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Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

"What we have heard and known we will tell the next generation."
Psalm 78

Photo: Menno-hof: Shipshewana, Indiana
Photo: Richard Thiessen

MENNONITES AND MENTAL HEALTH

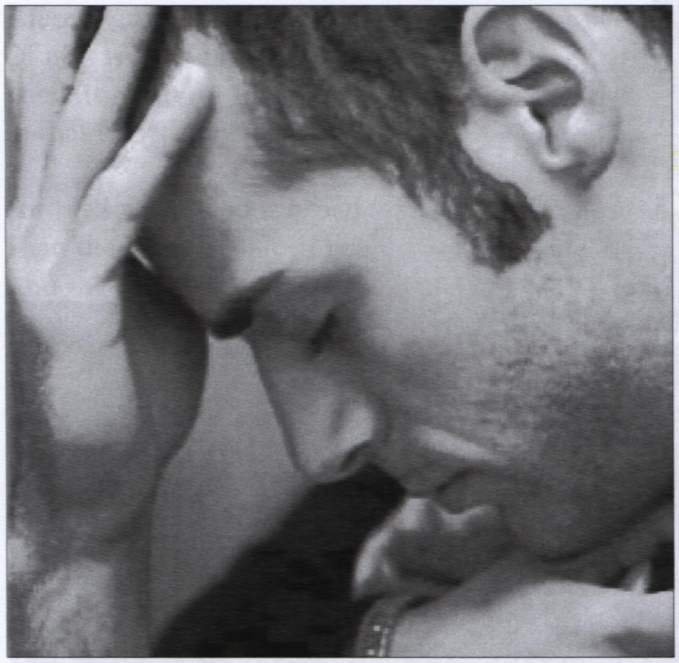
Contents

Editorial

by Maryann Tjart Jantzen

Nothing defines the quality of life in a community more clearly than people who regard themselves, or whom the consensus chooses to regard, as mentally unwell. (Renata Adle, American Author)

This issue contains a variety of offerings on the topic of mental health, from moving family stories of how the anguish of mental illness can be passed from generation to generation to hopeful accounts of how Mennonites have rallied in progressive ways to assist those suffering from mental disorders. These



individual stories also reflect a communal narrative, a tale of the various ways, at different points of time, in which Mennonite communities and families have responded with despair but also compassion; misunderstanding but also profound perception; fear but also courage.

What is crystal clear, however, is that a community's response to experiences of mental illness reflects its values in profound ways. While we have often failed to act with adequate understanding and compassion, following age-old patterns of judgement and distrust, as this issue reveals, Mennonite have also often responded in ways that affirm the dignity and worth of individuals who are mentally unwell. As scripture affirms, when one part of the body suffers, all are affected; and when one member triumphs, the remainder can also celebrate.

Which of us does not have a family story, often unspoken, of anguish related to mental illness? I think of my aunt, my father's sister, who struggled with schizophrenia for most of her adult life. Reclusive, alienated at times from much of her extended family, unable to leave her small studio apartment in Chilliwack for nearly a decade because of the voices of authority telling her to stay home and her delusion of KGB vans on her street deporting "the mothers" to Siberia, she was in some ways an object of pity and derision. And yet visiting family members were always greeted with joy and thanksgiving and often with home-cooked goodies. The same voices that entrapped her also kept her company in her solitude; she never spoke of being lonely and always declared her faith in a God of goodness. I learned over time to not judge the quality of her life — which to the rest of her family seemed so often seemed devoid of meaning — by my standards of normality.

May God give us the grace of compassion and understanding for those whose perceptions seem so different from our own seemingly sane views of reality.

Upcoming Events Fall 2011

October 15, 6pm Emmanuel Mennonite Church. Annual fundraising banquet with speaker Colin Neufeldt (see profile). Tickets are $25 and are available from board members or from the MHSBC office.

Nov 12 Genealogy workshop with guest speakers Dr. Tim Janzen and Dr. Glenn Penner. Contact the office for more information.

Community Event:

October 29 and 30, 6pm Clearbrook MB Church. The Mennonite Media Society presents the BC launch of the newly revised DVD, *And When They Shall Ask,* and the launch of Henry Engbrecht's CD, *Lasst die Herzen immer froelich.* The program will feature a choir, directed by Henry Engbrecht, singing German songs from the CD, as well as excerpts from the DVD (which now includes 45 minutes of bonus features). Film producer David Dueck and artistic director Henry Engbrecht will discuss the making of the film and the sound recording. *Kaffee und Kuchen* will be served after the event, and CDs and DVDs will be available for purchase.

Profile of Colin Neufeldt

Colin Neufeldt will be the featured speaker at the annual fall fundraising banquet of the BC Mennonite Historical Society. Colin was born and raised in Coaldale, Alberta. He attended Columbia Bible College, and later Mennonite Brethren Bible College. After obtaining a BA (Honours) from the University of Winnipeg, Colin received his MA, LLB and PhD from the University of Alberta. Since 1993 he has been practising law in Edmonton. He is also an Associate Professor of History at Concordia University College of Alberta where his research focuses on the experiences of Soviet Mennonites during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Colin and his wife and daughters attend First Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

Colin Neufeldt recently delivered a lecture to a packed Abbotsford house on the topic of Mennonites who collaborated with the Soviet terror. You won't want to miss this dynamic speaker. Mark this event on your calendar.

Colin Neufeldt, featured speaker at the annual fall fundraising banquet of the BC Mennonite Historical Society

My Father's Illness

by Helen Rose Pauls

Our entire class is walking down Arnold Road to Neumann's Store for ice cream to celebrate the last week of school. It is June 21, 1954, and soon I will be finished grade one. "My dad is coming home tomorrow," I say to my friend Leonard who is walking beside me. "You don't have a dad," he says, puzzled. His own dad died in a car accident a few years ago and our mothers often help each other. "Of course I have a dad," I say. "And he has been in a hospital for three years and now he is better."

Mr. Dyck's old Chevy is crowded as we cross the one-way Mission Bridge to Essondale Mental Hospital. He is visiting his wife there and, for the first time, my siblings and I are visiting my dad. We range in age from 2 to 9, and mother finally has permission to bring us along with her. It is a good sign. We are in a waiting room in the Crease Clinic, and the floor has tiny white tiles in a pattern that reminds me of our chicken wire fence. The guard looks after us while my parents visit on a bench across the room. Their voices are low and serious, and I can't understand anything because they are talking in Low German. Sunshine streams through the windows and the room is very white, like the uniform of the guard, who takes me on his lap and hugs me. He gives me candy and then, a kiss on the cheek. I am horrified and thrilled.

The first breakdown came in 1951. Dad was delusional and becoming violent. Mother feared for our safety

Helen's father reading with children.

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and on a visit with my sick sister to see Dr. Barkman in Abbotsford, mother described his paranoia. Dad would not let her out of his sight, claiming that she was unfaithful and meeting other men, signalling them with a secret code: perhaps the color of her clothes that day; the way she hung the wash on the line; sign language with hands and feet. Even throat clearing and coughing were suspect. He began to lock the door at night so she could not go outside, although we had no indoor plumbing. Everything came to a head one Sunday when guests came to visit. As mom poured the coffee, dad switched his cup with hers, thinking she was trying to poison him. He was flushed and seemed sick, and went to the bedroom to rest. When mom went to check on him, he became violent and she was injured. The visitors left without saying a word. Mom called out to my older brother who was eight at the time, and she sent him racing through the fields to her parents, who had a phone. The police came to take dad away.

I come into the kitchen after a nap and the room is full of women. My mother has a bruise on her cheek and a cut on her forehead, and one of the women from church is pouring nasty-smelling medicine from a tall brown bottle onto a cloth and dabbing at the wound. My mother does not look at me. Even as a four year old, I can sense a density in the air, as if I am not welcome. There is sadness; there are unshed tears, even despair. No one says anything and so I pass through to the front room where my brothers are sitting on the daybed.

Dad was held at Crease Clinic in Essondale Hospital from April to August, when he was released after many insulin shock treatments. At home, he continued to work on our small farm. Then our family took the train to Alberta to stay with his parents for several months, but in November, after a return to Arnold, signs of suspicion and paranoia increased, and my mother again feared for her life. She once said to me, "I had to think that if I was gone, what would happen to my children? They would be without a father or a mother." She wrote a letter to the doctor in Essondale, describing his symptoms. A letter sent from Essondale to Dr. Barkman asks, "Should this woman be encouraged to return the patient to the clinic?" In December of 1951, he was incarcerated again. Diagnosis: paranoid schizophrenia. Two doctors and my mother signed the admission papers.

He wrote loving letters to my mother and begged to return home. The letters were in Low German to escape imagined censors. Records from the hospital say he was uncooperative, antisocial, and refused to undergo occupational therapy. In May of 1952, a lobotomy was considered, but for some reason this was not carried through. He endured electric shock therapy. Mother suffered feelings of guilt for having him confined, and these increased when a man got up at a church meeting and said, "I visited John at the clinic and he seemed fine to me." Some sided with him and others stood up for her. She was supported with visits, food and bolts of fabric – these often left quietly in the mailbox or on the doorstep.

I am sitting with mother and my little brother in church during the long German sermon. Mrs. Falk across the aisle gestures to me to come sit with her. She gives me a smile and peppermints. Old Mrs. Kemmel, as we stand on the church porch after the service, pinches my rosy cheeks and asks, "Are these apples?" I back away believing she will bite me. Now I know she was being kind. Mrs. Loewen next door lets me pick all the plums and cherries I can eat. Our other neighbour, Mrs. Schroeder, looks after us sometimes.

In June of 1952, someone accidentally let dad out of the corridor to the outside garden and he escaped. He had refused to wear institutional clothing and managed to slip away undetected. He walked and hitchhiked to our home, arriving in the morning, wet and spent. He had travelled from Coquitlam to the Sumas Flats in one night. The RCMP had already been called by the hospital and they came to return him to Essondale.

I wake up and see a long yellow stripe on a dark pant leg and big black boots in the hall outside the bedroom I now share with my mother and little brother. For years after, whenever I look out of the hall window at night, the shadow of the huge cherry tree reminds me of my dad, wild-eyed, black hair dishevelled, being held fast by strong arms. Apparently he resisted the officer by holding tight to the barn door, but once he knew he was beaten, he climbed into the police car on his own volition. According to the hospital records, dad was surly and hostile after this, "refusing to mix with other patients and constantly trying to open doors." They also noted that he had "the vocabulary of a college graduate and excellent grammar."

Mom rented her seven acre field to a neighbour, keeping enough land for a huge vegetable garden, canning large quantities for winter, and also keeping

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a cow. Each day we cranked the old cream separator and delivered the butter to customers all over the village. Mom made our clothes from old ones she bought at the thrift store in Vancouver, turning them inside out and reusing the material. In summer we all picked berries, the little ones filling their hullocks from the lowest branches in her row. Meanwhile, a social worker visited, and mom began to receive social assistance along with the accompanying stigma. Our little house was in poor repair, and in winter mother shovelled a ridge of dirt where the walls connected to the floor outside, to keep the gale-force Sumas Prairie winds at bay. In summer, she planted these ridges full of flowers. When I asked her how she managed to survive with five small children and a farm during those years, she said she could not have done it without relying on God for strength every day.

Mother wrote to the officials at Essondale faithfully to ask about dad's progress. Slowly, he began to take an interest in his environment and mixed with the others. He carved a lovely chess set and became more cooperative. A letter from a doctor to mother dated April 1954 states that "he is much improved and you should arrange to meet me to discuss rehabilitation plans." There are also letters between several doctors discussing his future, stating that my mother seems strong and capable and that she seems to love her husband and is willing to take a chance on him. The record also states, "The patient is completely changed with regard to appearance, energy and interest. He is active, talks more freely with some nervous blinking. His suspicions in regard to his wife he realizes now are quite wrong. He appears to be in definite remission." One curious reference in the "ward notes" states, "Because the patient is a Mennonite and rather restricted in his social dealings with the community around, … his excessive jealousy in as far as his wife was concerned, might have been considered normal in a purely Mennonite community."

Dad was discharged on June 22, 1954, on six months probation. Apparently he did quite well at home but continued to blame my mother for having him locked up. But when he got a job stripping forms from cement walls at a construction site at Woodlands School in New Westminster, he could provide for his family once more and look to the future. If it were not for one of the younger men at church who offered him a ride to work, dad might not have regained full confidence and health. No one who knew him would have offered him a job, as mental illness was then much misunderstood.

For years I could sense that some of my friends were wary of dad. Once they got to know him, this wariness ceased and our home became a welcoming place for village youth. Dad built a backstop with chicken wire and 2x4's in the hayfield, and children came for miles around to play baseball. He got us an encyclopaedia, microscope, telescope, and a hi-fi for his favourite music. On Sundays, instead of an afternoon nap, he loved to take us on drives: to the Albion Ferry, White Rock, Lynden Park, or to Hell's Gate. He was very interested in our school work and took great pride in our achievements. Unlike many of the fathers in the village, he was permissive and trusted us. Although he was rarely asked to say public prayers or make the *Einleitung* (introductory) invocation at church, he was always bringing milk to his work buddies, picking up hitch hikers, helping the widow down the road or fixing someone's farm implements. One summer he and mom took in the children of a workmate whose wife was ill, and together they also helped raise three foster boys. He and mom often hosted those who were rarely invited out, and he never allowed us to gossip or to judge anyone. Later on, he received the Sumas "Citizen of the Year" award, which he took home and hid on the clothes-closet shelf. My fondest memories are of seeing him relax in his reclining chair after a hard day's work as a labourer, reading a book, an aria from "Barber of Seville" blasting from the hi-fi speakers.

Dad passed away in 2000. Before we could list his condo for sale, we had to remove mother's patchwork quilts which he had stapled onto the walls of the living room, so that he could enjoy his favourite music without disturbing the neighbours. Now, on his birthday, I play Beethoven as loud as I can, and I cry. It is still a mystery to me what made him ill for four years and what caused his improvement. Floods, berry industry problems, difficult refugees, church legalism, a brain injury while working in the peat bogs have all been cited. I only know that he was a wonderful dad and we were fortunate indeed that he recovered.

Sources for this essay were files acquired from Riverview (previously Essondale Hospital for the Mind) after dad's death, visits with Mom, my siblings and his sister and my memories. He refused to discuss these difficult years with anyone.

Six generations of Mental Illness: A Family Story

by Elsie K. Neufeld

There is much pain that is quite noiseless ...seen in no writing except that made on the face by the slow months of suppressed anguish and early morning tears. Many an inherited sorrow that has marred a life has been breathed into no human ear. (George Eliot)

The following account bears witness to a family that, for six generations, has endured mental illness. It is excerpted from a paper presented in October 2010 at the University of Winnipeg Conference, Mennonites, Melancholy and Mental Health: An Historic Critique, and was published in Journal of Mennonite Studies, Spring 2011. Neufeld's son was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in spring 2010.

April 25, 1926. In the southern Ukraine, in the village of Neuendorf, Chortiza, Tina comes running with news for her sister, Susanna, who lives there, in the clay-and-straw-brick house on the second last yard along the dirt road.

Tina is screaming. She is screaming and screaming, *"Daut's oba schracklich. Schracklich!"* (It's terrible. Terrible!)

Her cries are about their Uncle Isaak Derksen's sudden death. Their mother's brother.

These are the words recorded in a family book: *"Am 25 April fand man Grossvater [Isaak Derksen] tot im Stahl. Er sah dunkel für die Zukunft."* (Grandfather was found dead in the barn. The future looked dark to him.) He was 61 years, 9 months and two days old.

Whatever the darkness, he will not be the last in the family to suffer.

Susanna is Isaak Derksen's niece. And my maternal Oma – born in 1899, the youngest daughter of a well-to-do landowner. She had dark, waist-long hair. She skated to school on the river, played *Schluesselbund Lieder* (a circle game played at weddings or youth gatherings) with the youth and fell in love. At 17 she married Heinrich, the son of a minister; her being five months pregnant would have been doubly shameful. In photos of that time her eyes have that beyond-sad look.

Heinrich wanted to emigrate in the early 1920s, but Susanna cried and cried at the thought of leaving her family, and so he relented. They would stay. Susanna changed her mind, but it was too late. Heinrich lost his *Stimmrecht* (right to vote), was denied work. He left home to work in Zentral. From there he sent home the *Kasten* (chest) intended to transport belongings to Canada, filled with apples he'd gleaned from a field. The family barely survived; their threadbare clothing was patched. Heinrich returned a year later.

February 3, 1938. Heinrich is *verschleppt* (carried off). Susanna is alone with eight children, the youngest not yet two. For three days and nights she is immobilized. Subsequent trips to the prison are futile. According to records released years later, Heinrich is executed soon after arrest.

Who can say how that trauma and its aftermath altered the brain circuitry of Oma and each of her children? Their story was central to my upbringing.

Then, the long trek; and later, reunion with some family members in Northern Germany. One son is killed in combat. Hein, the eldest son, is captured by the Russians and repatriated, while his wife and three children manage to resettle in Canada.

Another rending: Oma and her youngest four immigrate to Paraguay. There, in the Chaco's "green hell," Maria, Oma's youngest daughter, becomes pregnant at 16. Maria is forced to wear a black dress to her wedding. The groom's brother, a minister, blames Oma. Oma has her first "official" breakdown.

In the mid-1950s, Oma and children immigrate to Canada. All but her youngest have married. He and Oma buy a small farm, but the stress of debt and starting over again trigger another breakdown. The seller is gracious and rescinds the deal. Oma briefly lives with my parents, who have four children; mother is pregnant with my twin brother and me. Then Oma and son move into the house next to my parents' on our farm. Oma can't take care of herself or her son. Sometimes she hammers on the wall of her house and Mom rushes over. "She couldn't even cook a pot of po-

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tatoes," Dad later recalled. But one day Oma's activity accelerates. She is busy, busy. She hurries from house to barn and back, a butcher knife in hand.

And then Oma crashes. She can't be alone. She circulates between her children's homes. In Manitoba she is taken to the *Nervenanstalt* (mental institution). What happened? "They gave her pills."

A package arrives in the mail. Inside is a small blue dress that Oma has sewn for me. It is a good sign. She is getting better again. Upon her return to our farm, Oma plants a garden.

Was there a diagnosis? People didn't talk about it back then; they considered it "*Seelenkrankheit,*" a result of some unconfessed sin. Whatever it was, the lows and highs appeared suddenly. Cyclically.

I remember Oma's catatonia. How Mom steered her before the mirror, placed a comb into her hand and nudged it towards her hair. "*Ma,*" she said. "*Ma. Du motzt.*" (You have to.) At a birthday *Faspa* (luncheon) for Oma, her friends, all immigrant women without men, sat at the table, drank coffee, and talked about Oma in the third person. Oma stared straight ahead. She might say yes or no.

She recovers and resumes life. Cooks, bakes, plants beans and potatoes, begonias and dahlias, and hangs laundry outdoors. Her blue budgie, Freddie, perches on her head while she eats dinner alone, or pecks crumbs off the table. Evenings, Oma reads *Deutsche Romane* (German novels) from the church library and writes letters. She listens to "New Life," a German radio program, and hums along with "*Gehe nicht vorbei, O Heiland*" (Do not pass by, O Saviour) as she sews aprons and embroiders tea towels for her granddaughters. She tries to teach me how to thread a needle and knot the long yarn. Sometimes she laughs so hard her belly moves like squished air inside a balloon.

Then, long-awaited news. Hein, Oma's eldest son, finally has permission to emigrate to Germany in early February, 1978. My parents fly there with Oma. What a shock! Hein, at 60, is a broken man. He is guilt-plagued at having remarried without being divorced. Such are the consequences of war. It can't be undone. He has three children in their late teens with his second wife.

On the second day of the visit, Oma, traumatized, declares, "I want to go home. Now." "It was terrible; I had to almost carry her onto the plane," Mom recalls. In photos, Oma's eyes are glassy. She is there, and yet not.

Five months later, on August 9, 1978, a phone call. *Hein ist tot. Selbstmord.* (Hein is dead. Suicide.)

There are sorrows for which there is no language. "What more did he want?" his family asks repeatedly. "All these years, all the rejected exit visas, and then, finally, we arrive in Germany, and…."

Anna, the eldest, recalls she was home ironing when her father went into the basement storage room. She wondered why. He came up and said he was going for a walk. She had a terrible premonition; he had attempted suicide before. It grew dark. Her mother, sister and brother came home, but her father did not. The police found him hanging in the nearby forest. The rope was one the family had used to secure their suitcases.

Susanne, his second daughter, reflects by email what her father was like and how his illness affected the family:

"My father? We grew up with that…. You know, he was the dearest father: wise, insightful, funny. He worked a lot (hard). Was beloved and entertaining (chatty) ... and then, from one day to the next (literally, overnight), he remained lying in bed, and if he got up, he simply sat there: didn't want to speak, just stared…. Or pretended he was reading a book, the same page all day long. Or he became very aggressive…. And then time passed and he was fine, and he didn't want to sleep, and he stayed awake all night and was completely euphoric...

"It happened often; he was fine for 2-3 months and then again very bad for six months. And constantly changing. Seldom, very seldom, was there a good time. We were used to it. We children didn't know any different. Yes, and then, when I was 15, he attempted his first suicide. Then, approximately two years later, the second attempt. And then, here in Germany, the third, which he completed."

What is required of a man to die by his own hands? Hands that have worked the earth, folded in prayer, fondled a breast, and cradled his children's newborn heads. Hands that shook other men's hands in greeting. Or, lifted to wave: Goodbye. *Auf Wiedersehen.*

Was it cowardice? Courage? Did he look into the horribly dark sky one night, and, like the character in Dostoevsky's story "Dream of a Ridiculous Man," notice a star intently … because "that star had given me an idea: I decided to kill myself…."?

Imagine the neural chaos preceding the calm, the relief that, surely – dear God, let it be so – is born in

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that moment.

"I think he could no longer bear it himself," writes Susanne. "He only wanted rest. And from then on his soul had rest. It is no sin … I knew that then already. I was just so sorry for Father that no one would understand it."

And Oma? She didn't recover from her last depressive episode. She died in 1982 of stomach cancer. Her last words were, "*Es brennt, es brennt. Wasser.*" (It's burning. Water.) An apt metaphor for madness, how it burns the person from the inside. For some, only death extinguishes the flame.

My Faith On Trial

by Rev. Jacob Quiring (1913-2004)

Throughout his life, Jacob Quiring took a keen interest in the life of the Mennonite Brethren Church. As well as teaching at several post-secondary institutions and pastoring Bakerview MB church for almost a decade, he served several terms as moderator and assistant moderator of both the Canadian and BC MB Conferences. At times he was critical of some of the trends and developments in the denomination, but his love for the church never wavered.

Quiring was a man of great integrity and honesty. He reflected deeply on the Christian faith and wrestled with theological questions throughout his life. Although he struggled with doubts from time to time, he remained a committed follower of Christ throughout his life. (Adapted from GAMEO online ©1996-2011)

As a child, I was thrust into a deeply religious community. My parents had accepted and lived by the faith of their fathers. They believed firmly in the inspiration of the Scriptures and accepted the interpretation of the Church. If they ever questioned any aspect of its teaching they either did not let on or else I was too obtuse to notice it.

I, too, began life with an unquestioning faith. Religion was a very vital part of my life. I was introduced to the Bible in home, school and church and accumulated a considerable amount of Bible knowledge. With my concept of God, I had no problem with the supernatural or the miraculous.

As a community we lived a rather isolated life. We were isolated by language and culture and also by poverty and maybe even by principle. Modern means of communication were not available to us. The public media had very little influence on our lives and the universities were well beyond our reach. Skepticism did not infiltrate our ranks. Any indication of doubt in the veracity of Scripture would have sounded an alarm and created a shock so that few would have felt the liberty to express it. The only doubts that troubled me in my teens were those that concerned my personal salvation.

And here also it was the firm belief in the veracity of Scripture that rewarded me with the full assurance of my acceptance with God.

I attended denominational schools that were faithful in teaching the doctrines accepted by the Church. The climate was one of unquestioning faith in God, in Scripture and in the interpretations as accepted by the denomination. No seeds of skepticism were sown in my mind at the time. It seemed we lived by the slogan, "believe first and seek to understand later"....

During my whole public ministry I have served my denomination in Bible School, Bible College and in the Church. The denomination did not lack guardians of the faith. Any rumour of a deviation from the confession of faith was checked into. Consequently few, if any, doubts surfaced during that time....

What really led me to question various aspects of my faith was my attempt to reconcile my interpretations of Scripture with what I observed happening in the world of reality. To be more specific, my faith in expecting answers to my prayers had begun to erode because what I thought were vital and valid prayers failed to bring visible positive responses.

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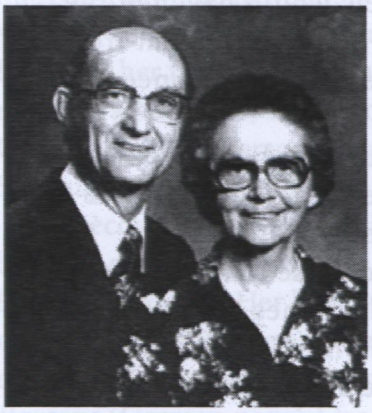
It came as a shock to us when our oldest daughter informed us that her marriage was in trouble and that she and her husband had separated. We took recourse to our first and last resource and prayed earnestly and persistently and with a measure of confidence that God would heal the relationship. When the separation led to divorce and remarriage we knew that this chapter was closed. Our specific prayers had ended in failure.

The strange and unsociable behaviour of our oldest son had been a cause for deep concern to us. When the doctor diagnosed him as a schizophrenic, both our son and we felt a measure of relief. The problem had been identified and given a name. However, the hope for a cure was out of sight and out of reach. The cause of this illness was still a mystery and the nature of it a riddle.



Jacob and Anna Quiring

The medical profession was able to help control the disease but not to cure it.

Some will understand and others won't what a parent suffers when a member of the family seems destined to live a meaningless life and become a burden to society. What else could believing parents do but call on their God. Like the father of the epileptic I have become prostrate before my heavenly Father and prayed, "Master, I have brought unto thee my son." Many years have passed and I am still at first base. My son's condition remains unchanged. I still pray, but probably more out of helplessness, compassion and even self pity and less expectant that the God of miracles will intervene. I have more-or-less become reconciled to the idea that my son, like many others, will one day die a schizophrenic.

Our second daughter was a happy young mother of two, vibrant with ambition and facing her future with hope. Then came the unexpected diagnosis from the doctor: "A fast-growing malignancy of the liver." The doctors had no encouraging word for us. Her early demise seemed certain. Having a great desire to live, she and her husband exhausted all known medical resources for healing. Meanwhile our only real hope lay in God. Prayers for healing were directed to the Great Physician. All prayers laid claim to the promises of God and took courage from biblical and extra-biblical accounts of miraculous healing. Prayers were many, sincere and unceasing. But in spite of all these prayers her condition deteriorated until her life ebbed away. Tears continued to flow and grief continued unabated, but the prayers for healing had come to an abrupt end....

My questioning did not confine itself to the subject of prayer but spread to numerous other areas of faith. The uncertainty which followed continually narrowed the scope of topics I could preach and teach with conviction and confidence. This inner turmoil was not endured without pain and anguish. There were times when the intensity of it caused me to wish I had never been conceived. I knew it was folly to wish for the impossible but I would have been willing to forfeit all the promised pleasures for the peace and tranquillity of non-existence. Fortunately these feelings did not last and the will to live victoriously revived. However, the search for certainty continued....

I have never had a serious problem with the question of God's existence. God is there. I know this not by argument but by intuition. For me this is an axiom, a self-evident truth. The whole creation with its beauty, complexity and vastness leaves me no option. I could not be an atheist if I wanted to. The many attributes ascribed to God in the Bible all appear to be necessary to complete my concept of what God ought to be....

This is what I experience and observe. People ask for healing and they suffer and die; they ask for food and starve; they ask for freedom and deliverance and suffer imprisonment and torture; they ask for peace and suffer the horrors of war; they ask for protection and suffer bodily harm; they ask for a job to provide a decent livelihood for the family and are forced to go on welfare; they pray for good government and the press reports corruption.

Here is a plane loaded with passengers. I assume a number of them are genuine believers who have sincerely prayed for protection of life

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and limb before they boarded. The plane crashes and disintegrates. Dead bodies lie scattered among the ruins. One of those who prayed comes out alive with some cuts and bruises. What else can he do but declare a miracle in his favour. The Church picks up the story and joins him in thanking God for answered prayers. But what about those who also prayed but did not live to tell their story? No questions asked?

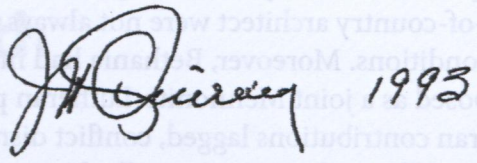
War threatened in the Persian Gulf. We all dreaded the awful consequences of modern warfare and prayed earnestly for a negotiated peace. These prayers were not answered and war broke out under the name, "Desert Storm." We changed our prayers and asked for peace and the cessation of hostilities. A cease-fire was declared, but did it come as an answer to the prayers of the Church world-wide, or in response to the devastating blows delivered by a high-tech war machine? Why did it come only after more than 200,000 casualties and untold suffering and privation for many thousands more? Again we have a question begging for an answer....

Prayer is not informing God, because He knows our needs before we ask. Prayer is not persuading God, because he is able and willing to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think. Prayer is not commanding God, because he is absolutely sovereign and none of his subjects are able to put him under obligation. His will is supreme.

If God is indeed a loving heavenly Father who knows what we need before we ask; who is by nature infinitely kind and beneficent; who is able to do exceedingly abundantly and who is also absolutely sovereign in the exercise of his will, then why pray?...

I believe that God is my Father and I am his child. I owe him the honour to address him as "my Father who art in heaven." I do indeed adore him. I pray to God the prayer of thanksgiving. I have received so much of material and spiritual blessings that my heart has difficulty speaking words of gratitude to Him to whom I owe all. I pray to God out of a deep sense of need and helplessness. I am a weakling struggling for survival in a world of opposing forces. I pray to God out of compassion for family and friends, for people like myself who will perish unless help comes either directly from God or from caring people through whom God works....

Dear God, remove whatever darkens my vision, blights my hope and weakens my faith. Lead me to be content with the limitations you have imposed on me and to accept unquestioningly that your ways are so much greater than the measure of my mind. Knowing that the whole truth is beyond my grasp, help me to discriminate between truth and error and to embrace and proclaim the truth that can be known. Teach me to trust you when the path I travel is rugged and the light grows dim. Let my faith end in sight and not in disillusionment. Let my life end in victory. Amen.



The History of Bethania Mental Health Institution

by Robert Martens

The pioneering Mennonites of North America displayed little interest in establishing institutions for people with mental health issues. This was understandable, given their lack of funds, education, and leadership, but on the other hand, a strong sense of motivation was lacking. It was felt that somehow, in some vague way, Mennonite communities would take care of their own.

In Russia, though, where Mennonites had been urbanizing and integrating into mainstream society, the need for such institutions had seemed clear, and in 1911 the *Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz* (General United Conference) opened the first and only Mennonite-run mental health hospital in the Old World.

It was a labour of compassion that would end, it seemed, in tragedy. The founders of the Bethania Mental Health Institute (*Nervenheilanstalt Bethania*)

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thought, of course, only in terms of ultimate success, and their plans were ambitious. A German architect was hired to design a cluster of buildings modelled after a facility in Bielefeld, Germany, and to that end a large property was acquired in Alt-Kronsweide, near Chortitza, on the banks of the Dnieper River.

Bethania Nursing Staff. From Als Ihre Zeit erfuelt was: 150 Jahre in Russland *by W. Quiring and H. Bartel.*

There were difficulties, however, from the start. Construction proceeded slowly, since the plans designed by an out-of-country architect were not always suitable for local conditions. Moreover, Bethania had initially been proposed as a joint Mennonite-Lutheran project, but Lutheran contributions lagged, conflict disrupted planning, and the Lutherans eventually dropped out. Mennonite donors stepped in to fill the void, particularly Lepp and Wallman, the massive farm implement manufacturing company.

The project was costly, but the results were remarkably beautiful. In spring of 1911, Pavilion No. 7, Bethel, was opened for female patients, and in fall, a men's facility, Pavilion No. 1, Salem. The main structure was begun the same year, and contained doctors' rooms, waiting rooms, a pharmacy, offices, a kitchen, and bathing rooms. Patients who required restraining were housed separately. Bethania was visualized as a community that would include doctors' quarters, a bakery, laundry, power station, and a farm. It was expected that eventually about 300 patients would be accommodated, and that medical care would be the best and most up-to-date available. According to Helmut Huebert, "There were strict orders never to strike a patient or to lock them in individual cells. Occupational therapy in the bakery, garden and farm was offered. Some schooling was provided" (qted in Petkau). A choir was even organized under the leadership of medical orderly David Klassen (Loewen 290). And though Bethania was Mennonite sponsored, it was planned as a facility for anyone in need, not just for members of the Mennonite ethnic group.

Then the troubles began. The onset of World War I hindered further expansion, as donations rapidly declined. It was only possible to admit 110 patients at a time. The years of postwar chaos ensued, and Bethania was repeatedly robbed as bandits roamed the countryside. In 1919 the project was nationalized, with administrative headquarters now located in Alexandrovsk. Perhaps the worst of times occurred when some of Makhno's men occupied Bethania, stripping it clean of clothing and food supplies. Transport was disrupted, and Bethania ran short of fuel. These events were followed by the famine of 1922, in which 61 patients died, more than in the ten previous years. Finally, in 1927, the construction of the Dniepostroi Dam sank Bethania beneath its floodwaters. Mennonites had frantically pleaded with authorities to move the institution to Halbstadt, but to no effect. During its tenure, Bethania had served 991 patients, 101 of them Russian, 87 German, 16 Jewish, and the remainder Mennonite.

The devotion of staff at Bethania was incalculable: "The personnel endured through all the hard years and did not abandon the facility. Many sacrificed their health to their calling" (Vogt, trans. author). Typical was Dr. Isaak Thiessen, son-in-law to Andreas Wallman, owner of the manufacturing company. After

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The first three Bethania nurses: from left, Anna, Lenchen, Lieschen. From Quiring.

Bethania was flooded, Thiessen moved his family to Chortitza, where he was employed at a hospital. Thiessen was arrested, released, and then rearrested during Stalin's Great Terror of 1937; however, he managed to survive 10 years in the labour camps of the Gulag and to work once again as a doctor in the Soviet Union.

And the vision of Bethania did not die. Henry Wiebe (born in a Chortitza village and educated as a social worker) and Maria Unrau (trained as a registered nurse) had both found employment at Bethania where they met, fell in love, and married. The couple escaped to Ontario in 1927. Here Henry served first as an ordained minister, but the hearts of the Wiebes were still with the mentally ill. In 1934, they opened their Stratford home to those in need of psychiatric help. In 1937 the Wiebes moved to a farm north of Vineland, where a large brick house on the property became a home for the mentally needy.

The Wiebes carried on their work with enormous energy and passion, and in 1944 the farm was purchased by the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. The conference administered the newly named Bethesda Home as an institution for individuals with mental disabilities until it became so large that the Ontario government took over administrative responsibility in the 1980s. For a long period of time, Bethesda was the exception to the rule of Mennonite indifference in North America to the issues of mental health. In a sense, Bethania had risen from the floodwaters of the Dnieper River.

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Mennonites And Mental Health

by Peter Andres

This is a good story. It's good because something redemptive emerged from human misery. It's good because it is prophetic – indeed, it remains prophetic even today. It is rooted in faith and history. Finally, for those of us who are Mennonite, it's good because it's Mennonite. This story is about Mennonites, mental illness and how a theology became praxis. For much of the material in this article, I am indebted to a book, edited by Vernon H. Neufeld, entitled *If We Can Love: The Mennonite Mental Health Story* (Faith and Life Press, 1983).

From the perspective of twenty-first century eyes, the lack of treatment of people with mental illness in the past has been a sad spectacle. In its most pathological form, the treatment of the mentally ill took the form of fear, rejection and cruelty. In its most benign form, treatment was determined by a concept of the sufferer as some form of divine "other," especially for people with schizophrenia, who were claimed to have some special spiritual insights. More often than not, it meant separation or violent and untimely death. These attitudes continued to exist well into the twentieth century, when western societies chose

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to warehouse these so-called "deviants" in large, poorly staffed and ill-equipped institutions. The prime paradigm seems to have been out of sight, out of mind.

Some important exceptions to this inhuman paradigm did, however, inform a more "moral" perspective. As early as the fifth century, the vocational work of St. Benedict with those suffering from mental illness was instructive. English Quakers of the eighteenth century were similarly enlightened, as was the nineteenth century American Dorothea Dix. Most notable was a community-based treatment and support program in Gheel, Belgium, which had a significant influence on how Mennonites would, in future, respond to those with mental illness. Lacking the benefit of modern science and medications, these pioneers grasped the importance of conveying love and self-worth as a response to illness. It is interesting to note that recovery rates for victims of illness were almost 50% when such humane, non-medical treatments were applied.

So how did Mennonites become involved in supporting people with mental illnesses? For a people committed to following Christ in life, there were a multitude of ways in which God's followers could serve God and humanity – indeed, Mennonites have found many ways to do so through missions boards, MCC, MDS, MEDA and many other social and economic expressions of faith.

As with these areas of involvement, work in the mental health field came to Mennonites through lived experience. Mennonites were no more immune to mental illness than any other group, and a formal response was initiated a hundred years ago with the development of Bethania Home among Mennonites in South Russia. This home was not designed to exclusively serve Mennonites. Significantly, its clientele included all ethnic groups of southern Russia. Even though civil war and migration made this endeavour a short one (lasting only about 15 years), it set a precedent that would influence future Mennonite action.

Bethania was not the only Mennonite mental health project, however. Bethesda Home in Vineland, Ontario (1932) and Hoffnungsheim in Paraguay (1945) were direct descendants of the Bethania experiment. However, not until World War II were the seeds for a profound and significant commitment to mental health care planted in the larger Mennonite community. As many as 1500 Mennonite men in the US joined the Civilian Public Service (CPS) as part of their conscientious objection to military involvement. Some of these men requested assignments that placed them into mental hospitals. What they met in these hospitals changed the course of Mennonite involvement in the mental health field.

Bethania men's building. From Quiring

Mental health, like all endeavours, had its champions. Key Mennonite figures in the development of programs and constituency support included Arthur Jost, Henry Fast, and Elmer Ediger. These and many others worked to obtain the support of Orie Miller and William Snyder of Mennonite Central Committee in Akron, Pennsylvania, to develop a Mennonite response to mental illness that would constitute a shift from the prevailing paradigm. This

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response would be characterized by the following principles:

- The need to keep people with mental illness involved in the community as much as their illness would allow.
- A balance between good "moral" (i.e., psychosocial) support and professional/ medical competency.
- A belief that spiritual supports form part of the rehabilitative process.
- The active role of the person with the illness in his/her own recovery.

These principles were not part of the prevailing professional ethos of the day. It was only much later that psychosocial rehabilitation (PSR) became a respected part of the recovery process in mainstream thinking.

The response from Mennonite centres across the US was surprising. Twenty years after the end of World War II, there were at least six mental health centres offering a full array of supports to people with mental illness. Kings View, Philhaven, Prairie View and Oaklawn were and remain centres of high quality mental health services in California, Pennsylvania, Kansas and Indiana, while Eden Mental Health Centre in Winkler, Manitoba was, for a long while, the Canadian expression of this profound endeavour on the part of Mennonites. These centres often began with a custodial agenda in mind, serving about 30 people at any time, but quickly moved to also include treatment.

Today, these centres serve a constituency that, in some cases, is as large as a million people. While these centres have roots that are Mennonite, they serve the larger community. In the case of Kings View in California, its services reach all of northern California south to Bakersfield. In most cases, these centres also offer a full range of treatment and support services for adults, seniors and children. They include psychiatric treatment, housing and employment services, along with a unique counselling program called the "Recovery of Hope." It was only decades after these developments that MCC in BC became involved in community-based mental health support, with efforts growing into what is today called Communitas Supportive Care Society. While over time connections with MCC have diminished, the involvement of these mental health care centres with their communities, their states and provinces has become much greater.

When one compares Canadian involvement in mental health with its US counterparts, it is interesting to note the difference in relationship between these centres and the government on one hand and the Mennonite constituency on the other. In keeping with political traditions in the US, American mental health centres maintained a much stronger connection with MCC and the church constituency than did Eden in Winkler. This was particularly applicable in matters of finance. Eden was, right from the start, much more dependent on public funding than were US mental health centres, even though it maintained a strong board governance model based on Manitoba church conference participation. There are two possible reasons for this: a higher level of public trust in government in Canada on the part of Mennonites, and a much more privatized insurance-based medical system in the US as opposed to a single-payer system in Canada.

Above all, these centres were, and remain, manifestations of a Christian witness. Psychiatric and support services retain a strong spiritual dimension of care and support, even while providing professional care that is recognized in the broader community. Here is what one Dutch professional had to say about his involvement with Mennonite Mental Health Services:

"Upon returning home from [the war, these conscientious objectors] pondered what had made them so good at helping the deranged, the outcast, the vulnerable, the ridiculed, the deviant, without prior training in mental health work.... They had special things going for them: an abhorrence of violence and cruelty, an acquired sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, a cordial team spirit, a modest self-appraisal, and a sober lifestyle that stimulated community feeling rather than personal fulfillment of brilliance.... [T]heir quiet manners elicited trust and conveyed compassion; their capacity for sustained work including menial ministrations demonstrated the health-fostering quality of all work well done."

If that isn't a witness, nothing is. To God be the glory.

An Apple Tree Grows In The Garden

Dedicated to my father's story
by Connie T. Braun

After the famine, he was born in March
in 1931 on Ukraine's steppes;
on a state collective farm his family
sowed an apple-seed for their own garden.
Poor home-place is a small child's only door
to paradise—the earth of family tree.

Once rooted deep, in '43 that tree
cut down by war as Reds and Nazis marched
to death, though carnage also cut a door
through Stalin's iron curtain. On the steppes,
countless left behind their meagre gardens
as their hearts remained with missing family.

Now, remembrance wanders back through family
story, treads through memories, tangled trees
of darkest thickets, reaching for the garden
in Ukraine, where he was born that March
on golden plains. His words become the steps
to far-away and story cracks the door

to long ago. As if a time-worn door,
second language loosens. Slowly family
history reveals our tarnished steppes—
our truth has been as the Forbidden Tree;
this knowledge, too, required an exile march
though war was never staged in Eden's garden.

"Displaced, we gleaned the stranger's garden
for our food, and starving, knocked on alien doors
for bread. Across Europe's ravaged earth marched
soldiers as civilians fled. Our family
hid, we made our bed beneath the trees
and stars. Survival was a journey step

by step . . . ." In Canada, those vanished steppes
my father tills, 'til story is a garden.
Here, migrant birds may nest in apple trees,
and though the past has been a heavy door,
open now, the import of our family

heritage proclaims that new growth comes each March.

The door of our family home swings inward
like memories to the steppes. This coming March,
I'll plant trees of apple in my garden.

Yarrow, viewed from Vedder Mountain

Home Ground

Dedicated to my mother's story
by Connie T. Braun

Home is in the evening shade of a low mountain.

Buttercups grow between the strips of gravel road.
Crunch of the tires,
swish of the grass
under the floor boards, this is the song the car sings
as it carries a small child
towards the old farmhouse
with the green trim and the green door.

Behind the modest white house, a wash line
grows from the yard
near the garden and the raspberry patch
stretches out towards the slope of the mountain.

It's always summer in memory,
unless it's Christmas together with all the cousins
gathered around the evergreen.

In the garden bordered with marigolds
we grandchildren would wander freely
among beans stalks and potatoes—
rows and rows planted

after all those years of a family's displacement,

gorging on plucked carrots,
unwashed, dark earth clinging to the corners of our mouths.
Soil is the taste of belonging.

And language is the heart's true home place.
There were low mountains there. Did this river valley
call to mind the Vistula? "Die gute alte Heimat"
(Home Sweet Home).
By the age of two, I spoke their words for food and rest and family.
Named them with endearments, Oma, Opa.
Syllables and sound of first-language
flowed from my tongue like honey,
child-like sweetness to pour over their unspoken loss.

I return to the place
long after they both have died
after even my own children are grown.
I follow the road towards the low mountain
wanting to collect my memories.
The raspberry fields and the house are gone
—still, I know where to go.

Memory longs for the journey
just as the body longs
for its own ground.

Vancouver Chinese Mennonite Church

An Online interview with Lup Chee Ngai, Paster of Vancouver Chinese Mennonite Church, facilitated by Robert Martens

1. About myself:

My name is Lup Chee Ngai. I was born in the western part of China during the Second World War but migrated to Hong Kong at about 6 years of age. My father passed away 3 years later. My mother struggled to raise a family of 8. I had to work hard in childhood to support my family. However, I managed to finish high school at age 21. I started to attend a church youth fellowship at age 15, but became a believer in Christ at about 19.

After my conversion, an American missionary gave me spiritual training with regular Bible study and prayer meetings. When I graduated from high school, the missionary took me to a seminary and persuaded me to study there. However, I was not ready at that time so I ran away. I furthered my studies in a technical college and thereafter started a seagoing career that lasted for 12 years. After leaving the seagoing life, I got a teaching job at the Hong Kong Polytechnic, training seafarers as well as shore-based shipping management staff. During this time I was actively serving in church and had been the chair of the Deacon Board for many years. I was also actively involved in maritime and political issues in Hong Kong. I left the teaching job 12 years later and worked as a self-employed marine surveyor and consultant until the age of 55.

However, during all these years, the call of God kept ringing in my heart; hence in 1999 I packed up and migrated to Vancouver with my family. I studied at ACTS Seminaries and graduated with a M.Div. degree. The same year I began to pastor the Abbotsford Chinese Christian Church (MB). In 2007 I started to serve Vancouver Chinese Mennonite Church as lead pastor (MCBC).

2. The History of Vancouver Chinese Mennonite Church:

Vancouver Chinese Mennonite Church (VCMC) was the first North American Chinese Mennonite church. In the 1970s, many refugees who became known as "boat people" fled from Vietnam to several South East Asian countries. Some North American and European countries accepted these boat people under the condition that local organizations be willing to sponsor and support them for a time. Since many boat people were of Chinese origin and spoke Cantonese, VCMC was set up to meet their spiritual needs after they were sponsored by Mennonite churches in Canada.

VCMC held its first Sunday service on August 7, 1977, in the basement of another church, and Rev. Sai Fun Lee was appointed pastor. On June 4, 1978, VCMC was officially inaugurated and in the same year a Chinese school administered by the church was set up to provide education to children of the Chinatown area. On September 24, 1978, the church moved to its current address (375 E. Pender Street), purchasing an old building owned by the YWCA. On October 30, 1983, a new church building was erected at the same address to replace the old structure.

In 1990, seeing the need to provide accommodation for Chinese seniors in the Chinatown area, Pastor Lee mobilized the church to utilize the parking space of the church to build a five-storey home for seniors, which operated under the name of the church. This seniors' residence attracted many elderly Chinese (originally from mainland China and Hong Kong) who were living in the area; later many also became members of this church. Some younger immigrants from China and Hong Kong also joined the church in the 1990s, but most of them left the church once their financial situation had improved. After Pastor Lee resigned in 2002, the church lacked a lead pastor, and none of the other pastors stayed for long. Hence the church was not in a healthy state.

3. The current status of Vancouver Chinese Church:

We have about 120 members attending meetings regularly (90 attend Chinese services and 30 attend English services). Of the membership, 70% are Chinese from Vietnam; 30% are from Hong Kong and mainland China. The languages used are Cantonese and English. The older generation speak mainly Cantonese (most can also speak Mandarin) and the younger generation, mainly English. About 60% of members are over 65 years of age. The financial burden of the church rests mainly on about 30% of the adult members, many of whom are still earning minimal wages. Hence, many men from this church

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have two jobs in order to support their families even though their wives are also working. The young adults (English speaking) are earning more than their parents but have not yet contributed significantly to church finances.

The church is run by a Deacon Board that consists of five members. There is one Chinese pastor and one English pastor responsible for daily operations. The English service is 9:30 am (for young adults and teens) and the Chinese service is at 11:00 am. The church does not have much involvement with the Mennonite Conference because of language and cultural differences. However, this church still participates in major activities of the Conference as well as regular pastoral meetings.

The church members do not have much connection with China, Hong Kong and Vietnam. The boat people are not attached to Vietnam because it is not their mother country. Also, they lost their wealth when the Communist Party took over South Vietnam and they fled the country. Only in recent years have they started to go back to Vietnam to visit their relatives. The few couples in the church from Hong Kong and China do visit their relatives more frequently, but they now consider themselves Canadian. Since there are now very few immigrants of Chinese origin from Vietnam, and the rich new immigrants from China and Hong Kong do not like to live in the Chinatown area, the growth of this church is slow. It is likely that in 10 or 20 years, after the current adult membership is gone, the Chinese language services may cease.

4. The Mennonite/Anabaptist values of Vancouver Chinese:

Most of the church members do not know Mennonite history and therefore they do not understand the meaning of Mennonite/Anabaptist values. However, they are enjoying the fruits of Mennonite values, because many of them were sponsored to come to Canada by Mennonite brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, from time to time the values of love of neighbours, nonviolence, and living peacefully are preached, and we are still within the Mennonite community.

5. Sense of belonging in the Mennonite Conference:

There is no doubt that VCMC does have a sense of belonging to the Mennonite Conference because we are still paying membership fees and attending annual meetings. However, some members of the Deacon Board do not have a sense of commitment and would prefer an independent church. They do not feel at home when attending conference meetings, since most of them do not speak English.

6. Something special to contribute to the Mennonite community:

A church set up especially to serve one ethnic group may not work for long because its growth depends on the inflow of immigrants from the country of origin. VCMC is facing this problem now, as the number of current Chinese immigrants to this country choosing to worship in the church is dwindling rapidly. The solution to this problem may be to adopt a multicultural church model, ie, to worship in English but with simultaneous translation to different languages. This model may help retain new immigrants, because they all want to mix with local people as soon as possible. In any case, the care of individual ethnic groups should be assigned to a pastor of the same ethnic origin.

Mennonite Museums in Ukraine:

An entry from Ben and Linda Stobbe's Ukraine Blog

Ben and Linda Stobbe serve as North American Directors at the Mennonite Centre in Molochansk, Ukraine

Saturday, July 11, 2011

Mennonite museums are opening up like sunflowers in Southeastern Ukraine. In the Molotschna area we have three school museums, two city/ town museums and one private musuem. The town of Vasilievka has an excellent museum with a few German artifacts, and of course Zaporozhye has a significant display of Mennonite artifacts in their city museum. The school museums often are the most fascinating. Children from former Mennonite villages are encouraged to bring artifacts found in their homes. This week the history teacher from Udarnik (Neukirch) showed me a pocket watch which was recently brought in. The watch case itself was in pretty bad shape, but behind the watch, under a piece of leather-like material, were two folded

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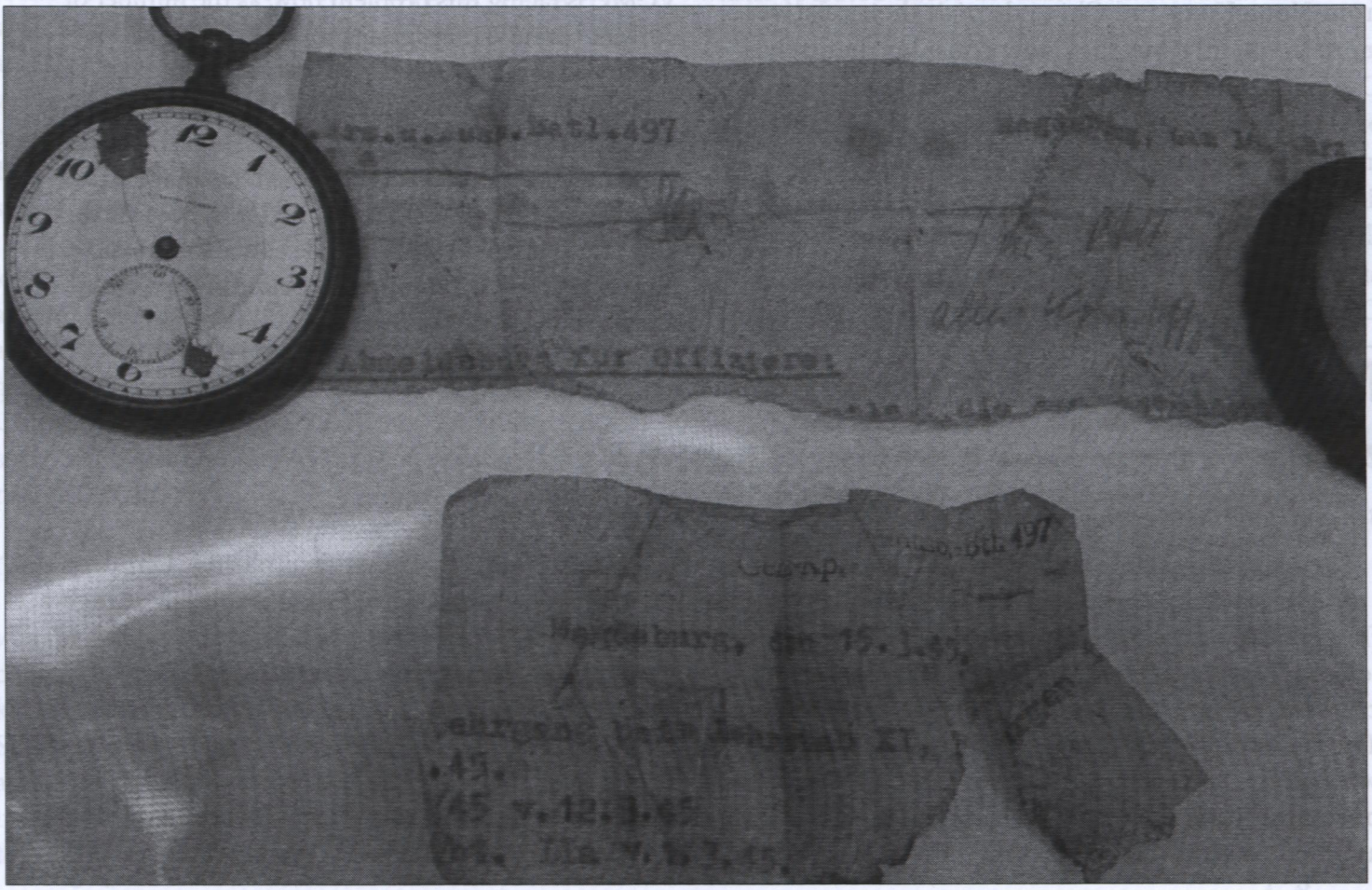
scraps of paper which told a story. The papers looked official and had typewritten notes and some scribbled notes, all in German. Board member Walter Unger suggests that the watch probably originally belonged to a German officer in WWII, who could well have fought in the final defence of Germany. He may have been killed in action, the watch removed by a Soviet soldier who brought the watch back to Udarnik. The date of 1945 is typed in the document. While this is not a Mennonite story it graphically reminds us that nearly 70 years ago villages in this area included two very different German speaking peoples — men who were primarily soldiers as well as women and children who were struggling to survive without a husband and father.

The other artifacts come from Vasileuka, a town half-way between Molochansk and Zaporozhye. The Director said, "Do you want to see a Mennonite icon?" Now, I was expecting a picture either of Menno Simons, Board member Harry Giesbrecht or boys playing crokinole while "distributing" sunflower shells. Surprisingly, he showed me a picture of Mary with the baby Jesus and probably Joseph. There is a German inscription which says something like "God's strong father's-hand protects your marriage." What was somewhat disconcerting is that this "icon" was placed right beside a photograph of two young men who apparently were bandits/anarchists involved in the plundering raids on Mennonite villages during the Bolshevik revolution. In fact the Director claimed that many Mennonite items stolen from homes during this time were brought to Vasileuka for redistribution. I am skeptical that the so called icon necessarily came from a Mennonite home. After all, this area was also populated with Catholic and Lutheran Germans. But the irony of having these items side by side is telling. Nearly 100 years later the memories still hurt, but we want to be involved in the reconciliation process. Your support and the goodwill extended by so many Ukrainians makes this a very satisfying process.

Check our website at http://www.mennonite-centre.ca/ for more information on our work and how you can help.



Voices From The Past: Excerpts from *Verlorene Söhne*, by Peter Klassen

Translated by Robert Martens

"Ethnic" Mennonites have sometimes talked about the Golden Age of their colonies in pre-Soviet Russia. And surely there's some truth in their nostalgia. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mennonite cooperation in the colonies resulted in impressive economic growth, prosperous agricultural endeavours, and a rich ethnic and spiritual culture. On the other hand, the concept of a "Golden Age" is surely an idealization of a time that was often characterized by conflict and injustice among Mennonites themselves, and in their relationship with the "outside world."

Peter Klassen (1889-1953), novelist, humourist, columnist, and poet, could be an excoriating critic of his own people. In his novel, *Verlorene Söhne* (Lost Sons), Klassen harshly criticizes Russian Mennonites for the abandonment of their spiritual and moral vision, and in particular for their indifference to the ethic of *Wehrlosigkeit* (nonresistance). In 1951, after seeing so many of its young men enlist in the military, the Canadian Mennonite Conference published 5000 copies of this novel. Today, in the context of widespread global militarism, Klassen's comments regarding the faithfulness of the church seem as relevant as ever. What follows are some brief excerpts, in translation, from *Verlorene Söhne*, that focus on this theme.

When a plough lies year round in rain and weather, it rusts and is eventually completely ruined.

And so it was among Russian Mennonites regarding the doctrine of non-resistance. Facing no dangers, no longer accustomed to fighting for their way of life, they became lax; their firmly held convictions, for which their ancestors had sacrificed their possessions and their homeland, now degenerated into mere tradition....

They had neglected to teach their children, apart from the Sermon on the Mount and the few biblical references that directly condemn killing and command non-resistance, that, far more, Jesus' teachings should be accepted in their totality....

They had neglected to teach their children the way of non-resistance in their daily lives.

In the schools as well, Mennonite history went untaught; and neither were there discussions around the questions of non-resistance and of the privileges received from government, for which the forefathers had paid such a great price....

All the doors stood open to raise their children in the beliefs of the forefathers, to arm their children with spiritual weapons against a wicked world.

And what was taught in the German schools? Almost nothing! In the village schools it depended upon the individual teacher's initiative to even mention church or Mennonite history. In the high schools there was also no Mennonite history, and in church history two brief paragraphs from Menno Simons....

So the schools offered little or nothing. And the church community in the instruction of youth and baptismal candidates?

The catechism was raced through, beginning at New Year's, indeed in some places only at Easter, until the day of Pentecost.

In our Mennonite catechism, there were, and still are, only three questions and answers that relate directly to non-resistance....

The church buildings were packed on Sundays. The heat and stale air were unbearable. The readings (*Vorlesen*) were dry, boring, and spirit-destroying in their endlessness....

There may have been exceptions of which the author is unaware.

The failures of the Mennonite Church bitterly haunted them during the time of the World War, the Revolution, and the self-defence brigades (*Selbstschutz*)....

The proverb says it all: "Nothing is harder to survive than a succession of pleasant days...."

Peter Klassen, *Verlorene Söhne*, Winnipeg: Christian Press, n.d.

These books, and others by Peter Klassen, are available in the Mennonite Historical Society library.

BOOK REVIEW

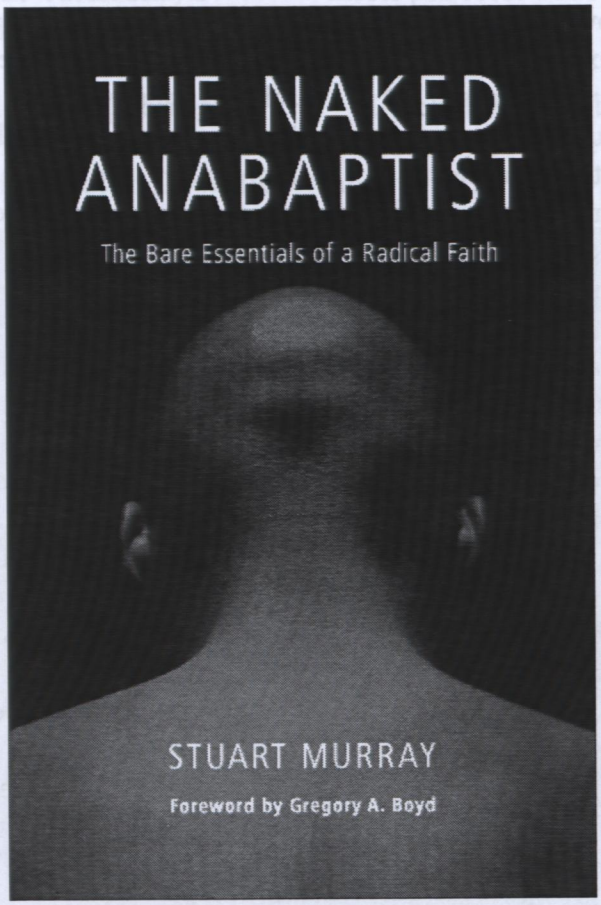
The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith

Murray, Stuart. Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

I'd always felt uncomfortable with all forms of 'civic religion.' I felt instinctively that Christians should not be ruling society but should be a witness to it, an alternative society with different values.... I didn't understand how anyone could approve of war from a Christian perspective. And I longed for community, not just "fellowship," in the church. When I discovered Anabaptism, I found I'd really been an Anabaptist all along without knowing it. The church to me is not the glue of the establishment, but an outpost of the radical changes the kingdom brings. (member, Anabaptist Network, qted in Murray 29)

Our global culture is in such a rapid state of flux that at times it might seem all sense of stability is being lost. The current trend away from the structures of denominationalism, for example, poses a profound challenge to the identity of historic churches; on the other hand, it also offers some intriguing prospects. The Anabaptist Network, based rather oddly in Britain, is a growing movement that builds on the values of Anabaptist/Mennonites but has virtually no official connection with their churches. In his book, *The Naked Anabaptist*, Stuart Murray remarks on an emerging interest in Mennonite, Hutterite and Amish traditions: "Christians from many other traditions were discovering the practices and convictions of these quiet, often withdrawn, communities – and finding them surprisingly relevant in contemporary culture" (21). The ideal for Murray and his coworkers is the "naked Anabaptist," that is, "Anabaptism stripped down to the bare essentials" (21). This rediscovery of the radical reformers, says Murray, frequently feels like a homecoming.



Book cover

The London Mennonite Centre was founded in 1953, but it was not until the 1980s that the term "Anabaptism" came into vogue. In 1991 the Anabaptist Network was established to provide resources and opportunities for individuals interested in Anabaptist values; since then it has spread to Korea, Japan, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, and even Montreal. The numbers are spread thin but enthusiasm is high. Aside from the Anabaptist-oriented Urban Expression, which initiates congregations in inner city neighbourhoods, the Network itself has not yet engaged in church planting. Members of the Network thus belong to other church groups, including some Mennonite congregations, and might call themselves, for example, Anabaptist Anglicans.

Why an Anabaptist Network at this point in history? Precisely, says Murray, because of the shifts to "imperial" Christianity and the ultimate demise of Christendom. The Early Church, he argues, was relatively faithful to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. When the Roman emperor Constantine inaugurated Christianity as the religion of the empire, Christian values were lost: the Shepherd Jesus became a Ruler; the cross became a military symbol; and Jesus was worshipped rather than followed. "What now did it mean to 'love your enemies' or 'do not worry about tomorrow?' How could such instructions be translated into foreign or economic policies?" (53) A second shift occurred when Protestant Reformers such as Luther battled corruption in the Catholic Church but ultimately succumbed to state power themselves; the mainline Reformers, Murray contends, emphasized doctrine over behaviour. Jesus was worshipped, not followed.

A third shift - or perhaps all three are part of a continuum - is occurring before our very eyes. We now

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Roots and Branches

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live in the thoroughly secularist world of post-Christendom, says Murray, and the church will never again predominate. In Murray's opinion, this is something to celebrate since the official church has rarely represented authentic Christian values. From now on, Christians will always be on the periphery, like Israel in exile. And who better, asks Murray, to turn to than the Anabaptists, who were accustomed to living at the edges of society. They put Jesus back in the centre of their theology, and blended practice and belief. Early Anabaptist leader Hans Denck wrote, "No one can know Christ unless he follows after him in life. No one can follow him unless he first know him" (58-9). It might be argued that Murray is somewhat unfair to Constantine and to the medieval and Reformation churches, but he writes persuasively.

The Anabaptist Network is based on seven core beliefs, including Jesus as example and revelator, bringing the good news to the poor and powerless, peace, just economics, and community. The Anabaptists, argues Murray, despite serious flaws, endeavoured in times of brutal persecution to practise these core beliefs. Murray calls for peace as the centrality of Jesus; mutual aid to counter the aggressive global economy; mutual accountability, which is difficult to sustain in these individualistic times; baptism as a symbol of personal and communal commitment; and the sharing of wine and bread as a pledge of discipleship. All these teachings, he says, were vital to the Anabaptists, who blossomed in their peripheral status.

Stuart Murray, who is a clear and accessible writer, usually has a good sense of Anabaptist history, and while he admires Mennonites, he does not idealize them. Mennonites can be critiqued, he contends, for legalism, divisiveness, separatism, quietism, and inertia. The "naked Anabaptist" is always clothed in culture. "Let go of your traditions," he advises, "and hold on to your heritage" (16). Murray argues for the spirit of *Gelassenheit*, yieldedness, "vulnerability and openness, ... nonviolence, truth telling, and honesty.... [I]t is profoundly subversive, refusing to be overawed or cowed by those with power, wealth, or learning" (171). On the other hand, the non-denominational, ecumenical Anabaptist Network owes a great debt, he says, to the Mennonite heritage. "I will not become Hutterite, Amish, or Mennonite," he says, "but I am grateful that the principles of 'naked Anabaptism' are sometimes clothed in Hutterite, Amish, and Mennonite dress, and I honor their attempts over many years to be faithful and radical followers of Jesus" (159).

There's a Wideness In God's Mercy

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in Heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of our mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

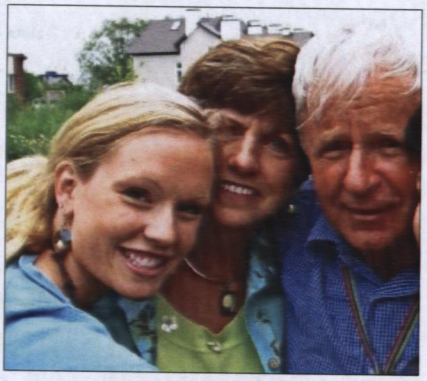
But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own.

If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord.

Frederick Faber, 1854.

This hymn was sung at the funeral of Laura Wiebe Enns (by Laura's request) on July 18, 2011. Laura, who left this world on July 13 after living and dying with much integrity, volunteered at the Mennonite Historical Society Archives.

Lois Klassen and Laura Enns enjoying a warm summer evening in Klaipeda, Lithuania, where Laura spent many happy summers teaching English



Laura Enns and fellow volunteers at Lithuania International University, Summer 2009.