

EDITORIAL

Vote your core beliefs

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

While we won't endorse candidates of the five political parties in the upcoming May 2 election, or tell you how to vote, we do ask Mennonite voters to both examine the political views and voting records of candidates regarding our deeply held core beliefs in peacemaking, compassion for the poor and care for creation before placing your ballot in the ballot box.

With the rise in militarism as an unquestioned solution to increasing terrorism, with the economy too often built on the backs of the poor and most vulnerable, and with the corporate greed apparent in providing our never-satisfied hunger for fossil fuel-supplied energy, this is the opportune moment to ask the tough questions of those wanting our vote.

Much of the campaign rhetoric has bypassed many of these issues, but they should matter most for those of us who claim to follow Jesus, who came to bring peace, not a sword; who threw out the money-changers of the ancient Jerusalem temple because the religious establishment was exploiting the poor; and who told the rich young ruler to "sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor" if he wanted eternal life. In today's parlance that would be cut to, "Get a life!"

Historically, we have been far too quiet and passive on these matters. Our acculturation in recent years has dulled our consciences and silenced our witness. With a certain smugness we feel

more comfortable and authentic doing service assignments in far-off Kenya or Haiti, noble a calling as these creative acts of kindness are. We shy away from the public square because of its noise, its deception, its glamorous media mirages, its repetitive inability to walk the talk, its cyclical broken promises.

"It's all such a fraud," we say in disgust to ourselves and our friends. And then, wanting to be good citizens, we inadvertently fall in line with the partisan culture of our times, voting in the self-interests on which most candidates build their platforms.

There is an alternative to this. We appeal to you to rise above your cynicism, to take seriously the call to be, in this case, countercultural as the "salt" in an unjust world.

Fortunately, there are impatient voices calling us to action. In a recent letter to the editor (Jan. 24, page 14), peace advocate Gerhard Neufeld of Winnipeg, Man., called us to pay special attention to Bill C-447, which languished in Parliament after its first reading in March 2010 until the dissolution of Parliament last month. This Act, supported by Mennonite Church Canada, seeks to establish a Department of Peace with its own minister at the federal level. This proposed legislation needs a push from the grassroots to initiate ongoing discussions as a viable alternative to war.

Does your favourite candidate know about this and will he/she advocate its

formation?

There are 18 different bills dealing with issues aligned with our faith beliefs listed on the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ottawa website: Canada's immigration and refugee protection policies, criminal records, consumer protection, free trade between Canada and Colombia, corporate accountability for oil and gas mining, prevention of climate change, respect for conscientious objection to the use of taxes for military purposes, elimination of poverty in Canada, and regulation of corporate practices in the purchase of minerals from the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Unfortunately, the political voices with a background in our core beliefs—such as Vic Toews, Canada's Public Security Minister who was born in Paraguay to a Mennonite refugee family—have succumbed to the fear-mongering of the present government by postponing Bill C-49, which would provide a safe haven for refugees and not return them to their country of origin. Instead, Toews has called the Tamils who came to our shores last year, "terrorists."

And in a recent hearing regarding the much-publicized ballyhoo of International Co-operation Minister Bev Oda's "not" funding of a \$7 million CIDA grant for Kairos, the church-based aid group of which MCC is a partner, Harold Albrecht, MP for Kitchener-Conestoga, Ont., went to some lengths to distance himself from Mennonites, clarifying that he was a member of the Brethren in Christ (BIC) denomination. Even though BICs are of the same communion, as members of Mennonite World Conference, it seemed more important for him to dissociate himself from our core beliefs than to come to grips with the political motives of denying the grant.



ABOUT THE COVER:

'Mother of Lovingkindness,' by Jerry Holsopple, 2011, acrylic and gold leaf on wood; based on the 15th-century Russian icon, 'Vladimir Mother of God.' 'The faces of Mary and Jesus touch, showing us the deep love between them,' says Holsopple, whose works were shown at the 'Mary in Anabaptist Dress' Conference at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, last month. See story on page 16.

PHOTO: JERRY HOLSOPPLE, EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

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Canada

reflected.

Neither artist, however, feels that churches use visual art to its full potential. Siemens thinks that many churches are receptive to incorporating more artwork, but rarely ask for it. That means it's often up to the artist to initiate a project, which doesn't happen very often. "Artists are scared or shy, or they just don't see that God gave them a powerful gift," said Siemens.

Klassen said that Peace Mennonite does a good job with music and drama, but the visual arts aren't integrated as often. She would love to have a gallery in the church or to see paintings worked on as part of the service. She feels, though, that humble artists and a generation gap could be keeping things from moving forward, which means the church misses opportunities to enhance services. "I think it's inspirational

and helps other people worship when they see [art] being done right in front of them, and it's not something to be intimidated about," she said.

At the event, Klassen and Nickel had a conversation with their pastor about putting on an art show at Peace Mennonite in the future.

Both Siemens and Klassen hope this show will inspire other young artists to share their work, and encourage churches to use the talent in their congregations. They also hope to make this an annual event.

As a last word to young artists, Siemens said, "It's just a gift that you've been given, so put [your artwork] out there even if you don't think it's that great, because other people might think it's really amazing." ❧

Political issues for a young electorate

BY AARON EPP

Special to Young Voices
WINNIPEG, MAN.

Kelsey Hutton knew who she was voting for weeks before Manitobans headed to the polls for this month's provincial election: the NDP.

For the past three weeks, Hutton has been working for the party's election outreach team, knocking on doors and talking to people about the party's platform. "I really believe that the NDP should win," she says. "Knocking on doors is a big thing that wins elections," says the 23-year-old, who attends Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg. "It's hugely time-consuming, but I want to do my part." Hutton estimates that she and her team have spoken with more than 4,000 people since Sept. 9, the Friday after the election was announced.

As someone concerned about the poor and the environment, Hutton feels the NDP's values are most in line with her own. "I know realistically when we vote for an MLA [member of the legislative assembly], we can't control what they do or what

decisions they make," Hutton says. "What I feel like I'm controlling when I vote for a party is the base values that are going to influence the decisions that MLA makes."

Hutton is one of many young adult Mennonites in Manitoba who will head to voting stations to decide who can best lead the province for the next four years.

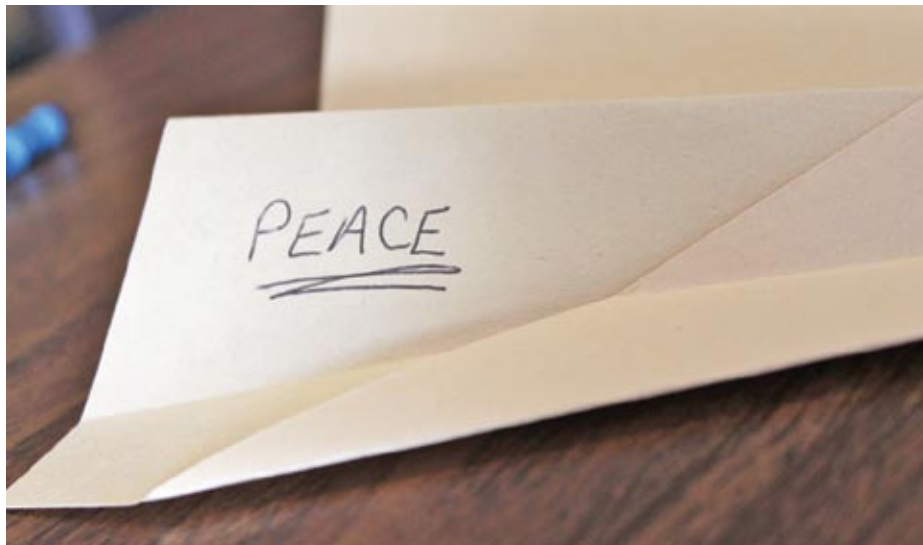
Stefan Epp (no relation to the writer) doesn't say who he's going to vote for, but key issues he's considering before he casts his ballot include support for social programs, poverty reduction and the environment.

"Those have always been important issues for me, in part guided by my faith," says the 26-year-old, who attends Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg. "I think it's important that our society cares for 'the least of these'—that our society is a compassionate [one] that cares for those who need [the] most."

Epp works at Food Matters Manitoba, a



Chris Siemens, 29, hosted an art show featuring young adults at his home this summer.



Throughout the week in Waterloo, youth folded and decorated planes to send a message of peace to Ottawa.

Planes for Peace

Youth fold paper planes at Assembly as a protest against Canada's militarization

EMILY LOEWEN

Young Voices editor
WATERLOO, ONT.

These paper planes may not fly themselves to Ottawa, but even so they will deliver a message to Stephen Harper—spend less money on war. Throughout Assembly youth folded paper planes, covering them with words or pictures of peace, and then sent them off to the capital with youth pastor Sarah Johnson.

The act of folding paper is “something really simple,” said Renae Friesen from Altona Berghthaler Mennonite Church, but in big numbers it could make a difference. And big numbers they achieved; by the end of the week over 1,000 planes were constructed, some including messages like “this plane doesn't fly, and neither should yours.”

Though the teens hope that Canada's leaders will consider their message, they are also realistic about the immediate impact. “It's not like they're going to return [the fighter jets],” said Micahela Epp, from Altona Berghthaler, but if we don't do anything they won't know that we disagree.

Epp, Friesen and Benita Bage felt that it was important to get involved in politics

like this because their future is at stake, and if they don't work for change now they will have to live with the consequences when they're older. The teens suggested that rather than the government spending money on war, they should spend it on things like education, social programming and foster care.

According to Kathy Giesbrecht, associate pastor at Home Street Mennonite Church, the government should be using the billions spent on conflict to establish a Department of Peace, a movement with chapters in over 30 countries (www.mfp-dop.org). Creating a peace department wouldn't mean doing away with defence entirely, “we're not naive,” Giesbrecht said, there is conflict in the world but we think they “might want to experiment with some solutions” and find some that don't include violence.

Though Giesbrecht thinks the government tends to write off pacifists, she said she has hope “my own government and the world can live in different ways in my lifetime.” ☞



Anika Bartel, Trang Tan, Eric Siemens and Fiona Mo fold and decorate paper planes to be sent to Ottawa with a message of peace.

young voices



PHOTO BY EMILY LOEWEN



Jack Layton inspires young people to vote for change

BY RACHEL BERGEN
National Correspondent

"My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world." (Jack Layton)

In Canada, there is a low turnout of young voters. In fact, according to a 2008 study done by Elections Canada, only 38 percent of young people are heading to the polls to vote.

Stefan Epp, 26, a Winnipegger who attends Home Street Mennonite Church, thinks this is because young people may feel alienated or disconnected from politics or politicians. But he says the late Jack Layton, leader of the New Democratic Party, had a remarkable ability to rally forces to work together from different age

"I think Jack renewed a hope in a lot of us, that there is a possibility that our well-being as Canadian citizens is important and that our voices can be heard," she says.

On issues such as the environment, healthcare, poverty, housing shortages and militarism, the government has not done what is best for those on the margins of society, these young people believe.

"They have gone from a world leader to a world disgrace," Epp says of Canada's environmental record.

And for Dueck, who works at a drop-in

Epp and Dueck believe that Layton may have inspired young people and others who would never have voted, to vote for change.

groups, political parties and regions of Canada.

Emily Dueck, 27, from Toronto United Mennonite Church, agrees. She has often been cynical about politicians, especially Conservative politicians. Prior to Layton assuming the leadership of the NDP, Dueck says she thought of politicians as a bit dishonest and that their agenda included "not standing up for those who are on the margins, looking out for big businesses and corporations, their economic standing in the world, and not looking out for the needs of regular citizens."

But Layton made a big impression on her, so much so that she stood in line for nine hours to attend his funeral in Toronto.

centre in Toronto that Mennonite Central Committee runs, the bulk of the homeless and impoverished people she works with do not vote at all because they don't think their vote counts.

Epp and Dueck believe that Layton may have inspired young people and others who would never have voted, to vote for change. "My hope is that young people can imagine a better world, and work for a better world within the current political system," Epp says. "There is a possible route to creating the change they want to see in the world."

While it is evident that Layton's words inspired Canadians, as many people attended his funeral or watched it on television, Epp and Dueck hope that his words will motivate

EDITORIAL

A political lament

DICK BENNER
EDITOR/PUBLISHER

As an American living and working in Canada, I am both intrigued and saddened by two political events of the past ten days in these two North American countries—the take-out of Osama bin Laden by the U.S. military and the take-over by a militaristic Conservative majority government in Monday's elections in Canada.

Both shake my Anabaptist moorings to the core. Frankly, I am groping for hope and a whole lot of healing in the days ahead. Both countries, bent on meeting violence head-on with guns and billion-dollar stealth fighter-bombers, keep plunging the world into a “cycle of hate” (Braun, p. 13)—a cycle of animosity that “must be broken.”

It seems as if our peace witness, our votes (hopefully) for candidates with a different agenda, have gone silent. With the prophet Isaiah we wonder how long it will be before Yahweh will “judge between the nations, arbitrate for many peoples—when they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

On the US side there seems to be an endless, ongoing obsession with the bin Laden killing, provoking a host of reactions—celebration, triumph, relief, closure and renewed grief. On the down side, it has triggered an ugly renewal of the torture debate, the apologists for which the *New York Times* says are both “cynical and disturbing.” It calls torture, as the Bush administration administered it, “immoral, illegal and counterproductive.”

Spokespersons for the political right in the US couldn't contain their glee over the killing of bin Laden. Sarah Palin said Americans were “united in celebration” and Mike Huckabee, celebrating the death of a madman, murderer and terrorist, “welcomed bin Laden to hell,” as if he has jurisdiction over that torture chamber for the wicked.

On the Canadian side, the problem of increasing militarism as a strategy for national security is even more endemic. The now firmly entrenched Harper government, often described as a divide-and-conquer regime, may well dominate the country's direction for more than a decade, according to *Globe and Mail* columnist Lawrence Martin.

Not only is Harper committed to the purchase of 65 F-35 stealth bombers at an estimated cost of \$30 billion (working out to as high as \$1,000 for every man, woman and child in Canada), he has, in the words of writer Marci McDonald “aligned himself with the wing of the Jewish community that holds the most uncompromising views on the Middle East peace process.”

That alignment came very close home to Mennonites in our work with Kairos, when as their partner through Mennonite Central Committee, we suffered a \$7 million “defunding” by CIDA (Canada International Development Agency) ostensibly for its “boycott and divestment campaigns against Israel—a move equated with anti-Semitism”—a

charge that was later found to be baseless.

Not only are these political strategies of stepped-up security and balance of power in the Middle East where an “Arab spring” is sweeping across dictator-controlled countries, out of touch, they have not proven effective over the long haul. Bin Laden, without stealth bombers or drones, it was noted by *Washington Post* columnist Ezra Klein, was very effective “in nearly bankrupting the U.S. economy” with his 9/11 attack.

But more fundamentally, it is wrong. It doesn't see the world with God's eyes, as David Steven, a pastor writing on *The Mennonite's* website noted: “When Al-Qaeda and those like them enter another country and kill people we call it ‘terrorism.’ When the U.S. military and intelligence personnel and those of our allies enter another country and kill people, we call it ‘justice.’ I wonder if God sees it that way.”

Student Intern to develop CM youth section, website

Emily Loewen, studying for her master's of journalism degree at Ryerson University, Toronto, begins today, May 16, as *Canadian Mennonite's* student intern. She will

develop a youth section for the bi-weekly publication which references an interactive link on the magazine's website, featuring news, issues and topics that engages high-school and university-age Mennonites. She will work out of the Waterloo office as a team member of the CM staff. From Langley, B.C., she is a 2009 graduate of Canadian Mennonite University and last year was a summer intern in Mennonite Central Committee's United Nations Liaison Office compiling research on international issues, attending UN meetings and monitoring news from conflict zones.



ABOUT THE COVER:

During the 100th anniversary services at Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto, Ont., last month, Sunday school children prepare to bury a time capsule that will be opened in 25 years. See story and more photos on page 19.

PHOTO: LAVERNA REIMER, DANFORTH MENNONITE CHURCH

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Canada

MCC calls on feds to seriously rethink Bill C-10

BY RACHEL BERGEN

National Correspondent

Everybody wants to feel safe and deserves to, but what about offenders?

The federal government is working towards passage of Bill C-10, formerly known as “The Safe Streets and Communities Act,” as a bundled bill in order to speed up the legislation. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) believes this action is hasty and not thought through, as it focuses mainly on punishing offenders further and barely at all about the victim’s healing.

According to the MCC Ottawa website, four of the nine pieces of legislation propose longer or mandatory prison sentences, two would impose greater financial penalties on offenders, and two would create new obstacles for offenders reintegrating

into society. Only two directly address the needs of victims, and none of the initiatives propose new crime prevention or rehabilitation strategies.

MCC doesn’t believe these initiatives will make streets and communities safer. Instead, it advocates for community-based justice initiatives, including preventive and restorative justice, claiming



Heidebrecht

they address the victim as well as the offender. Community-based justice programs are proven to work better than merely imprisoning people, according to the John Howard Society, which cites recidivism rates of 45 percent for people who have

been incarcerated without community-based justice programs, but only 15 percent or less for those who are involved in such programs.

“Justice varies for each community,” says Paul Heidebrecht, director of the MCC Ottawa Office. “It is not just a one-size-fits-all process of what will make everyone safe in Canada. We think the Government of Canada should be looking at the creative alternatives.”



Peters

Bundling bills is a fairly rare occurrence, according to Heidebrecht. It occurs occasionally, but usually the legislation requires that each separate initiative be processed three different times to ensure there are no faults. The Conservative’s election platform stated that Bill C-10 would be pushed

through within the first 100 sitting days of Parliament.

Don Peters, MCC Canada’s executive director, recently sent a letter to Rob Nicholson, the minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, advising the government to take due process to attend to the bill: “We affirm the Government of Canada’s interest in making our communities safe. . . . Our basic concern is that Bill C-10 will diminish the federal government’s capacity to fulfill this calling.”

Included among the omnibus Safe Streets and Communities Act’s nine pieces of legislation are: The Protecting Children from Sexual Predators Act, which proposes increased penalties for sexual offences against children and two new offences for facilitating or enabling the commission of such an act; The Penalties for Organized Drug Crime Act, which would target organized crime by imposing tougher sentences for the production and possession of illicit drugs; and The Eliminating Pardons for Serious Crimes Act, which would extend the ineligibility period of pardons to five years for summary conviction offences and 10 years for indictable offences.

According to the government, the crime bill will target crime and terrorism, and provide support and protection to victims of crime. Heidebrecht, on the other hand, believes the bill will primarily impact offenders and ex-offenders. ❧

It is not just a one-size-fits-all process of what will make everyone safe in Canada. We think the Government of Canada should be looking at the creative alternatives.

/// Briefly noted

Community meal raises funds for Kenyan orphanage

WINNIPEG, MAN.—In just under two hours, Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) and the supporting community raised \$4,100 for Hope Community Centre, an orphanage in rural Kenya. Hosting its annual homecoming event, MCI student council executive was invited to take charge of a traditional Mennonite supper of noodles and sausage in an effort to raise money for the centre. After a few hours of cutting onions and peeling sausage, the majority of which was donated, the evening proved a great success. The money will be used to purchase food for the centre’s 150 students. It is expected that the gift will feed the entire community for more than a month. Through a Mennonite Central Committee work-and-learn tour called MCI for Hope, the school will be sending a group of students to Kenya for spring break next year. Says principal Darryl Loewen of the upcoming trip, “More than care or regard for issues of poverty, homelessness or loss due to HIV/AIDS, I trust that this visit to Hope will prompt students to passion for . . . the children of God. I pray that the Holy Spirit will cause us to embrace a broader understanding of the kingdom of Christ.”

—Mennonite Collegiate Institute