



the Assembled News

Vol. 4
Wednesday, July 6
2016 Assembly

God~Faith-People begins!!

Welcome to
Mennonite Church
Canada
Assembly 2016

[home.mennonitechurch.ca/
saskatoon2016/](http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016/)



Whether you are new to our national church family gathering or an experienced veteran, our prayer is that you will find this time to be a meaningful celebration of our covenantal relationships with God and with each other. May our conversations spark deep listening, our worship inspire prayerful connection, our learning reveal fresh perspectives, and our fellowship reflect the Holy Spirit among us.

Karen Martens Zimmerly;
Executive Minister,
Formation and Pastoral Leadership

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Challenging Israel's occupation of Palestine

By **Deborah Froese** with files from **Byron and Melita Rempel-Burkholder**

Aquifers in the West Bank, Palestine, hold enough water to supply its inhabitants, but distribution is controlled by the Israeli government. Most of the water is directed toward the neighbouring nation of Israel and the Jewish settlements dotting the West Bank.

According to the human rights organization Al-Haq, the settlements consume more than 6 times the amount of water allocated to the 2.6 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. The Jewish settlement population is less than one quarter the size of the Palestinian population.

Restricted access to water is just one of the injustices that Byron and Melita Rempel-Burkholder encountered in Palestine while serving on a Mennonite Church Canada short-term ministry assignment at Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) earlier this year.

What they witnessed left such a deep impression that they helped craft a resolution for discernment at Assembly 2016. The resolution invites congregations, communities, and church members to explore the ways they may be "impeding or facilitating, ignoring or promoting, the quest for a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis."



Photo by Byron Rempel-Burkholder

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"Assembly 2016"

It also encourages the application of economic pressure through government sanctions and investment restrictions.

“The resolution attempts to echo the voice of the Palestinian Christian community,” Melita says, referring to the 2009 document “A Moment of Truth” from the interdenominational consortium, Kairos Palestine. “We talked to our BBC colleagues about boycotts as a resistance strategy. Virtually all of them supported it, even if their own economy suffers in the short term.”

For years, news media, politicians, and even some Christian leaders in the West have sympathised with Israel while minimizing or ignoring the impact of Israel’s occupation. Those who compare the occupation to Apartheid in South Africa or point out Israeli human rights violations—such as

discriminatory access to water and the restriction of Palestinians’ rights to movement—are often labelled “anti-Israel.”

Byron says the resolution is pro-Israel; it seeks an Israel that lives up to the standards of justice upheld by international law and by the prophets of the Old Testament. “This resolution is about blowing the whistle on the injustice of the occupation,” he adds. “It’s about supporting Palestinians in a nonviolent quest for self-determination, justice, and a peaceful coexistence with their Israeli neighbours.”

“Listen to both sides of the story, not just the side of Israel,” pleads Amira Faroud, a writer and the social media coordinator for BBC. “Think of the nation that is here, and the suffering that we face every day.”

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 forced a massive displacement of Palestinians. About 200,000

United Nations-registered refugees with ancestral homes in Israel now live in 19 West Bank refugee camps. Three times that number have refugee status but live in the towns and villages of the West Bank. Many more Palestinian refugees live in neighbouring countries.

Israel administers 60 percent of the West Bank geographical area, which includes military zones, nature preserves, agricultural enterprises and Jewish settlements. It exerts enormous power over the remaining 40 percent too, even though that land is administered by the Palestinian Authority. Israel enforces policies that favour neighbouring Jewish settlements and it imposes severe travel restrictions on West Bank Palestinians, who may need to cross military checkpoints into Israel for jobs, higher education, emergency medical care, or even to access ancestral land near the Separation Barrier. They can

continued on next page.

Assorted Announcements

Final Registration Data:

512 registered (as of June 25, 2016)
36 Area Church delegates
307 congregational delegates
169 Non-delegate Attendees
84 volunteers

Delegate Numbers

40 Area Church Delegates possible; 36 registered
761 Congregational Delegates possible; 322 registered
220 churches in the national church family; 126 represented at Assembly

Connect with others —and your stuff

A message board and a lost and found are located at the Information table in the registration area.

Live Streaming!

All plenary sessions at Assembly 2016 are being streamed live. To watch events as they unfold, or to review recorded video later, go to home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016/video



Prayer Room

Need a break to meditate and contemplate? Visit the prayer area in the Blair Nelson room, hosted by Larry Epp.

Document Quick links:

Discernment Guide:
commonword.ca/go/654

Full Schedule:
commonword.ca/go/656

Report Book:
commonword.ca/go/655

Assembly Homepage:
home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016

See the latest issues of the

the **Assembled** News



online at:

home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016

only do so with permits, which are often arbitrarily withheld.

Melita points to a story from Hala, BBC's library manager. Last fall, Hala's family applied for permits to pick the olives on their farm which became inaccessible from their home when the Separation Barrier was built in the early 2000s. The Israelis only gave a permit to her 85-year-old father-in-law who couldn't harvest olives by himself, so they lost the harvest.

The risks to Hala's family are far greater than the loss of one harvest. Over time, being denied permits could cause them to lose their land. Current laws decree that West Bank farmland not worked for three years in a row becomes "state land." As the Israeli government interferes with Palestinian rights to earn livelihood from the land, it continues to expand the

size and number of Jewish settlements—even though international law deems those settlements illegal.

"After 49 years of military occupation and failed peace talks, some Palestinians get frustrated and act violently," Byron says. "There's no excuse for that, but on the other hand should we be surprised that people will act out that way when there are so few alternatives?"

A number of North American denominations have already passed resolutions similar to the one Rempel-Burkholders are promoting.

Melita and Byron Rempel-Burkholder served in a variety of support roles in Palestine at Bethlehem Bible College (BBC) from Jan. to April, 2016.

Byron, an editor and writer, was a missionary kid in Ethiopia. He spent a few years in the late 80s and 90s doing mission and pastoral work in Congo and Canada respectively. Melita has served as a teacher, a counsellor, an advocate for prison inmates, and as a chaplain. To learn more about their experience in Palestine, see their blog at <https://byronandmelitainpalestine.wordpress.com/>



Making tough decisions in the church

Dan Dyck;
Director, Church Engagement - Communications
Mennonite Church Canada

In an early reflection on the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process, Jack Suderman, retired executive director of Mennonite Church Canada, wrote that in

the context of shifting theological ground, the church can say (repeat) what it has always said, change what it has always said, or say something new.

Dan Jack, moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta, recently sent us a message pondering "the notion of change within continuities" evident in the histories of national church predecessors—the Mennonite Church (MC), General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC, a bi-national conference with the U.S.) and Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC).

Soon the idea emerged of creating a timeline to highlight contentious issues discussed in our wider Mennonite community between 1900 and 2000. To have been recorded in official church documents

suggests that these were significant matters of the day.

The timeline markers running throughout this issue of The Assembled News help provide insight about the past discussion and discernment of various issues. Some of these issues resulted in concrete decisions; others are less clear. Considerably more research would need to be done to determine if subsequent decisions brought further clarity, or if the body felt comfortable with ambiguity. And in other cases, it appears decision outcomes were left to individuals (e.g. 1959 – luxurious living). Thanks to archivist Conrad Stoesz at the Mennonite Heritage Centre for conducting this research. The content has been edited for length, clarity, and style.

Making Tough Decisions in Church: A Timeline

1913: Lifestyles

It is determined that churches must exercise diligence to save the entire membership from conforming to incoming lifestyles; that patience and forbearance be combined with firmness and strict adherence to the Word of God in both teaching and discipline (MC).

1929: Indigenous Relations

The Mennonite Land Board is charged with including assistance for landless native people (CMC).

Here is something to try

By Mary Marsh

In the world as you go through it,
 If a person annoys you or seems out of sorts,
 think this,
 “You have a light.”
 “You have a song.”
 Ask yourself,
 “Can I help them find their light?”
 “Can I hear the faint whispering
 of singing deep inside?”
 Each of us has a light to shine.
 The light may be covered by pain
 or worry,
 but it is there.
 You may see a glimmer of it
 as if through a dark wood
 Each of us has a song
 that sings from within
 The song may be muffled
 or stifled,
 or picked up angry discord
 through years of abuse
 or neglect
 it may just be lost
 in the jumbled noise of machinery
 or inane babble
 of the shallow stream of thoughts
 that runs through the world
 without direction or meaning or passion,
 just the yammering of greed and loneliness.

“Look at this!”
 “You really need one of these!”
 “You can really have it all!”
 while pointing big flashing neon signs at the void
 You may need to find your light
 to see where the light
 is hidden in others
 You may have to learn your song again
 in order to hear the sound
 of a real voice
 above the clamor
 You may need to sit quietly:
 shining and humming
 in a field on a warm day
 with a soft breeze moving
 the leaves of nearby trees
 Or in a room with people
 who care for you
 just listening to soft conversation
 Or, maybe, on a beach
 with the waves whispering
 and crashing
 or in a car
 on your way to work
 when the noise of the day
 has not begun to drown you out
 There really is nothing
 more important to do
 Nothing else will matter
 by the time it is
 too late

Taken from <https://randomyriad.com/part-of-the-process-poems-on-life-nature-and-music/>.
 Used with permission.

Making Tough Decisions in Church: [A Timeline](#)

1939: War

Church leaders in Western Canada and the USA meet in Winkler to discuss impending war and the church's response.

(Ed: Research suggests that no consensus could be found. Some wished to hold the government accountable to its promise of complete exemption, while others preferred alternative service.)

1950: Restructuring

A constitutional revision sees the restructuring of several boards, including administrative separations between home and foreign missions agencies. It is further revised in 1968 (CMC).

1955: Luxurious living

In search of non-conformity and separation from societal norms, all members of the church are called to practice lives of self-denial and frugality, to live simply rather than in luxury (MC).

1956: Financing the wider church

It is decided, against the arguments of several delegates, that a definite levy be placed on each member of the Conference (CMC).

Special Offering: Peace House



One of two offerings at Assembly this year will support the ministry of Gregory Rabus and Jennifer Otto, Mennonite Church Canada Witness Workers. In partnership with the Ludwigshafen (Germany) Mennonite Church, they have established *Friedenshaus* (Peace House), from where they will deliver programs in response to a large influx of refugees in that city. Germany language classes plus sports, music and cultural programs are helping the adjustment of newcomers to that city. *Friedenshaus* is a ministry rooted in the Anabaptist values of hospitality and reconciliation.



A gift for the next generation

Special offering: Share the gift of music

Music is spirit language. Singing together draws us closer to the Spirit of God. Singing together transforms and inspires us. MennoMedia, the publishing ministry partner of Mennonite Church Canada (and Mennonite Church USA) is developing a new song collection for 2020 in both book and digital form. Your financial generosity will bring the gift of music for the next season and to the next generation of being the church in a changing world. This is one of two offerings that will be gathered at Assembly this week.



Photos provided.

Making Tough Decisions in Church: [A Timeline](#)

1959: Marriage

In light of the serious disintegration of the Christian view of marriage and home, the church humbly seeks to intensify its protest against contemporary social evils (MC).

1960: Capital Punishment

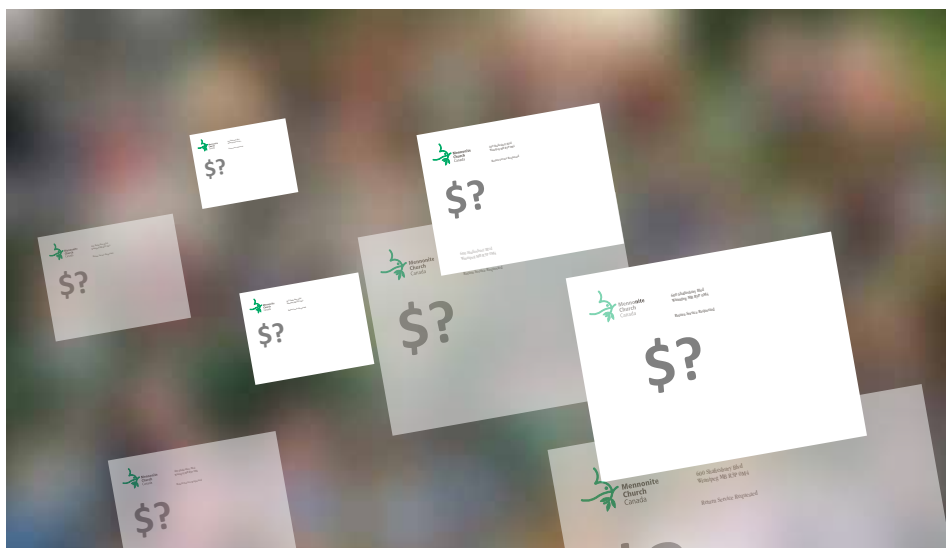
The Board is charged with studying the Conference position on Capital Punishment for presentation to the local church to adopt as a guide (CMC).

1961: Communist ideology

While rejecting any ideology which opposes the Gospel or seeks to destroy the Christian faith, the church decides that it cannot respond in any way contrary to Christian love against those who hold or promote such views, but must seek to overcome their evil and win them through the Gospel (MC).

1962: Unity

The Conference establishes a Church Unity committee to address and reduce conflict within congregations (CMC).



Generosity Lives Here \$?

Deborah Froese

Growing leaders in Khon Kaen, supporting the small but vibrant church in Palestine, and shaping faith formation right here in Canada. These are a few of the ministries that the national church is engaged in and remains committed to even as its future shape is still emerging.

Want to help ensure these ministries remain vibrant? Swing by the Mennonite Church Canada Generosity Wall and collaborate to complete a picture of ministry. A large poster covered with envelopes hangs on the Generosity Wall by the main entrance into the plenary area. Each envelope on the poster is labelled with a value of \$1 to \$100. Make your donation, and the corresponding envelope will be removed, eventually revealing one of the many ways your generosity is at work.

Partnership development directors Daniel Horne (western Canada) and Jason Martins (eastern Canada) will be available to accept your donations throughout Assembly.

Climate Change Working Group Summary

The Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) was established by the Mennonite Church Canada General Board to study divesting from the fossil fuel industry. It was initiated in response to the Climate Change Resolution brought the 2014 Assembly.

The CCWG is composed of Mennonite Church Canada constituents representing different geographic regions and various perspectives such as financial, scientific, fossil fuel industry employment, and environmental activism. The group met in person in September 2015 and prepared a comprehensive report. In summary:

After considering several options in light of moral, scientific and financial discernment, we of the CCWG are not recommending divestment of the small amount of funds currently invested in fossil fuels as the primary action at this time. Instead, we are recommending that Mennonite Church Canada adopt a strong deliberate investment approach for future investments, choosing investment instruments that promote the transition to a new energy economy that values community building, social justice, and a less consumptive lifestyle. This strategy prioritizes investing in “the good that we want to see.” In addition, Mennonite Church Canada should do a number of non-financial actions that will support an investment shift and increased Mennonite understanding of climate change as a justice concern.

The full report [not available at press time] contains a description of our process, detailed reasoning for these recommendations, as well as background information about climate change and our response as a church.

- CCWG

Making Tough Decisions in Church: [A Timeline](#)

1968-69: On divorce and remarriage

The conference recognizes the need and legitimacy of divorce, and resolves to provide guidelines on the matter for churches. “It is moved that the guidelines be worked at individually and accepted, rejected or modified” and that “the Conference does not vote on the guidelines but that they be accepted gratefully as helpful counsel and information.” This motion is tabled and followed by a motion to “continue to work on the subject of the family and marriage disintegration.”

(CMC)

1973-75: Women in Leadership

Both the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church begin ordaining women as pastors and employing women as professors in their colleges and seminaries.

1974: Indigenous Relations

The church determines we should teach our children that Native people should be proud of who they are (CMC).



Photo courtesy Mennonite Heritage Center Archives

From the Archives: Evolving Structure

The Mennonite Church with its Canadian roots in Ontario dates back to 1820, according to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). The idea for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) was birthed in 1902 at a meeting of church leaders from Sask. and Man. in Tiefengrund, Sask.

In 1950, a constitutional revision brought restructuring to several boards of CMC that included administrative separations between home and foreign missions agencies. Further reshaping occurred in 1968 and 2003. In 2016, restructuring is anticipated once more through the work of the Future Directions Task Force.

Church leaders involved in the formation of CMC:
(Back row) David Epp, Laird, Sask.; Johann Dueck, Eigenheim, Sask.; Heinrich Warkentin, Laird Sask.; David Toews, Eigenheim, Sask.; Gerhard Epp, Eigenheim, Sask.. (Front row) Benjamin Ewert, Edenburg, Man.; Peter Regier, Tiefengrund, Sask.; Johann M. Friesen, Altona, Man.; J.E Sprunger, Berne, Indiana.

<https://archives.mhsc.ca/conference-of-mennonites-in-canada-founding-meeting-tiefengrund>



Along the Road to Freedom exhibit

Originally scheduled to end before Assembly 2016, *Along the Road to Freedom*, an exhibit by Ray Dirks, Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery curator and artist, is being held over at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre in Saskatoon throughout Assembly week.

Along the Road to Freedom is a series of paintings that tell the stories of mothers, daughters, grandmothers and sisters who led their families out of persecution and suffering to lives of freedom and peace. The exhibit is touring North America and appeared last year at Mennonite World Conference in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Diefenbaker Canada Centre is located on the University of Saskatoon campus. It is open from 9:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Friday, and from noon to 4:30 p.m. on weekends.

Making Tough Decisions in Church: [A Timeline](#)

1975: On abortion

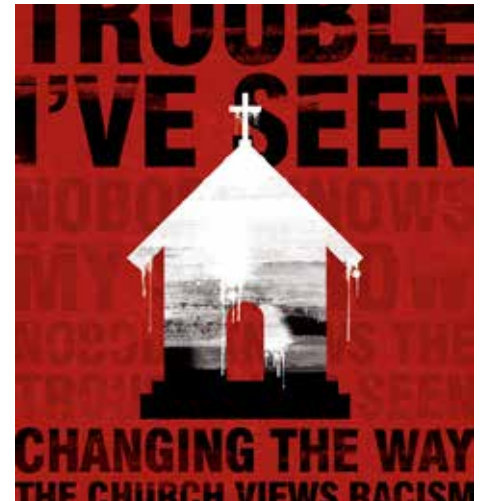
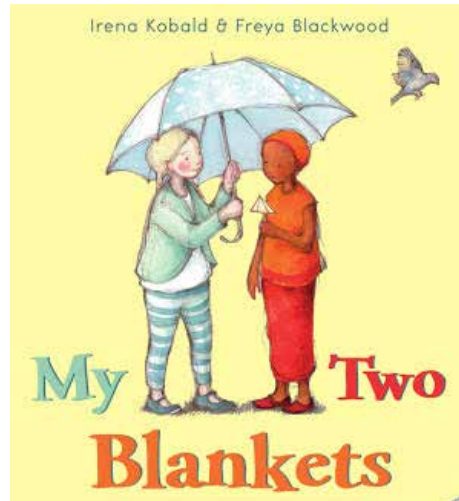
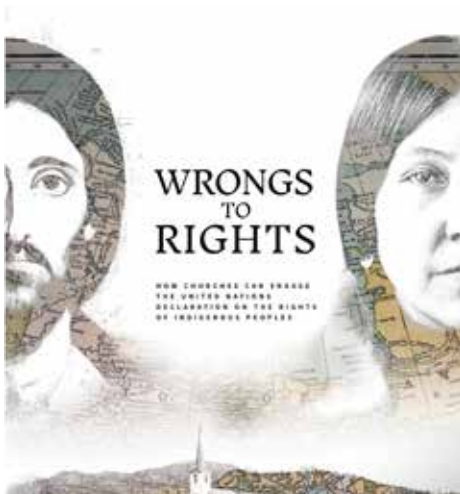
The church says that abortion violates biblical principles regarding the sanctity and value of human life. (MC)

1986-87: On human sexuality

The church confirms the need for continuing discussion and covenant with each other to “mutually bear the burden of remaining in loving dialogue with each other in the body of Christ . . . to take part in the ongoing search for discernment and for openness to each other.”

1992: On the Doctrine of Discovery

While commemorating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus arriving in North America, the church determines it should express humble gratitude for the benefits received from this land rather than a triumphalist spirit of celebration. (GCMC).



UNDRIP: It's not about a leaky faucet.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has specifically summoned churches to embrace the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). But what is the Declaration? And how might it gift and reorient Christian faith and practice?

In *Wrongs to Rights*, over 40 authors from diverse backgrounds – Indigenous and Settler, Christian and Traditional – wrestle with the meaning of the Declaration for the Church.

www.commonword.ca/go/508.

Wrongs to Rights is on sale at the CommonWord resource table on site.

Teach your children well.

Dozens of congregations are sponsoring refugees. But explaining what that means to your own children can be a challenge. Luckily, CommonWord has a bundle of kid-friendly picture and story books to help parents illustrate the very real dilemmas faced by newcomers to Canada. Find what you need at www.commonword.ca/go/497.

This and other children's resources on refugees are on display at the CommonWord resource table on site.

Racism has NOT left the building.

The high-profile killings of young black men and women by white police officers, and the ensuing protests and violence have challenged many white Christians to re-examine their intuitions when it comes to race and justice. Drew G. I. Hart places police brutality, mass incarceration, anti-black stereotypes, and poverty, into the larger framework of white supremacy.

Available at the CommonWord resource table onsite and at www.commonword.ca/go/488.

Buy, Borrow, and Download a wide variety of resources during Assembly 2016 at **CommonWord**
Bookstore and Resource Centre

Making Tough Decisions in Church: [A Timeline](#)

1995: Conflict

The church furthers its commitment to covenantal discernment over potentially divisive issues by accepting the document, *Resolution on Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love - Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement* (GCMC).

1995: Restructuring

At the 1995 joint sessions of the MC and GCMC in Wichita, Kansas, the two conferences voted in favour of a formal merger, setting 1999 as their target date for complete denominational integration.

1999: Restructuring

At joint sessions of the MC, GCMC and CMC, the formation of two national conferences from the three bodies was approved – Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.