

Shaped by the Spirit

Grace Mennonite Church

Shaped by the Spirit of Grace

Pastor Darrell Winger

This fall at Grace MC we are exploring what it means to be “shaped by the Spirit”. Jesus promised his followers that he would send his Spirit to teach and guide them in the way of truth and life. It is both encouraging and daunting to know that God, by his Spirit, is shaping us so that we increasingly reflect the life of Christ. But how are we shaped by the Spirit?

As you read this edition of *Graceletter*, you will discover some of the ways God’s Spirit is shaping us through Grace. Our family and church family histories and experiences shape us. We

are shaped through our engagement with our broader church families, Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite World Conference, as we discern together the way of Christ in this cultural—and *kairos*—moment. The Spirit shapes us as we struggle together to discern the best response to the needs of refugees, to those suffering from warfare in Gaza, to those who have lost homes in forest fires, or to those who are alone in long-term care homes.

Slowing down enough to see God at work through the beauty of his creation,

whether in our Grace gardens or through Niagara ponds and beaches and fields, also shapes us. There are many ways the Spirit is shaping us if we are open. May we gracefully and graciously listen to and learn from each other this coming fall as we follow the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus.

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Visiting Paraguay

John Doerksen

I was born in Paraguay in the Mennonite colony of Neuland, and came to Canada in 1959 when I was 6 years old. I had always wanted to go back to visit, and finally made plans with my brother to go this spring. My dream was to visit the property in the village of Neu-Halbstadt where I grew up. My childhood playmate, Heinz Woelk, still lives in Paraguay and accompanied me to that site. We had a great time sharing and comparing our memories of those years. **Cont’d on p. 2**





Gleanings from MC Canada Gathering 2025

From John Rempel

Matters of business, community, and faith struck me at our national conference. Concerning business, our leaders acknowledged that those in charge several years ago made a major error of judgment in dispersing most programs and responsibilities from the national church to the regional ones. There was strong agreement that many of those functions, like preparing worship resources or supporting missionaries, require the resources of a larger body. This shift has now been completed.

The way business was transacted encouraged community. We sat at round tables (like ours in the church hall) during the reporting and could talk among ourselves and respond to the presenters. For one of the business sessions I sat at a table of Eritrean and Ethiopian delegates. This was a rich encounter.

Finally, Doug Klassen, our national leader, refocused our faith. At the closing Communion service he preached passionately about the grounding we have in Christ as the only adequate foundation for all of the diverse ministries we undertake. I came away from the gathering with confidence that we have gifted leaders who are guiding us with an inspiring vision.

From Dave Brubacher

At the Gathering I attended the leadership day, with 175 pastors from across Canada. The keynote speakers were David and Shawna Boshart. David is president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) and Shawna works in coaching and spiritual formation with Mennonite Church USA. I was part of the search committee that brought David Boshart to AMBS. It was delightful to see him thriving in his role. He and Shawna made a thoughtful consideration of current leadership needs and how to build resilience.

The Gathering theme, "Each Gift," based on I Peter 4:10, ***"Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received,"*** was like a salve for my aching soul. To be encouraged to use our gifts in the service of others rather than ourselves was a welcome counter to many of the voices we hear today.

I have not attended one of these sessions since I retired. It was gratifying to see at least 10 pastors who I either coached or mentored in some way still active in pastoral ministry. I was one of the older persons present and I will confess to feeling somewhat like a proud parent.



...cont'd from p.1. Paraguay: As I think about my trip and the time I was able to spend in the various Mennonite colonies there, it brings to mind the struggles that my parents and other pioneering settlers had back then. I am amazed at the modern lifestyle people are now able to enjoy.



Anabaptism@500: Memories of Zurich

John Rempel

On May 29, 2025 I had the good fortune to attend “The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500”, the day-long celebration commemorating the birth of the Anabaptist movement in Zurich, Switzerland. The highlight of the celebration was a festive service in the Grossmünster, the very church in which the leading Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and young radicals Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz had worshipped and debated before they finally split over doctrinal issues 500 years ago. The church was packed with 1200 people inside and another 900 outside.

Three parts of the service were inspiring. The opening hymn was “Grosser Gott wir Loben dich” (“Holy God we praise thy name”), the anthem of traditional Mennonitism. The closing hymn was “Sizohamba naye” (“We will walk with God”) a Swazi-land Mennonite hymn that has become an international favourite. Both were sung

with gusto!

In the pastoral prayer two petitions struck me. One was, “help us not to be ashamed of Christ”. The other one was a petition for Mennonites “to hold together evangelism and social justice in our vision of mission.”

Finally, high level Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed church leaders expressed gratitude for the reconciliation God’s Spirit has brought between them and Mennonites. We still have differences of conviction on some matters but we deal with those as sisters and brothers in Christ.



Bears and Blankets and Books, Oh My! Jan Steven

Bears and Blankets is flourishing! We’ve given over 1000 Care Kits to over 40 Long Term and Retirement Homes. I met with two Directors of Seniors Services at the Niagara Region—Paolo Varias and Gina Stringer. They are delighted!

Free Books for Kids (Bears and Books) is still in start-up mode. We’ve distributed over 800 books and 50 “read-to-me-bears” to 7 schools. I met with Karen Schmidt, Service Advisor for Children’s Services at the Niagara Region. She is happy to help.





Photos by Sue McCabe

A Summer to Remember

Text by Kevin McCabe

Spring 2025 started quietly, but June, July, and August packed a wallop. Namely, a record number of heat warnings. Such heat seems to have affected the insect population and all animals which rely on it. After June 1st the numbers of butterflies, dragonflies, and even mosquitoes appear to have dropped. This is likely the effect of very hot and humid days, with long stretches without precipitation.

Nonetheless, Sue was able to catch both birds and insects on camera. Specifically, an unusual

hummingbird clear-winged moth (which behaves very like a hummingbird), a white-faced meadowhawk dragonfly, a great blue heron at Martindale Pond, a night heron at Port Weller, a monarch butterfly, and a blackswallowtail butterfly—both, rather appropriately, on a butterfly bush.



And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things. . . —G. M. Hopkins



Discerning Apartheid in Israel Lacey Willmott

As peace churches and peace supporting communities, Mennonites have long advocated and acted for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel. In a humble attempt to be the hands and feet of Jesus, Grace's Peace Group is exploring commitments under the American Quaker-led campaign called the "Apartheid-Free Network."

Over the past several years there has been an emerging consensus on Israeli apartheid in the international human rights community, including Palestinian, Israeli, and international organizations. This system of apartheid predates the current devastation and atrocities in Gaza, that many be-

lieve constitute a genocide, and goes beyond the borders of Gaza, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Grace Peace Group believes that recognizing Israeli apartheid is part of a longer-term commitment to justice and peace for Palestinians and their Israeli neighbours.

Driven by our own hearts and faith, and MCEC PIN's recent encouragement for congregations and groups to engage this work more directly, the Grace Peace Group is discerning a Spirit-led path to contribute to justice and peace as best we can. The Apartheid-Free Network website (<https://apartheid-free.org/>) offers us suggestions

and resources for action within faith communities. As an example, the Peace Group and Adult Study Group will run "Advent & Apartheid", a three session PowerPoint introduction to the issue after church on Sept 21, Oct 5, and Oct 19. We encourage and welcome members of the wider congregation to join us on this journey.



Gaza Families Fundraiser Yard Sale

On Sat. Aug. 23rd, the Grace Peace Group and the Niagara Palestine Coalition put on a Yard Sale Fundraiser for Gazan families in the Grace parking lot. About 20 volunteers, as well as food and 'themed items' vendors, raised \$4000. to support local Palestinian families trying desperately to bring loved ones to Canada from Gaza and Egypt. I want to say a **huge** thank you to our Grace MC family for supporting us with vanloads of donations, plus baking! Well done, good and faithful servants!

Laur Steven





Bloomin' Korner

Bob and Irene Dell

Your Gardening Gurus have allowed very little rust to gather on their gardening tools. Since late February much of our time has been spent on clearing away those 'uglies'—like leaves and dead flower stems—that accumulate over the winter. (Those blessed pine tree needles just get into *everything*.)

Winter is when we do our planning for the coming growing season. 2025 marks our 3rd year of looking after the Church Gardens and this year it was time to do some dividing and transplanting. Our winter planning focused on "The Island Bed"—it's the one with the Bird Bath. We added some attractive plants which were split off from other areas on the grounds. Go have a closer look!



Most recently our gardens are enjoying more sun and heat, which are giving everything the boost that we've all been looking for. We are enjoying the "fruits" of our labour now in late summer.

Our gardens are awash in colour!



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"I do not understand the mystery of Grace —
only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us."
— Anne Lamott