

# The Messenger

EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE  
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... a church  
on the move

pages 8-13



**Evangelical Anabaptism: Is it relevant today?**  
See pastors' responses, pages 3-5

## Thanksgiving and realism

**I**N Thanksgiving, let's be realistic. When some Christians read "in everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18) and "giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20), they feel obligated to thank God for the ugly side of life. This is unnecessary.

Os Guinness says such an emphasis "contradicts much of the Bible" and "can also be psychologically damaging."

He says, "Don't force yourself to thank God for these things or you will be harder on yourself and softer on evil than God is. It is not that *even* the Christian need not give thanks for these but that the Christian *especially* should not give thanks for them" (*In Two Minds*, pp. 280-282).

John Stott writes "we cannot thank God for absolutely 'everything,' including blatant evil" (*God's New Society*, p. 207).

The focus of Romans 8:28 is not on "all things" (some of which are bad), but on how God in his sovereignty is committed to

work for good in our lives.

What we can be thankful for is that, no matter what, God is with us. He is working in our lives for good in bad situations. Yet such a perspective is not easy to reach—pastors and people need to be patient.

This Thanksgiving, families grapple with deaths in the family, crops that fail, BSE-closed borders, Hurricane Juan, West Nile Virus, unemployment, illness, and tragedy—and more. Hurting, they need not say it is good. Yet they are not forsaken.

It was an apostle, stoned and left for dead, often in danger, repeatedly imprisoned and ultimately beheaded who wrote the verses quoted above. The apostle Paul knew not all was good. Rather, Paul followed the Crucified Christ who triumphed, and he had confidence that because of Him, we will triumph also. In this, we can join in giving thanks.

Terry M. Smith

## Concerns shared at CMU

**O**N September 24 it was my privilege to speak at an EMC student luncheon at Canadian Mennonite University. Reflecting on my journey and the role of institutions, I made three points.

*First, we need to gently face our questions.* Pick your questions—not all are equally important. Be patient with yourself and others as you work out answers. Continue to be part of Sunday worship and study groups—no matter what.

Remember that our faith is ultimately grounded in revelation that happened in history and given in Scripture; its basis is stronger than our individual understanding of it.

*Second, let's not pit Anabaptism and Evangelicalism against each other.* I agree with Ronald Sider who says we need each other. Nelson Kraybill, president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, has said, "I don't have to try hard to muster complaints about North American evangelicalism. But then I can do the same with the Mennonite church, and I know too well my own failures.

"I have resolved to stop comparing the best of my Anabaptist heritage with the worst of

evangelicalism. Early Anabaptism was, at its core, evangelical: Christ-centred, biblical, confessional, and invitational. Mennonites in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will profit from drinking at the streams of contemporary evangelicalism—but we must also dip back into the spiritual wells of evangelical witness in our own heritage" (p. 6, *Our Faith*, Summer 2003).

*Third, we must refuse to choose between evangelism and social justice.* There is no substitute for evangelism or for social justice. Yet in some EMC churches the link between evangelism and social justice is weak.

We now know it was wrong when William Carey, the Baptist cobbler, was told many years, "Young man, sit down! When God wants decides to convert the heathen, He will do so without your help or mine."

During the civil rights protest of the 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr., was told, "I believe in integration, but I know it will not come until God wants it to come. You Negroes should stop protesting and start praying" (p.149, *Strength to Love*). Yes, Dr. King responded, prayer was needed, but protest was too.

Terry M. Smith

### The Messenger

EDITOR

Terry M. Smith



ASSISTANT EDITOR

Rebecca Buhler

**THE MESSENGER** is the publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. It is available to the general public. Its purpose is to inform, instruct and inspire: inform concerning events and activities in the denomination; instruct in godliness and victorious living; inspire to earnestly contend for the faith.

Letters, articles, photos and poems are welcomed. Unpublished material is not returned except by request. The views and opinions expressed by the writers are their own and do not necessarily represent the position of the Conference.

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**Mailing information:** All correspondence, including undelivered copies, change of address and new subscriptions, should be addressed to:

The Messenger  
P.O. Box 1268  
Steinbach, Manitoba  
R0A 2A0

Phone: 204-326-6401

Fax: 204-326-1613

E-mail: [emcmessenger@mts.net](mailto:emcmessenger@mts.net)

Portions available at

[www.emconf.ca/Messenger](http://www.emconf.ca/Messenger)

**MESSENGER SCHEDULE:**  
No. 19 - November 5  
(copy due October 24)

Editor's note: In 1970, editor Dave K. Schellenberg asked church leaders to comment on The Church, is it relevant today?

## Now, leaders are asked to discuss Evangelical Anabaptism: Is it Relevant Today?

# A practical interpretation of Jesus' command and commission

Pastor Jacob Enns

**I**S Evangelical Anabaptism relevant today? First, we do well to understand what it is. Anabaptists believe in living as a faith community, separate from the world by voluntary choice. They are believers who have upon personal request received adult baptism on their confession of sin and their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

The Evangelical Anabaptist lifestyle is a practical interpretation of the great commandment and great commission of Jesus Christ regarding peace and love for God and one's neighbours and seeking to win them for the Kingdom of Heaven—including one's enemies. Jesus followed a life of self denial and reconciliation at the ultimate personal cost—his life—and taught his followers to do likewise.

Evangelical Anabaptism views the world through the eyes of Christ. Evangelical Anabaptism tries to practice the values that Christ preached. It is a complete shift in focus from the accepted worldview where personal well-being and comfort are the main objective in life.

In Evangelical Anabaptism the greatest serve as the least, the

rich become poor, and the wise become as fools in the eyes of the world. It is, as Donald Kraybill describes in his book *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, truly an upside down life in contrast to this world. Now the question is, "Does it work?"

**W**HAT Christ called his followers to be and do was and is still diametrically opposed to the values and principles of this world. The philosophy of modern culture is to live at the expense of one's neighbour. Get others to do as much for you while you do as little for them as possible. While the world preaches self-deification as the road to greatness, Christ preached humility, service and self control as the guide to true greatness.

The world believes in control through power, and through violence if necessary. Anabaptists believe in winning through the power of sacrificial love. The world

views that as weakness. Jesus proclaimed a message of peace without the use of force. He loved without condition and he was known for giving grace to sinners. Jesus taught and practiced peace, and his values and teachings were taken as a serious threat by the established power structures of his day.

Because of Jesus' teaching and practice, he had to be eliminated by those who disagreed with him. When Jesus was crucified and put in the tomb, for all intents and purposes it looked as if all he had tried to do was lost. However what looked like a failure was a success. His suffering brought healing to mankind. Christ called his followers to incarnate his lifestyle even to the point of death for the sake of others—even enemies.

For the sake of peace and being a witness Anabaptists choose to suffer rather than inflict suffering. That is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of ultimate Christ-like strength. The way of the sword and self-deification has been and is being tried by the world over and over again. The way of peace has yet to be tried by the world. The way of peace has not, as Gilbert K. Chesterton said of Christianity—"been tried and found wanting, but rather, found and left untried."

The Evangelical Anabaptist way of life is challenging because it calls one to self-crucifixion. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it cannot bear fruit" John 12:24. Suffering and death are not to the Evangelical Anabaptist what they are to the world. To Evangelical Anabaptists suffering and death is the road to life. For the world it is the road to death. ■

Evangelical  
Anabaptism  
views the  
world  
through the  
eyes of Christ.



Jacob Enns is pastor of Tilbury EMC in Ontario.

# I stumble over terms and go to Scripture

Pastor Earl Unger

**W**HEN I think of Evangelical Anabaptism and its possible relevance in today's world, I stumble over the words themselves. Anabaptist thinking dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, while evangelicalism arose in reaction to the excesses of fundamentalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, a wide range of church groups such as Lutherans, Baptists and Mennonites all call themselves evangelical. Because labels can be deceiving, I felt compelled to do some research to discover just what *Evangelical Anabaptism* means.

I discovered this to be a movement characterized by an insistence on discipleship as the essence of Christianity, on the church as a brotherhood, and on an ethic of love and non-resistance. This is an understanding of the church that was rediscovered by radical reformers like Menno Simons and Conrad Grebel.

Now in your own minds I want you to picture the ideal church. We'll never live up this ideal, I know, but play along with me anyway. What would this church look like? What would it be called? What would it teach? How would its people live? What would their values be? For my purposes your answers to these questions are not as important as from where you would take your cue in forming your opinions.

Would your thinking immediately go back to Grebel, Manz and Blaurock, or Menno Simons? In the canvas of my mind, when I paint a picture of the ideal church I don't turn to the forefathers of the Anabaptist movement, as good, righteous and pious as they were. Nor do I turn to Augustine or any of the early church fathers. Rather, I take my directives from something more ancient and more reliable—God's revelation to us, the Bible.

I pastor a church that has a clearly defined purpose of reaching the under-churched and over-churched. If Evangelical Anabaptism is relevant, it must be relevant for these kind of people. So, I ask myself what, above all else, do we want these people to be like once they have been disciplined by our church? Am I asking these people to become Mennonites? Am I asking them to become Anabaptists? Am I asking them to become Evangelical Anabaptists?

As valuable as these terms are, I have to answer no to all these questions. Our quest as a church is to effectively



Earl Unger pastors Stony Brook Fellowship (EMC) in Steinbach, Manitoba.

# Let's rise up on two powerful legs

Pastor Ward Parkinson

**A**S I write this, the World Athletic Championships are centre stage in Paris, France.

I've always been a fan of track and field. In my school days my wannabe athlete status seemed within reach. Now, with my hairline and waistline creeping inexorably in opposite directions, I resign myself to admiring from the sidelines the exquisite accomplishments of top-level athletes. While certainly not as glamorous as other events, there is one discipline—the shot put—that provides a metaphor for my thoughts on evangelical Anabaptism.

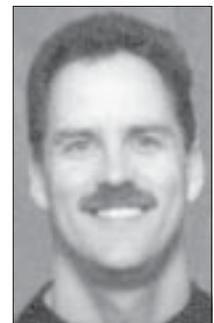
In the shot put event, the object is to launch or put a heavy ball (the shot) from one's shoulder so that it flies as far as possible. The shot put athlete must combine brute strength with precise technique in order to propel this heavy ball an optimum distance. With one leg, he or she summons as much power thrust as possible. The other leg must provide corresponding control and balance in order to remain within the throwing circle. Overstepping the line disqualifies the throw.

As one who encountered the Evangelical Anabaptist tradition only as an adult, I have come to appreciate what it represents. I see each of these adjectives (Evangelical, Anabaptist) as inseparable to the church's identity and mission—like the two legs of an athlete.

One leg, *Evangelical*, provides the thrust, becomes the driving force of the church. The clear mandate of the church is to make disciples, to bring the message of the gospel to others. There is an urgency to the gospel message. Without Jesus, people are lost. This year our Conference has celebrated the way in which this urgency has been recaptured in the last fifty years.

The danger in allowing this leg to weaken and atrophy is, I trust, obvious. We fall into the trap of prizing our stability. We note with pride that our controlling leg never comes close to going over that line. But without evangelistic passion, without an urgent message to convey, we are without relevance. In missions, church planting, and personal witnessing, we must use this thrusting leg to drive us onward. The shot must fly, after all.

The other leg, *Anabaptism*, provides stability, balance, and definition to the effort. This refers to the content and the living out of our faith. Our Anabaptist forebears sought



Ward Parkinson is pastor of Morris Fellowship Chapel (EMC) in Manitoba.

communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unsaved so that they will respond to God's call of salvation. Our aim is not to try to convert people into Evangelical Anabaptists, but into born-again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. As a designation, then, such people would be called *Christ-followers* or Christians. Mennonite writer Eric Kouns says,

The Anabaptist vision requires that we recognize what the first Anabaptists were actually attempting to accomplish—not the creation of a new phenomenon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but the recovery of the Spirit of the Christianity of the first century. Church history began with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon believers in Jerusalem, not with the baptism of Grebel, Manz, and Blaurock in Zurich.

Now let me put your minds at ease by assuring you that I believe the gospel of Jesus Christ includes living a life of discipleship and living a life of peace. These are terms usually used in defining *Evangelical Anabaptism*. So, to answer the question, "Is Evangelical Anabaptism relevant today?" I say that as far as Evangelical Anabaptism points us to the study and application of God's Word to our personal lives and away from clinging to an intermediate point of history as the pinnacle of theological thought or following fallible human beings, my answer is an emphatic Yes!

If I had a wish, it would be that we would abandon the typical labels like *Evangelical*, *Anabaptist*, *Evangelical Anabaptist*, and especially *Mennonite* in favour of seeing ourselves simply as disciples of Jesus Christ, the way Luke described believers in the book of Acts.

Disciples of Jesus Christ see themselves as sinners redeemed by Christ's gracious work at Calvary, which they receive by faith. And their reason for existence is simply to proclaim what Jesus taught and assist in the building of his kingdom till he returns. If that is the essence of *Evangelical Anabaptism*, then it has never been more relevant! ■

with all their hearts to be obedient to Scripture, often at great cost. We have inherited a great biblical tradition that emphasizes radical discipleship, and an allegiance to one kingdom only, the Kingdom of God.

The danger in ignoring or downplaying this leg is that we become sloppy and lazy. We care only for distance and forget about proper technique. In the end, both are compromised. We prize numbers, size, reach, while our distinctiveness from the world's way of thinking and our allegiance to that one Kingdom weakens.

I recall watching a Christian speaker in the United States take time in his presentation to give tribute to the various sectors of the military (Army, Navy, Marines) represented in his audience. This was followed by a rousing rendition of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. All very stirring, especially since September 11. I couldn't help but wonder, though: Whose kingdom was being served? Whose truth was marching on? Just as the true competitive athlete is distinguished by discipline and training that surpasses the rest, the church must be distinctive by her differentness. Her unique allegiance must be clear.

A question: In the shot put, does the stabilizing leg impede the launching of the shot? That is really the question being asked in regard to Anabaptism's relevance. Does our Mennonite tradition get in the way of evangelism?

As the Lord instructs us through Paul, to win the prize the athlete must compete according to the rules (2 Tim. 2:5). The context reveals this to mean working diligently at being biblical, handling accurately the word of truth. So long as our spiritual heritage is true to Scripture, it will enhance and direct our launching efforts. How can something that essentially defines us impede us?

This radical discipleship, this Kingdom allegiance—the world hungers for it because it knows it not. It is what makes us salty. If our thrusting leg is the light of the world, then our controlling leg is the salt of the earth. Even in Matthew 5, one without the other is inconceivable. Let us rise up on two powerful legs, and aim for the prize. ■

Answers to

Kids'  
Corner

September 24, 2003

Jeroboam  
Saul  
David  
Esther  
Solomon  
Ahab  
Jezebel

Esther means star.

## Remember the Persecuted on November 16

November 16 is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP). Right now around the world over 200 million people are suffering for their faith.

Join with Christians in over 100 countries to stand with our suffering sisters and brothers and pray for God's peace and grace in the midst of suffering and hostility. Pray for the physical needs and safety of suffering Christians and their families. Pray for the persecutors. And thank God for His faithfulness in the midst of tribulation.

This year's theme is *Pray for us* (2 Thessalonians 3:1-3): "Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly...and pray that we may be

delivered from wicked and evil men." Focus countries this year are China, Ethiopia, Iran and Nepal.

Church worship kits are available. Churches and groups can choose original paper kit, a CD-ROM kit with a PowerPoint presentation, or a teacher's kit for Christian educators. The kit can be purchased and downloaded online (some components will arrive by mail).

IDOP Canada's partnership includes the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, of which EMC is a member. Order by mail (IDOP Canada, M.I.P. Box 3745, Markham, ON, L3R 0Y4), phone 905-479-5885, or online at [www.idop.ca](http://www.idop.ca).

IDOP

# With Our Missionaries



## Window on Missions

Lester Olfert  
Foreign Secretary

THE HOT days of summer are gone. Farmers have harvested most of their crops. Just the other day I cleaned up our garden because frost was in the forecast. Only the carrots are left to dig.

I'm reminded of the prophet Jeremiah's words, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). Jeremiah laments the fact that they as a people are still living in exile, living under oppressive rule. They were looking to Jehovah to liberate (save) them.

There are many people in this world whose heart cry may be similar. They live in dark, politically oppressive situations. These are real needs. Others live in spiritual bondage and are waiting for someone to come and save them. These are real needs too.

As a person committed to evangelism and missions, I have a special concern for spiritual needs of people. Daily I am reminded of hundreds of millions of people in our world who need the saving news of Christ.

Many are in spiritual darkness out of touch with the living, eternal God, unaware of their real plight. Nevertheless, they long for light to illuminate their darkness.

People groups are at different stages of openness to the message of Jesus. Our missionaries work in areas with varying degrees of openness. But when Jesus stepped beyond the normal Jewish comfort zone and into the territory of Samaritans, he showed his disciples how people can surprise us by their interest (John 4).

People can be like the Samaritans that Jesus compared to a ripened harvest. In fact, Jesus rebuked the disciples and said, "You say, Four months more and then the harvest. I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35-36).

Let's get involved in the harvest! How?

- Does your pastor preach on missions?
- What is your church doing to recruit more workers for the spiritual harvest? Many youth from our churches are in Bible college or university preparing for their future careers. Are we challenging them to be involved in the harvest? Do we encourage them to consider cross-cultural missions as a career?

- Does your church have a vision for starting a daughter church nearby? Canada

## The harvest is over and we are not saved

is a place of growing spiritual needs.

- Does your church have a missions committee? If not, start one. If you have one, what difference does it really make in the vision and action of the congregation? To keep the vision of missions alive in your church, are copies of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary mission book distributed?
- Many churches are planning a missions

emphasis during fall and winter months. Is this a one-time shot or an expression of an on-going concern?

- Are we open to answer God's call to send someone from our church, our family, or even to go ourselves?

Harvest time is an exciting time when we see the ripened fields and respond.

How is your congregation responding? How are you responding?

### Oasis, Mexico

## Adjustments in Mexico

Greetings from Mexico! Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints (Philemon 1:3-7).

I have been very sick for over a week this past month. We are not sure whether it was just a flu virus or related to all the changes of living in this climate. It got very discouraging and somewhat overwhelming to be so sick and not have medical facilities nearby.

Martha has been extremely busy getting ready to teach English and Music at Oasis EMC School. Materials are very hard to get and so she has had to piece together her lesson plans for the start of classes. School has been going for a couple of weeks now and it is going very well.

Our Mexico Missionary Staff Retreat took place August 25 to 29 at Santo Thomas, an EMC camp and retreat centre. We sang a lot, prayed together, had devotions and sessions together and enjoyed eating and playing games together.

The place itself is unique—an eight or nine hour drive into the hills of Mexico. It meant passing through a lot of towns and villages where you felt like you were driving into people's yards (sheep, cattle, horses, chickens beside your vehicle) and up steep mountain paths until we came to the centre.

It was fairly rustic but quite adequate. The scenery was incredible—gently rolling hills, sheep in the pastures, lots of shrubbery and trees, incredible sunsets, and some amazing lightning storms. How

fortunate we were to have this event take place only one month after arriving on the field.

The church at Oasis has made us feel welcome and have done their part in making us feel at home here. They couldn't control the temperature, but they did make sure our cooling system worked.

The needs of people are similar no matter which country one is in and sometimes they can tend to become overwhelming—overwhelming to us but not to the great God we serve. It is our prayer that God will be able to use us in the work for the kingdom here. Pray that as a church we will grow spiritually and that we might be effective in living out our Christian Life everyday of the week in every aspect of life.

Pray also for the financial welfare of the people here. This year's peanut and cotton crops look very good; pray that they will be able to harvest them in good shape. The watermelon crop did not do well; many of the watermelon were of poor quality and the prices were not nearly as good as last year's. This reflects directly on our church and school budgets.

We are encouraged in our work but continue to covet your prayers as we seek to be effective in the ministry God has called us to.

Peter Doerksen



Peter and Martha Doerksen (Grande Prairie) serve as pastoral couple of Oasis EMC in northern Mexico.

## Downs and ups of KwaZulu tent outreach

The first major upset to our tent ministry was in May last year when it burned to the ground. We replaced it with a new and larger one after which we had our second upset a month ago. It got ripped apart in a major windstorm. The factory was able to repair it and we were about ready to start again with our meetings when we had our last upset.

A key volunteer to the tent ministry, Dumiseni Fakude, was fetching water from a nearby canal at home when he fell in and drowned. He was a saved member of a family that is otherwise loyal to an African syncretistic religious sect.

The Evangelical Church where Dumiseni attended took charge of the funeral which was held at the home where he grew up. It was a wonderful testimony to the home and community. Four came forward during the altar call after the evangelistic message at the funeral.

We hope to start again with our tent meetings on September 25.

Despite the setbacks the Lord is blessing our ministry. Well over 300 have already been saved in our meetings this year in a total of 17 weeks of meetings at five venues.

Earlier this year we ventured into urban settings for the first time and learned some good lessons on the value of pre-meeting advertising, pre-arrangement of meeting sites and suitable toilet facilities.

With one exception we're pleased with the follow-up that the churches are doing with the new converts so we believe that most of the fruit will remain.

At one place the nearby-established evangelical church has now started a fledgling church. The place where the tent was torn from the windstorm was near a town. When the mayor heard the news of the tent's departure he organized for another tent to be pitched and then the local church carried on with the meetings on their own initiative. The Lord is working!

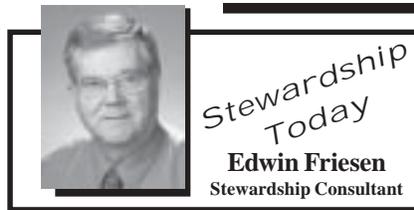
Joe Reimer



Olga and Joe Reimer (Blumenort) are involved in evangelism in South Africa.



The Evangelical Church Tent Committee is involved in setting meeting dates, arranging venues, and assuring that follow-up happens.



### BEING INTENTIONAL

I AM always fascinated by people's theories and stories about money.

Often after one of my presentations or in private encounters, people will share their rules of thumb about how they manage their money. Though it is often assumed that people who manage their money well must have a detailed, written budget or spending plan, a fat income, or a fancy accounting program to track their money, many of these people don't.

This might lead the casual observer to conclude that these folks operate simply by the seat of their pants. Nothing could be further from the truth. People who manage their money well have adopted certain maxims, or rules of thumb, which guide their financial decisions.

Usually these rules are not written down but are clearly understood by the person/couple and people commit to these self-imposed rules with great zeal. In short, people who do well with money are people who are very intentional with their money.

Following are some of the rules of thumb that I have gleaned from people over the years. They are not given in any particular order nor do they represent a systematic approach to financial management.

- When you get your paycheque, immediately give your tithe/first-fruits gift to God.
- Don't put all your (investment) eggs into one basket.
- Borrow only for stable and appreciating assets (land, house, education).



Dumiseni Fakude (left) drowned recently. On the right is evangelist, Rev. Thulebona Mafuleka.

- Never go into debt of any kind.
- Clear all purchases over \$100 with your spouse.
- Keep total monthly debt obligations to less than 30 percent of take home pay.
- Pay off credit cards in full each and every month.
- Deposit half or all of the monthly child tax credit into a fund designated for that child's post-secondary education.
- When shopping for a house, look for homes that are not more than 2.5 times your annual household income.
- In a two-income household, live on 1.5 incomes and invest the balance.
- Save all your pocket change and reward yourself with an annual weekend retreat.
- Use half of your annual tax refund to make an additional lump sum payment on your mortgage or other debt.
- Deposit at least five percent of income into retirement funds.
- Keep records of income and spending.
- Pay all bills as they come due.

Are there rules of thumb you follow in managing your money? What have you learned about money that you could pass on to others? Or are you still flying by the seat of your pants?

To those who manage well, Jesus says, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt. 25:23). Is it time you adopted some maxims and became more intentional about managing your money?

For stewardship education and services, contact your nearest Mennonite Foundation of Canada office. Abbotsford - Dave Kroeker, 1-888-212-8608; Niagara - Darren Pries-Klassen, 1-888-212-8731; Kitchener - Mike Strathdee, 1-888-212-7759; Winnipeg - Edwin Friesen, 1-800-772-3257.



Minister Ike Froese and Pastor John Wall (seated) shared Sunday morning duties on September 14.



Members visit after the service.

**Church profile:**

# Straffordville EMC: A congregation on the *move*

AS I WALK on the far side of paved Plank Road, the screech of tires and blast of a horn catch my attention. I glance up to see three vehicles too tight for comfort. The first two turn into the church parking lot, while a third speeds from the site of the near accident.

It was September 14, time for Sunday school at Straffordville EMC, and—in many ways—this congregation *is* on the move.

The church meets two kilometers south of Straffordville, a village in a highly-populated area of southern Ontario not far from the shore of Lake Erie.

It's estimated that 25,000 German Mennonites live along Lake Erie, says Pastor John Wall. While unsure of that figure, he expects many more members of conservative Mennonite backgrounds will journey to Ontario from Mexico where

years of drought have taken their toll.

**The pastor**

John has been pastor since the church began in 1996. He says he enjoys the church's rural location, and it's evident that he cares about people who gather or who could.

Ask people what their pastor's strengths are and they say John has a gift for teaching, a sense of humour, an ability to confront when necessary. He drives a long-distance truck run once a week—it helps him speak to where people are, as one member puts it.

John would rather talk about the church, but he and Lorna will tell their story. They grew up in Mexico. John's roots are Old Colony, while he describes his wife as "purebred Kleine Gemeinde." They were

baptised and married in the KG. They moved to Canada in January 1986 for a year; then to Seminole, Texas, for two months; and finally back to Canada.

John welded seven years, was active in Mount Salem EMC, and studied at Aylmer Bible School in evenings. When the business where he worked was closed, he upgraded to enter "electronics." After Steinbach Bible College was mentioned, though, he went there instead in 1993. It was a challenge to study and work to support his wife and two sons (Harry, now 19, and Steve, 17), but he graduated in 1996.

**The church starts**

"Well, I think Mount Salem talked about starting a church for many years," dating back to about 1990, said John. The process

Albert Froese guides the adult Sunday school class.



A Sunday supper gathering at the home of Larry and Elizabeth Zacharias. Perch was on the menu.





Mary Kornelsen and helpers lead the Sunday school opening.



During Sunday school, a Moms class is led by Elizabeth Zacharias.

became more serious when the EMC Board of Missions approached him in his final year of college.

A church-planting core group began to be identified from within Mount Salem EMC. The potential core met informally a few times and then about 10 couples were commissioned. The church's first official service was on November 3, 1996, in Straffordville Public School. The congregation held its chartering service on March 16, 1997, and in July was received as a member church of the EMC.

In fall 1997 the church began to meet in MacGregor Public School in Aylmer, Ont. While various locations were considered, the church then rented a Reinlander Mennonite church building that was originally a Kingdom Hall. Though the building was large enough and for sale, its lot was small and parking was dangerous on the highway. The situation eased when neighbours on two sides were willing to sell partial lots, making parking and expansion possible. The building was purchased and a major addition was completed in 2000.

The building seats 150 comfortably, 160 in a pinch, the pastor said. Average attendance is 130, though on September 14 it was 146. The congregation also rents a grass lot for youth activities; it can't build on the land, but a volleyball net hangs there.

**Church programs**

The congregation has six children's classes (held in a portable with seven rooms), a mother's class, and an adult class. Sunday school is held year-round. About 70 people attend Sunday school, though 80 to 90 have sometimes, John said.

A Ladies Fellowship operates. There are Navigators 2:7 and SEAN programs for adults. Bible studies were held at different periods, but not currently.

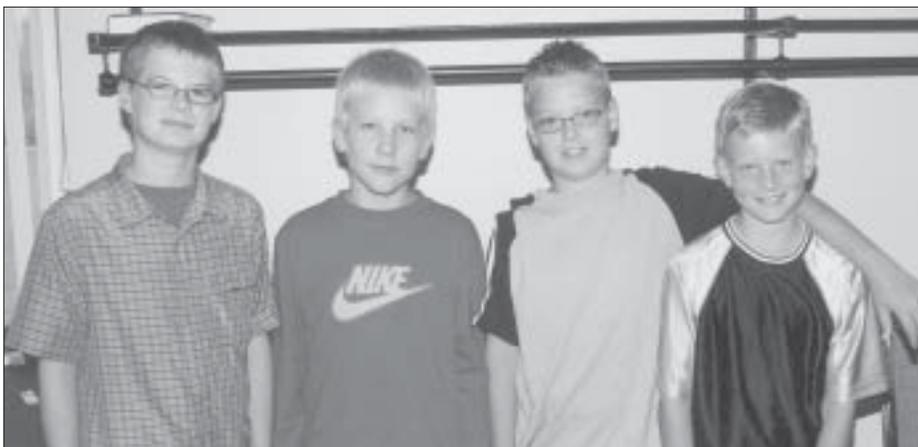
The youth group runs year-round, though it halted temporarily when the main youth sponsors, Jake and Katharine Reddekopp, left for missionary service in Ghana, Africa. Ben and Lena Krahn and Dave and Aggie Blatz will give leadership now. Youth group was scheduled to restart on Sept. 17.



Hilda and Tanya Loewen provide special music.



Margaret Thiessen guides a children's class for six-year-olds.



Young leaders of the future—Jason Zacharias, Steven Wiebe, Larry Sawatzky, and Jesse Froese.



Lorna and pastor John Wall have served as Straffordville's lead pastoral couple since the church began in 1996.



Pastor John Wall visits with Ike Froese in a pepper field.



Most field garden produce is picked by migrant workers, according to John Wall.



Abe Loewen, a deacon at Straffordville, has a truck service centre.

### Men's prayer meeting

Seven men gathered at 8 a.m. on Saturday. Attendance was light, but discussion was good. From Psalm 139, pastor John said that God knows everything about our sinful lives, "yet he still wants to hang out with us." Men talked about how to relate to people and to strengthen the prayer meeting. They prayed.

### Leadership

The church has a ministerial of ministers and deacons that meets monthly; a board of elders (two couples who assist finances and other church matters); and a board of trustees that cares for the building and grounds. A church constitution is being worked on, John said, which could influence structures.

One leader is Ike Froese, who less than a year ago became a minister. Born in St. Thomas, he was taken to Mexico until 16, when his family returned to Canada.

A deacon couple in Mount Salem church, Ike and his wife Maria were part of Straffordville's planting core. He finds the church to be a "real blessing." He preaches in the winter and has taught an

adult study series.

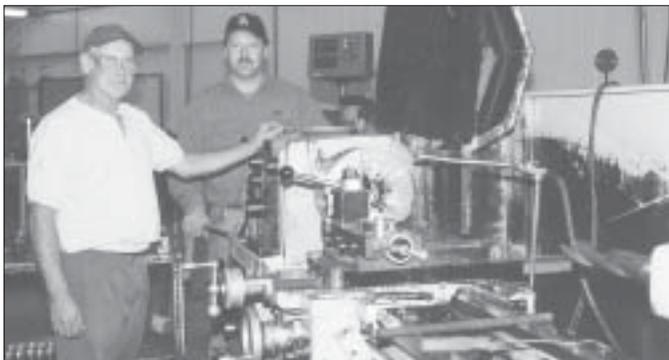
Ike worked as a carpenter and then in a car plant. Six years ago he began to farm, owning 80 acres and renting 300—which might seem modest to westerners, he says. He works with his three brothers, three brothers-in-law and father. Peppers, onions, and cucumbers are mentioned.

Onion and pepper fields are visited. Most garden produce is picked by migrant workers from Mexico and elsewhere, John said. As we move around the countryside, Ike and John talk of a nearby school district concerned over migrant German Mennonite families working together in the fields.

Parents alone can't make enough money and the income allows the family to live for the rest of the year in Mexico. A family can get established in a few years if they manage funds well. Children are not forced to work, do so voluntarily, and can go to school when they return to Mexico, it was said.

By mid-September this year much of the harvest is done in southern Ontario. Pumpkins are early, soybeans need water, and corn stands tall.

Tobacco fields, mostly picked, are visible.



Peter Rempel (right), co-owner of Rem-Tech Industries near Aylmer, stands with machinist Don Lawton.



Straffordville is a small community in itself, but the wider area is highly populated.



A youth gathering.



Ministerial members in about 1999: deacon couples Maria and Ike Froese, Susie and Peter Rempel, Jake and Katharine Reddekopp, and pastoral John and Lorna Wall.

What does the pastor think of Mennonites being involved in the tobacco industry? John said he has gently raised concerns, but is uncomfortable speaking out against people's livelihood. He is concerned that tobacco harvesting happens through Sunday.

While employment in farming is common, so is employment in trucking, automobile manufacturing, and small businesses. Truckers such as Dave Froese and son Albert talk easily of long-distances driven, routes, and delays at the border caused by the anniversary of September 11. Dave drives to Fort Wayne, Ind., three times a week.

Abe Loewen, a deacon and treasurer, as a co-owner started Aylmer Truck Center in May 2003 to service vehicles. He joins John and me for coffee at Tim Horton's—a "Mennonite watering hole," the pastor quips. Abe grew up in Mexico, lived in Belize for two years (where he met his wife Leona, who helps with church finances) and then came to Canada.

Another business co-owner is Peter Rempel of Rem-Tech Industries in Aylmer, Ont., which specializes in custom machining of stainless steel parts.

Peter speaks of being involved in the KG

in Mexico, of enjoying teaching there in a school. He came to Canada eight years ago and became involved in Mount Salem. At Straffordville he served as treasurer, was elected as a deacon, and a year ago became congregational chairman.

### Sunday school

After an opening, most children move to the portable. The young teen class meets outside on the volleyball field. Albert Froese leads adults in a study of 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. People discuss what it means when Paul is jealous for the church and how he responds to false apostles.

### Language use

Sunday school instruction and most comments are in English, which could seem surprising—the congregation was started to provide more German services to reach German-speaking people, John and Lorna say. Bulletins were originally in German, but have been in English for the past two years. There's a German message once a month. In summer 2002 a German service was held before Sunday school and an English service.

The church has never used as much



The church's first official service was November 3, 1996, in a school.



On March 16, 1997, Straffordville's chartering service was held, with Conference pastor Don Thiessen welcoming John and Lorna Wall as pastoral couple and recognizing the congregation.



In a warm act of welcome in July 1997, moderator Ralph Unger shakes the hand of pastor John Wall, receiving the Straffordville EMC into the fellowship of the conference.



A major addition to Straffordville's building was completed in 2000.



Trucking is a major industry in southern Ontario. Dave Froese works at keeping his rig clean.



Pastor John Wall wants people to know that Straffordville is close to Eden.



Steve Wall leads in Sunday morning choruses.



The middler's Sunday school class of Anna Sawatzky.



Steve Wall fills in as Sunday school teacher for the youth class.

German as was intended. While the thought was to reach people as they moved directly from Mexico, the church is better equipped to reach out to people who have already made some changes in Canada, the Walls say.

The Old Colony Church is doing well in southern Ontario, John says. To reach more conservative people, the congregation would need to change outwardly, including clothing, and he doesn't see that happening.

There is strong interest in English by a congregation whose average age is fairly young. He grapples with whether language should serve people who attend or those who don't. Still, a mixture of German and English is heard in the service and in foyer conversation.

**Worship service**

Steve Wall guides in choruses in English. Pastor John reads Psalm 122:1 from the bulletin and then prays in German and English. In looking over announcements, the pastor sees that young people are invited to a corn maze and jokes that he could go as a guide.

Ike Froese leads in *Gott ist die Liebe* (God is love), then decides, "All together we sing best, right?" *The Solid Rock* is next,



Margaret and Abe Berg with son Micah. Margaret is the church's reporter, while Abe has served as a minister-in-training.



Peter Rempel is the congregation's chairman. His family are wife Susie, and children (by age) Aldo, Sonia, Joann, and Toby.



Men gathered on Saturday morning for a prayer meeting led by pastor John.



Anna and Dave Froese served twice as gracious host couple to the editor—at convention 2001 and during this profile.

and Ike asks if people are sure they are linked to it.

Steve Wall reads Scripture. I preach and bring greetings from “churches to the west.” Ike leads in *Auf, denn die Nacht wird kommen!* (Work for the Night is Coming), and the pastor uses Scripture to pronounce the benediction.

### Strengths of church

A strength of the church is its leadership in general, says Abe Klassen. He and his wife Sarah have served as a deacon couple for two years.

The ministerial is all young couples, says Peter Rempel. He appreciates how ladies bring food to sick people. Pastor John says church unity has been strong from the start. Another strength is that leadership has developed; it has been a priority to develop and train leaders from within the congregation, he says.

### Challenges ahead

What challenges does Straffordville face? With people working hard to get

established, sometimes they do not have enough time for church involvement beyond Sunday morning—that was a theme. More involvement during the week or visiting would be helpful, leaders say.

Some people like to pass on responsibilities to others, Peter Rempel said. While some people think the pastor can do it because he is paid, the church needs to work together on it. Also, he suggests that the ministerial needs to be strengthened. How? Encouragement, vision, and education.

### Words to the west

What would Pastor Wall want other EMC churches to know about Straffordville? That “we exist” and are somewhat different, and that there are “no instant churches” in southern Ontario. Beyond the educational and cultural differences, he’s convinced that the East can teach the West.

Yet the conference concept, while taught by John, is new to people. Holding a convention in Tillsonburg in 2001, a few kilometres away, helped build ties with the wider EMC. Taking people to convention elsewhere helps. “We can do some of these things,” he said.

Soon after Sunday service vehicles would again leave the parking lot. On Monday truck drivers will head out on long distances, business owners will drive to work, and farmers will check fields.

Soon for me the distance from Straffordville to Winnipeg, Man., is covered by a one-hour car ride to London, Ont., and a two-hour plane trip. I’ve been privileged to glimpse the journey Straffordville EMC is on. Through the week and next Sunday, as vehicles again travel just south of Straffordville village, the journey of following Christ continues.

Terry M. Smith



Southern Ontario is a highly-populated area, but Pastor John Wall cautions people that there are “no instant churches” here.



Norma Rempel and her Sunday school class of 4’s and 5’s. (September photos by editor)



John Braun and Henry Loewen assist in the Sunday school.

Thanks go to Straffordville EMC leaders and members who were interviewed, for the congregation’s patience on Sunday morning, to gracious hosts Dave and Anna Froese, and to people who assisted with transportation during the weekend.

Special thanks go to pastor John and Lorna Wall for arranging interviews, hospitality, and transportation. Thanks go to Straffordville church reporters for past reports.

Editor

## NICARAGUA MISSIONS EXPOSURE — WORK TEAM

Volunteers are needed to work at the construction of a building at Camp Maranatha. There will also be opportunity to learn about the Fraternity of Evangelical Mennonite Churches of Nicaragua. Don Plett, former EMC missionary in Nicaragua, will be the coordinator and leader.

**Dates: February 7 to 20, 2004**  
**Application Deadline, Nov 30**  
**Cost: \$2,100 approximately**

For information and application forms contact:

Lester Olfert  
EMC Foreign Secretary  
204-326-6401  
or [lolfert@mts.net](mailto:lolfert@mts.net)



## Weddings

**FRIESEN – FRIESEN:** Darryl, son of Rey and Elaine Friesen, and Terrilee, daughter of Al and Laura Friesen, were married on August 8, 2003, at Crescent-Fort Rouge United Church in Winnipeg, Man., with Al Friesen officiating. The couple lives in Winnipeg.

**COUSINS – COSENS:** Mike, son of Janet Cousins of Winnipeg, Man., and Candace, daughter of Jack and Brenda Cosens of Anola, Man., were married on August 23, 2003, in Anola, with Jack Cosens of Anola officiating. The couple lives in Winnipeg.



### Announcing the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Women's EMCup January 23–24, 2004 Rosenort (Manitoba) arena

To register as a team or as an individual contact:

Laura Thiessen, 204-475-1419,  
[cl\\_thiessen@excite.com](mailto:cl_thiessen@excite.com) or  
Angela Kroeker, 204-586-8859,  
[patang@yahoo.com](mailto:patang@yahoo.com)

Registration deadline is November 18, 2003.

Out-of-province teams are encouraged to attend. They can be billeted by getting in touch with Laura or Angela. Three games are guaranteed.

Since the purpose of the event is to connect with fellow EMCers for a fun game of hockey, teams should be made of EMC members and regular attenders.

## EMC student luncheons

Canadian Mennonite University—held September 24  
University of Manitoba—because of a booking problem, rescheduled for November  
University of Winnipeg—planned for second semester  
Red River College—under consideration

Other post-secondary meetings have been held with EMC students at colleges and universities in other provinces. We are committed to connecting with EMCers studying in many places. These events are sponsored by the EMC Board of Church Ministries.

The Board of Missions sponsors events at Steinbach Bible College and Providence College (I work for both boards).

Pastors, send in your student lists. Students, send me your e-mail address, phone number, or snail mail address!

Gerald D. Reimer  
Conference Youth Minister  
[emcger@mts.net](mailto:emcger@mts.net)

## Births

**HIEBERT** – to Wes and Darcia Hiebert of Mitchell, Man., a son, Bryson Damen, on January 29, 2003.

**REIMER** – to Robin and Glenda Reimer of Blumenort, Man., a son, Owen Cole, on February 15, 2003.

**DOERKSEN** – to Stuart and Lisa Doerksen of Steinbach, Man., a daughter, Maria Agnes Kristine, on May 3, 2003.

**ESAU** – to Trevor and Lynette Esau of Blumenort, Man., a son, Mason Trevor, on May 5, 2003.

**SWENARCHUK** – to Danny and Cori Swenarchuk of Ste. Anne, Man., a daughter, Emily Jolene Kimberly, on May 16, 2003.

**BEZANSON** – to Bryon and Janice Bezanson of Swift Current, Sask., a son, Josiah David, on September 2, 2003.



**HAROLD U. PLETT**  
1929–2003

Harold Plett was born September 28, 1929, in Linden, Manitoba. With birds singing in the background and the rich aroma of a campground breakfast in the air, Jesus took our dad home on Tuesday, August 26, 2003.

Harold and Mary had just started a week of camping at Spruce Woods with many of Mary's siblings. This camping trip was to be the grand finale of an unforgettable summer of love. This summer they celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary at the Prairie Rose EM Church and how they enjoyed the love and friendship of so many!

Harold and Mary had several opportunities to be with family, whether at Pinawa for several days with all their children and their families, or being involved with the weddings of their grandchildren. Dad lived this summer of love to the fullest, full of vim and vigour, interested and content with all.

His smile was contagious, his wave was heartfelt and the toot of his horn was one of a kind. Although we miss him so much, we're sure that God has a special gardening project in mind for our Dad.

If friends so desire, donations in memory of Harold may be made to EMC Missions. The funeral took place on Saturday, August 30, 2003, at the Prairie Rose EM Church in Landmark, Man., with Harvey Plett and Mike Plett officiating.

His Family

Editors' note: Harold Plett was a long-time reporter for *The Messenger*. We appreciate his years of service on behalf of the magazine.

## Holiday Travel

presents

### Mennonite Heritage Ukraine and Historical Russia Tour 18 days in Kiev, Zaporozhye, Moscow and St. Petersburg

Departure Date: May 14, 2004

For more tour details and  
informational meetings  
contact

### tour host

**Len Loeppky**

204-326-2613

[aloepky@mts.net](mailto:aloepky@mts.net)

Box 491, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada  
R0A 2A0

Holiday Travel

Clearspring Centre, Box 2799  
Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada R0A 2A0

# Shoulder Tapping

**Note: Because positions are numerous, short ads will appear. Please notify *The Messenger* when ads are not needed. An ad can be removed after two insertions unless prior arrangements have been made. Thank you.** - Editor

Pelly Fellowship Chapel (EMC) is looking for a full-time **lead pastor**. Pelly is a small rural community (300 people) in east-central Saskatchewan. The congregation averages 40 on Sunday mornings and is the only evangelical church in the community.

Please forward your resume or questions to the search committee by mail at Box 70, Pelly, SK S0A 2Z0 or phone Eugene Prokott at 306-595-2287, or email woodlandsigns@sasktel.net

Abbeydale Christian Fellowship (EMC) of east Calgary, Alta., seeks an **associate pastor** with strengths in counselling, teaching and preaching. Duties also include mentoring lay leadership in existing youth and college and career ministries. ACF is medium-sized (180-220), a congregation seeking to disciple members and attendees, encourage their gifts and involvement, and to reach out to neighbourhood and families of church adherents. We have strengths in lay leadership and ministry. Needed are gifts and abilities complementary to the existing pastor and lay leadership. Submit resumes to Harold Friesen, search committee chairman at SearchCommittee@abbeydale.org Description, qualifications and background, duties and responsibilities are posted on our website at www.abbeydale.org.

Vanderhoof Christian Fellowship (EMC) seeks a **full-time senior pastor** to serve a growing congregation of about 170 people in the centre of British Columbia. Our congregation is blessed with a large number of young couples, college and career, and youth. Home care groups are a thriving ministry here. The applicant will be a team player and work with other staff. If you feel the Lord calling you, contact Ron Penner at 250-567-9983 or email at vcfemc@telus.net. Applications must be received by December 20, 2003.

A rural western Manitoba community church is looking for a **full-time lead pastor** with a special gift and passion for ministering to young people, and a strong vision for developing and maintaining small town community relations. Contact Dennis Friesen (council chairman) at 204-824-2208 or Leonard Plett (deacon) at 204-824-2475 or e-mail lplett@mb.sympatico.ca.

La Crete Christian Fellowship Church (EMC), in a thriving northern Alberta community, seeks a **full-time senior pastor**.

LCCF also seeks an individual for **full-time youth ministry** who is gifted and called to lead and disciple a growing youth group.

Forward your resume to search committee, La Crete Christian Fellowship, Box 385, La Crete, AB T0H 2H0; or email lccf@telusplanet.net. Contact John Bueckert at 780-928-2212 or email at bueckert@telusplanet.net.

Morris Fellowship Chapel (EMC) seeks a **youth leader** for a half-time position to direct the youth group program. Expansion in this ministry could include post-secondary age group. Contact Pastor Ward Parkinson at Box 219, Morris, MB R0G 1K0. Call 204-746-2424.

Kola EMC, serving a small community in southwest Manitoba, seeks a **full-time youth pastor** to work primarily with a group of about 25 youth. Contact Len or Lori Koop at 204-845-2130, email lkoop@mts.net, fax 204-845-2098; or Harold or Cheryl Friesen at 306-646-4545.

Swift Current EMC seeks a **senior pastor**. Our congregation of approximately 180 consists of all age groups. Major areas of ministry include preaching, providing vision and developing leaders within the congregation. Contact search committee, 2150 Walker Street, Swift Current, SK S9H 4C1 or e-mail: emcsc@sasktel.net.

Pansy Chapel (EMC), a small rural church in southeastern Manitoba, seeks a **part-time senior pastor**. Send resume to search committee chairman Dylan Barkman, Box 25, Pansy, MB R0A 1J0. For information, phone 204-434-6370.

Riverton Gospel Chapel (EMC), a small rural town in Manitoba's Interlake, seeks a **half-time pastor**. This friendly and loving congregation has an average attendance of 75-100, with a high percentage of young families. The area provides other employment opportunities in various sectors, including farming and construction, and has good schools.

Contact Paul Peters, board chair, by mail: Box 356, Riverton, MB R0C 2R0, by e-mail: paul@vidir.com, or by phone: 204-378-2740 (home), 204-364-2442 (work).

Endeavour Fellowship Chapel (EMC), a warm, friendly congregation with 50 to 60 in attendance on Sunday morning, seeks a **pastor**. It is located in a small town/rural part of east-central Saskatchewan, between Yorkton and Hudson Bay.

The church is flexible both in standards for both candidate education and experience. As an evangelical church in town, it serves a wide range of people. Contact chairman of elders Neil Fenske at 306-547-4738 or Box 263, Endeavour, SK, S0A 0W0.

Fish Creek Christian Fellowship (EMC) in Calgary, Alta., is looking for someone or a couple to give **ministry leadership to our youth/college and career**. This is a self-supported position. Contact Garry Kornelsen, 55 Woodford Cres. SW, Calgary, AB T2W 4C6 or phone 403-281-3747.

Steinbach EMC in Steinbach, Man., seeks a **full-time lead pastor** to provide leadership to a team that includes an associate pastor and a youth pastor. The applicant must have previous pastoral experience. Forward resume to Henry Klassen, Box 996, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0; Phone: 204-326-6068; E-mail: henryk2@mts.net.

Gimli Bible Camp seeks a full-time, year-round **camp director** with managerial experience, a strong background in Christian camping, ability to program events and work well with public, with an evangelistic passion especially for people from the inner city.

The camp has a strong summer ministry to children and youth and a year-round guest ministry. Salary to be negotiated.

Contact: CSSM Ministries Manitoba, 200-189 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, MB R2L 1L7. Phone 204-668-2776, fax 204-667-1496, or e-mail csm@mts.net

Action International Ministries needs a **business administrator** to serve in Manila, Philippines. This position is open immediately for someone who loves the Lord and people, is an administrator, and can trust the Lord for their support. Other ministry opportunities exist. Learning Tagalog is encouraged, but not required. You would work with about 25 missionaries and 12 Filipino staff who minister to urban poor, street children and to strengthen churches. Two years is required, four or more preferred. Check our website: <http://www.actionph.org> or e-mail Mary Ann at maryann@actionintl.org

## Evangelical Anabaptist Seminary New Youth Course!

October 23 and 24 (9 to 4)  
Developing Leadership  
Capacity Among Youth\*

Rick Bartlett  
held at CMU

\$153 credit; \$50 audit.  
204-487-3300

## Fall course at SBC

### Helping Hurting Parents

A course for those wishing to help parents who are hurting because of children who have divorced, died, or discarded parental teaching.



November 6 to 8  
Thursday and Friday 7 to 10 p.m.,  
Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Call SBC's office at 204-326-6451 or visit  
[www.sbcollege.mb.ca](http://www.sbcollege.mb.ca) for information.

## Evangelical Anabaptist Seminary Courses\* Winnipeg, Man.

### Winter Semester (starts Jan. 5)

New Testament Introduction, George Shillington\*  
Contemporary Theological Movements, Karl Koop\*  
Growth of the Church, Daryl Climenhaga\*  
Anabaptism, Pietism and Evangelicalism, Karl Koop  
The Church at Worship, Irma Fast Dueck  
The Problem of Evil in a Biblical Perspective, Pierre Gilbert

### Spring Intensives 2004

Old Testament theology, Pierre Gilbert\*  
Preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Herb Kopp\*  
The Book of Revelation, Loren Johns\*

\* Lists  
EAS courses.

All others are  
Dual-Track  
consortium,  
CMU courses

Note: Location for  
courses does vary.

Cost? For credit students (3 units): \$460. Auditors: \$125  
For information, contact: Pierre Gilbert, coordinator, at 204-487-3300;  
E-mail: [pgilbert@cmu.ca](mailto:pgilbert@cmu.ca)



A Woman's  
Journey of Faith  
**Betty Koop**  
La Crete, Alberta

**PEACE RIVER—GERTRUDE**

TODAY I am looking at a little pitcher I picked up at a second-hand shop in Peace River, Alberta. It is beige with a darker brown rim around the top, quite ordinary looking, but it reminds me of an extraordinary woman.

I looked in amazement at the opulent executive suite in the Peace River motel that the desk clerk had let me have for regular price. Plush carpeting, king-sized bed, fireplace, and Jacuzzi tub were some of its features. What a beautiful place to spend the eve of our 38<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

Then reality hit. I was *alone* in this beautiful room. My husband has just been admitted to hospital when a stress test revealed major heart problems.

Many phone calls and tears later, the phone rang at my end. It was a dear friend from La Crete whom I had called earlier so they could inform the church of our change in plans. He told me he had been in contact with his sister, Gert, who lived in Peace River and she would be happy to give me a home for the duration. We had never met, so I was touched that she would open her home so readily.

Since Peace River is a town where I easily lose my way, we agreed to meet at Smitty's—one place I could find. When I had parked the car, I looked for the yellow T-shirt she said she'd be wearing and I saw her immediately. Her warm but matter-of-fact manner put me at ease.

At her house, we moved my baggage into a spare bedroom. Gert was an ideal hostess. She treated me more like a sister than a guest so I felt at home very quickly. When I moved in, we thought it would be for about five days or so. But when Glen's angiogram showed the need for open-heart bypass surgery, it became clear that we would be in Peace River and/or Edmonton for several weeks. But Gert seemed to have no problem with the extension of my stay, which eventually stretched to 37 days.

We developed a close friendship during that time. Spirited discussions over evening tea or morning fruit and yogurt cemented a bond that was very special to me. Gert had a way of listening actively when I needed to find a release from stress. And

it was great listening to her share so frankly some of her life's pilgrimage.

I especially enjoyed her account of the recent surprise celebration of her birthday put on by friends and family. She is usually not at a loss for words, but apparently seeing the crowd gathered in her church basement in her honour actually left her speechless momentarily.

She described a skit presented by her brother and nephew, which left the audience (and me) in stitches. Her brother, wearing a lady's wig, re-enacted one late-night ferry crossing at Tompkins Landing (near La Crete) when Gert was traveling back to Peace River.

As she waited at the crossing, she removed her uncomfortable dentures, and put them in her lap. As the ferry churned away from the dock, she suddenly realized that her teeth were no longer in her lap. She implored the ferry operator to reverse to the landing so she could search for them. After they all scrambled around on the ground searching, they finally found the teeth, unharmed. It made a very amusing story!

Gert's life had not always been easy. She and her husband had four lovely children, but their marriage was in trouble. When her husband left her, she was forced to become the primary support for her children. Gert had a teacher's certificate but realized she needed to upgrade to a degree in order to boost her income. The story of how the Lord put people in her way to help her so she could take her degree program in just over a year is another illustration of God's faithfulness being "new every morning." And, being Gert, she certainly did her part in achieving this goal.

When I met her, she had just retired from full-time teaching. However, she was not one to sit in her rocking chair with idle hands. She was always active, substitute teaching, preaching the occasional sermon at her church, playing Scrabble with friends, encouraging her children, entertaining her grandchildren, and listening to others on the phone. Her giving heart and energetic nature were an inspiration to me.

She was there when I received the news of my mother's death. She knew just what to do: a warm hug and not a lot of words. She visited Glen when I had to leave for our son's wedding and for Mom's funeral and rallied her friends to pray.

Living with a broken marriage and its consequences is very difficult. I marvelled at Gert's ability to carry on, without

# Coming Events

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Oct. 16</b><br>Eden Foundation Banquet<br>David Schroeder, speaker<br>Altona EMMC<br>Altona, Man.<br>Phone: 1-866-493-6202                      | <b>Oct. 29</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Morris, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476    |
| <b>Oct. 19</b><br>EMC Region 8 Praise Night<br>Steinbach EMC, 7 p.m.<br>Focusing on God's<br>Greatness<br>Phone: 204-866-3597                      | <b>Oct. 30</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Altona, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476    |
| <b>Oct. 23</b><br>Eden Foundation Banquet<br>David Schroeder, speaker<br>Bethel Mennonite Church<br>Winnipeg, Man.<br>Phone: 1-866-493-6202        | <b>Oct. 31</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Winkler, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476   |
| <b>Oct. 24</b><br>Eden Foundation Banquet<br>David Schroeder, speaker<br>Steinbach Mennonite<br>Church<br>Steinbach, Man.<br>Phone: 1-866-493-6202 | <b>Nov. 1</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Morden, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476     |
| <b>Oct. 25</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Landmark, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476                             | <b>Nov. 4</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Brandon, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476    |
| <b>Oct. 27</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Steinbach, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476                            | <b>Nov. 5</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Swan River, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476 |
| <b>Oct. 28</b><br>Sunong: The Right to<br>Machatau<br>Wycliffe Dinner Theatre<br>Otterburne, Man.<br>Phone: 800-708-2476                           |   |

Voices for Non-Violence, of MCC  
Manitoba, has a new Domestic  
Violence website:  
[www.mcc.org/abuse](http://www.mcc.org/abuse)

bitterness, not with pious words but with loving actions toward others who were hurting. After all, she took *me* in!

I think she exemplified Martin Luther King's admonition: "If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl, but by all means keep moving" (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*).