the resolution on conscientious objection adopted early in August by the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

In parliament the Progressive Party strongly opposed the bill describing it as “complete overkill on the SACC resolution” and so wide-ranging that any critical discussion on military service could become punishable.

The SACC motion pointed out that the Republic of South Africa is at present “a fundamentally unjust and discriminatory society” and deplored the use of violence to counteract the violence of terrorist groups who are reacting to a repressive society. It also called for a task force to study methods of nonviolent action for change.



### The incorruption of a saint

Catholic officials used 10 keys—one kept by the King of Spain—to open the casket of St. Teresa of Ávila, the mystic who died in 1582. They confirmed that her body remains preserved, or “incorrupt,” as it was when the casket was last opened in 1914.

Source: *Catholic Register*

Painting: Eduardo Balaca



### Imam brings burgers and calm

An anti-immigration protest outside a mosque in Liverpool, England, was de-escalated after counter-protestors, including one whose placard read “Nans Against Nazis,” engaged in late-night conversation with the protestors, as the Imam handed out burgers. Calm prevailed, and both sides listened to each other. Source: *The Guardian*

Photo: Daniel Reche/Pexels



### Island of reverence

The Pope’s September visit to Timor-Leste—formerly East Timor—involved a \$1-million altar, an open-air mass with 600,000 people—nearly half the total population—and the controversial bulldozing of 11 homes to make way for the gathering.

Source: *BBC*

Photo: James Ee

*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

A bus crammed with youth setting out from New Hamburg, Ontario, en route to a convention in Estes Park, Colorado. The theme of the 1996 conference was, “God’s People on the Edge of Tomorrow.” Mennonite youth conventions were on the “edge” of significant growth as participation progressed from a few local delegates to entire congregational youth groups.

Text: Laureen Gissing-Harder

Photo: *The Canadian Mennonite*/

Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

✉ **Love and hate**

**I agree with Ryan Dueck’s insightful article, “A place for hate” (June 2024), particularly in today’s harsh world.**

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon observed there is a season for everything, including love and hate. This may seem chilling. Yet, Solomon also acknowledged that God makes everything beautiful in its time. Finding peace requires acceptance of God’s timing. We are admonished not to hate evil people but their *deeds* when they mistreat people, destroy nature and dishonour God.

Almighty God vows that vengeance is his; *he* will repay, not us. We are called to live in harmony with one another. God wrote the Ten Commandments as a guide for believers to live rightly. God detests haughty eyes, a lying tongue, murder, wickedness, false witness and dissenters among his people.

Jesus says: love your enemies and pray for your persecutors. The greatest commandments are to love God and neighbour. He reminds us that the Lord sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. Paul counselled Roman Christians to bless those who persecuted them and to feed hungry enemies.

In Alan Paton’s 1948 novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, he warned fellow whites to start loving their black neighbours, lest they turn to hating. The Beatles song “Revolution” vowed against contributing to hate.

Fear and hatred are linked. They fester when we won’t forgive. Love and hate are important, intertwined emotions. They are not easy to discuss, but, somehow, we all need to do better in loving one another and God.

– ROBERT G. PROUDFOOT, EDMONTON, ALBERTA  
 (FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ **Accept change**

**I write in response to “From fresh cabbage to ‘shovel-ready industrial land’” (August 2024). Even farmers can and must accept change. It is challenging, but we can survive when we all work together and people have a simple basic roof over their heads. It’s forward-looking. Creator God will provide in due time.**

Trust. Faith. Hope. Love. With lots of charity thrown into the mix.

– GINNY SHANK MARTIN, KITCHENER, ONTARIO  
 (WATERLOO NORTH)

✉ **In praise of hymnals**

**Something unexpected and beautiful happened at our small Mennonite church last Sunday—we sang out of hymn books. I love singing out of the book, and I dislike singing “off the wall.” Here’s why.**

Firstly, I am not a good singer. When I hold my own hymn book at a certain angle, I can hear my own voice better and there is hope that I can find the alto notes.

Secondly, I can see the notes on the page better than on the wall. This also gives me a fighting chance to find my note.

Thirdly, when I hold my own book, I can quietly focus on the words I want, regardless of what others are singing. Let me explain. For years I faithfully attended church wearing a happy mask even though I was profoundly unhappy, trying to negotiate my way in a bad marriage. It took all I had sometimes just to walk through the door on a Sunday morning. I was out of gas for prayer. I was out of gas to listen to a sermon. Sometimes the rich music of a beloved hymn was all that fed me. While everyone around me had moved on to verse 3 or 4, I could quietly re-read the words of a comforting verse. This was often my inspiration during that time.

Those days are over, but I still want to savour words that touch me rather than move on.

Singing “off the wall” is commonplace and probably here to stay, but I’ll always be the one holding a hymn book because I made sure to hunt one up in the supply cupboard before the service.

– DORIS DALEY MEHL, TURNER VALLEY, ALBERTA  
 (TRINITY MENNONITE CHURCH)

✉ **Credit to Bill Janzen**

**At a time when Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is getting some criticism for past HR decisions, it is also a good time to remember one of MCC’s finest—Bill Janzen of MCC’s Ottawa Office (“Bill Janzen honoured,” August 2024). Service in the name of Christ provided effectively; recognition rightfully honoured.**

– PETER ANDRES, CHILLIWACK, B.C.

**Be in Touch**

• Send letters to [letters@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:letters@canadianmennonite.org). Our mailing address is on page 39.



## ✉ Representing all in transition

What a bold decision to address the issue of those who leave the Mennonite Church. You represent *all* concerned, including the pastor, those who stay, those who leave and those who are still in the decision-making process. It is a call from God to be gentle, kind and loving in these transitions.

– JOHN PETERS, KITCHENER, ONTARIO  
(WATERLOO NORTH MENNONITE CHURCH)

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## ✉ Plant-based eating

With thanks to Zach Rempel for the wisdom of his sobering and articulate insights (“A recipe to reverse the economy,” August 2024), it seems short-sighted to contemplate the negative impacts of unrestrained growth without focusing specific attention on the ways in which our patterns of food consumption contribute to the environmental degradation of the planet.

A substantial body of evidence points to the harmful role that raising livestock plays in the widespread destruction of rainforests, which are often and convincingly referred to as the lungs of the planet. Plant-based eating makes a substantial and proven contribution to improved personal health and longevity, as well as the broader well-being of our planet.

– PAUL THIESSEN, MD, VANCOUVER, B.C.

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## ✉ Grief of displaced churches

I am writing in response to the recently published article “Finding a home in the MB conference” by Will Braun (September 2024). The article offers attention and curiosity to a church that chose to move from the Mennonite Church to the Mennonite Brethren church. Yet within our Mennonite family are people who have found their new home here, not by choice but by being rendered homeless elsewhere.

I am the pastor of Jubilee Mennonite Church, which was voted out of fellowship with the MB church in March 2023. (Thoughts and views expressed here are my own, not Jubilee’s.) Less than a year later, our neighbour church (River East Church) was also voted out of fellowship by the MB conference.

Both churches desired a continued relationship with the MBs, and that desire was deeply disappointed. In light of our

release, we found a home in Mennonite Church Manitoba (a continued relationship for Jubilee; a new one for River East).

I can’t help but see the absence of stories of the grief of loss from being *removed* from fellowship. We did not all get to choose how we moved locations. I would invite CM to apply the same attention and curiosity they afforded the church in the article to the churches facing the grief of displacement. How we tell those stories and whose story we emphasize matters.

– JANESSA NAYLER-GIESBRECHT, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA  
(JUBILEE MENNONITE CHURCH)

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## ✉ Leaving over inclusion hurts

As a former congregant, I have a lot of respect for Brent Kipfer (“Finding a home in the MB conference,” September 2024). I know him as a kind and wise man who I’ve known since childhood in St. Agatha Mennonite Church.

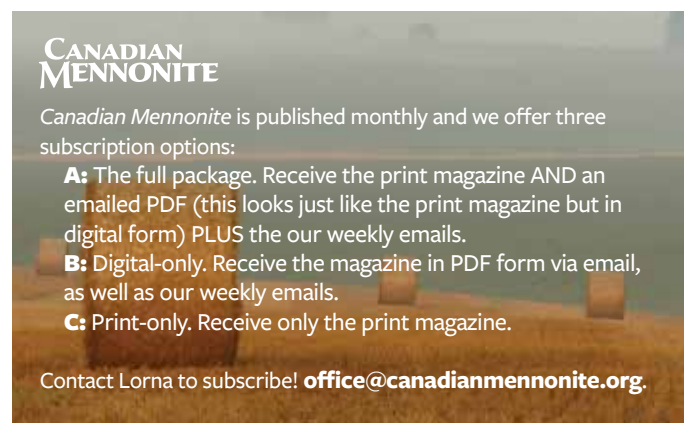
We left St. Agatha when I was 10 and attended another congregation, River of Life, the congregation I was discipled and baptized in. After I went to CMU to study theology, I heard that River of Life was also leaving over 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.

As a queer person, it hurts to see people I love and respect leave the conference over my inclusion and that of other 2SLGBTQ members.

Am I so evil that you can’t be in the same denomination as me? You literally taught me my faith, but now can’t break bread with me?

I’m blessed to have found a home where I am loved and respected. Where my queerness is a blessing, not something to hide. Where the faith I was taught can be passed on to my children. Where we are welcome.

– TIM WENGER

The image shows the cover of the Canadian Mennonite magazine. The title "CANADIAN MENNONITE" is at the top in a serif font. Below it, the text reads: "Canadian Mennonite is published monthly and we offer three subscription options: A: The full package. Receive the print magazine AND an emailed PDF (this looks just like the print magazine but in digital form) PLUS the our weekly emails. B: Digital-only. Receive the magazine in PDF form via email, as well as our weekly emails. C: Print-only. Receive only the print magazine." At the bottom, it says "Contact Lorna to subscribe! office@canadianmennonite.org." The background of the cover is a photograph of a rural landscape with a field and a small building in the distance under a cloudy sky.

**CANADIAN MENNONITE**

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- A:** The full package. Receive the print magazine AND an emailed PDF (this looks just like the print magazine but in digital form) PLUS the our weekly emails.
- B:** Digital-only. Receive the magazine in PDF form via email, as well as our weekly emails.
- C:** Print-only. Receive only the print magazine.

Contact Lorna to subscribe! [office@canadianmennonite.org](mailto:office@canadianmennonite.org).

CM **Obituary**



**Martha Snyder**  
(December 14, 1935 – August 22, 2024)

Martha Snyder, who attended Bloomingdale Mennonite Church, died on August 22. Martha and her husband, Paul, were known as Canadian pioneers in their work for justice and inclusion of all people, especially those in the Mennonite LGBTQ community. Martha's grandchild, Steph Chandler Burns, pastor of Pastors in Exile (PiE), says, "She is the reason I believe God is love." Chandler Burns adds, "She took seriously the call to work for justice, to love people on the margins, to learn and change her worldview, and to listen to other people. And she modeled it."

LGBTQ justice was a primary focus of Martha and Paul's lives, but they also took in a refugee family and international students. Years ago, the Snyders founded a group for people whose families had disowned them because of their sexual orientation. They also founded a parents group, the legacy of which, Chandler Burns says, includes a similar group run through PiE.

Although Martha grew up in a time when the church was fairly negative toward homosexuality, she credited her parents, who had changed their own worldviews on various issues, and who took loving others seriously. Martha did likewise around LGBTQ justice and inclusion, continuing to learn through the whole of her life.

"I used to go to church with my grandparents when I was little," Chandler Burns says. "Grandma led worship all the time. I remember clearly when she worked in my favourite hymn—'Obey My Voice'—because she knew I liked it. She wanted to show five-year-old me that I belonged."

"My grandma made everyone feel loved. She disagreed with so many people and still loved them in a way that I don't see from just anybody."

**Births/Adoptions**

**Muitire**—Mufaro Merry-Anne, (b. Aug 19, 2024), to Ennet Bera & Clemence Muitire, Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

**Paetkau**—Deacon Abe Bernard, (b. Aug 2, 2024), to Daniel & Cailey Paetkau, Sterling Mennonite Fellowship, Winnipeg, Man.

**Deaths**

**Braun**—Loren, 69 (b. Aug. 24, 1954; d. July 22, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

**Bueckert**—Dave, 91 (b. Aug. 16, 1932; d. Aug. 8, 2024), Rosthern Mennonite Church, Rosthern, Sask.

**Dettweiler**—Christopher, 35 (b. Feb. 27, 1989; d. Aug. 23, 2024), Breslau Mennonite Church, Breslau, Ont.

**Enns**—Ed, 97 (b. Aug. 14, 1927; Sept. 1, 2024), Rosthern Mennonite Church, Rosthern, Sask.

**Enns**—Elsie (Nickel), 91 (b. Oct. 23, 1932; d. May 26, 2024), Carrot River Mennonite Church, Carrot River, Sask.

**Funk**—Henry, 83 (b. Oct. 3, 1940; d. Aug. 3, 2024), Mount Royal Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

**Harder**—Helga (Dyck), 85 (b. Sept. 29, 1938; d. July 3, 2024), Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ont.

**Isaak**—Carla (Reimer), 84 (b. Dec. 12, 1939; d. Aug. 15, 2024), Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

**Reesor**—Dorothy, 93 (b. Aug. 29, 1930; d. June 3, 2024), Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, Ont.

**Rempel**—Jacob J., 97 (b. Nov. 1, 1926; d. Aug. 17, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

**Ropp**—Norma, 89 (b. June 27, 1935; d. Aug. 3, 2024), East Zorra Mennonite Church, Tavistock, Ont.

**Sawatzky**—Jacob A. (Jack), 96 (b. Dec. 31, 1927; d. Aug. 4, 2024), Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg MB

**Schellenberg**—Rey, 86 (b. Oct. 5, 1937; d. July 31, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

**Shantz**—Dorothy, 94 (b. Jan. 1, 1930; d. Aug. 21, 2024), Breslau Mennonite Church, Breslau Ont.

**Wiebe**—Hilda, 87 (b. March 5, 1937; d. Aug. 1, 2024), Bergthaler Mennonite, Altona, Man.

**Wiebe**—Jacob, 96 (b. Nov. 3, 1927; d. Aug. 4, 2024), Mount Royal Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

**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)



# Update from war-stricken Myanmar

*The following is from a September 2 email sent by Amos Chin, president of Bible Missionary Church, Mennonite in Myanmar, to Mennonite Church Canada. It is edited for length and clarity.*

**G**reetings from Myanmar. We are facing a significant challenge for our youth. As the number of soldiers in the junta [military] has dwindled, [youth] are being forcibly recruited to serve in the army, with men and women collected in different ways. The airport is strict regarding young people leaving the country, and young people rarely decide to go to prison rather than serve in the military.

Now, not only young people but also men aged 40 to 65 must undergo military training and defend their region. I don't know how it will continue.

Our country is in a deep economic downturn, suffering from inflation and job shortages. Millions face food shortages due to skyrocketing commodity prices. The civil war is becoming more intense and spreading further. As a result, more than 2 million people have left their homes and are displaced.

Because of the civil war, our four Mennonite congregations (236 families) are unable to return to their villages. They suffer from insufficient food and medicine shortages. Our Mennonite church was destroyed by bombing and has not been repaired. Please offer prayers for them.

Although the country is declining, our missionary work is becoming more successful. In December 2023, the government permitted a Peace Concert in Kyone Mangleh Village. More than 2000 people participated. Gospel songs were performed, and peace talks were held. After the concert, 14 Buddhists accepted Christ and received water baptism.

This year we established a new church in a village near Yangon. Seventeen Buddhists converted to Christianity and received water baptism. A temporary tent was built for worship. However, the surrounding Buddhists were angry about the emergence of new Christians and began to persecute them. Although new believers experience stoning and ex-communication, they continue to grow in their faith without fear.

The construction of a BMCM (Bible Missionary Church, Mennonite) church in Kalemyo had been halted due to skyrocketing prices, but due to the hard work of our people, it was rebuilt and today is almost complete. Five other churches have halted construction due to rising prices. We need your prayer support for continued construction.

Our mission is very successful because of God's presence. It is our prayer that the Anabaptist Mennonite Church will grow in Myanmar and make God's glory manifest.

# Canadians headed to Global Youth Summit

MC Canada Release

**A** young adult from each of the five regional churches will represent Mennonite Church Canada at the Global Youth Summit (GYS) in Germany, May 30–June 1, 2025. Convened by Mennonite World Conference, the summit will coincide with Anabaptism's 500th-anniversary celebrations.

The following are the youth representatives from Canada:



**Caleb Yang** is a member of Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship in Vancouver. Yang says that being Anabaptist “means finding home after a long journey of wandering.”



**Liam Kachkar** attends Edmonton First Mennonite Church. This selection fulfills a longstanding dream after Kachkar met a young adult who attended a previous GYS.



**Danika Warkentin** is a member of Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Warkentin is intrigued to participate in discussions with others passionate about the church's future.



**Laura Rodriguez Reyes** is a member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario. Born in the global south, she feels a duty to use her privilege and education to support those who lack opportunities.



**Shenyce Buhler** is a member of Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, where she volunteers as a worship leader.

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**INTRODUCTORY PRICED UNTIL 10/31/2024.**

# Resourcing the Anabaptist church

Arlyn Friesen Epp

Over 500 years, the Anabaptist community has grown to be a diverse and global expression of faith. The resources of Anabaptism reflect this diversity.

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) represents most Christian churches rooted in the Anabaptist movement. In addition to the ongoing resourcing work of its commissions and networks, MWC has several significant resource titles: “Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists,” the Global Anabaptist/Mennonite Shelf of Literature, and the Global Mennonite History series. Other notable global Anabaptist resources include The Global Anabaptist Wiki and Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. All these are wonderful places to begin a journey into the wider Anabaptist story.

I offer additional resources from within a Canadian Anabaptist Mennonite perspective. For a relatively small family of faith, we have produced many resources and have many authors and institutions whose materials we generate, distribute, occasionally translate and preserve.

Different kinds of Anabaptist writers have left indelible marks on our identity and faith: historians, diarists, theologians, scholars, poets, biographers, preachers, cooks and others. Our regional and national archives and historical associations hold many of these treasures (see Mennonite Archival Information Database).

In many cases, resources were published as apologetic accounts for the basic understandings of Anabaptism. Recent titles include *Radicals and Reformers*, *Anabaptist Essentials*, *The Naked Anabaptist* and *Living the Anabaptist Story*.

Mennonites have written novels and poetry that express an insider’s view of Mennonite life (see *On Mennonite/s*

*Writing*). Through the art of literature, another window opens into the complexities of our identity and faith.

Other writers have profoundly shaped our ethics around the kitchen and the table (e.g., *More-with-Less Cookbook*, *Extending the Table* and *Simply in Season*). Indeed, we are what we eat and how we eat.

Our institutions offer rich resources on who we are as Anabaptists and who we are becoming. Our denominations have vision and identity statements, confessions of faith and a wide spectrum of ministry resources in formation and witness, on topics as diverse as Indigenous relations, climate action, international ministries, education and peacebuilding. CommonWord curates and makes accessible these and related resources for users to buy, borrow or access online.

Our universities and colleges are important incubators of foundational and emerging thought, expressed through public lecture series, academic writing (e.g., *The Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible*), blogs (e.g., Anabaptist Historians), and journals (e.g., *Vision*, *Anabaptist Witness*).

Mennonite Central Committee, Community Peacemaker Teams, and many others offer service opportunities, provide eye-witness accounts and encourage calls to action while also resourcing the church. News and faith stories are explored through *Canadian Mennonite*.

Through social media or other media, Anabaptists connect as affinity groups or support networks to plan worship (e.g., Together in Worship, Anabaptist Worship Network), offer parenting support (e.g., Anabaptism: The Next Generation), navigate post-Christendom (e.g., Anabaptist Collective), and more.

Networks extend our reach into

other important conversations and call us to action. These include Anabaptist Climate Collaborative, Palestine-Israel Network, Mennonite Action, and The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, among others. Each provides resources that are reflective of our faith and help shape Anabaptism going forward.

Finally, MennoMedia, our binational denominational publisher, makes available key titles that shape our faith community: hymnals (e.g., *Voices Together*); curriculum (e.g., *Shine*); biblical studies (e.g., *Believers Church Bible Commentary*), in addition to Herald Press titles on specific themes. Hundreds of self-publishing efforts augment the Anabaptist collection.

In celebration of the 500th anniversary, MennoMedia prepared an entire suite of new Anabaptist publications, including devotionals, children’s books and the *Anabaptist Community Bible*, to which hundreds of small groups around the world contributed.

This wide array of materials is representative of the hopes, commitments, activities and learnings of the local, regional and nationwide faith communities across the globe. The challenge moving forward will be to produce more resources that give voice to the many voices that have been unheard, and for materials to be available in languages that reflect our linguistic diversity. May the Anabaptism of the future seek to reflect the full family of God. ●



Arlyn Friesen Epp serves as director of Mennonite Church Canada’s CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre. This

piece first appeared in the Fall 2024 issue of Leader.





RYAN DUECK

# DEEPER COMMUNION

## Restless hearts in Hollywood

**S**o, a struggling actor and a pastor walk into a bar ...

What sounds like a setup for a lame joke was my reality one afternoon in the Rockies last year. My wife was attending some meetings, and I came along for the ride. Another tag-along and I found ourselves meandering around town before landing on a patio pub.

I asked him what he did for a living and he, an actor, took me on a deep dive into the world of sets, screenwriters, Hollywood strikes, and the difficulties of breaking into a cut-throat industry. It was interesting. I don't come across a lot of actors, and my new friend was a colourful conversation partner.

Then came the dreaded moment. Things could either get really interesting or seriously awkward.

"So, what do you do?" he asked.

I took a deep breath and said, "I'm a pastor." I doubt he would have looked more stunned if I had told him I was a ballet dancer or a dog-food taster. He stared, grinned uncomfortably and blurted out, "Oh wow, well, forgive me, for I have sinned ... like a lot."

I laughed. (I've perfected the art of deflective laughter in these contexts.)

He looked nervously at the beer in front of him. I don't think he had ever met a pastor in the wild before.

He warmed up, though. "You know, I've been thinking that I need to pick a

faith or something."

I smiled. "A faith or something?"

"Yeah, I think I'm missing something spiritual in my life and, you know, I've been thinking that I need to get into God."

I asked him if he had been raised in a religious tradition. He looked at me blankly. I inquired about his knowledge of Christianity. Nothing. He was well and truly a product of the secular age.

He told me a bit of his story—struggles with substance abuse, addiction in his family, a temper that could get the better of him. It wasn't hard to detect a crisis of meaning and identity.

I mostly listened. It was clear he did not have many opportunities to explore these matters with others. I tried to encourage him to plug into a Christian community in his home city, somewhere he could connect with others on the journey of "getting into God." I tried to dissuade him from the notion that "picking a faith or something" was a solitary task. He nodded at all the right times. But I don't know how much of it landed.

As I thought about my new friend later, I reflected on two things. First, his comment: "I've been thinking I need to pick a faith, get into God."

"Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." So goes the oft-quoted passage from Augustine. I believe there is something within each human being

that knows or senses that there is more to this life, however inchoate and unformed this sense of more might be.

Second, my friend's "forgive me for I have sinned" comment. While humorous and predictable, it also pointed to something real. Again, I think to be human is to know that we often miss the mark, that there is some standard we fail to meet, some flourishing (for ourselves and for others) that eludes us—and that we are at least partly to blame.

Both of his comments could simply be reflexive responses to the odd phenomenon of meeting this weird creature called a pastor. Maybe he was just saying things he thought I might want to hear. Maybe he was just trying to kill time before scurrying back to secular safety.

Maybe, but I don't think so. I believe that the "God-shaped hole" is a thing. That to long for forgiveness is part of being human, not some kind of weirdly "religious" pursuit. However confusedly it comes out, however scrambled and incoherent our categories are in a secular age, we do long for a transcendent meaning that we do not have to invent for ourselves. Hearts get restless, after all. It's how they're made. ●

*Ryan Dueck serves as pastor of Lethbridge (Alberta) Mennonite Church. He can be reached at ryanduecklmc@gmail.com.*

CINDY WALLACE

### Attentive

I recently read Andrew Root's 2022 book, *Churches and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful, Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age*. Root is a lot more excited about Karl Barth than I am, but he's also a great storyteller. He encourages churches to worry less about our culture's definitions of success and productivity and to focus on the wonder of God's presence. Root calls for us to simplify our lives: pray, wait and be present to each other and our community, trusting that God will act.

A congregation of 200 can do this work. So can a congregation of 15, or an individual walking through a mountain town or going to work each day. I think this kind of watchful presence is what Ryan's story is about.

There are many reasons why folks may be wary of religious people, and especially religious leaders. But the humble way of Jesus—prayerful, attentively curious, not taking ourselves too seriously—offers a particular chance to connect. It can happen in a church building or in a waiting room or on a pub patio. Maybe we're a little embarrassed, a little shy, but we find ourselves talking about those deep longings. We look for God together. ●

*Cindy Wallace is professor of English at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan.*

JUSTIN SUN

### Inward

As a fellow pastor, I've also had the (dis)pleasure of being in a new situation and sussing out whether or how to reveal my occupation. On many occasions, I've had conversations with strangers, for extended periods, without revealing I'm a pastor. I don't necessarily have a problem with it; I just want to be sensitive, knowing it can be fraught where I live, often for good reasons.

I get where Ryan's coming from in his reflections about hearts and forgiveness. At the same time, I feel that the awkwardness of encountering pastors is partly a sign of intergenerational religious struggle. A friend who's doing his thesis on religious trauma writes that survivors often have difficulty reintegrating into religious communities, engaging in spiritual activities, or even rekindling any desire for spirituality. I wonder if difficulties encountering pastors are part of a larger struggle with the traditions that have been handed down generationally.

With that in mind, situations like Ryan's turn me inward, wondering how to cultivate spaces—transformed from the ones we've inherited—that allow those who long for more to recognize that Christians (read: Jesus) are a good companions on the quest for more.

P.S. Ryan, if you encounter Oscar Isaac in your Hollywood travels, send him my way please! ●

*Justin Sun recently began studies at Vancouver School of Theology/Vancouver Coastal Health following pastoral work in Richmond, B.C.*

ANIKA REYNAR

### Hesitation

These days, I find myself in conversations with people who are deeply invested in finding solutions to complex social and ecological crises. Ryan's story of encounter has me thinking about recent conversations where I've been "outed" as a person who studies and identifies with Christianity. Like Ryan, I enter these conversations with some trepidation. Unwelcome faith-talk can lead to visceral discomfort, and even harm. But in the conversations that I'm thinking of, my presence as a person of faith has done something else; it's given others permission to voice their own questions about meaning and purpose.

Does my work matter? Is it possible to find solutions to huge crises without also tending to people's spirits? What does spiritual care look like if I don't believe in God? Does any of this have meaning?

As I listen, I often notice "God-shaped holes." But I remain hesitant to speak about this noticing for fear of being preachy, or positioning God as a simple solution to complex, systemic problems. I'm left wondering: how do I testify, through my words and my life, to the God who creates meaning with us in our deepest longings? Are our churches places where people can recognize this shape of God? ●

*Anika Reynar works in Boston as a facilitator and mediator in environmental disputes.*

# SUCH AS THESE

## SUNDAY SCHOOL IN 2024

*But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not try to stop them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*

What about the kids?

# W

hen I taught children's Sunday school, I would start by asking, "What's the news?" Children would share their fears and sorrows, their excitement and joys. All things God cares about. All things that can be woven into faith formation. At any age.

Derek Suderman says, "We often fundamentally underestimate what kids are capable of." (page 15) I think that's true. Just as we lament when people forget that older folks are still fully human, we should remember that kids aren't just cute, noisy beings needing entertainment. They are already fully

human, already in relationship with God.

At the same time, faith formation in 2024 often looks a lot different from what we may recall.

– Susan Fish



# GETTING PASSIONATE ABOUT THE BIBLE

*Religious studies professor Derek Suderman is passionate about faith formation through Bible study and Sunday school. He has taught the Bible on five continents. He also holds a degree in education. Canadian Mennonite invited Suderman to offer his vision for Sunday school.*

By Derek Suderman

**S**unday school has been approached differently by different people. At times, the church has taken a defensive posture: *It's scary out there and we're going to shelter you and teach you what's right so you can stand fast.* In this approach, the goal is to present answers, remove ambiguity and convince others to think along the same lines. I don't think this is a very helpful stance—and it tends to be hard to find teachers if this is the model.

Other people treat Sunday school or faith formation like getting a vaccination (and for kids, sometimes it may feel like going to the dentist). If you take your kids to church once or twice a month, they will meet nice people, and hopefully good values will rub off on them.

Some of these people have largely given up on the tradition, and for them Bible study has been eclipsed by a focus on core values. The challenge is that values within the Christian tradition are linked to a certain understanding of the tradition. The more you try to distill and encapsulate values, the less you have a sense of where they came from or how they relate to one another.

By the time kids are in high school, Sunday school often moves into discussing hot button issues or current events. I have no problem with this, but it gives youth the assumption that you outgrow Sunday school or the Bible. They tend to move on to seemingly more rigorous subjects like science and math. I regularly challenge undergraduate students on their assumption that they have outgrown the Bible

I'm struck by how often children and youth become painfully aware that while the world is increasingly complex, their understanding of the Bible or engagement with the tradition hasn't kept pace. To understand the Bible and engage the Christian tradition well takes all the intellectual ability we can muster.

Too often we treat the Bible in Sunday school kind of like Aesop's fables—there is one key point to get across. If we're not careful, the “moral” replaces the story or the account itself. Over time, a moralizing approach can get simplistic.

What I find fascinating is how often in the Bible there's a teaching like “love your neighbour,” followed by long discussions about what it actually means. I think the Pharisees' question to Jesus—“Who is my neighbour?”—in Luke 10:29 is an important one.

It's not just: open the Bible and out comes the one-line moral of the story. It's important to sit with a text and to get into some of the complexity that makes it worthwhile.

## What's Sunday school about?

We are bombarded with hundreds of explicit and implicit messages a day, from what to eat and wear to which topics are vitally important. If we in the church get caught in a kind of a purity mentality where we don't talk with kids about certain topics, kids will get information and opinions elsewhere.

One of the most countercultural things Mennonites can do today—children and adults—is to deeply engage with documents that few others think or care about: the Bible. I have come to think of studying the Bible, in part, as a form of intellectual self-defence. The Bible is a document that emerges from a time, place and culture far from our own. I think this is its special power and gift. Studying the Bible provides a window into a different way of thinking and operating, which in turn provides a mirror for reconsidering elements of our own situation.

Where we have often thought we and our children should care deeply about an issue, we often neglect to ask: Why should *we* be interested? What distinctive voice or insight might we contribute to the larger conversation?

This is all a big part of what Sunday school is about.

## What's the teacher's job?

We need to move past the idea that it's the Sunday school teacher's job—or the curriculum writer's job—to answer all our questions. Or that the primary goal is to provide right answers. Instead, you can ask children what they know or what they think a character might feel like when something is happening. There are ways of engaging people at all ages in the story. Over time, that can be

expanded and made more complex.

We tend to want to be certain, and that moves into the question-and-answer mode. But the wheels can come off in various ways. What happens if the Sunday school teacher doesn't know how to answer a question? What happens if you get an authoritarian teacher who knows exactly what everything means and how it should be understood? What happens by the time someone's 12 or 13, and starting to say, "Well, I don't really buy that," but there's no room to engage in a deeper conversation?

The irony about the search for certainty is that once people are certain about something, they're no longer curious about it, and learning stops. The Bible becomes something to defend rather than a companion and conversation partner on life's journey.

An approach that favours curiosity over answers helps children recognize and get used to the idea that people don't always agree. To learn to disagree and continue to engage on relatively minor issues develops our ability to better engage on more challenging questions.

We need to move from the idea that children are to be consumers of someone else's views to one where children are participants in interpretation. With young kids, you can find ways of having them be participants in understanding in a way that can grow over time, but it's different than them simply receiving the right answers.

One of the challenges for Sunday school teachers is to help kids have a sense of the larger story. At the same time, the nature of church attendance has changed so much that it's increasingly difficult to have ongoing conversations. Over time, that weakens the ability of kids to grasp the larger story.

### What do teachers need to know?

I think we don't spend enough time helping to inspire and train teachers.

When it comes to recruitment, often churches ask who's "good with kids," but those people may have little

interest or background. Sunday school can become merely childcare with a craft and snack. We need to inspire adults to be interested in this stuff and then to teach and pass their passion on.

Coaching offers an interesting analogy. A common selling point in Sunday school teacher recruitment is to say "the curriculum does everything for you." You wouldn't hire a sports coach and tell them they only need to show a video. Coaches are often former players who now pass on something they're passionate and knowledgeable about.

If you think of the rabbinic model—used by Jesus and his disciples—it's about apprenticeship, following along and seeing how the master operates in different contexts. But mentorship doesn't fit neatly into a 45-minute block once a week (or every three weeks). If you're coaching, you're leading practices multiple times a week. Again, this is different than recruiting warm bodies who look at Sunday school curriculum in the car on the way to church.

Sometimes adults don't want to teach Sunday school because they are afraid of the responsibility or getting it wrong. Others want to pass on moral values but no longer buy many of the stories.

Sometimes, they haven't worked through their own questions and are nervous about being exposed.

But many people simply don't have a clue where to start and feel intimidated. We're used to expertise in different areas of life, and we know when we don't have it.

I don't want potential Sunday school teachers to feel paralyzed out of worry they're doing it wrong or are unqualified. With questions, you start wherever you are. You're not trying to

reach a certain level of knowledge before you do anything. This is where there is a role for curriculum—but ultimately the book can't lead the group, only the teacher can.

The other key piece of this is the conviction that we're not alone—we need to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit and the living word of God. The responsibility doesn't rest solely on whoever is facilitating the conversation. That idea is implicit in my belief that



We often fundamentally underestimate what kids are capable of.

Bible study is funda-

mentally a group activity, because the Spirit comes where two or three are gathered.

But I do wish we spent more time providing opportunities for Sunday school teachers to get inspired and interested themselves, because I think that would have a ripple effect.

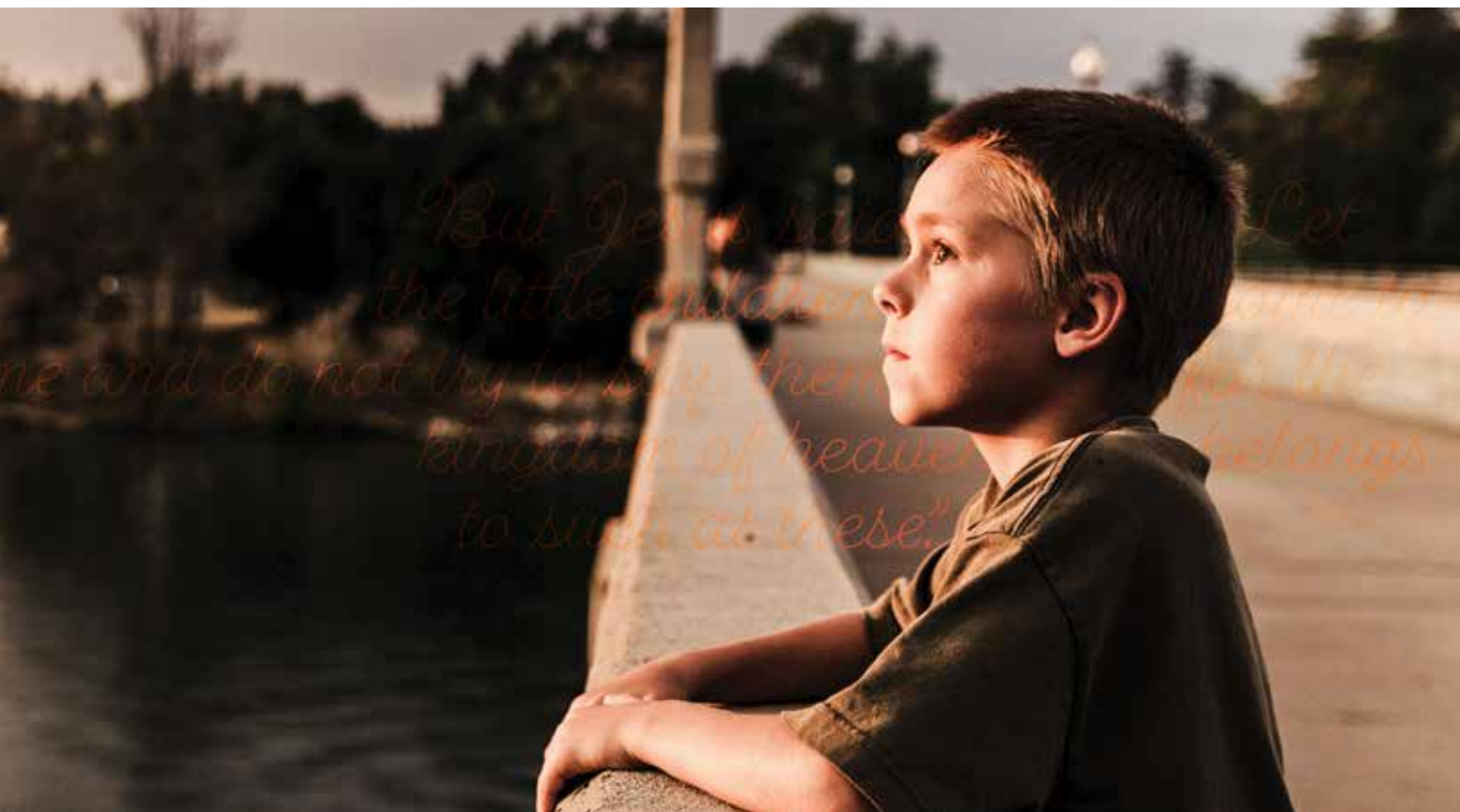
One of my hopes is that a church could have rotating groups of Sunday school teachers. One group could study together for a few weeks while the

other group is teaching the kids, and then they could switch. For several weeks, the leaders get together and talk together about the Bible, get excited about it, learn to understand it together, and then for the next few weeks they teach the children while the other group gets re-inspired. This way, you're not building the plane as you're flying it, but there are people flying it while the others are working on parts.

into our life. Increased biblical engagement will increase literacy, but literacy will not necessarily increase engagement.

- Value and affirm questions; don't shut them down.
- Recognize we live in a different time and place from when and where the Bible was written. Our task is to figure out what ancient writings from a different culture have to offer us now. This can be

is best done together. Communities with different cultural perspectives or socio-economic situations offer diverse perspectives. It's not just about finding one moral that everyone agrees on. If we made a concerted effort, we would have a good basis for a community of learning because often people in Mennonite churches tend to trust each other. But we need more diverse groups



### A Sunday school wish list

- Think about the Bible more as a library than a book. It includes fascinating perspectives that sometimes agree, sometimes raise questions and are sometimes at odds with each other. Recognizing this can lower the temperature of discussion and generate understanding.
- Move from a literacy framework to an engagement framework, from fill-in-the-blank knowledge to a focus on regular interaction built

done even among seven-year-olds. It's as simple as telling a story such as Jacob and Esau, and saying: "Have you ever felt like this person?" People can put themselves into the story.

- Learn to live with open-endedness, as we do with music. You can try to figure out which boyfriend Taylor Swift is talking about in a song, but generally people identify with it because they can identify with the experience and feelings.
- Recognize that studying the Bible

doing this together. I'm concerned about the increasing tendency to only talk about faith and spirituality among people we agree with. We need each other, but we're not used to thinking that way as we become increasingly polarized. Having a more diverse group enhances your Bible study or your Sunday school class.

- Focus on Jesus, but don't play off the New Testament and the Old Testament like they are enemies. If you do, you will lose helpful





connections.

- Avoid asking yes/no or factual questions and then jumping immediately to questions of application. Don't jump from how many days Moses was on the mountain to how we apply this to our lives. Take time to look at a passage and wrestle with open-ended questions. This will draw people into the process of interpreting a story or passage, not just applying someone else's interpretation. It will also generate more interest.

### What do kids need from Sunday school?

It's important to be age-appropriate in terms of the kinds of questions kids can deal with. But we often fundamentally underestimate what kids are capable of. We pre-empt the questions we would like to ask because we don't think they are capable of engaging. In learning, the key place is always at the edge of what you know. If you stay with what you already know, you stop learning. I'd love to see us introducing more and broader material as people

enter high school. Instead of going through the Genesis stories for the eighth time, what if we studied Amos?

Let me close with a story that has application for Sunday school. For many years, my daughter thought history was

totally boring. When her elementary class studied the Middle Ages, they filled out worksheets while I wondered why they weren't making catapults instead. In her final year of high school, she had a history teacher who knew her subject and was passionate about it.

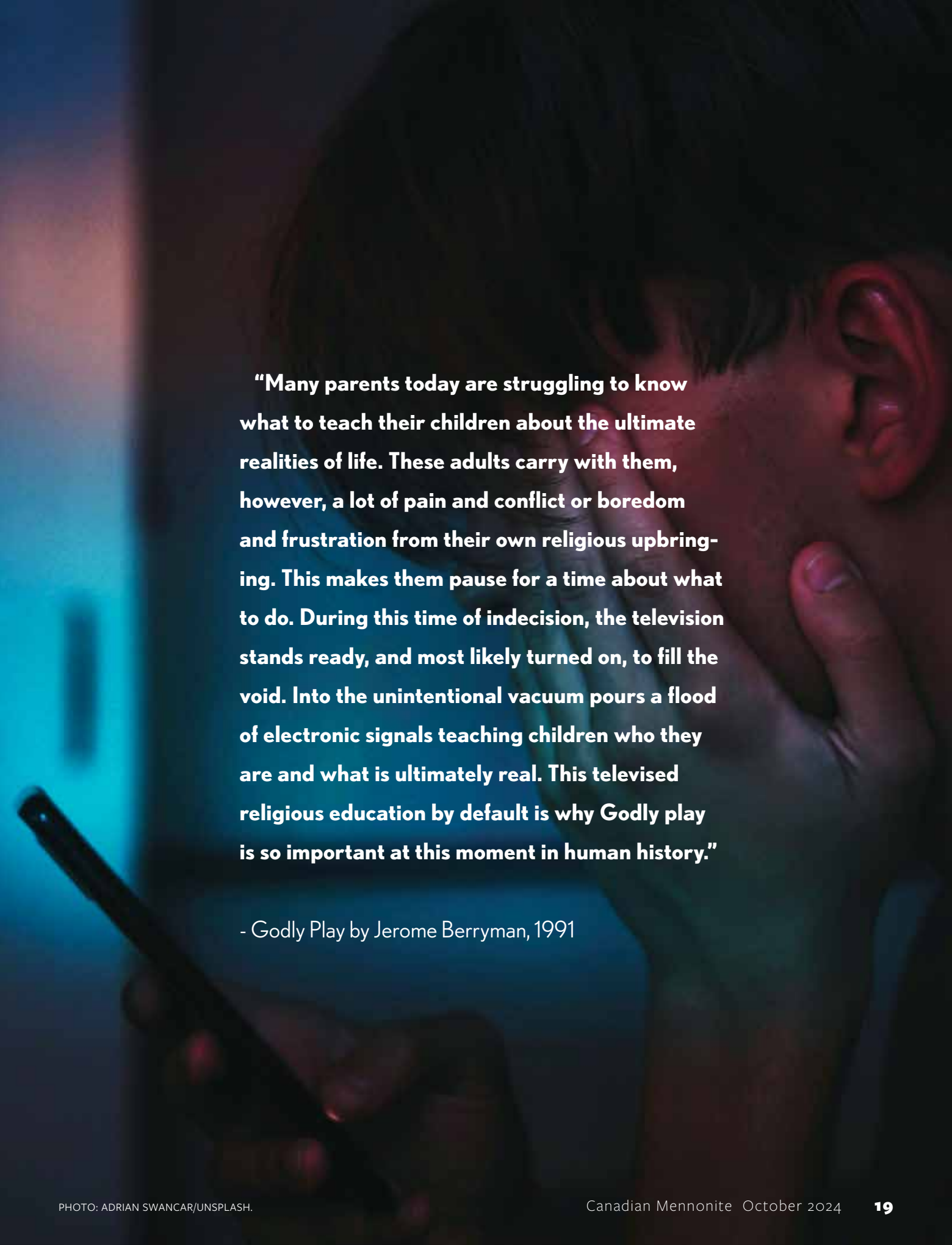
That transformed my daughter's perspective—we heard more about that class than any other subject. Suddenly my daughter saw connections and contemporary implications all over the place. I can wish she'd had that experience all along, but it reminded me that it's never too late. ●



Derek Suderman teaching about the Bible at Conrad Grebel University College.



Derek Suderman is associate professor of Religious Studies and Theological Studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.



**“Many parents today are struggling to know what to teach their children about the ultimate realities of life. These adults carry with them, however, a lot of pain and conflict or boredom and frustration from their own religious upbringing. This makes them pause for a time about what to do. During this time of indecision, the television stands ready, and most likely turned on, to fill the void. Into the unintentional vacuum pours a flood of electronic signals teaching children who they are and what is ultimately real. This televised religious education by default is why Godly play is so important at this moment in human history.”**

- Godly Play by Jerome Berryman, 1991





# CLIMBING THE CHURCH TREE

*Following the principle of “nothing about us without us,” we thought it was important to include young voices in our examination of faith formation for children. Canadian Mennonite sent the following questions to 11-year-old Julia Mathies, who responded by email.*

By Julia Mathies

## **Do adults in church take kids seriously?**

I think most adults in church take kids seriously and include them in things like children’s time (now we call it congregational story time), worship, junior and senior youth, Soul Food (our midweek intergenerational activity with games, worship and a shared meal) and planting a garden together in our churchyard. Kids are also sometimes asked to read scripture, ring the prayer bell, do readers theatre and announcements, but I think kids should also be allowed to do bigger things.

Adults think kids enjoy going to church, but sometimes it feels like they don’t realize what we want to do. I like church, but I think adults could include kids in different ways. Once, two

friends and I decided to plan a “service,” so we walked downstairs and looked in one of the children’s Bibles to find something to do a “sermon” about and something for children’s time. Then we asked our parents and other adults to come and hear our church service. (I preached.) Afterwards, my friend’s mom asked if we would like to help our pastor plan a service. One of our pastors picked us up (I got to ride in the front seat) and brought us to our church to plan the church service that we led a few weeks later.

In the service, we often hear adults talking about things that kids might not understand, but I think kids can address big issues too. I have noticed that once some kids reach middle school, they stop coming to church altogether. If adults gave kids a time to

speak about the topic for the day, kids might feel more connected to church because they could prepare what they wanted to say, say what they wanted to say, and feel heard. Even if kids didn’t come to a lot of activities, they would feel more welcome and accepted.

## **What words would you use to describe children’s activities?**

Vacation Bible Camp is often really exuberant. Junior youth is creative, fun and exciting. Sometimes you don’t get to move around very much in church, but at Soul Food it feels so good to be able to just run and play crazy games. Soul Food helps me connect with people and feel closer to God. At the beginning of Advent at Soul Food, we always walk our church labyrinth. It is always a beautiful, calm, contemplative,



warm experience. You have a candle and you go to the centre of the labyrinth, which symbolizes getting closer to God, and then you have your candle lit by one of our great pastors, Carmen and Kendra.

**What's the most important part of Sunday school for you?**

In Sunday school, I've learned a lot about Jesus, but Soul Food and church are more important to me because more kids come to these. I always enjoy church, whether listening to the service while playing with younger friends in the nursery or being in the sanctuary. I usually sing along even if I'm not in the sanctuary. I like to dance with teenage friends in the aisle of the service if there's an especially fun song. I appreciate the creative ways our pastors include kids, and I like talking with people of all ages after the service. I like intergenerational Sunday school; it's a way to connect children and adults who might not connect in other ways.

**What are your best memories of Sunday school?**

I appreciate the Bibles the congregation gave us when we joined junior youth. People wrote messages inside to us. Seeing people I know get baptized at a service by the lake was powerful and it was important to be interacting with nature. Church retreat is cozy and I feel safe and connected with nature. Something that came into my life this year is Ontario Mennonite Music Camp, which is kind of a combination between church and music.

**What is your favorite song, Bible story or activity?**

Two of my favorite hymns are "The world is about to turn" and "Oceans." Singing "Silent Night" helps calm me. There are so many hymns and I love them all.

I like the Bible story about Esther because she was brave and powerful; she stopped people from getting killed.

My favourite activity is climbing the tree after church. Everyone

loves to sit up there together. I can feel the wind in my hair and it's just fun talking with people in trees. It's better to talk with people when they're moving around, because when they're sitting down, they're sitting with the same people the whole time.

**If you were in charge of Sunday school, what would you do differently or what would you say to leaders?**

I'd say that soccer, playing tag and climbing the church tree are part of church. It's joy, and that's from God. We could also use time for kids to make a play about a certain part of the Bible and that could be the sermon one week—it gets the kids more involved. I would say thank you to our leaders—pastors, table parents, Sunday school teachers, mentors—who do all these things and who talk to kids individually and get to know us better. They're representing love. ●

*Julia Mathies lives in Waterloo, Ontario, and attends Waterloo North Mennonite Church.*



# WHATEVER BECAME OF SUNDAY SCHOOL?

*The history and future of Christian education*

By Maurice Martin

**T**hey had forgotten about the kids.

It was the 1980s; two major Mennonite denominations had merged, spending five years and a large sum of money to figure out how to bring the various mission boards into the integrated denomination, when suddenly people realized that no attention had been given to where Sunday school would fit into the plan.

Arising from that realization, Dan Nighswander, who served as executive secretary of the Mennonite Church in Canada at the time, invited me to coordinate Sunday school discussions on a half-time basis for one year. Though I had been a teacher and pastor, the task was daunting.

Some of what I learned at the time may be useful now. The aftermath of COVID's great interruption and reduced attendance in many churches means Sunday school—or Christian education—is particularly worthy of attention.

## How Sunday school started

In 1780, Robert Raikes, a newspaper publisher in England, started a school designed to bring poor children off the streets and teach them to read and write, using the Bible as the primary text. They met on Sundays and the classes were known as “Sunday school.”

By 1874, the Methodist Church had begun the Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Union in England. When the Methodist Church migrated to the U.S. from England, it brought Sunday school along.

Soon the phenomenon spread across various denominations in both the U.S.



*Sunday school in St. Catharines, circa 1978.*

and Canada. While Sunday school was a separate entity at first, it eventually became more of a congregational program with its own leadership structure. The focus shifted from literacy to biblical instruction or “Christian education.” The Sunday school movement was led by the laity, with the blessing and support of pastors and the church.

Eventually, adult Sunday school was also instituted, and by the mid-1900s, evangelical churches across North America commonly promoted “Sunday school for all ages.”

Sunday school also became a vehicle for evangelism and conversion. My grade 1 Sunday

school teacher at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church in St. Jacobs, Ontario, regularly presented an invitation to us children to “accept Jesus” into our hearts.

## Mennonite context

Largely due to Methodist influences, Mennonites in North America began to



*St. Jacobs Mennonite Church in St. Jacobs, Ontario, in 1977.*

adopt Sunday school. However, the Old Order Mennonites, who split in 1889,



resisted what they called “creeping Methodism” with its attendant revivalism and use of the English language. They believed that Christian education belonged in the home.

But other Mennonites—Mennonite Church and General Conference—widely adopted Sunday school as their own and published curricula for all ages. The adult study program, which was prepared by a committee of the wider church and functioned as a kind of lectionary, was commonly known as “the quarterly” when I was young. Each church could use the quarterly to write their own materials on the prescribed texts.

Many older people today remember fondly the regular articles written by Howard Charles in the Teacher’s Guide.

While Sunday school was conducted in various ways across the Mennonite Church, my experience was that of classes divided by age and separated by gender—though often women’s classes were taught by men.

In my church, the children’s Sunday school classes met in the basement, with the various adult classes in the sanctuary. Each teacher stood in an empty pew facing his class. There was a bit of a cacophony across the sanctuary as numerous teachers spoke simultaneously.

While Christian education was largely conducted by untrained laity before the formation of Mennonite Church Canada, starting in the 1970s, there was an increasing emphasis on teacher training events. I was among other pastors and trained lay teachers who led these events in the area conferences. In addition, biannual training events were held in conjunction with the binational Assembly.

In the ’80s, during the consultation process to consider where Sunday

school fit in the conference reorganization, we recognized that a “school” model is not the only or best way to learn the Christian beliefs. Sunday school became known as Christian education and nurture. Officially, we eventually decided to simply call it “formation,” with the adjective “Christian” implied. It has been called that ever since, though many people still lapse into the old term “Sunday school” as a habit of the heart.

congregations use the children’s curriculum produced by the Mennonite church? How will they learn what it means to be a Christian and relate in Christian community, and what it means to be people of faith in the midst of our ever-changing society?

Among adults, will the focus of faith formation increasingly be on fellowship, or will there be a substantial learning component? Will Bible study be a central part, or will it only be



After the integrated denomination separated into Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, the publication of curricula and related materials in support of formation remained a common endeavour, undertaken by MennoMedia, which is jointly owned by MC USA and MC Canada.

**Sunday school in the future**  
As the church moves into an uncertain future, we can’t forget about the kids. Formation has unique challenges in a changing world. How will our children and youth learn the scriptures? Will

referenced in support of key themes or topics?

Back in 1989, we asked ourselves to dream about the future of faith formation. I hope dreamers today are dreaming dreams for the children in the church, dreams for Sunday school that go beyond cool activities for children to immerse children (and adults) in the Bible, so that we can truly be the people of the Book. ●

*Maurice Martin is a retired Mennonite pastor who attends Mannheim Mennonite, and lives in New Hamburg, Ontario.*



# YOUNG ADULTS BRIDGE CULTURAL GAPS

*Collaboration between churches kickstarts long-awaited children's programming*

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

In Mezgebu Tucho's eight-and-a-half years as pastor of Bethel International (Oromo) Church in Edmonton, the challenge of nurturing the faith of children and youth in his church has been ever-present.

For years, Tucho asked his pastoral support group in Mennonite Church Alberta to pray that his church would find someone who could lead Sunday school in his congregation, which is made up of Oromo-speaking immigrant families from Ethiopia.

"If we didn't get a volunteer, we would pay for maybe a youth or adult to teach the Sunday school," he said, "We tried everywhere but we didn't [find anyone]."

Tucho noticed that the children and teenagers at church were more interested when aspects of church life took place in English, a challenge since Bethel's services are in Oromo.

"They didn't have Bible studies [or] any song that was in English, so that's why the church was boring for them," he said.

A solution presented itself when Tucho spoke with Suzanne Gross, co-pastor of Edmonton's Holyrood Mennonite Church, which has members from Liberia, earlier this year. Holyrood had two young adults within its congregation teaching children's church during the adult services. Gross suggested Tucho ask young adults in his church to teach the children. Tucho immediately

thought of three young women in his church's choir.

Young adults, Gross said, help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in the congregations because they can read and speak English and have grown up for at least several years in the Canadian context.

"We're using our young people who are in-between these two generations and cultures and, in (Bethel's) case, languages," said Gross.

Tucho described the young adults in his congregation as "really adapted

with this culture."

Gross met over Zoom with the young adults at Bethel to tell them about *The Peace Table* children's Bible, a resource Holyrood has found helpful because of its simplicity. Each story has one recommended

activity, "peace paths" connecting different Bible stories together and "wondering questions" that "open things up," rather than directing them, said Gross.

Time and resources have been factors for Bethel and Holyrood when it comes to teaching Sunday school and finding a curriculum. On any given Sunday, Tucho estimates around 20 to



**Suzanne Gross (left) at the baptism of youth from Bethel International Church: Abdi Mekonta, Ebba Mekonta, Rebu Bekele, Yeronika Bekele and Yeron Mezgebu Abdissa.**

30 people attend out of Bethel's 50 members, because many work on weekends. Gross said that it's not realistic to expect young leaders to pore over pages of curriculum to prepare a Sunday school lesson, and her church can't afford some curricula.

"*The Peace Table* Bible is a great resource for folks who teach Sunday school on the fly," Gross laughed.

At the end of each service at Holyrood, the children join the adult worship service and share what they have learned. Then one of the young adult leaders turns to the congregation, and says, "Church, we have a question for you!" Gross says everyone leaves with the children's question on their minds.

Tucho said the new children's program at Bethel has been going well. It keeps young families coming to the church. Bethel now has copies of *The Peace Table*, and the young adults use it in their children's church program.

"We are very effective," said Tucho. "[The young adults] teach them every Sunday and really we are fruitful now.... The children and teenagers are very happy, the church is very happy." ●

*'We're using our young people who are in between these two generations and cultures.'*

# IMAGINE HOW BEAUTIFUL GOD MUST BE

Wendy Janzen talks about children's formation in wild church

By Susan Fish

**W**endy Janzen serves as eco-minister with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, as well as founder and pastor of Burning Bush Forest Church in Waterloo, Ontario, and co-founder of the Wild Church Network.

Burning Bush meets monthly outdoors. Gatherings are informal and relaxed, allowing for children to participate as they wish.

**Canadian Mennonite:** The Burning Bush model seems to be a potentially better fit for children and youth in terms of how they learn, rather than having them sit indoors.

**Wendy Janzen:** The way forest church started was with my kids attending forest school. It offered a different approach to learning, one where the setting was not just the location where learning happened, but the natural world was also their teacher or partner in learning. When this applies to church, we keep our focus on God, but we draw on the long tradition through Christian history of two revelations of God: scripture and creation.

We begin each Burning Bush gathering by offering a short reflection on the scripture and other readings we've chosen.... Then people are sent off for 20 minutes to be open to what happens, how the Spirit moves through the texts or the natural world, how God shows up, where they sense an invitation to engage in questions about life and faith and God's activity in the world. When people come back

together, they share what they've experienced.

Early on, we decided we wouldn't create children or youth programming because we believe what we do is engaging for kids. It's inquiry-based. Children and youth can be curious, exploring, playing, even digging in the dirt while engaging in their settings. During the wandering time, depending on their age, they go alone or with their parents.

One October, the colours of leaves were gorgeous. A mother and her daughter wandered together, observing what they saw. The girl said: "If the world is this beautiful, imagine how beautiful God must be." They got into a theological conversation that was organic, arising because they were given the freedom to explore together.

Children aren't segregated into Sunday school in their age groups. They are integrated with adults, and they hear what the adults share about.

**CM:** As adults, we tend to think abstractly and separate ourselves from the natural world. Does Burning Bush Church offer an opportunity for adults to become kids again?

**WJ:** Absolutely. We have used Matthew 18:2-4 as a theme—being like little children—reminding adults to be

curious and to be tactile. Developmentally, children have much greater access to awe and wonder, something we lose after adolescence. Children are mentors for us when we observe how they engage in wonder and curiosity.

**CM:** Parents feel a sense of responsibility for their children's spiritual formation. Does what you do supplement a more standard Christian education model or is it enough for faith formation?

**WJ:** I have wondered that myself. For the families for whom Burning Bush is their only faith community, their



Participants of all ages gather for Burning Bush Forest Church.

children won't come out with all the Bible stories and themes covered by a well-developed curriculum. But it is formational in a different way. Children at forest church do get scripture and faith formation, but it is more of an introduction to a contemplative way of worship and life than a foundation of doctrine and theological answers. Some other Mennonite-affiliated churches—such as Estuary Church in B.C.—do wild church once a month. ●



# MENNOMEDIA EVOLVES TO MEET CHALLENGES

By CM Staff

**J**oan Daggett, project director of MennoMedia’s *Shine: Living in God’s Light* curriculum, tracks trends in Christian education as part of her work. We asked her about the challenges and opportunities for faith formation of children in 2024.

Over the past number of years, church attendance patterns across North America began shifting away from the model of regular weekly attendance. When it came to Sunday school, that resulted in children missing a Sunday or two a month. In turn, this meant teachers had to help children catch up on material they missed. The need to help teachers address this challenge with flexible curriculum was already on the radar of MennoMedia’s curriculum developers.

Then the pandemic hit. Since then, according to Daggett, “It’s been a struggle for churches.” The resulting drop in curriculum sales has now rebounded to near pre-pandemic levels, but that doesn’t mean a return to normal in the world of Sunday school and curriculum.

Attendance continues to be more sporadic than ever. *Shine* addresses this with “resources such as “follow the story” cards that offer continuity and sequence of curriculum for elementary-aged children.

Another change and challenge is an increased desire among parents to take the lead in the faith formation of their children. Daggett points to a multi-country survey of children’s ministry in June 2021 in which 97 percent of respondents indicated that “the Church should not be the primary lead in faith nurture of children, but rather their role was to support parents, reinforce

parental nurture and be available for advice if needed.” This reflects the experience of families during the height of the pandemic, when parents, as Daggett says, “were their children’s teacher ... when their churches were not able to do that.”

This new mode of parental role in children’s faith formation also bears out research that says that parents are the most influential factor in the faith formation of children.

Further, a 2019 American study conducted by the Barna group found that church leaders of all denominations universally agreed that children’s spiritual formation should start with parents.

For Daggett, this is good news as it



*Elisa Galdamez of Peace Church on 52nd in Vancouver was pleased to receive a copy of The Peace Table from the church as she started Kindergarten.*

## Other resources for children’s faith formation

- What parents can do to increase the chances of raising children who will believe and practice some version of their faith. [firstthings.com/article/2021/05/keeping-the-faith](https://firstthings.com/article/2021/05/keeping-the-faith)
- How parents who aren’t sure what they believe can create spiritual practices for their kids. [almostheretical.com/teaching-your-kids-while-deconstructing-christianity](https://almostheretical.com/teaching-your-kids-while-deconstructing-christianity)
- An approach to church for families, especially for those not part of a church. [messychurch.ca](https://messychurch.ca)



reverses the former trend in which parents sometimes assumed the church would take on this responsibility.

There is, however, a disconnection between parents and churches when it comes to expectations of the other, according to a report done by the Lilly Endowment's Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative. Parents express a desire for genuine and collaborative partnership rather than the church acting as the expert, but churches place little emphasis on training and equipping parents.

According to a Scripture Union Canada survey, while 55 percent of churches provide resources to help families pray and engage with the Bible, these efforts have limited success. Survey respondents observed that, "Parents have to be involved and equipped. It's not enough to give them a resource and expect them to form their kid's spirituality."

The Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative was launched to provide funding to bridge the gap between parents and the church.

In 2023, MennoMedia received a grant of US\$1.25 million from the Lilly Endowment to develop a program called *Shine Everywhere*, which began to be released in February 2024. Its purpose, Daggett says, is to "try to help churches think about how they build better relationships with their families and how they partner with them more."

Another resource developed by MennoMedia is *The Peace Table Bible* released in 2023. It offers pathways to peace with God, creation, others and oneself. A wide range of churches report using *The Peace Table* as a framework for worship and learning as well as during children's story time.

"We want to equip churches and families to help their children [grow in faith]," says Daggett. "That seems to be very appealing not only to Mennonites and Brethren but also people outside as well." *Shine* resources are used by many Mennonite and Brethren churches as well as churches in 17 other denominations. ●

# TEACHING CHILDREN TO LISTEN WELL

*Multicultural Sunday school in Quebec*

By Madalene Arias

**I**n 2022, Mennonite Disciple Mission (MDM) church in Joliette, Quebec, searched within its congregation for someone who could take over Sunday school. They didn't want just anyone.

This francophone, intercultural church has a regular attendance ranging between 30 and 50, the majority of whom come from African countries. They conduct services in French and Swahili but deliver Sunday school only in French. On any given Sunday, 10 children between the ages of four and 10 fill the church's only classroom.

Parents at MDM want their children to be respectful and attentive listeners at Sunday school and everywhere else. They want them to know God and become familiar with the stories of the Bible.

To lead Sunday school, they needed someone who could really captivate an audience. Someone who genuinely liked kids and could get them to listen and get them to talk about their worlds.

The folks at MDM turned to brother Joseph Kitenge. Parents at the church had seen his interactions with children and noticed that children were drawn to Kitenge.

"Personally, I love kids. Naturally, kids like me," he says with a smile.

With the help of his 16-year-old daughter, Kitenge teaches Bible stories to the children.

When available, they use the children's version of a Bible story. The images are especially helpful in keeping their audience's attention. Other times, Kitenge uses the regular Bible. Most of the time, the children have some image

to follow. This is important, as the younger children cannot read.

Kitenge, who is originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, describes his teaching experiences as "not easy but not hard."

Telling a story is no problem for him, but the children will play when they think Kitenge is too preoccupied to notice. Other times, when it seems they've all settled down to listen, someone will ask to use the washroom.

"I cannot say no," he says. But because the goal is for the children to become respectful and attentive listeners, he asks everyone in the class to wait for their peer to return before resuming the lesson.

Other times, Kitenge's daughter will engage the children by teaching them a new worship song. Kitenge says she is a talented singer. (She was not available for an interview.)

In addition to developing listening skills, Kitenge tries his best to teach the children at MDM to respectfully coexist with all people, no matter their differences.

This is important in a church that values multicultural worship and regularly invites people of various backgrounds to worship with them. Kitenge says that sometimes people will accept the invitation and attend one service but do not return thereafter.

It is also important as the children go into the community and to school. As the children of MDM begin a new school year this fall, Kitenge hopes that the time he has spent instilling values of respect and listening will shine through in their classrooms. ●

# BENDING WITH THE YOUTH

*CMU student on the beauty of messy church*

By Danika Warkentin

*Danika Warkentin has been selected by Mennonite Church Manitoba to attend next year's Mennonite World Conference Global Youth Summit in Germany. Reflecting on her selection, she told MC Manitoba, "I hope that we do not get so anxious about what the future existence of the church will be and can remain focused on the people who make the church what it is. If the church can bend with the youth, I think that church will be a place where all feel welcomed, valued, and inspired to participate." Canadian Mennonite asked Warkentin to say more about the church bending with the youth.*

I grew up in Springridge Mennonite Church in Pincher Creek, Alberta. Springridge is a rural congregation with a membership of only 30. A larger church might have had an accomplished pianist, a middle-aged person to teach Sunday school, or a full-time pastor who preached every Sunday. We didn't have any of those, so from a young age, I accompanied congregational singing on piano, taught Sunday school, led worship services with fellow youth, and, when I was in high school, I even gave a sermon.

The invitation to share my gifts instilled a sense of belonging in me. It also made me feel that I was truly a contributing member of my church community.

This experience showed me the profound importance of making sure that youth are not just attending church but also shaping church. If church openly embraces the gifts youth offer, that makes us want to remain in church and play our part in its messiness.

And welcoming youth gifts into worship *will* make it messy. That does not mean a lack of organization, but

rather shows a value for welcoming the imperfect. My church told me my gifts were valuable and that they wanted me to share them even if they were imperfect.

As youth, I think that is what we want. We are already so critical of ourselves, so that is the last thing we want from our church. Youth want a place to be able to wander and wonder.

Too many use their religion for the aesthetic of purity, as a way to hide our shadows, as Richard Rohr says. Can the church instead be a place where we can show up in all our humanity with our shaky spirituality, our unformed questions, our shattering doubts?

If the church can allow itself to be shaped and made stronger by the gifts and quandaries of their youth, what a

difference that would make for the sense of belonging we could feel.

One of my favourite memories of feeling this kind of welcome came from

my grandpa leading adult Sunday school at Springridge. I was only 14 or 15 when I began attending, but even then my grandpa would sometimes ask me directly what I thought about something. I knew this was a space where anyone could say what you thought or how you really felt without fear of judgment. Some people brought up surprising questions and doubts,

and that solidified our community fabric in a messy, beautiful way. ●

*Danika Warkentin is a student at Canadian Mennonite University, and attends Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.*



## CM For discussion

1. If you were asked to teach children's Sunday school, what would your answer be, and what would be behind that response?
2. How does your pattern of church attendance affect your participation in the community, God's bigger story and possibly even Sunday school?
3. Jesus said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). In what specific ways is God calling you to become more childlike?
4. What are your best memories of Sunday school?

– CM Staff

Find resources on "Kids & Faith" at [commonword.ca/go/4105](http://commonword.ca/go/4105)

**CommonWord**  
Bookstore and Resource Centre

# Sask farmer joins ag producers at climate forum

By Katie Doke Sawatzky

**S**teve Guenther was combining lentils on his farm 32 kilometres north of Saskatoon when we spoke. Guenther, 56, attends Osler Mennonite Church and operates a 1,100-acre organic farm with his wife, father and son.

This past year, Guenther participated in the Prairie and Rancher Forum, organized by Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS), a non-partisan group that supports farmers and ranchers in lowering their emissions.

Thirty-six farmers and ranchers gathered for three meetings in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, to come up with recommendations for sustainable agriculture in the face of climate change. Participants included 23 oilseed and grain farmers, 19 with mixed operations (ranching and farming) and seven others. Eight were from Alberta, 19 were from Saskatchewan, and nine from Manitoba.

“I enjoy those interactions and community and citizens’ involvement,” said Guenther, who learned about the forum after taking part in an FCS mentorship program. “It was a fun space to be, where you can find agriculture and politics and even religion in there a little bit, and philosophy.”

Though some of the participants were Christian—with one studying Greek for graduate work in religious studies—the views of participants were diverse.

In the first meeting, it became clear that the largest obstacle to discussion was disagreement on whether climate change is real. “If you’d been a fly on the wall in the first meeting,” said Ian McCreary, forum co-lead who farms with his wife, Mary Smilie, near Bladworth, Saskatchewan, “you would have said we’re not even going to get one [recommendation].”

Smilie, who has worked as a consultant on community-based decision-making in the healthcare sector and facilitated the forum discussions, agreed, saying, “That’s probably the hardest thing I’ve ever facilitated in my 20 years of facilitation.”

In the second meeting, the leadership team encouraged forum members



to acknowledge they wouldn’t be able to change the opinions of others.

What members *did* agree on was that they wanted a voice about the environmental regulations coming down the line and how such practices are instituted. “Everyone who farms wants to see sustainability in agriculture,” said Smilie.

The task was to figure out what that looked like.

Twenty-six experts from various fields presented on a variety of topics, making recommendations to forum participants. As an organic grower, Guenther was involved in recommendations around nutrient-cycling and nitrogen use. Guenther described being mindful of consumer desires for farmers to reduce pesticides and fertilizer use, but said, “Farmers can’t just snap their fingers and change a system overnight. There’s all kinds of environmental and market pressures that we have no control over.”

Using a “gradients of agreement” approach to reach consensus, forum members voted on each recommendation by raising numbers of fingers to indicate their level of agreement. In the end, they came to consensus on 36 recommendations on measurement, livestock management, soil health, natural habitat, nutrient management and energy in agriculture.

**Steven Guenther, left, at a Farmers for Climate Solutions meeting. Above: Steve Guenther, left, and his son Jadrian, harvesting lentils.**

“It was astounding that we were able to get to 36 recommendations,” said McCreary.

He also expressed surprise that opinions didn’t fall along predictable, ideological lines. “I found myself in incredible agreement with people on some issues who I just profoundly disagreed with on others,” he said. “I think it is a really important learning for not only this process but for our body politic as a society.”

Guenther relished talking to people he disagrees with. “I think we’ve lost that ability to have those conversations in Mennonite churches, and that really saddens me. I go to these meetings, and they become my church experience.

“There is a spiritual element to taking care of the earth and taking care of each other,” he added. “Those ideas were present everywhere. [Everybody in the room] had that kind of spiritual value.” ●

*The Prairie and Rancher Forum’s report is available at [farmersforclimatesolutions.ca/prairie-farmer-rancher-forum](https://farmersforclimatesolutions.ca/prairie-farmer-rancher-forum).*



# MCC accused of inadequate response to sexual assault allegation in Mozambique

By Will Braun

“I wanted to help people gain access to water,” Katie Moyer says of her motivation for taking an assignment with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Mozambique in 2016. It was her first job after earning an engineering degree from Messiah University in Pennsylvania, her home state.

During her four years with MCC, Moyer worked on seven sand dams, seconded by MCC to Conselho Cristão de Moçambique (Christian Council of Mozambique—CCM) in the city of Tete. She loved the work. Moyer, who still lives in the country—now working for Equip Mozambique—is proud of the work she was part of and the people whose lives are better today because of it.

But Moyer paid a high price. In two interviews with *Canadian Mennonite*, Moyer told of a troubled workplace at CCM Tete (see sidebar) and alleged sexual assault by a fellow MCC worker.

She also speaks of how MCC’s response to sensitive and difficult situations failed to meet her needs. In this, her story overlaps with accounts of other former MCC workers *Canadian Mennonite* (CM) has reported on (“Involuntary,” July 2024).

Five months into Moyer’s term, members of the MCC team from different cities travelled to projects in various locations. On the second last day, Moyer says a male member of the group kissed her “out of nowhere.”

The next day was the last day of the trip, and according to Moyer she went to where the man was staying in the evening to confront him about the kiss before he

returned home to Beira, 600 kilometres away, where he worked at the MCC office. She told the man what she needed to, and says he then proceeded to touch and kiss her. Moyer alleges, “I said ‘no, stop’ multiple times.” He continued. This went on for some time.

Given the setting and circumstances, Moyer was afraid to leave. “I was paralyzed,” she wrote later.

Moyer alleges the encounter ended with the man raping her.

She says she “disassociated” during the incident. “I didn’t feel anything,” she says. The assault left her with bruises in addition to emotional and mental effects that surfaced later.

*Canadian Mennonite* has not spoken with the man, who is Mozambican and whose partner was pregnant at the time.

Moyer was raised amid what she calls fundamentalist “purity culture.” She had never kissed a boy, and she says the “abstinence-only education” she received led her to believe sex was something women endured.

“[I was] pretty naïve at the time,” she says of her early days in Mozambique.

Several days after the alleged assault, Moyer reported the incident to her supervisor, the MCC country representative. Traumatized, dazed and convinced she would lose her job for having sex outside of marriage, which was contrary to the MCC code of conduct, Moyer did not provide many details or frame the incident as assault.

The supervisor did not probe.

Moyer says she was later told of an internal investigation, but no one sought her input.

About a month after the incident, Moyer received a disciplinary letter from the MCC representative. The letter said Moyer had “voluntarily disclosed to the MCC representative that she had been in an unsafe situation with a colleague that resulted in sexual relations.... Katie made some unwise decisions which contributed to her being in this unsafe situation.”

The letter required her to refrain from contact with the man, avoid being alone in non-public settings with men and to not visit Beira during the representative’s upcoming home leave.

In response to questions about the incident, MCC said in an email: “MCC cannot lawfully discuss the details of personnel issues, either past or present. However, we can say that some past cases would likely be handled differently today.”

(For MCC’s complete response to CM, see [canadianmennonite.org/mozambique](http://canadianmennonite.org/mozambique).)

In 2020, MCC apologized to Moyer for the disciplinary letter.

Ten days after the incident, a doctor recommended Moyer report the incident to police, but she was too afraid and confused to do so.

Moyer was diagnosed with acute stress shortly after the incident. She experienced flashbacks and depression. Other medical diagnoses followed. Moyer does not link them solely to the incident but feels it contributed. MCC provided ongoing counselling services and covered her health expenses.

Despite the problems, Moyer is gracious in speaking about her supervisor, who had a complex and demanding job.

In 2019, after learning about a new

MCC complaint procedure, Moyer submitted an “incident report” about the alleged 2017 assault.

MCC sent an investigator from Canada to look into the case. Following the investigation, MCC Human Resources (HR) staff informed Moyer that the investigator concluded her complaint was “founded.” But this was based on the vague mandate the investigator been given, which, according to the letter, was to simply establish whether the man had violated MCC’s workplace harassment policy, which covers a range of behaviours.

The brief letter apologized for the disciplinary letter Moyer received in 2017. To conclude, it said that since discipline occurred at the time of the incident, MCC would not take further action.

Moyer has never been informed of what disciplinary measures the man faced. She knows he was not terminated, because she continued to see him in regular online staff meetings.

She says he was antagonistic toward her, aggressively questioning her work. He also attended team retreats, making these times intended for renewal the opposite for Moyer. She says he made comments to belittle and intimidate her.

She stopped attending her church because the man’s mother attended, and Moyer was afraid he would show up.

Moyer raised these concerns in her 2019 incident report. They receive no mention in the initial MCC letter informing Moyer of the outcome of the investigation.

Moyer requested a review of the investigation findings. A team of senior MCC staff conducted the review. In the end, a letter from one of the review team members reiterated that Moyer would not be informed of the disciplinary measures taken.

The letter addressed the question of sexual assault directly, saying that “situations without verbal consent don’t necessarily mean there was sexual assault. There would need to be a process before any conclusions could be made.”

In a subsequent email to Moyer, the director of HR for MCC U.S. clarified that a further process would be a legal action by Moyer in Mozambique and/or Pennsylvania, and that, “two different attorneys indicated that your own descriptions of your actions during the original incident would likely point to consent in the eyes

Carol Penner makes a similar point. She serves as director of Theological Studies at Conrad Grebel University College. Her doctoral work related to violence against women, and her continued research in the field included co-editing the 2022 book *Resistance: Confronting Violence, Power, and Abuse within Peace Churches*.

Penner says that in a workplace investigation, what matters is “the balance of probabilities,” not a lawyer’s assessment of what would happen in criminal case, where the bar is higher and prosecutions of sexual assault are notoriously elusive.

While Penner says she cannot comment on the specifics of Moyer’s case without seeing the investigator’s report, she asks: “What were the exact findings of the investigation? Did they find that sexual assault likely occurred?” A complainant deserves to know the specific findings.

In Moyer’s case, MCC never clearly stated whether they believed her accusation of rape.

“If they had believed me, then things should have been handled very differently,” Moyer says. At times, she felt MCC defaulted to recommending counseling instead of also taking concrete steps.

Penner says that when sexual assault occurs, it should be grounds for dismissal. Moyer feels the man should have been terminated.

MCC did not respond to questions about whether the man in question still works for MCC or what disciplinary steps he faced.

Moyer concluded a four-year term with MCC in 2020. She says she had “mostly moved on,” and indeed her tone bears little bitterness, but when she heard of other former MCC workers speaking publicly about MCC’s handling of difficult situations, she “saw a need for broader accountability.”

She is not seeking personal gain but



Gardens irrigated by a sand dam in Phiri-Meque, Mozambique.

of either court system.”

“That was shocking to me,” says Moyer. “Their response just made it seem like I should stop being a nuisance.... At that point I was pretty much done.” Moyer, who was not willing to pursue legal action, saw no further avenue of recourse.

In a seeming turnaround since 2020, MCC told CM in a recent email, “The criminal courts assess evidence under a specific legal standard. Even if a lawyer were to advise that the evidence under that standard would likely not lead to a conviction on a criminal charge, this changes nothing about MCC’s responsibilities to such a person.”

would like to see changes in MCC. Those would include:

- “a dedication to reconciliation and peacemaking” that involves “real consequences” for serious misconduct and does not turn a blind eye;
- yearly training on prevention of sexual exploitation and assault for all MCC staff and partners that receive MCC funds;
- victim-survivors informed of disciplinary measures related to their case; and
- an online “dashboard” or other public platform that shows the number of misconduct cases reported, open, closed and disciplinary measures taken. The World Health Organization is one organization with such a dashboard.

“I don’t think that MCC as a whole is necessarily bad; they just need to change how they operate,” Moyer says, noting that she would not rule out working for MCC again, assuming changes were made to ensure safety.

MCC says changes are happening in the organization. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment training is now “required for all staff.”

Regarding a “dashboard,” MCC said the organization will be in a “better position to talk about follow-up steps once our internal investigation into a current complaint and litigation [in relation to John Clarke and Anicka Fast] are complete.”

As for informing complainants of consequences for those who harmed them, MCC said, “It is standard practice for these corrective or disciplinary actions to remain confidential between HR personnel and the named person, and not shared with others, unless those actions directly impact another person.”

But in Ontario, for instance, courts have required significant disclosure of disciplinary measures. Penner says it is normal for complainants to be informed of disciplinary consequences—that’s the “industry standard,” though organizational policies differ.

MCC told CM it has “implemented major changes in [its] HR policies and processes,” since 2019. They now have a safeguarding coordinator role in the International Program department, a protection coordinator role in the HR department, a “formal process” for investigating reported concerns and policy specific to Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment. MCC is “significantly growing” its HR staffing in international settings.

Many of the concerns CM has heard from former MCC workers relate to HR culture, and some relate to incidents since 2019.

MCC says it is also “exploring the creation of a third-party listening space for those with concerns, similar to the Office of an Ombudsperson.”

In some ways, the case of Moyer is different than the cases of former MCC workers previously reported by CM. When asked what commonality she sees, she cites: “interactions with HR, not feeling heard, general lack of care for service workers, lack of institutional support, [and] when things do happen, there’s not an appropriate response.” ●

## Response to a fraught partnership

**W**hile Katie Moyer was dealing with the fallout of an alleged sexual assault, she and her colleagues were also enduring turmoil in the office of CCM Tete, the MCC partner she worked for. Melissa Wilson, who came on as MCC country co-representative part-way through Moyer’s term, told CM about what she says was a history of serious concerns about labour law violations, mismanagement and a dysfunctional work environment at CCM Tete. Three other sources with direct knowledge of the situation attested to serious problems at CCM Tete.

Moyer was the only ex-pat on the staff of about 20 people at the organization, which received significant funding from Canadian Foodgrains Bank, administered through MCC.

Wilson heard from numerous CCM Tete employees who expressed serious concerns about the organization. At one point, after two senior CCM Tete personnel loudly berated Moyer for an extended time—a practice not uncommon in the office—Wilson and her co-representative pulled Moyer out of the office to work remotely.

In 2019, Moyer filed two complaints with MCC about CCM Tete. MCC found that her complaint of sexual harassment by a CCM superior, who made inappropriate comments and shared explicit video, was founded. Her complaint about aggressive behaviour by the head of CCM Tete was deemed partially founded. MCC indicated to Moyer that it had recommended corrective measures but would not disclose those to her.

Troubles at CCM Tete were such that Wilson says another major funder pulled its support. She says MCC was also close to suspending funding after seeking numerous remedies.

But then, Wilson says, MCC decision-makers outside the country changed course abruptly, directing Wilson and her co-representative to continue the relationship with the head of CCM Tete. The situation escalated. Wilson said she could not in good conscience work with the man. She and the other representative offered to work with CCM Tete through an intermediary.

MCC fired the co-representatives for “insubordination.” In the end, Wilson says, decisions were made out-of-country with the three people closest to the work not included.

Moyer, who appreciated Wilson’s support, completed her term despite it all.

MCC still works with CCM Tete. ●



# Database of worship resources launched

By Mykayla Turner

**T**ogether in Worship is a curated collection of free online resources from Anabaptist sources that support communal Christian worship. Through our partnership with CommonWord, Together in Worship welcomes Anabaptist organizations, communities and individuals to submit worship resources to their team of curators. If a resource is suitable, it will be catalogued and indexed on the Together in Worship website. Resources include words for worship, music, visual art and teaching materials. These resources are freely available to download and reproduce under the terms of a Creative Commons license.

As the chair of Together in Worship, I remember talking with a worship leader in my congregation, The Church at Nairn, in Ailsa Craig, Ontario. Ruth Smith Meyer started writing worship materials in the late 1970s and now has 50 years' worth of materials in binders—resources she always hoped to share with others.

Carol Penner, co-founder of Together in Worship, says, “By sharing something you’ve created with Together in Worship, you are helping the larger church to listen to itself, foster diversity, and better understand the many ways we fulfill our calling as followers of Jesus.”

Arlyn Friesen Epp, director of CommonWord and a member of Together in Worship’s leadership team, says, “We know most worship planners consult the internet for inspiration and content. I am thankful we have a growing online Anabaptist source of worship materials that is free to access and use, that reflects our wider

community’s aspirations, and is responsive to current realities. CommonWord is pleased to be partnering with Together in Worship in this effort.”

Together in Worship resources can be accessed at [togetherinworship.net](http://togetherinworship.net), while resources can be submitted to [togetherinworshipnet@gmail.com](mailto:togetherinworshipnet@gmail.com). ●

*Mykayla Turner works as a worship coordinator for a Mennonite congregation in rural Ontario and is the chair of Together in Worship.*



**Ruth Smith Meyer is a worship leader at The Church at Nairn in Ailsa Craig, Ontario. Her worship materials are now available in Together in Worship’s database.**

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# LIFE IN THE 80S



## Walking through open doors

*An interview with John and Edna Peters*

By Susan Fish

**J**ohn and Edna Peters, 87 and 86, respectively, live in Winnipeg, where they are charter members of Charleswood Mennonite Church. Edna worked as a nurse and a pastoral coordinator and served on the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) board, while John taught agriculture at two universities, served with MCC in Paraguay and Bolivia, and worked as the business manager for Canadian Mennonite University.

### What is your first memory of church?

**Edna:** My early memory of our little country church in rural Saskatchewan is sitting still. Being told that's what you do: you sit and listen. The church had a window behind the pulpit, high up, and I remember sitting and watching the clouds go past that window.

**John:** For me, church was as much a part of life as doing chores and having lunch at 12. It was part of the community. Not to belong to a church was unthinkable.

### What is your best memory of church?

**Edna:** I remember waking up to the

gospel when I went to Rosthern Junior College and heard the gospel in English. Services at our church in Herschel had been in German, and although I could speak German, I hadn't grasped the essence of the gospel. I suddenly understood when Peter J. Dyck of MCC came to speak. I came to personal faith during his week with us.

**John:** Every second Saturday evening was youth night. We were challenged to find a scripture portion in the Bible. I was pretty good at it.

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

**Edna:** The worst times were when there was conflict, but those were also growth points, when you listened and started talking with each other.

**John:** I remember a time in Paraguay when they had evangelistic meetings and people were getting saved. One gentleman decided to change his life and get baptized, but the church said he was a smoker and couldn't. I thought, here was a chance to nurture this person and they missed it.

### What song, book or verse has been the most meaningful to you?

**John:** I like to read historical novels and biographies of those in the church. One of the most moving was about a pastor in Russia in the '20s—*From Stable Hand to Professor*—who was eventually executed by the Germans.

**Edna:** I have a hard time choosing a favourite song, but when I'm trying to get to sleep, I go back to the German songs my mother and dad sang. They're still there, and in times of difficulty or concern, I can sing.

### What's the hardest thing about getting old?

**John:** We haven't experienced that yet! The problem will be when I can't drive as far as I want, but we've been blessed by good health.

**Edna:** When we moved into our seniors complex 13 years ago, I was having mobility issues, which I don't have anymore, thanks to good medicine and orthopedic surgeons. I feel really grateful for the ability to continue to live the way we do and hopefully still contribute.

**What's the best thing about getting old?**

**Edna:** Our great granddaughter. None of our children live in Manitoba but we have a grandson in Winnipeg, and they have a little girl. She's a lot of fun and inspiration. John and I also continue to enjoy living together.

**John:** I agree!

**What's something younger people don't understand about aging?**

**Edna:** When I was busy with four boys and my husband, I didn't realize how important it is to build relationships, nurturing your family and your marriage and beyond. People who reach an older age without paying

attention to relationships are lonely. It's also helpful if these are people of faith.

**Who were influential people in your life?**

**John:** When we announced we were going to Paraguay, a friend said, "Create an island of sanity in an insane world." That was 60 years ago, and the world is more insane now, but that was a very profound statement. He meant: do what you can where you are.


**Edna:** We had just bought our first house when my oldest brother came to visit and said, "You shouldn't just sit here making money. You should be doing something." I thought we *were*

doing something. That was our push. It kept nudging us to consider what that meant in practical terms. We talked about it with our pastor, who invited us to lunch. Little did we know there would also be MCC staff there who saw opportunities for us in Paraguay. The doors were open and we walked through them.

**If you could preach one sermon, what would it be about?**

**Edna:** I am the vine, you are the branches. I've preached on this before, but I have more to say.

**John:** I'd preach on our wedding text: Colossians 3:16-17. ●



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# Making space might save someone's life

*A hurting woman finds a good fit at Rockway Mennonite*

By A.S. Compton

*Notice: This article mentions addiction, rape and abortion.*

“I never thought I would set foot in another church.”

These were the opening words from Grace Ibrahima's sermon at Rockway Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario on June 2.

“Churches can be somewhere warm and comforting and reassuring and accepting, with a lot of hope and aspiration. It was not like that for me when I was growing up.”

Over lunch in her home this summer, Ibrahima shared her life story with me, Thomas Reimer, the pastor at Rockway, and another mutual friend.

Ibrahima was born in Trinidad. She told of a childhood of beatings, threats, secrets and having never been told “I love you” by her family. She was taken out of school at age nine due to their poverty. What her parents did tell her repeatedly was to “stick to your own,” meaning to keep to communities and circles of Black people, and not to trust white people.

At the age of 20, she decided to emigrate to the U.K. On the ship to England, she was raped. When she learned she was pregnant as a consequence of the rape, she had an abortion.

In 1988, after she married, she and her husband moved to Waterloo, Ontario, where she became a nurse. At nursing school she was quick to blame her struggles on racism; in hindsight, however, she says, that was not entirely true. She recalls a professor who helped her fill in gaps in the education she had missed since leaving school, and who pushed her to succeed.

Despite her accomplishments, the pain of her past drew her to addiction. “I remember alcohol—that first drink



**Grace Ibrahima**

dancing down my body to my toes.” Alcohol took over her life, particularly after her husband passed away in 1995.

One day, while working as a nurse at Grand River Hospital, she came to work drunk and was suspended. She blamed the suspension on the fact that she was a Black woman on a mostly white staff. “While alcohol was near killing me, I still heard that line: stick to your own.”

With time and a good rehab program, she put alcohol behind her. She returned to nursing and wrote three books about anti-racism and Black experiences.

By happenstance, she became friends with Arlene Groh. Ibrahima says Groh was interested in her writing and work in racial awareness. One day, Groh mentioned she was a Mennonite,

something Ibrahima met with curiosity. Groh told Ibrahima that her community would love to meet her, and invited her to church at Rockway Mennonite in Kitchener.

Somewhat cautious, Ibrahima watched an online service on Mother's Day this past spring. In a Mother's Day prayer, among the many different experiences of mothers, Reimer included those who had had an abortion. The service was tender, raw and inclusive. Ibrahima says this made her feel like she could belong and that these people, despite being a very white community, were safe.

She met with Reimer and a few others who encouraged her to speak to the church, to share her life story and experiences as a Black woman.

In her June 2 sermon she admitted

that as she was driving to Rockway that morning: “I could almost hear the crack of the sticks my parents used... I could almost feel the burning of the leather belt...I could almost hear my parents saying, ‘Grace, you’re going to be seen and not heard.’” She heard the echoes of their mantra to “stick to your own.”

But to Ibrahima’s surprise and delight, the church was a good fit. She says she’s not sure about God or Jesus, but feeling accepted and genuinely welcomed made her feel at home, regardless of her undefined faith.

Reimer says with kindness that Ibrahima could talk for hours; the openness of the church community indicates to Ibrahima that the church would listen for hours.

“Before I went to the church,” Ibrahima says, “I felt as though I had a loose-fitting jacket, unsuited to the weather. By the time coffee was done, I felt as though the people said, ‘This sleeve is too long, we’ll shorten it; it’s a spring jacket and the weather is cold, we’ll stuff it for you...’ I felt such freedom. A beyond-wonderful experience.” A good fit.

She now calls Reimer “my pastor,” with a wink.

She recognizes that topics like abortion, rape and addiction are often taboo, but she says that making space to acknowledge such realities in our churches “might just save someone’s life.”

Ibrahima knows there are many others out there who have hurt like she has hurt, who are in the depths of pain and addiction, living in fear of judgment. She said to me as I took notes, “Let them know they’re not alone. Trauma grows bigger in those dark places. Once you open the light, and start sharing, that trauma has less power.”

Ibrahima summarizes her experience of Rockway Mennonite with the words of civil rights activist and author Maya Angelou: “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” ●

## News briefs

### Attacks in Burkina Faso

In late August, the village of Barsalogo, Burkina Faso was instructed by the military government to dig defensive trenches. Some villagers, refused and were forced at gunpoint to dig. On Aug. 24, during digging, villagers were attacked by the armed group Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). Al Jazeera reports nearly 200 people were killed. Siaka Traoré, Mennonite World Conference Regional Representative Central and West Africa, reports that the following day, in the village of Kounla, assailants entered a church, ordered the women and children to leave, and executed the 26 men remaining. The pastor of this church, who studied at the Maranatha Institute in Bobo-Dioulasso, was killed. *Sources: Al Jazeera, MC Canada*

### Resources for October 7 anniversary

Mennonite Church Canada’s Palestine-Israel Network (PIN) has released a flexible liturgical resource to be used in congregations. “If the War Goes On” is designed to be used in worship on four Sundays around October 7, 2024, as a lament and liturgy to hold in our hearts the people and the churches of Palestine—and others living in areas of war and oppression. The resource was created in partnership with rabbis and the groups “Halachic Left” and “All That’s Left.” Available at [mennonitechurch.ca/pin](http://mennonitechurch.ca/pin). *Source: PIN*

### Churches call for ceasefire

In a recent letter, César García, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), joined with more than 200 global Christian bishops and executive leaders who urged world powers to end complicity in the violence and atrocities committed in Gaza. The letter calls for an immediate permanent ceasefire, work for the release of hostages and prisoners, the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to civilians, and a halt to all weapons and ammunition transfers to Israel. *Source: MWC, Churches for Middle East Peace*

### MCC takes stance on military exports

A coalition of leading Canadian civil society organizations, including Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), has issued an urgent call to the Canadian government to immediately cease all military exports to Israel. In an open letter addressed to Foreign Affairs Minister Joly and Prime Minister Trudeau, the coalition expressed grave concerns over Canada’s potential complicity in the ongoing violence in Gaza and its non-compliance with international legal obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty. MCC has met with government officials on matters related to arms sales and general humanitarian aid in Gaza, and continues to advocate for peace. *Source: MCC*

### CPT reports on casualties in Iraqi Kurdistan

Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) has released a report on civilian casualties by Turkish and Iranian military operations from 1991 to 2024. It details that, since 1991, Turkish and Iranian military operations have caused 845 civilian casualties (425 killed and 420 injured), 15 non-belligerent casualties (10 killed and 5 injured), and 8 non-combatant casualties (8 killed) inside Iraqi Kurdistan. *Source: CPT*

### MDS builds bridges

Since 2015, Mennonite Disaster Service has built more than 130 bridges in remote areas. Johann Zimmermann of JZ Engineering in Virginia has honed the design with straightforward instructions so volunteers can build bridges in the field. *Source: MDS*

# Talking peace in a room full of guns

*MCC worker mediates agreement in DRC*

By Mulanda Jimmy Juma, MCC Release

**M**y beautiful homeland of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is full of cultural and natural riches. Yet, because powerful groups inside and outside DRC compete for our rich mineral resources, it pains me to say that DRC is also a place of great violence and displacement.

Last December in South Kivu Province in eastern DRC, different armed groups named the Wazalendo left their hidden location and moved, weapons loaded, into the town of Bunyakiri. Tension quickly broke out with civilians, police and the Congolese army.

The Wazalendo killed two people. After more violence, an outraged motor-cycle taxi driver killed a member of the Wazalendo. When the conflict boiled over in the surrounding community, the Wazalendo prepared to fight another armed group.

Fearing the kind of large-scale massacre that has happened too often in eastern DRC, leaders of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force in DRC (MONUSCO) acted quickly. Working with the provincial government, they organized a mediation team to address the crisis. The team was made up of Congolese pastors, leaders of nongovernmental organizations, lawyers, traditional leaders, government officials and two MONUSCO staff.

I live in nearby Burundi, where I serve as representative for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). MONUSCO became aware of my previous mediation work, including in DRC, and invited me to join the team. To my surprise, I was asked to serve as chief mediator.

My experience and expertise with peacebuilding started with MCC training and continued as I earned my master's and doctoral degrees. Also, I grew up in DRC in the midst of war, so I understand



**Mulanda Jimmy Juma holds a microphone as he interacts with participants of a mediation he led in January in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.**

the culture, the context and the languages.

In late January, I travelled to Bunyakiri by UN helicopter due to roads being highly insecure. I was briefed, and we planned the mediation process to take place there. When we began, I was astonished to see 200 people gathered and all the divided parties present in the room—Congolese army commanders, the police, traditional village chiefs, pastors and the leaders of five armed groups, including from the largest and most feared. MONUSCO had done its homework and legwork.

To begin the two-day dialogue and negotiation process, I led a quick training on conflict resolution, covering topics of listening, patience, techniques to deepen the understanding of a conflict and ways of seeking positive solutions.

But not long after we started the negotiations, I could feel the tension rise in the room when we learned another civilian had been killed in a nearby village by an armed group. Throughout that day and the next, we could hear weapons firing. Even the meeting place was full of guns, carried by armed groups to ensure the

security of their leaders, MONUSCO and the army.

We gave everyone a chance to express their views and frustration, not only about this conflict but their living conditions. Anyone could share their stories and their pains and hopes, even the leaders of the feared armed groups.

I also used my sense of humour to ease the tension and make participants laugh. I believe this helped to create some sense of community and desire to stay in the room.

But a turning point came when disgruntled leaders from two armed groups suddenly stood up and walked out of the meetings. I walked toward them and pleaded with them to return to the hall. Thankfully, they agreed. I believe they felt listened to and had developed trust in the mediation team.

On the second day, smaller meetings with the divided groups addressed specific issues and concerns. During the break times, I spoke privately with key leaders, and I could see this increased their trust in the process.

As our mediation team entered the room for the final plenary session, we had



no idea how the meetings would end. On their behalf, I presented key issues, causes and proposed solutions. The negotiations that followed were difficult, and there were sharp disagreements.

But finally, after some amendments to the proposed solutions, all participants agreed on key points. They included banning combatants carrying weapons in the local villages, doing away with illegal checkpoints and increased road taxes, and ending illegal detention centres run by all groups, including armed groups, police and the army.

At the end of the meeting, a leader of an armed group whispered to me, “If this agreement is not made public through radio, armed groups will ignore it.” His wise words led to an immediate broadcast of the agreement through local radio to the surrounding communities.

A monitoring team of both men and women was set up to ensure the implementation of the resolutions. Five months later, there has been no massacre, no further violence.



**Mulanda Jimmy Juma is MCC representative for Burundi and Rwanda. He is a writer who lectures widely on peacebuilding.**

As a Christian, I believe God makes a way where there seems to be no way. This is what gave me hope, strength and courage to mediate this very complex conflict. ●

*Mulanda Jimmy Juma is MCC representative for Burundi and Rwanda. Previously he was MCC representative in DRC and Angola. Juma is also the former coordinator of the African Peacebuilding Institute.*



**On August 25, approximately 150 people gathered for Saengerfest: A Centenary Mennonite Music Festival in Kitchener, Ontario. The event marked 100 years since the initial arrival in Ontario of Mennonite refugees from the former Soviet Union. The event combined historical reflection and collective song. Music was led by Mark Diller-Harder, accompanied by the Menno Singers Choir.**



# CM FOCUS ON SCHOOLS

## CMU students connect to global research project

By John Brubacher, Associate Professor of Biology

**D**uring a research leave at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I had the opportunity to train as a partner instructor in the Tiny Earth program headquartered there. This program, launched in 2018, is a microbiology lab curriculum used by a growing international network of students and instructors. The program's goal is to “studentsource” the discovery of new antibiotics—one avenue of response to the emerging crisis of antibiotic-resistance in disease-causing bacteria.

The 17 students in my Microbiology 1 course in winter 2023 worked with me to integrate Tiny Earth into the lab curriculum. The basic idea is straightforward: students isolate pure strains of bacteria from a soil sample, assemble a library of about 20 strains of soil bacteria, and screen these strains for antibiotic production by growing them on lawns of “tester

strain” bacteria. From these screening experiments, students identify soil isolates that inhibit the growth of one or more tester strains: those isolates are producing something acting as an antibiotic.

Studies of such course-based undergraduate research experiences routinely demonstrate the benefits of this discovery-based approach. Students learn the skills and techniques that are standard for an introductory microbiology course. They learn in the context of doing real science, asking questions that no one knows the answer to, and seeing where their observations lead them. Students are engaged and empowered by participating as scientists in a project of genuine public interest.

We used about a quarter teaspoon of humus from the woods just south of the CMU campus. The 2023 iteration of Microbiology 1, and the three biology students who continued the project in independent study courses this past fall, have so far identified nine strains of interest. The likelihood of any of these yielding a new antibiotic is quite low, but the growth of the Tiny Earth network around the world greatly increases the odds of discovering something useful.



*Dr. John Brubacher, Associate Professor of Biology, has worked with students to identify nine strains of interest as part of the international Tiny Earth research network.*

Along the way, students also gain a new appreciation for timeless theological lessons about the beauty and complexity of small things, and the need to use the gifts of the soil reverently and wisely.

This project is just one example of the research in which CMU students can participate and contribute to real-world research. Working on such projects with faculty develops the fundamental skills and understanding of the modes of operation students need to learn to conduct meaningful scientific exploration.

For more information and updates on Tiny Earth, see [tinyearth.wisc.edu](http://tinyearth.wisc.edu). ●



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# Youth leading change

By Josh Hill

**E**xciting things are happening at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. After a year of visioning with Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCCO), we are launching the **Youth Leading Change: Community Peacebuilding Certificate Program**. This program is designed to teach students the foundational components of peacemaking through an adapted use of MCC USA's *Peaceful Practices* curriculum. The program is facilitated by a Rockway Religious Studies teacher and is structured so that students explore their faith through practical experiences of living out the scriptural calls to peace, justice and service to others. To earn a Peacebuilding Certificate from MCC, students are required to complete the five core activities:

- Introductory Module: *Peacebuilding Fundamentals*
- Migration and Resettlement: *'Forced To Flee' Simulation*
- Restorative Justice: *'Training Active Bystanders' Course*
- Indigenous Reconciliation: *'Kairos Blanket Exercise'*
- Climate Action for Peace: *'Our Shared Future' Simulation*

After each core activity, students will

debrief with their teacher in a sharing circle for deeper reflection and conversation about the connection between Mennonite faith and peace and justice initiatives. These sharing circles aim to help students name the ways in which faith informs practice, and practice builds faith.

In addition, students must complete 30 hours of community service by volunteering in an MCC program area within the local community, such as MCC Indigenous Neighbours, Walking with People in Poverty, Thrift Store, Materials Resource Handling, etc. As students volunteer and connect with MCC staff and programming, the hope is that a passion for serving is ignited within them, and that such passion will lead them not only into exploring their faith more deeply, but also into greater connection with the work of MCC locally, nationally and potentially internationally.

This unique program shows what a powerful collaboration between Mennonite organizations can look like. Students are given the opportunity to

grow in their faith, develop leadership skills and earn a valuable certificate to add to a post-secondary application. MCC is able to expand their volunteer base in the short term and is given the opportunity to cultivate the development

of a new generation of volunteers, donors and leaders for the future. Rockway benefits as our students embed the peaceful practices learned through this program into the ways they solve conflicts in our school community and demonstrate leadership for their peers. Building and empowering the next generation of Mennonite leaders can only be accomplished when we work

together. We are excited for the launch of the **Youth Leading Change: Community Peacebuilding Certificate Program** this fall and are grateful for the partnership with MCC. ●

*Josh Hill is the principal of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario.*



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# Learning and belonging at Grebel

By Jennifer Konkle



Above, Ella Funk. Right, student Barak Kline, in the red Grebel sweatshirt.



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“What makes Grebel so unique is how the community makes it feel like a home away from home,” shared PACS student Barak Kline. “My experiences as a resident and student have transformed my university experience in a special way that will continue to shape me long after I finish my studies.” Community is central to Grebel, and building connections and accountability is woven into both the residence and academic programs.

“I love how Grebel has a space for all kinds of people,” explained Arts student Ella Funk who attends Nutana Park Mennonite Church, in Saskatoon. “A lot of people feel like outsiders before they come to Grebel, but they often find a home in the various groups and activities.”

As a PACS major, Barak has embraced learning opportunities like attending Mennonite Central Committee’s

annual student seminar at the UN. “I’ve thoroughly enjoyed the PACS courses I’ve taken so far,” noted Barak, “and I look forward to my courses this term as they’re all interdisciplinary in their approach to the issues, challenges, and changes that our world is facing.”

Students learn inside and outside the classroom. “Chapel brings diverse perspectives to familiar stories, often thanks to the fields of study of those on the Chapel Committee,” explained Ella. “I’ve valued developing a more intellectual and discussion-based side to my faith, complementing the spiritual and musical elements I came in with.”

“The value of living in community at Grebel is that it offers a place to be seen and heard,” summarized Barak, “as we all—students, staff and faculty—strive for excellence and community together.” ●

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# RJC is a community that's hard to replicate

By Kienna Krahn

I never realized how special RJC is until I left. The community you build there within your class and the larger school environment is hard to find elsewhere. At RJC, finding and integrating into the community was as simple as stepping out of your room and saying 'yes' to activities like karaoke nights, study sessions, or walks to the coffee shop. This vibrant, interconnected environment made it natural to form deep, lasting relationships.

The transition to life after graduation made me realize the challenge of recreating such community. In the real world, without these built-in opportunities for engagement, it is more arduous and less intuitive to make connections.

I find myself nostalgic for exceptional and enriching experiences like RJC's ALSO (Alternative Learning & Service Opportunities) Week. This unique program offered a deep dive into real-world issues such as housing problems in Appalachia, and provided practical skills like using a crowbar and a drill. These experiences broadened my perspective and gave me tangible skills I've found surprisingly useful.

RJC's daily chaos—the lively late-night



**Kienna Krahn (centre) and two classmates in Kentucky, as part of the MCC Appalachia Build program.**

study sessions, the intense but rewarding musical practices, the dance parties after right answers in math, and the walks to the local ice cream shop—created a special sense of belonging. Friendships and shared experiences from RJC are profoundly cherished in my memories.

Now as I navigate university life, I realize how unique and irreplaceable those moments, people and sense of belonging were. The transition has underscored how special and impactful that community was, and how much I miss the everyday, spontaneous connections that made RJC feel like home. ●

*Kienna Krahn graduated from RJC this year. She now lives in Calgary where she attends Foothills Mennonite Church and studies at the University of Calgary.*



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Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC) seeks a full-time pastor to lead an intergenerational ministry of worship, preaching, teaching, providing pastoral care and helping the congregation care for each other. The ministry is carried out with another pastor in a team environment.

Learn about us at [tumc.ca](http://tumc.ca). For more information and full job description, go to [mcec.ca/ministry-opportunities](http://mcec.ca/ministry-opportunities).

The position is available from January 2025 and the application period will remain open until the position is filled.

**Inspiring Devotionals**

Just released: Two original books of inspiring Christian devotionals. *Authentic & Courageous, 100 Daily Boosts for a Woman's Soul* and *Positive & Courageous, 100 Daily Pillars for a Man's Soul*. By George & Kathy (Bartel) Watson. Get an inspiring copy today. Available on Amazon.

**New to Montreal, Join Us**

Located in the heart of Montreal, within walking distance of three universities, Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal is an Anabaptist, affirming congregation.

Check us out: [mfmtl.org/about-us.html](http://mfmtl.org/about-us.html).



Mennonite Church Saskatchewan is seeking an Interim Youth Minister/Worker on a contract basis until mid-July, 2025. Averaging 10 hours/week, this position will involve coordinate and working with youth pastors, leaders, and sponsors on province-wide and regional youth events such as MegaMenno and youth retreats, including travel to the 2025 MC Canada Youth Gathering. Interested candidates are invited to send their cover letter and resume to Len Rempel at [minister@mcsask.ca](mailto:minister@mcsask.ca). A full job description is available at [mcsask.ca](http://mcsask.ca)

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SCAN ME



**Nationwide**

**Oct. 27:** International Witness Sunday: “Welcome to the Banquet Table: Sharing in God’s Global Feast.” Congregations across Canada are invited to celebrate relationships and gifts we share with our brothers and sisters around the globe. Resources at [mennonitechurch.ca/IW-Sunday](http://mennonitechurch.ca/IW-Sunday)

**International**

**British Columbia**

**Oct. 18-20:** MCBC Ladies Retreat at Camp Squeah. Linda Todd guest speaker, register at [mcbc.ca](http://mcbc.ca)  
**Oct. 26:** Coffee House fundraiser and silent auction, 7 p.m. at Peace Mennonite Church, Richmond; proceeds to support Indigenous students.  
**Nov. 1-3:** MCBC Pastor/Family Retreat at Camp Squeah. Details to come.

**Alberta**

**Oct. 19:** Come Together, faith in action celebration in support of MCA ministries. Edmonton, 7 p.m., details to come.  
**Oct. 26:** MCC Alberta’s annual In Tune conference, The Soul’s Cry for Home, Ambrose University in Calgary at 9 a.m. Plenary and workshop sessions explore migration and resettlement.  
**Nov. 2:** Come Together, faith in action celebration in support of MCA ministries. Calgary, 7 p.m., details to come.

**Saskatchewan**

**Oct. 2:** Join Osler Mennonite Church for a 6-week CMU Xplore Bible study on the Sermon on the Mount with Michael Pahl. Held on zoom, Wed. 10:30-11:30 a.m. on Oct. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 and Nov. 6. No need to register ahead. See [cmu.ca/xplore](http://cmu.ca/xplore)  
**Nov. 11-15:** Registration for “Healing Haunted Histories: Decolonizing Discipleship”

with Elaine Enns and Ched Meyers. Course presented by CMU and MC Sask, at MCC Centre, Saskatoon. Details at [mcsask.ca](http://mcsask.ca)

**Manitoba**

**Sept. 13-Oct. 26:** MHC Gallery exhibits “Mending with Tradition” by Jessie Jannuska, and “Paper Letters” by Katrina Craig, on display to Oct. 26.  
**Sept. 21:** Fall at CMU. Canadian Mennonite University celebrates the new academic year with Fall at CMU, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. More at [cmu.ca/fall/](http://cmu.ca/fall/)  
**Sept. 28:** *The Secret Treaty* Book Launch at Mennonite Heritage Village.  
**Oct. 3-4:** 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba at University of Winnipeg. Keynote by Elder Dave Scott and presentation of *The Secret Treaty* by Jonathan Dyck. More at [ctms.uwinnipeg.ca/events/subjects-settlers-citizens/](http://ctms.uwinnipeg.ca/events/subjects-settlers-citizens/)  
**Oct. 18:** MHC Gallery annual fall fundraiser, 7:30 p.m. at 610 Shaftsbury Blvd.  
**Oct. 26 & 27:** Canadian Foodgrains Bank “Singin’ in the Grain” fundraising concert (26) 7 p.m. Douglas Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, (27), 3 p.m. Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Winkler. All funds raised support a Christian response to hunger.  
**Nov. 7:** Common Word Book Launch for *The Secret Treaty*, Marpeck Commons, Canadian Mennonite University.

**Ontario**

**Oct. 5:** MCC Material Resources warehouse, New Hamburg open house, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., games, snacks and hands-on activities for all ages.  
**Oct. 6:** PiE (Pastors in Exile) presents Bible Trivia for Adults, on Daniel 8-12. 7-9 p.m. WK United Mennonite Church, Waterloo. Spooky theme, costumes welcome. More at

**[pastorsinexile.org/2024-bible-trivia-for-grownups/](http://pastorsinexile.org/2024-bible-trivia-for-grownups/)**

**Oct. 16:** Grebel Alumni Community Supper, 6 p.m., Grebel Dining Room at Conrad Grebel University, Waterloo.  
**Oct. 17:** MCEC Pastors Fall Retreat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m., St John’s Anglican Church, Thamesford. Register at [mcec.ca](http://mcec.ca)  
**Oct. 20:** Junior Youth Day, 1-5 p.m. at UMEI Christian High School, Leamington.  
**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.  
**Nov. 2:** Challenge for the Church: Antisemitism workshop,

9 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Waterloo North Mennonite Church.  
**Nov. 14:** Benjamin Eby Lecture Series, “Reading socio-political experiences through graffiti and street art in conflict-affected societies,” by Eric Lepp, Peace and Conflict Studies. 7:30-9 p.m. Great Hall at Conrad Grebel University, Waterloo.  
**Nov. 29-30:** Church at Nairn (formerly Nairn Mennonite) annual Spirit of Christmas, Ailsa Craig (29) 6:30-9 p.m.; (30) 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Live music, crafts, tearoom. More info: 519-232-4425  
**Nov. 29-30:** Men listening, men talking retreat November 29-30, at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, New Hamburg.

**Online**

**Sept. 24-26:** Free practical theologies and wisdom traditions spiritual care symposium with Anabaptist Mennonite Bible Seminary. Register at [internationalassociationforspiritualcare.org](http://internationalassociationforspiritualcare.org)  
**Nov. 15:** 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).

**Upcoming Advertising Dates**

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# Faith Story

## Beginning again

by Debbie Wagler



**A**s a former English literature student and teacher, I often hear God speaking to me about my life through song lyrics and the writing of others.

In fall 2022, as I was preparing for a return visit to Indonesia, where I had lived from 2011 to 2015, I began slowly reading my way through Christine Valters Paintner's book *The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within*.

Valters Paintner introduces various practices for pilgrimage, including setting aside time, creating space, meditation, anointing yourself for pilgrimage, and receiving a seven-word prayer. In 2022, as I started my personal "pilgrimage" of reading this book, my seven-word prayer was: "Make me an instrument of your peace." I placed this prayer on my pegboard.

Valters Paintner describes pilgrimage as "an outer journey that serves our inner transformation." I connected deeply with the analogy of faith as a journey, especially after my time in Indonesia. In many ways, my time overseas shaped and changed my expression of faith, my connection to the global church, my isolation from what had previously been familiar, and my connection with and reliance on God.

My career journey and calling have also taken unexpected turns, first as I moved to the other side of the world to teach, and then as I transitioned back to Canada and became a psychotherapist.

During my return to Indonesia, it was meaningful to revisit places that have been spiritual anchors for me. For example, Gunung Salak was the mountain I glimpsed daily on the way to school, always reminding me of the verse, "I lift my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1–2, ESV). I also hear that verse set to music, and to this day, whenever that song crosses my mind, I picture Gunung Salak.

Sometime since 2022, I changed the prayer on my pegboard: "I will make room for you."

Fast forward to mid-August this year. While setting up a desk as a writing and devotional corner, I became conscious that I hadn't cracked open one of the daily devotional books in months. I absently wondered how long it had been, then gasped as the bookmarked page opened to January 26. I was shocked!

Even though my spiritual life has been nurtured through listening to and playing

Christian music, participating in my church, and using audio devotional apps like Lectio 365, I have neglected the practice of sitting still in contemplation.

In fact, if I am honest, this year I have

noticed myself swinging between the extreme go-go-go of responsibilities and numbing out on social media or Netflix.

My journey lately has been one of navigating a spiritual desert. I have



*Gunung Salak in Indonesia.*



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strayed from some of the rhythms and practices that sustain my spiritual life. This summer, my church has been singing Will Reagan's song, "Not in a Hurry," and it has been a reminder of what I need to learn, how to slow down and listen. Its lyrics remind me, "Just to rest in Your nearness/I'm starting to notice/You are speaking."

In mid-August, I also opened Valters Paintner's book. My eyes landed on words I highlighted back in 2022, words that seemed freshly written just for me at this moment, describing yet another practice for pilgrimage, the "essential" practice of beginning again. Valters Paintner normalizes the experience of "the waning of our inner fire and perseverance" and gently reminds us, "We are human beings and go through times of dryness." She says the "soul killing" part is not the dryness, but the "not returning at all."



**Debbie Wagler, delighted with a stack of free books she recently received.**

Here I am, nearly two years from when I started reading the book, not finished the last chapter, and yet feeling that chapter one is what I need today. I need to begin again.

I'm reminded of God calling Jonah twice to warn the people of Nineveh. After Jonah's attempted escape from God's first call, smelly detour through a fish's stomach, and despairing prayer of repentance, God rescues him and simply restates the call to go to Nineveh. When God shows compassion on the repentant people, Jonah recognizes God as "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jonah 4:2,

ESV) but ironically, is displeased by this, not registering that God had extended him the same compassion in God's offer to begin again.

Beginning again is a lovely invitation that strips away shame and anxiety and allows me (or any of us) to just get back at the practices of the life of faith. That's what you can find me doing—not being great at faith or pilgrimage or spirituality but beginning again without too much shame when I falter or fanfare when I stick with it. It's freeing to begin again rather than to judge my wanderings or the wanderings of others.

If you counted the words in my current pegboard-prayer above, yes, you were right that it's only a six-word prayer. As I begin again, I am still mulling over a word to add. It could be: "I will make consistent room for you" or "I will make room for just you" or "I will make room for you, God" or "I will make room for you again."

As I begin again, I find God growing in me a deepening self-compassion, compassion for others, a sense that God is all about compassion, not judgment, and a vision that God's intent is to grow and nurture us all towards Godself.

My questions to you, fellow pilgrim, are: What are you being invited to begin again? And what might God say when you do? ●

*Debbie Wagler attends The Gathering Church and lives in Kitchener, Ontario, where she works as a registered psychotherapist.*





## Announcing the inaugural MennoCreative residencies

### **Nolan Kehler**

Winnipeg

Project: A podcast series centred around *Silent Light*, a film, and now an opera, about faith and infidelity among colony Mennonites. From the opera opening in Brooklyn to the small town he grew up in, Nolan will ask why big-city performers care about old-fashioned faith and what Mennonites can learn at the intersection of our traditions and secular culture.

Nolan is an opera singer and storyteller with years of experience in radio, both with Golden West and CBC.

### **Melody Steinmann**

New Hamburg, Ontario

Project: A five-part magazine series telling the stories of church people with developmental disabilities. The articles will be published beginning later this year.

Melody holds a divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and has worked in the disability field.

### **Elizabeth Millar**

Lower Montague, PEI

Project: Interviews with leaders of newcomer/diaspora churches, leading to written stories focusing on faith amid the intertwining of cultures.

Elizabeth recently earned a PhD in practical theology from McMaster University. Her focus was sacred storytelling.

For more about MennoCreative residency opportunities, see [canadianmennonite.org/creative](http://canadianmennonite.org/creative).

PHOTO: DAVID BARTUS/PEXELS.

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