

YEAR IN REVIEW 10:15 Saturday morning.

For those who don't know me, I'm Ruth Bergen Braun, MCA Communications.

Many of you who are my age-ISH will recognize that as the opening to Randy Bachman's hit *Takin' Care of Business*.

I had been struggling with how to begin this Year in Review, and then as reports were dropping into my inbox for the Annual Report book, I realized once again, that we have incredible people *Takin' Care of Business* for Mennonite Church Alberta. At least some of you had been workin' overtime!

As I was looking for how to begin this Year in Review, I also considered the hymn *God is here among us*. *God is here among us* doesn't have a catchy danceable tune and most of the lyrics don't work for a Year in Review, but that title describes this past year in Mennonite Church Alberta. As we were takin' care of business God was here among us, so let us review 2023.

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, our moderator is finishing 6 years of capably organizing meetings, leading meetings, attending meetings both in person and by zoom. Executive meetings, General Council meetings, All Committee Meetings, plus she was part of Mennonite Church Canada's Joint Council. Through all these meetings as she leaves her role, Brenda continues to be grateful for how we care deeply about being the church together. MCA people show up and work together and find paths forward even when tough times, particularly during those Covid years, make doing

so difficult. We have been blessed by her steady and capable leadership. Thank you, Brenda!!

Our executive minister Tim Wiebe-Neufeld both pastors and manages Mennonite Church Alberta. Two very different skill sets! Crunching numbers with the finance folks and then comforting a Chin congregation considering MCA membership after the death of their pastor. Tim regularly reminds us of the promise of God's presence in Christ as we seek to be the church God is calling us to be. Tim's work in 2023 included shepherding Pastor's Council, assisting in pastoral searches, visiting congregations and supporting the discernment processes of those congregations facing challenges. Tim particularly celebrates the hope building here at Holyrood, thanks to the leadership of Joon and Suzanne, as the interim period, financed by MCA, concludes.

Tim's broader Mennonite connections include his work with the MC Canada Executive Staff Group. Through Mennonite Church Canada, we celebrate our direct International Witness relationships with Joanne and Werner De Jong in Ethiopia and Tom and Christine Poovong in Thailand and work supportively with Indigenous Relations and Climate Action.

Communications is a myriad of details in any given week. The website. The Communique, creating print material and digital reports. Donor letters, designing graphics and more. A highlight of 2023 was *A Window Into*. Each month I gathered prayer requests, stories, photos and video clips from our feature congregation. You saw the end product but I had the joy of actually talking to folks in those congregations hearing how much they

appreciate having a faith community to call home. More good news: the weekly newsletter, the MCA Communiqué has increased to 235 subscribers from 209 last year!

2023 was a rich year for Bridge Building. Suzanne's report has examples of how working with others to build relationships — building bridges within our own multi-cultural regional church, with Palestinians, Muslims, the Jewish community, and with Indigenous peoples. She says "As we share what often seem to be small and insignificant stories of interaction with diversity, we leave our times together with renewed awareness of God at work in our communities through these beautiful mutual relationships."

MCA would be in dire straits without committees. Our committee members dance between their day jobs, families, and commitments to their local congregations while still *Takin' Care of Business* for MCA. We are grateful for each of you.

Doug Wiebe, our one person personnel committee navigated a year of change, saying goodbye to Steven Giugovaz, Church Engagement and Tany Warkentin, treasurer and hello to Wayne and Austin Janz joining as Highside Solutions, our contract treasurers.

Not only did they coordinate last year's Annual Delegate sessions in Pincher Creek, Community Building and Program Committee began planning these Annual Delegate Sessions in September! In addition, they distributed funds for Student Bursaries, hosted A Taste of MCA, and organized three Fun and Fundraiser events in November!

Missions and Service are *regrouping* and *re-envisioning*. We will see one of their initiatives tomorrow — a strength-based presentation of what congregations in MCA are already doing to reach out into their communities. In 2023, they have walked alongside (perhaps even danced with) South Sudanese Christians in Calgary, and organized the sponsorship of two Sudanese students attending Meserete Kristos Seminary in Ethiopia.

Congregational Leadership or CLC is a behind-the-scenes committee that is not so behind-the-scenes for pastors and other church leaders through the credentialing work, retreats, and faith studies that CLC helps plan and provide. CLC's primary purpose is to equip congregational leaders for their tasks, helping congregations with visioning and discernment and working with and supporting Tim, our Executive Minister. We don't see them out front but we certainly need them.

Camp Valaqua is sacred ground to us as MCA people! And Jon Olfert is the steady beat of Camp Valaqua, keeping the rhythm going. But we don't often hear of the many details that Jeff Schellenberg, Valaqua's manager takes care of. I attempted to gather some of those together last summer in the article: *Jeff Schellenberg: Here, There, and Everywhere*. Jon and Jeff are supported by a hardworking camp committee. Thanks to a generous gift from Foothills Mennonite, following the sale of their Guesthouse, they have been tasked with using these funds wisely to ensure a vibrant camp into the future.

Gone are the days when Nominations committees picked up the phone and cold called people until their slate of nominees was filled. Now Jan and Joani email with: “I'm contacting you on behalf of the Mennonite Church Alberta Nominating Committee. Your name has been brought forward as someone who has leadership skills that would benefit the work we do together in the regional church. I would love to talk with you about the position and the work.” How could anyone say “no” to that pleasant plea? Come. Join us. Let us do this work together.

Our Creation Care Working Group is new. They do not have a report in the report book but they do have a workshop this afternoon. Liesel and Char, with help from Jessie and Jeremy, are taking the initiative and stay in regular communication with me to make sure that anything Creation Care or Climate Action coming from MC Canada is promoted on their page on our website. If you haven't looked at it — click the link in the Communique.

Margaret Kruger Harder has been an Alberta voice at the Joint Council table since the restructuring of 2017. Joint Council choreographs the dance of MC Canada, conferring about finances, visioning for the future, discussing how MC Canada relates to partner organizations, and more. A variety of people around this table bring positive energy and courage to the nationwide Mennonite Church.

Since 2016, MC Canada committed, by establishing the Palestine-Israel Network (PIN), to upholding our identity as peacemakers with relation to the ongoing occupation of Palestinian lands by Israel. This year PIN matters even more. We have all seen the images coming out of Gaza and Israel. We were looking forward to hearing Munther Isaac in person just days before this conflict erupted. Suzanne, our PIN convener, challenges us all to “pray for wisdom as we navigate the waters of history, culture, human rights and safety for all.”

This year we were often reminded of these three phrases:

Supporting Congregations. Nurturing Connections . And Celebrating Faith in Action.

This IS what we do together as Mennonite Church Alberta. Sometimes awkwardly but often in beautiful choreography as *God is here among us*.