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Forming of the First Hmong Mennonite Church

By Peter Vang

In the years 1979 to 1980, most of the Hmong people who came from Thailand refugee camps to Canada were sponsored by Mennonite churches. Of these, some of them were already Christian.

In 1980, due to difficulty with the English language, Steinmann Mennonite Church, and other churches in the New Hamburg area, assisted 6 Hmong Christian families to have their own Sunday service at Grandview Public School in New Hamburg. These services were held in the Hmong language.

As time went by the group grew and there was need for more space. Some of the Hmong families in the Kitchener-Waterloo area were also attending the services. All the Hmong sponsors from the different churches, representatives from Mennonite Central Committee, and the Hmong leaders held a meeting at Wilmot Mennonite Fellowship Hall in Baden. At that meeting the Hmong Church Supporting Group was formed, and the Hmong church was named the Hmong Christian Church. Wilmot Mennonite Fellowship Hall also offered their church building to the Hmong Christian Church from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. every Sunday afternoon.

In 1981, since most of the Hmong lived in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, a request was made to First Mennonite Church, in Kitchener, to provide space for the group to worship. First Mennonite agreed and the Hmong Christian Church moved their Sunday services to First Mennonite Church. The services were held in the afternoons until 1996.

In 1982, the First Hmong Mennonite Church applied to be a member of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec (now Mennonite Church Eastern Canada). It was accepted into the conference in 1984.



Peter Vang speaking to MHSO on June 14, 2003 at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

PHOTO CREDIT: MAURICE MARTIN / CANADIAN MENNONITE

With the strong support of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada, Mennonite Foundation, various local Mennonite congregations, and the strong leadership of First Hmong Mennonite Church, on November 15, 1996, a church building was bought for the First Hmong Mennonite Church on 93 Doon Road in Kitchener.

Keys to Success in Forming of First Hmong Mennonite Church

An important key to the success of forming First Hmong Mennonite Church was that most of the Hmong in this area were sponsored by local Mennonite congregations.

Another important key was MCC's sponsorship of Lao Vang (Peter Vang) to work for MCC as a Refugee Settlement worker. Peter's position was supported by MCC and Canadian government funding.

Local Mennonite churches also offered their church facilities to the Hmong to use for our Hmong language worship services. We enjoyed the strong support of MCEC, Mennonite Foundation, and Mennonite pastors. Also key to

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our success was strong leadership and strong membership from within the Hmong group.

Some Experiences of Being Mennonite

Over the years the Hmong church has received strong support from Mennonite congregations, Mennonite pastors, and MCEC. There has been fund raising through the sale of egg rolls, donations for the mortgage fund, and other financial support from Mennonite Foundation and MCEC. And over the years Mennonite pastors have provided leadership training.

Wilmot Mennonite Fellowship Hall and First Mennonite Church both shared their church facilities for the Hmong to use while we were becoming established as a church of our own.

The Mennonite church has allowed us to maintain our social norms, customs, and independence while giving us the opportunity to slowly adapt and learn about Mennonites. We feel that there are still many things about being Mennonite that we need to learn and experience in the future.

Mennonites and Hmong are very similar in terms of mutual assistance to each other and having a refugee background.

Challenges the Hmong Face

We don't have a lot of challenges



First Hmong Mennonite Church on 93 Doon Road in Kitchener.

PHOTO CREDIT: MENNONITE CHURCH EASTERN CANADA



First Hmong Mennonite Church ministers and church council, circa 1992.
Peter Vang is in the back row, second from the left.

PHOTO CREDIT: MENNONITE CHURCH EASTERN CANADA

in Canada integrating the cultural background of the Hmong people with the beliefs and traditions of the Mennonite church. This is because we find the Mennonite church is more liberal than some other denominations. They have allowed us to integrate certain customs into our worship practices. Some Hmong who were Christian and Missionary Alliance before still struggle with the issue regarding who should be allowed to be married in the church. There is also the issue of dressing in white, which is seen as a symbol of authority. However, there are some older people who still struggle between worshiping God and the tradition of worshiping the spirit of their ancestors. There are still some challenges for the Hmong leaders and its members to distinguish between the old beliefs and traditions, and the new Christian beliefs in God.

There are also some inter-generational challenges for the Hmong as the younger members feel more comfortable speaking English while the older people continue speaking Hmong.

Hmong Customs and Traditions

There are some Hmong customs and traditions that the Hmong have incorporated into the Mennonite church life in Canada. Many of these have to do with marriage and interpersonal relationships.

We still do not allow people with the same last names to be married to each other because the Hmong belief that any Hmong with the same last name are consider to be brothers and sisters. They can, however, marry their cousins if they have different last names. Many marriages are still being arranged by a family representative from both sides. This is called *Men Kong*, or in Hmong *Meejkoob*.

The practice of the groom paying money to the bride's parents is a Hmong tradition to show commitment from the groom to love, respect, and care for his new wife forever. The Hmong believe that any thing that you get for free you may not treat with respect. Also most of the money that the groom pays to the bride's parents is used for the wedding and given as a gift to the new couple.

A wedding is normally held right after both parties agree to marry. You don't want to wait too long or it may jeopardize the marriage.

A married name will be added to the son-in-law's first name after

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Students enrolled in T.E.E. course. Circa 1994.
PHOTO CREDIT: MENNONITE CHURCH EASTERN CANADA

having one or two children. This is done by the father and mother-in-law to indicate that the son-in-law is married and mature. An example of this is; the son-in-law's first name is Lee, the married name is Chung, his name is now called Chung Lee.

In the Hmong tradition, respect is shown by calling each other according to the two persons' relationship. This means the use of titles like uncle, aunt, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, father-in-law, etc. We do not call each other by our names.

It is still a challenge for the parents to see the young people kissing and hugging each other in open signs of affection.

A tradition of support for one another during a sad time is very important to the Hmong. When a person has past away their family is supported with visitation, comfort, and financial donations from other families to the grieving family.

Currently there are 293 people, including children, attending the First Hmong Mennonite Church on Doon Road in Kitchener.

Peter Vang was sponsored by Bloomingdale Mennonite Church in 1979, he now lives in Kitchener. He serves as chair of the First Hmong Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

The Resettlement of Refugees in Canada Mennonite Involvement

by Tim Wichert

Every day, we read stories in the news of refugees fleeing from war and persecution: Iraq, Afghanistan, Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan. According to the United Nations, there are about 15 million refugees in the world, who have had to flee from their country. Another 30 million people are displaced within their own countries. These numbers are overwhelming.

Only a fraction of these people come to Canada. As many of you know, we have an elaborate — and complicated — process for accepting or rejecting these refugees. From around the world, about 25,000 refugees are accepted in Canada each year. Some of these come through the asylum process, and have their claims heard by the Immigration and Appeal Board — or IRB. Others are resettled directly from overseas through sponsorships, either by the Government or private groups.

But just 30 years ago, there was no system in place for people to claim refugee status. The Canadian immigration system gave priority to certain nationalities, primarily Europeans. That slowly began to change in the late 1960s. Canada signed the UN Refugee Convention in 1969. Slowly, we began to accept new immigrants from Africa and Asia. Procedures for making a refugee claim were put in place. A new Immigration Act in 1976 included a provision for private sponsorships. A Mennonite Member of Parliament, Jake Epp from



Telling their stories at the MHSO meeting, L to R: Tim Wichert, MCC Canada; Jack Seangsyri, Grace Lao Mennonite Church; Leticia Salazar, First Mennonite Hispanic Ministry; Peter Vang, Hmong Mennonite Church.

PHOTO CREDIT: MAURICE MARTIN/CANADIAN MENNONITE

Steinbach, Manitoba, had been advocating this option in order for church groups and community groups — the private sector — to become involved in settling people in Canada.

Jake Epp's family, like many other Mennonite families including my own, had experienced suffering and persecution in South Russia — the Ukraine — after the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Mennonite

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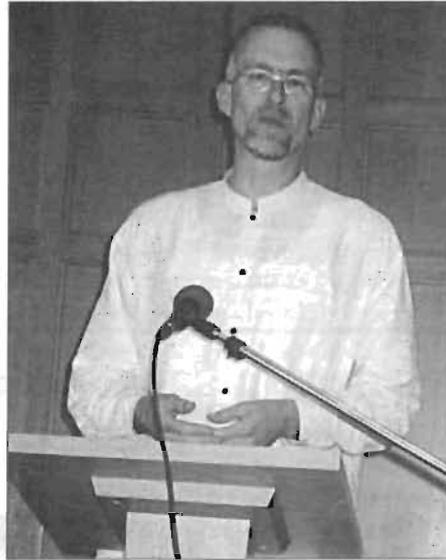
Central Committee (MCC) was created during this period — in 1920 — to assist Mennonites that were being persecuted and displaced by war in Russia and the Ukraine. There was an incredible amount of suffering. Many were victims of rape, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, exile to Siberia, and summary execution. Many went hungry.

This personal connection with persecution, and the experience of being refugees, has continued to inspire many Mennonites to be involved in more recent refugee crises. And it provided the impetus for Mennonites — through MCC — to play a leading role in developing Canada's modern-day refugee assistance policy. The impetus for responding also arises from the Biblical imperative to love strangers as ourselves (Leviticus), to treat victims as we would want to be treated (Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan), and to generously share our present abundance with those in need (Paul).

Along with changes in Canadian immigration policy in the late 1970s, the international scene changed dramatically. As we know, there was a huge exodus of people from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. They were fleeing persecution, and unstable political and economic conditions. Here in Canada, we were able to watch this crisis unfolding in Southeast Asia on television and in newspapers. Hundreds of thousands of people were fleeing. Some over land.

Others were crowded onto boats, and became known as the boat people. Day after day, we heard stories of refugees searching for safety with incredible difficulties. Seeing these images, people here were asking, "What can we do?"

MCC had programmes in the region. The question we asked was also — what could we do, how could we provide help in some small way for this huge group of people. What



Tim Wichert speaking to MHSO on June 14, 2003 at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

PHOTO CREDIT: MAURICE MARTIN / CANADIAN MENNONITE

transpired was largely initiated by one person, John Wieler of Winnipeg. John was travelling in the region, and took a detour to see what was happening. He visited refugee camps in Thailand to witness the crisis firsthand. Upon his return to Canada, he did numerous interviews regarding the situation.

At a recent meeting of MCC refugee workers in Winnipeg, John

was recounting the story. He did an interview with Maclean's magazine about the crisis in Southeast Asia, and how Canada should respond. At the time, the Government of Canada had been thinking about taking 10,000 refugees. In his interview with Maclean's, John Wieler suggested that Canada should take 50,000. That was 10% of the overall numbers at the time. It seemed like an outrageous suggestion.

What happened? In June 1979, the Canadian Government announced that 50,000 refugees would be resettled in Canada. Was it realistic? Well, over the next year and a half, 60,000 refugees came to Canada from Southeast Asia. Many of these were sponsored, or supported, by the Government. But over half of these — 34,000 — were sponsored by private groups. In fact, Canada accepted more refugees for resettlement — per capita — than any other country at that time. It was considered a "golden age" in Canadian refugee policy.

Across Canada that year — 1979 — churches, community groups and others were offering to sponsor refugees. There were over 7,000 groups involved, primarily church groups. During this time, the MCC Office in Ottawa — in particular Bill Janzen — initiated discussions with the Government to draft a refugee sponsorship agreement. The purpose of this agreement would be to make the sponsorship process easier. MCC would assume the overall

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responsibility for all Mennonite churches and groups that wanted to sponsor refugees. These churches and groups would not have to deal with the Government bureaucracy; MCC would do that.

It was a remarkable innovation. MCC became the first official sponsorship organization. The Canadian Minister of Immigration, Bud Cullen, attended a signing ceremony at the MCC offices in Winnipeg.

Suddenly, the private sponsorship programme, which had existed in theory, but had never been used before, became an extremely popular and useful tool to bring refugees to Canada. Groups would commit to helping refugees find a place to live, help them learn English, find a job, try and help them adjust to life in a new country and a new culture. In one fairly famous case, the Mayor of Ottawa, Marion Dewar, made a public statement saying that they would take 4,000 refugees.

Mennonite churches sponsored almost 4,000 refugees from Indochina in 1979 and 1980, which was over 10% of all the private sponsorships. Almost half of all Mennonite churches across Canada sponsored a family. There were some problems to be sure, some misunderstandings. But mostly, it was a positive experience. We learned about new cultures. We learned about life outside of our own communities and our own country.

Since those early days, Mennonite churches across Canada — through MCC — have continued to sponsor refugees. Over the past 24 years, we have helped approximately 15,000 refugees come and settle in Canada and start a new life. These days, approximately 15% of total private refugee sponsorships in Canada are done through MCC. MCC continues to have one of the largest sponsorship programmes.

Here in Ontario, First Mennonite Church is one of the most active Mennonite sponsorship groups, along with the Ottawa Mennonite Church, and the Toronto United Mennonite Church. The Ottawa Mennonite Church, for example, continues to sponsor an average of 4 or 5 cases each year. Approximately 100 people at the church are involved in the refugee programme, through committees, support groups, and friendship circles.

Other churches will do a refugee sponsorship every few years. The Zurich Mennonite Church sponsored 2 families from Afghanistan last year, a total of 10 people — who all arrived just a few weeks before Christmas. Christmas was much different in Zurich that year.

Some churches have developed other refugee programmes. In Kitchener, Mennonite churches came together 15 years ago to form the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. Eunice Valenzuela, originally from Nicaragua, is currently the Director of the Coalition. In Toronto, Mennonite churches provided support for the Mennonite New Life Centre and New Life Church, started 20 years ago by Betty and Adolfo Puricelli. Both of these organizations continue to provide invaluable assistance for refugees.

It is interesting to see where the refugees have come from. Unfortunately, it depends on where the current crisis is. In the 1980's we helped many people from Central America. We also had a special focus on Somalia and Ethiopia. In the early 1990's there was a focus on former Yugoslavia. But over the years, we have helped people literally from around the world. In the past few years, we have had special projects which have focussed on refugees from Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Colombia. Our work has been inter-faith; we have sponsored both

Christians and Muslims. We have worked closely with churches in other countries, such as the Mennonite Church in Colombia.

Refugee work remains at the heart of MCC work in Canada. When MCC Canada was created it was clearly given the task of continuing the work of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization to help "Mennonite and other refugees". Today, MCC's first response to the plight of refugees and displaced people has been to provide food and other material assistance. Churches have collected refugee kits, blankets and clothes, and these things, along with food, are being provided to people affected by wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and Congo.

But many are unable to return home. Fortunately, many refugees who have been unable to return home have been able to find a new home in Canada. Mennonites have played a significant role in shaping refugee policy in Canada to allow this to happen. The Canadian private sponsorship programme — pioneered by MCC — is the only one of its kind in the world. It's a remarkable programme that has allowed churches and other community groups in Canada to assist refugees, the displaced, and other vulnerable people in need of a new life.

It has allowed the Mennonite Church in Canada to grow and expand, but more importantly it has allowed us to establish a reputation as an open, welcoming community that is willing to love strangers/newcomers and share our generous abundance with those in need.

Tim Wichert lives in St. Catharines. He is the director of MCC Canada's Refugee Programme.

This article is from his presentation to the MHSO meeting at First Mennonite Church on June 14, 2003.

A Century of Christian Education

By Shirley J. Wagler



East Zorra Mennonite Church. Circa 1990.
PHOTO CREDIT: MENNONITE CHURCH EASTERN CANADA

Sunday May 17, 1903 was a day filled with many emotions. There was anticipation for some, and anxiety for others, so prayerfully they started Sunday School at East Zorra Mennonite Church. No one could see the future, but a variety of visions began to play out in their heads.

"Since the German language was used exclusively in worship, the congregation felt there was a definite need for the children to learn German and established the Sunday School for this purpose. In earlier decades, instruction in the school system had been in German but with greater government funding and control came English instruction. If the young people and children were going to understand the preaching and scripture reading they would have to learn the high German language of the Bible. Virtually everyone's mother tongue continued to be the Pennsylvania German dialect called *Deitsch*, but reading and writing the German of the Bible was vastly different."¹

Men like Jacob M. Bender saw a need for more in-depth Bible Study by the men and women of the congregation. However, there was a fear that starting a Sunday School program

would take the emphasis away from the preached word. There was also a concern that with the laymen taking over the leadership of Sunday School, they would become more influential than the ordained bench. "A degree of tension existed between the Sunday School and the ministry."² This was due to a variety of factors such as the fear of change because the preached word was no longer the only focus on a Sunday morning and many people "found the Sunday School more interesting than the worship service."³

The majority of East Zorra members favoured it, so the Sunday School began. As the German language was used exclusively in worship, and public schools taught English, the feeling was that the church needed to teach the German ABC's in reading and writing. Sunday School was held for many years, mostly in the summer months. The children learned the German alphabet, vocabulary and basic grammar from the German primer called the "*ABC Buch*" Older youth studied a German catechism with little memory cards handed out at the close of Sunday School. If they had memorized four by the next Sunday School they

received a bigger memory verse card. Adults did a Bible study, a chapter at a time, with John being the first gospel they studied.

"It was the first church program run by non ordained people of the congregation. It gave a new opportunity for laymen and women to be involved in the life of the church as they developed leadership abilities, teaching skills and increased their Bible knowledge."⁴

In 1925, East Zorra built an addition on the east end of the meetinghouse which included a basement for children's Sunday School rooms. Memories of this Sunday School include a big table with sides up to hold a sandbox for the younger children to play with. The classes were so large that it was a miracle if you were able to hear your teacher above the other classes. Men and women taught the children's classes with men filling the role of superintendents.

By 1930, a few English classes were the first evidence of progress resulting from Sunday School. "Three decades earlier Sunday School was started to keep the church German, but ironically it ended up being the door through which the English language became acceptable in Amish worship. A second significant development in the Sunday School that came about 1934 was the use of published Sunday School lesson helps."⁵

In the early 1930's, the worship service and Sunday School had joined to be held every Sabbath Day, so changes came again. Neither had two hours, so they needed to condense the sermons and likewise the superintendents did not have as much input in Sunday School. Teachers started to have more leadership, with superintendents giving opening comments and closing.

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With such a large congregation many people were called to teach. We find that every teacher would be assigned two benches filled with either men or women and there was not a space or curtain in between. This must have been challenging to hear your teachers thoughts and comments and not the one behind, or in front of, or beside you.

Men traditionally were the superintendents, although women appear to have taught women's classes and children's classes. In 1935, we see the first woman, Lily Mae Schwartzentruber, teaching a youth class. The Mennonite Publishing House at Scottdale, Pennsylvania became an integral part of our Sunday School. Lesson materials were ordered from 1934 for children and adults alike. Writers and editors with great vision and insights developed materials for teacher and students. These materials enabled lay people to teach and learn the scriptures. From the early memory work cards to our lesson books of today we are grateful for the work of the Publishing House.

We have seen many changes over these one hundred years. First, Sunday School instruction happened only in the summer months, and then it became a year round hour of classes. Presently in the summer we

do not have classes by grade, but a more combined format as numbers are greatly reduced.

Teaching has been very important at East Zorra. We also have had major building projects, usually to provide better teaching space. In 1925, an addition of a basement below the cloakroom for women and the ministers room provided more classroom space. The demolition of the old building and the building of a new structure in 1951 provided the church with a full basement divided up into classrooms. In 1997 we built a big education wing on the east end of the church.

As the church building filled to overflowing again and again, sister churches were started at Cassel, Tavistock and Hillcrest, taking superintendents, teachers and pupils along so more people were enabled to develop their skills.

Changes continued to happen. In the 1980's and 1990's we had women taking leadership as superintendents in the Junior Department. In 1995, Arvilla Leis became our first woman superintendent in the Adult Sunday School Department. For the last several years we have had elective Sunday School classes for adults studying videos with topics such as "For Bitter or For Better" by presenter John Drescher.

The Junior Sunday School department has very enthusiastically practised and produced Christmas programs for many years. In March 1981, they did a major musical at Easter "The Storytelling Man" by Ken Medema involving the whole student body. For the 100th Anniversary of Sunday School in May of 2003 they were again involved in drama, German

singing and the musical "Forgiveness in the Family" (the story of Joseph) by Marilyn Houser Hamm. This production involved intergenerational participation.

Sunday school opened the door to the world through missionary activities, stories and the generous support of missions through agencies such as the Mennonite Central Committee and the Mennonite Board of Missions.

The challenge was to balance the desire between keeping things the way they were and opening the door to new programs. Jacob R. Bender (Jacob M. Bender's son) was another innovator who saw the value of Winter Bible School for youth and Summer Bible School for the children. He joyfully participated as a superintendent and teacher. Christian Education has had many blessings such as young people attending Bible Colleges and Seminary, with some going into full time ministry at East Zorra, and around the world. It is gratefully acknowledged that Christian Education has been the seed bed that blossomed into a celebration of one hundred years.

As the kaleidoscope turns, different patterns fall into place. Sunday School changes with every passing generation. We look back and marvel as we see the changes at East Zorra and wonder what the next one hundred years will reveal.

Endnotes

¹ Fred Lichti, **A History of the East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church** (Tavistock, ON 1977) p. 65.

² Ibid. p. 66

³ Ibid. p. 66

⁴ Ibid. p. 66

⁵ Ibid. p. 66



One of the Junior Sunday School department Christmas programs.

PHOTO CREDIT: MENNONITE CHURCH EASTERN CANADA

Shirley J. Wagler is the historian for the East Zorra Mennonite Church. This essay won the J Winfield Fretz Award for local historians.

Book Review

Especially for Mennonites, A Message of Love

by Abraham M. Martin,

(Wellesley, Ontario: P. and L. Shantz
and M. Smith, 2001)

800 pages.

\$40.00

Reviewed by Ed Janzen

Here is a book I bought in the most unlikely of places, the St. Clements Trim Work Factory Outlet. I knew the store because I had purchased trim for home renovations there. I came to know the book because of the stir it created among Woolwich Township Mennonites. I have come to value the book for the insight it provides into one of the most persistent challenges facing Mennonite communities, how a peace-confessing community manages internal conflict with integrity. Abraham Martin and his "own people," as he refers to them, are not unique in their experience of this challenge. When a community experiences exposure of its internal conflict, whether willingly or resistantly, there is an onus on readers to appreciate the community's dignity without gratuitous exacerbation of its vulnerability. There may be lessons of grace and charity to learn from respectful reading. This cautionary pause is suggested by Martin himself; he writes in the conclusion:

If it is read for curiosity's sake and if it creates rejoicing to hear that my people have been so deceived, then may the rejoicing turn to mourning in this time of Grace.
(page 469)

This caution is served well by the text itself. *Especially for Mennonites* is thick reading; understanding it requires considerable time and energy. It is written in seven parts. The first

five parts are a verbatim record of Martin's devotional reading during the years of his estrangement from his worshipping community. Several portions of text in these five parts are underlined; they are the basis for Martin's understanding of his conflict with his community of faith. He lays out this understanding with considerable detail in the final two parts of the book. Martin's writing reflects the archaism of his sources in word choice and aphoristic style. Sometimes his writing is full of the pathos of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, sometimes it reads like an anglicized Luther Bible. Sometimes there is an urgency in the text as if Martin writes to discharge a duty of care for the spiritual health of his people. His concern flows from his conviction that, "a reformation is just as greatly needed now among "Mennonites" as it was needed in Menno's time among the Catholics." (page 5) Martin's concern appears as a strident indictment in his conviction of the apostasy of Mennonites (page 459), that they have come to a deadly fall (page 453) and in his fear that the charges that have been made against him are too much like the sin against the Holy Spirit. (page 468)

In the first five parts, we read excerpts from: the New Testament, *Martyrs' Mirror*, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and a popular catechism known to Martin entitled *Conversations on Saving Faith for the Young*. Excerpts from the New Testament focus on issues of temptation, judgment and resistance to evil. The *Martyrs Mirror* excerpts predictably emphasize the risks of faith and faithfulness in the face of suffering and persecution. Excerpts from Menno Simons highlight his thoughts on excommunication and the judgment of hypocrites. Excerpts from Philips' *Handbook* encourage withdrawal from evil and a godly life. The catechism excerpts encourage diligence

in love and wariness against evil. These readings must have been very dear to Martin; he writes about his years of Sunday and holiday solitude:

I was bereft of human companionship, but the days have been the shortest of my life. The unity in spirit with the departed saints of whom we can read so much of their faith and living testimony, has given me the most desirable companions possible to a person that is yet clothed with this sinful flesh. (page 416)

Not until we come to the final two parts of the text, is there any sense of what Martin's issue is exactly. There are two parts: the first is the substantive issue, the second is how the conflict was handled. The flashpoint issue at the centre of the fuss is tobacco, its use and its justification or lack of justification among Martin's group. However, this is not established until the last part of Martin's writing. The first thing that Martin does is to 'bedrock' his argument in the role of technology in the life of a Christian. Technology, or inventions in Martin's terms, like all of creation, belongs to God. Humanity is free to use whatever may have been created by God for the further glory of God. Technology is good for it assists humanity to "do the work that needs to be done because of the fall of man." (page 418) The more efficiently this work is accomplished the better; it is an opportunity to offer heartfelt gratitude to God for all the gifts of life and to share its increase with others. Martin writes, "we actually owe the excess to those who have more need of it than we do ourselves." (page 440)

Two things compromise the righteous use of technology and things in general according to Martin:

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when they are used to serve fleshly lusts, that is, to satisfy selfish desires, and, when it is assumed that rules are needed to govern their use. The former reveals the carnality of all “creations.” The latter argues the carnality of rules as nothing more than the creations of the “brains of men,” doubly carnal for being the carnal creation of a carnal being. Martin’s greater concern is with the rules because they confuse obedience with salvation. (page 419) Such rule-making places Mennonites firmly among the apostate: “fearing the Holy Spirit will not govern the church,” lacking in true repentance, unfaithful to baptismal covenants, perpetuating misunderstanding of the true church, and honouring the creation more than the Creator. (page 435) Finally, we arrive at Martin’s understanding of the tobacco issue; it serves ‘fleshly lusts’ and the rules governing its use compromise baptismal covenant fidelity. It joins other things which might similarly cause compromise and ought to be avoided: various media such as musical instruments, radio, television,

sports and magazines, the irrational denial of conveniences, the celebration of Christmas, family life celebrations like weddings and funerals. (pages 419, 423, 428, 440, 441)

When Martin came to these convictions, he shared them actively with ministers, sending letters when he found that talking only made matters worse. Eventually he sent 400 letters sharing his concerns, one to each member of his group. (pages 461, 462) In response, he states he was accused “heavily from the pulpit” for disturbing the peace, wanting to tell the deacons what to do, having a strong-headed spirit, and “trying to make a big name” for himself. (pages 458, 460, 461) The result, Martin writes, was his expulsion, though he was accused of “cutting himself off from the church.” (page 461) It is difficult to imagine any other outcome given what seems to be intransigence and inability to find mutually satisfactory solutions from both sides. Perhaps the most poignant evidence of tragic alienation in all of this is Martin’s letter to his grandchildren, outlining the “other side” of the argument. His

concern indicates that not even his family was spared alienation.

In the end, Martin’s book stands as a testament to the greatest challenge of Christian faith, to live it faithfully. This is a clear example of how the central dynamics of Christian community, integrity, faithfulness, compassion, humility and conciliation can become entangled by the power of personal conviction and the dire consequences which flow when it is exercised. There can be no Christian community without personal conviction and nothing needs wisdom and charity more than the expression of such conviction. The irony is that the theological core of Martin’s argument is not contrary to good Christian theology. The greatest gift this book may offer the reader is the prayerful pause which comes of trying to understand how to exercise personal conviction with the wisdom and grace of Christ. Such a reputation would be worthy of being made a spectacle.

*Ed Janzen lives in
New Hamburg, Ontario.*

Book Notes

Laureen Harder-Gissing, author of *Risk and Endurance* (Waterloo: Stirling Ave. Mennonite Church, 2003) documents the first 75 years of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church. Harder-Gissing, herself a member of the church, describes the historical context of the community and church that gave rise to this congregation. It was started in 1924 as a dissident group, which included minister U.K. Weber, that broke away from First Mennonite Church in Kitchener and the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. She tells of how it survived many years outside of all conference structures, but maintained its Anabaptist values. It is now a member of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. \$18.69

Lucille Marr, author of *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2003) 390 pages, tells how MCC in Ontario began and changed over the years. There is lots of material in the Mennonite Archives at Conrad Grebel and Goshen available on this topic. Combined with interviews of those directly involved with its formation, Marr details the many ways that the various Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups worked together to show the world their belief in service and peace. She also sheds light on the contribution and significant role of women in MCCO. \$38.00.

Paul M. Lederach, author of *Seeking What Cannot be Seen: The Blooming Glen Mennonite Congregation, 250 Years 1753-2003* (Blooming Glen, PA: Blooming Glen Mennonite, 2003) 184 pages, uses personal diaries, artwork, books, periodicals, meeting minutes and photographs to help tell the long history of this Francona Conference congregation. This Pennsylvania church over the years has often been on the leading edge of many trends affecting the larger church. \$25.00 US.

People and Projects

CALL FOR PAPERS

A history conference examining the interaction between North American Mennonites and refugees will take place on September 30 and October 1, 2005, at the University of Winnipeg. Called *Mennonites and Refugees: A 25 Year Retrospective*, the conference is held on the 25th anniversary of the coming of the so-called Vietnamese "Boat People" and other Southeast Asian refugees in 1979/1980. This was a time when many Canadian and American Mennonites became directly involved in refugee sponsorship.

Research papers are welcomed on one of the following four themes:

- 1) the historic, cultural and theological context which led North American Mennonites to take leading roles in refugee sponsorship programs;
- 2) the cross-cultural experience of both the refugees and the Mennonite hosts during the months of actual sponsorship and settlement
- 3) the organizational response by Mennonite institutions such as MCC Canada and other institutions to the coming of the refugees
- 4) the long-term inter-ethnic relationships — direct and indirect — between Canadian/American Mennonites and newcomers from the southern hemisphere, specifically those from Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia

The conference organizers also welcome submissions for storytelling by both hosts and refugees.

Please send proposals to:
Royden Loewen,
Chair in Mennonite Studies,
University of Winnipeg,
515 Portage Ave., Winnipeg,

Manitoba, Canada. R3B 2E9 or email to r.Loewen@uwinnipeg.ca

The conference will take place in Eckhardt Gramatte Hall at the University of Winnipeg on Friday, September 30 and Saturday, October 1, 2005

The conference is hosted by the Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg. It is sponsored by the Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites subcommittee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada with funds from Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

Members of the Planning Committee include: Sandy Dooley, Ionka Hristozova, Larry Kehler, Royden Loewen, Ken Reddig, Stephanie Stobbe, Tim Wichert.
from news release

SOUND IN THE LAND

Sound in the Land, a Festival/Conference of Mennonite-Rooted People and their Music is being planned for May 28-30, 2004 at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo to celebrate the wide array of Mennonite-rooted music making, from four-part to funk; jazz to 'Just as I Am'; song fest to folk; chamber trio to techno. "Mennonite-rooted" music refers to music composed/ performed by individuals with Mennonite roots and/or present affiliations. This first-time, multi-genred, interdisciplinary event will bring together composers, songwriters, performing musicians of varied styles, writers, and scholars who wish to contribute musically or verbally/academically via compositions, performances, workshops, creative writings, collaborative works or scholarly papers.

Sound in the Land will be both a festival with multiple concerts,

performances, mini-concerts, workshops, possible jam sessions/ reading sessions, and an academic conference addressing issues of Mennonite-rooted peoples and their music making in terms of ethnicity, cultural studies, or musical/ theoretical/ historical analysis. Collaborative projects pairing Mennonite composers and creative writers are also invited. Composers/musicians are strongly encouraged to bring along their own performers, especially for jazz/folk/ rock submissions, for which limited funds will be provided. Professional musicians & singers will also be hired, determined by scoring needs, budget, & festival performers' participation.

Full-length evening concerts will include music by various selected composers while daytime mini-concerts and workshops, 30 to 45 minutes in length, will involve single or multiple composers/performers. Multi-media and/or collaborative works will also be programmed. Twenty-minute conference papers and readings will be scheduled during daytime sessions, with extra discussion time provided for each presenter. For more information and registration check out the *Sound in the Land* website: www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/soundinland or email Carol Ann Weaver at watserv1.uwaterloo.ca/~caweaver.
from news release

WHS 90th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

The Waterloo Historical Society has printed its 90th anniversary of the annual volume. It was distributed in May of this year and is dedicated to Miriam Snyder Sokvitne. Many of the articles have a Mennonite connection.

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A few of the articles are:

On page 21 is *Snyder's Corner — The History of G.C.T. Lot 63: Schneider, Snyder and Snider on Lot 63* by Ellis Little (with many details from Roy Snyder). Lot 63 contained four farms near and on Northfield Drive, Bridge Street and what was Country Squire Road. The only buildings left are what is now Timeless Material Inc. and a decrepit springhouse on Bridge Street not far from Martin's Meetinghouse. (WHS and MHSO member Marion Roes lives very close to or on a part of what is/was Lot 63 and likes to think the picture of the oxen was taken near her home.) On page 33 is *A Place Called Bloomingdale: Uncovering Two Hundred Years of History* by Angela McLean. and which won the WHS Local History Award for 2002 from the University of Waterloo History Department. It, too, has much information about the Schneiders. Both articles have lots of pictures.

On page 58 is *Twin City Dairies* an overview of many dairies in K-W, some of which were started by Mennonites.

Volumes are available to read at Conrad Grebel UC Library, and to read and buy at the Grace Schmidt Room Kitchener Public Library. WHS Annual Volume is \$20. *submitted by Marion Roes*

DOORS OPEN

On Saturday, September 20, 2003 many of Waterloo Region's historically significant buildings were open to the public free of charge because of an event called *Doors Open*. It was part of the county's 150th anniversary celebrations. Hundreds of people visited each of the sites, taking advantage of the opportunity to see the many buildings available for viewing, many which are not normally open to the general public.

There were many sites of Mennonite heritage included in the event; Brubacher House, the Detweiler Meetinghouse, Joseph Schneider Haus, J. Steckle Heritage Homestead, and the West Montrose covered bridge. MHSO members Karl Kessler and Marion Roes, who are also members of the Waterloo Historical Society were heavily involved in planning the event.

FROM GUTENBERG TO GIGABYTES

John Sharp, archivist at the Mennonite Archive in Goshen, Indiana calls his project to make millions of Mennonite documents available to the world via the Internet *From Gutenberg to Gigabytes*. The Goshen archive, which was started in 1937 by the former Mennonite Church, contains about 12 million documents ranging from official records of congregations, conferences and agencies to personal letters and diaries. There are over 900 personal collections on file at the archive. These include the collections of John Funk, John Howard Yoder and Harold Bender. Much of the work is being done by volunteers to sort and prepare the documents for scanning. In this way people from around the world will be able to access documents, letters and photographs, many which are too old and brittle for public viewing.

The hope is to also include the documents of the archive at North Newton, Kansas sometime in the future. Founded in 1936 by the General Conference Mennonite Church it comprises of over 11 million documents. *from Mennonite Church USA News Service*

MHSO WEBSITE

This past summer Jennifer Toews, a student hired by MHSO, worked on the web page and contacted

congregations to get updated entries from them. Half the cost of Jennifer's wages were paid by Young Canada Works. Thanks to the tireless work of Toews the new MHSO website available to all interested people is now close to becoming a reality. The web site still needs some design work from Peaceworks, a website design company. Sam Steiner, MHSO president, is pleased with the content of the website. All the texts of the newsletters, *Ontario Mennonite History* and *Mennogesprach*, will be available online, and will be searchable. There will also be some out-of-print books and articles that can be accessed. There will also be a page to promote membership in the historical society.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the last issue of *Ontario Mennonite History* a printing error occurred at the bottom of page two. The last line was somehow deleted, making it difficult for readers to understand the first line on page three. The entire paragraph dealing with worship services should have read as follows:

"An Old Order worship service of today is amazingly similar to that described by Krehbiel in 1841. A Sunday morning service is two hours long and includes two sermons, two or three hymns, and two prayers. Krehbiel doesn't mention whether they knelt for prayer, but sources toward the end of the century indicate that was the common practice. Even today, Old Order Mennonites stand, turn around and kneel at the benches for the two prayers during the service."

FRETZ AWARDS

There were several entries in all categories of this year's J. Winfield Fretz Awards. The winner in the local historian category was Shirley J. Wagler

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for her paper, *A Century of Christian Education*, describing the role of Sunday School at East Zorra Mennonite Church. In the undergraduate category 1st prize went to David A. Martin for his paper, *Mennonite Fundamentalism and the Hawkesville Brethren: An examination of the origins of the Wallenstein Bible Chapel and its impact on the Local Mennonite Community*. Second prize went to Bethany Seiling for her entry *Uncovering my Maternal Ancestry*. In the graduate category two 1st prizes were awarded. The winners were Paul Tiessen for *On Learning to Read Gordon Christian Eby's Diary (1911-19)*, and to Lisa M. Wenger for *Unser Satt Leit: Our Sort of People; Health Understandings in the Old Order Mennonite and Amish Community*.

GREBEL TURNS FORTY

Conrad Grebel University College celebrated its 40th anniversary on the weekend of August 22 to 24, 2003. Highlights of the weekend were events featuring music by several alumni musicians. There was a worship service which included a reunion choir, as well as *Grebelfolk*, a less formal music program which included many former students. There were four hundred former students, faculty and staff who attended the festivities. Included were special guests J. Winfield Fretz of Kansas, Conrad Grebel's first president. Fretz was also the first president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, as well as the driving force behind the formation of MHSO. *from Canadian Mennonite*

SCOTT STREET MB TURNS 60

On the weekend of October 18 to 19, 2003, the Scott Street

Mennonite Brethren Church in St. Catharines, Ontario celebrated its 60th anniversary under the theme from Psalm 100 "Celebrating God's faithfulness." A large turnout was there to hear former pastors such as pioneer pastor Henry Penner reminisce. English, German and youth choirs sang at the various services. A wonderful power point historical summary was done by Frank Wiens. Planning for the event was under the leadership of present pastor Patrick Bartley and his associates. *submitted by Ed Boldt, MB Church Historian*

HARROW CELEBRATES

One of Canada's most southerly Mennonite congregations recently reached a milestone. Harrow Mennonite Church of Essex County was established in 1953, so on the weekend of October 11 to 12, 2003 they celebrated their 50th anniversary.

ST. CLAIR O'CONNOR TURNS 20

On September 27-28, St. Clair O'Connor Community, a multigenerational housing facility sponsored by Mennonites, celebrated its 20th anniversary. The event, organized by the staff and Mennonite Heritage Club, was based on the theme, "Building on a Mennonite tradition."

The program included music, tours and displays. A Sunday morning service of thanksgiving was led jointly by the two founding churches. Gary Harder from Toronto United Mennonite Church led worship, and Tim Reimer from Danforth Mennonite Church gave the message. A buffet lunch followed. Reimer, reflecting on the multi-generational nature of the community, quoted Zechariah 8:4-5: "Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff

in hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."

A highlight was the unveiling of a Mennonite History Wall with 16 panels that trace the roots of Mennonites in the Toronto area. The wall was funded with donations in honour of the 25th wedding anniversary of Victor and Rosemarie Heinrichs.

Marta Goertzen Armin, an artist and resident of St. Clair O'Connor, donated a painting: "My Grandmother's house in Schantzenfeld near Winkler." *from Canadian Mennonite*

LANGS FARM VILLAGE 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Langs Farm Village Association in Cambridge celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. It began as Preston Mennonite Church's response to the high-density community that was springing up around it.

The former Lang's farm, adjacent to the church, became the site of town houses, semi-detached homes and subsidized housing, with about 3,000 residents. With this rapid growth came social isolation and other needs. Vandalism became prevalent.

The congregation approved an outreach worker, community ministry committee and a small expense budget. Since 1980, the church building accommodates various programs and activities.

Preston church helped establish a Spiritual Discovery Group. Members also supplied home baking for a Breakfast Program. To enable Langs Farm Village children and mothers to experience summer camp at Hidden Acres, they contribute "birthday offerings" and drivers. They also support families with gifts and vouchers at Christmas and sponsor an annual community event. *from Canadian Mennonite*