

# This is what we were made for

*Lethbridge Mennonite Church*



Henry and Leona Dick  
Leona's 90th birthday, August 1, 2015

by *Ryan Dueck*, pastor Lethbridge Mennonite

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Last week, I saw an older couple in our church for the first time in fourteen months. Both are north of ninety-five years old. Incredibly, they have been married for over seventy-five years. It probably goes without saying that this simply doesn't happen very often (or at all!) anymore. They live in a senior's home that has had strict visitation guidelines throughout this pandemic and have consequently only seen a few designated visitors throughout. But last week, she called me. *The restrictions have loosened slightly. We can have four visitors now. Would you be one of them?*

Of course, I said yes. And a few days later, I found myself at their kitchen table. There were broad smiles and eager questions. *Would you like some coffee? How is your family? How is the church? How are you doing? We pray for you all often. Please pass along our greetings to the church.* It was so good to see them again. Not pixelated approximations of them on a flat screen, but the real flesh and blood, frail and faltering versions. It was good to shake hands, to hug.

Like most churches during this last year or so, ours has migrated online in various ways, to varying degrees, for varying periods of time. We've done everything from recording grainy services on my laptop on a Friday night to celebrating communion in our homes to live-streaming on Sunday mornings to holding "Zoom foyers" and other informal social gatherings and virtually all of our meetings online. This ability to go online has been a gift, truly. Weekly online services have been a lifeline for many. Some in our congregation have connected with friends and family across vast distances in ways that they might not have done if not spurred by this pandemic. I don't know what our church would have done without these options at our disposal, and I am immensely grateful to all in our congregation who have learned these new skills so we can stay connected.

And yet.... (You knew there was a "but" or an "and yet" coming, right?). Flesh and blood encounters cannot be replaced or replicated online. I was reminded of this as I sat at a sun-kissed kitchen table with these two friends last week. We were created for so much more than digital connection. We have these needs hard-wired into us for touch, for proximity, for physically coming and going to where others are, instead of swapping tabs on our browser or clicking on a different Zoom link. Even the most introverted among us are likely reaching the point where we are itching for a bit of embodied interaction by now, particularly as vaccines continue to roll out and the news seems more hopeful.

Last week I read the biography of the late pastor and writer Eugene Peterson. Peterson is perhaps most well-known for *The Message*, his colloquial paraphrase of Scripture. I don't use *The Message* often, but I have always loved Peterson's rendering of John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood." The incarnation is surely among the deepest of Christian mysteries. The transcendent Creator of all that is,

got down in the dirt and grime and physicality of our world and our lives. We are not Jesus, obviously. But I hope that in the months ahead we, too, will move back into the proverbial “neighbourhood,” into flesh and blood human relationships, embodied worship, shared meals, etc. This is what we were made for.



Henry and Leona Dick  
June 2021

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