

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada
Annual General Meeting, CMU, Winnipeg, Manitoba
January 24, 2026
DRAFT

Present: 22

Aileen Friesen, Plett Historical Research Foundation
Alf Redekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg
Brian Froese, Canadian Mennonite University
Bruce Guenther, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Executive member
Carina Gallardo, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Church Canada
Dave Neufeldt, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
David Klippenstein, Guest
Ed Krahn, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Jennifer Martens, Mennonite Heritage Museum and Mennonite Historical Society of BC
Jeremy Wiebe, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Treasurer
John Reddekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Katie Harder, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Linda Klassen, Mennonite Historical Society of BC
Lucille Marr, Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec
Robert Goertzen, Mennonite Heritage Village
Rob Tiessen, Guest
Sara Dyck, Mennonite Church Canada
Troy Osborne, Institute of Anabaptist Mennonite Studies

1. **Welcome** – Conrad Stoesz opened the meeting.
2. **Approval of agenda** – the agenda was accepted as presented.
3. **Devotional** - Jake Buhler - 2 Kings tells the story of the Book of the Law being hidden away in an archive to protect it from imminent Syrian attack. When it resurfaces 200 years later it is read to the King who tears his clothes in grief. He has never heard these words before. The scroll is taken to the Prophetess, Huldah, who authenticates the scroll. This leads to nation-wide repentance and a change in the course of Israelite history. A second story is of a postcard written near Moscow in 1949. It arrives in Osler SK amid great rejoicing. Years later it is translated and reveals information the family never knew. There is gratitude for biblical stories of archive and for personal archives that preserve family stories. May the archives live forever. Conrad closed in prayer.

Comment: history is a sacred trust.

4. **Minutes** – Linda Klassen read the minutes of January 17, 2025.

MOTION to accept the minutes with minor changes: Linda Klassen S: John Reddekopp **CARRIED.**

5. **Business arising** – There was no new business.

6. **Ratification of committees for 2026**

- a. A People of Diversity Committee (book project): Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Brian Froese, Lucille Marr, Conrad Stoesz, Bruce Guenther.
- b. Archives Committee: Laureen Harder-Gissing (chair) MHSO, Zachary LeClaire SMHQ, Conrad Stoesz, MHA, Carina Gallardo, CMBS, Jake Buhler, MHSS, Rob Thiessen, MHSA Linda Klassen, MHSBC.
- c. Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair) Brian Froese, Lucille Marr, Leonard Doell, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Jeremy Wiebe, Bruce Guenther, Ruth Plett. Conrad Stoesz.
- d. MAID Management Committee: Conrad Stoesz (chair) Laureen Harder-Gissing, Alf Redekopp, Hannah Keeney, John Thiesen,
- e. MHSC GAMEO Committee: Laureen Harder-Gissing (chair), Bert Friesen, Richard Thiessen, Aileen Friesen, Alf Redekopp.
- f. Unnamed Diversity Committee: Ed Krahn, (co-chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Brian Froese, Bruce Gunther, David Y. Neufeld.
- g. Website Committee: Andrew Klassen Brown (chair), Jeremy Wiebe.
- h. Russlaender Documentary Committee: Ailene Friesen(chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Conrad Stoesz, Dave Y. Neufeld, Richard Thiessen.

MOTION to accept the slate as presented: Linda Klassen S: Laureen Harder-Gissing **CARRIED.**

7. **President's Report** – Conrad Stoesz shared about attending the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement in Zürich, Switzerland on May 29, 2025. The service included a message from The Pope "...to show love, seek unity, and serve others... It likewise points to the need for honesty and kindness in reflecting on our common history, which includes painful wounds and narratives that affect Catholic-Mennonite perceptions up to the present day."

2025 was another year filled with anniversaries. Each celebration gave a clear message that this *is* important. Honesty and kindness are helpful qualities as we work towards writing and collecting our stories, preserving them and sharing them with a wider audience.

8. **Reports from Provincial Societies**

a. **Quebec** – Lucille Marr reported that she, Richard Lougheed and Zacharie Leclaire met recently. They discussed whether its helpful to be part of MHSC and agreed that it is. They are grateful to be part of it. Richard condensed parts of his book, *Cahier historique*, as a partial condensation of his book *Menno's Descendants in Quebec*. The French version of this book is sold out. Zacharie is connecting with First Nations groups, which is a large part of what SHMQ does. Lucille is part of the Brethren in Christ and

Mennonite Churches and gives a lot of energy to that. Zacharie is working a lot with MCC. He is enthusiastic about how history has formed his own faith journey. Copies of Cahier historique are available for circulation by email.

b. **Ontario** – Alf Redekopp reported that Laureen was on sabbatical for six months in 2025. They are facing financial challenges. A bequest from a few years ago is quite depleted. Membership has declined to under 100 members. They are hosting events but question how to translate that into memberships. They support Brubaker House, the Detweiler Meetinghouse and Altona Meetinghouse. Their bylaws were updated recently to comply with the Ontario Not For-Profit Corporations Act. Their newsletter is published twice per year.

c. **Manitoba** – Ed Krahn. Highlights include their publication *Heritage Postings*, where they are moving to themed issues. The current one is on Fuerstenland. They have begun searching social media to look for stories. They have engaged with other Organizers groups. They've also connected with the Ogniwio Polish Museum for potential future projects of Mennonites in Prussia and Poland. Board members are working with Holdeman groups and looking at outreach opportunities, like how to reach other Holdeman groups or the Brueder Gemeinde. They are talking about where they are going, how to grow and how to reach people. A discussion paper has gone out regarding outreach to different groups and demographics. Work continues on the Trails of the East and West Reserves. They received a large donation to make the trails accessible to all. They like to celebrate volunteers and their importance. Last year volunteers Harold Dyck and John Giesbrecht passed away.

d. **Saskatchewan** – John Reddekopp reported that a challenge for them is volunteers. They are down to two volunteers on-site but have volunteers in different areas such as their board members and *The Saskatchewan Historian*. There is an agreement with the Youth Farm Bible Camp to publish the periodical for free and use the back page for their own advertising. Jake Buhler is part of *Walking the Path*, a group that is working at connecting with First Nations. They meet with MHSS every six weeks to talk about relationships between First Nations and Mennonites. There are challenges with digitization and how to go about it. They had good response to their Anabaptism at 500 celebrations.

e. **Alberta** – Katie Harder began her report with these words: 'Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His faithfulness endures forever'. This year MHSA showed the documentary *Where the Cottonwoods Grow* in Edmonton, Calgary & Coaldale. The events were very well attended and included a large group from the Linden (Holdeman) community. Their spring conference, *Celebrating 500 years of Anabaptism*, was held in Calgary with Conrad Stoesz as the speaker. The fall Conference, *Sharing the Land: The Story of Reserve 107*, with Leonard Doell was also held in Calgary. There was a tribute to volunteer Ellie Janz, who retired after 14 years of service. They are reviewing what kinds of volunteers they need. They gained two new board members this year, Rob Tiessen and Don Stoesz. They look forward to showing the Russlaender documentary. They have a donor to help start up an endowment fund.

f. **British Columbia** – Linda Klassen. Their biggest success of 2025 was a concert, *500: A Celebration of the Anabaptist Mennonite Story* in March. This was the mastermind of Calvin Dyck and drew about 1,000 guests. The concert consisted of two choirs and an orchestra in the first half and the Mennonite Piano Concerto performed by Paul Williamson in the second half. Another success came in their EWZ

department. The many requests coming in, mostly from Germany, caused a backlog. One of the volunteers created a system and trained other volunteers to answer the requests and they are now caught up. Challenges include a number of volunteers who will be retiring in the foreseeable future. With fewer volunteers in recent years, they struggle to answer requests in a timely manner.

9. **MHSC Award of Excellence** – Conrad Stoesz read the citation and presented the award to Bert Friesen. Bert expressed deep gratitude for the award and said it was an honour to be recognized. He reminisced about the past and how things have changed from the days of the floppy disk until the present. His generation went as far as they could go in making archives available and now the current generation must continue the work.

10. Committee Reports

a. **A People of Diversity** – Ben Nobbs-Thiessen states that his job is to facilitate, not direct the process. Their last meeting was an update on the progress of the new book and how it fits into *Mennonites in Canada (Vol VI)*. It's time to consider publishers. They discussed starting a readers' committee and how the group can help. Laureen appreciates the support and encouragement of the committee. It was started in the early 1970's to produce *Mennonites in Canada* with the first book published in 1974.

b. **Archives committee** – Laureen Harder-Gissing reported that the committee is a fairly informal group of Mennonite archives from across Canada. One formal piece of business is to approve the budget for MAID. The MAID budget becomes part of MHSC budget. There are currently 18 different MAID groups across North and South America.

c. **Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites** – Ben Nobbs-Thiessen. This committee overlaps with *A People of Diversity*. MCC has agreed to fund DVCM V after lots of feedback from MCC and some changes to previous metrics. The funding supports conferences and publications. There are four yearly grants of \$8,000. The funds will go towards a justice conference in 2027. Also in 2027 is a *Migration to Paraguay* conference, which includes travel to Paraguay. There is \$8,000 for publications and another \$8,000 will fund a conference at Conrad Grebel in 2028. It will center on interest in newcomers and a more diverse and expanded view of Mennonites in Canada.

d. **MAID Management** – Conrad Stoesz reported that membership remains the same. They welcomed the Hutterite Historical Archive in 2025. The point is to post historically significant photos to MAID. There was a problem in the fall that required attention from Peaceworks and briefly disrupted operations.

Q: regarding privacy issues raised in MHSBC's report.

A. Laureen created a chart to help MAID think about privacy issues. Ontario has to be careful about posting life dates, as this is not well received in Ontario. MHSO will sometimes add information about a photo but not post the photo.

MHSS has had requests from two families to not post items publicly.

People often don't understand what MAID does with photos. MHSBC would like to add some guidelines for how to donate on their website.

Photos taken in public domain are okay to post online.

f. **MHSC GAMEO** – Laureen Harder-Gissing. There is a working group for GAMEO in Canada but they are part of the larger GAMEO board. There were many ‘denial of service’ attacks this year which skewed the visit number results.

Q: regarding updating older entries.

A: They are working on updating obsolete information. The editorial policy is to shift to integrated articles rather than listing old and new together.

The future of GAMEO is uncertain. There is lots of reorganizing going on in the USA. Gameo hasn’t gotten the attention it needs in quite awhile. It’s necessary to contribute to Gameo and personal ownership from within this community would be helpful. We can tell local histories through Gameo. It’s a volunteer-based structure, so support is vital.

g. **Russlaender Documentary committee** - Aileen Friesen. Many things and people were left out of the final cut but that’s the nature of this type of project. It will be widely available to other groups. Provincial societies will receive \$2,000 each for screenings. This film belongs to all the hard work of the provincial societies to make the trip and the documentary possible. It’s almost a love letter to the provincial societies for all they did to make this trip happen. It’s a testament to this community and all we do to preserve Mennonite history.

h. **Website Committee** – Jeremy Wiebe. The committee made some minor updates to the MHSC website last year. Members are welcome to make suggestions for additions to website.

i. **Mennonite Diversity Committee** – There was no report, however, Aileen Friesen has decided to remain on the committee.

11. Institutional Reports

a. **Mennonite Archives of Ontario/ Mennonite Church Eastern Canada** – Laureen Harder-Gissing was on sabbatical for six months. She found it interesting to observe from the researcher’s perspective instead of being the answer person.

b. **Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies / Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches** – Carina Gallardo. This was her first whole year in the archives. She is grateful for the support she received from both Conrad and Alf. Their two MAID volunteers left in 2024. A challenge is that they are down to one volunteer who has been there a long time. A highlight was that CMBS was at the Equip Conference for the first time. Carina got to give tours of the archives, hoping people will reach out. Susanne Voth Wiebe brought in a large donation to the archives.

c. **Mennonite Heritage Archives / Mennonite Church Canada**- Conrad Stoesz. Some highlights include a 15-minute radio show/podcast with over 50 episodes. The radio broadcast is reaching new audiences. Another is that this generation of university students are really job focused. They are encouraged to volunteer so MHA has 3-4 students in their 20’s and 30’s who have come to volunteer. Some are Mennonite, some are not.

d. **Canadian Mennonite University** - Brian Froese reported that the rash of anniversaries lately has put history in the limelight. Some professors have spoken at these events and are more history aware. Brian agreed to write a history of CMU. It has been put on pause and will start up again in 2027/28. He wants to keep the momentum of history going in the limelight. There are connections between CMU courses and MHA. They are looking at a future course on history in Manitoba.

e. **Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel** – Troy Osborne. The committee consists of Troy, Laureen and David Y. Neufeld. They had a busy year with the Bechtel lectures and a group tour to Europe. The tour finished in Zurich with the 500th anniversary commemoration. IAMS is responsible for the Mennonite studies minor. A challenge is that students are job focused and IAMS is looking for ways to encourage more students to enroll in Mennonite Studies. Conrad Grebel is in conversation with AMBS on creating a new open-source, online journal to replace the Mennonite Review. They are hoping to be active later this year.

f. **Chair in Mennonite Studies** – Ben Nobbs-Thiessen. The 2025 Fall conference was *Global Mennonites and the Justice System Since 1525 Martyrs, Perpetrators, Enforcers, and Advocates*. This year's conference will be on communication; people staying in touch with each other. Lots of students in undergrad programs are declaring Mennonite studies as their minor. A highlight last year was a study trip abroad in Belize (7 students, 3 adults). Aileen will be taking a group of students across Europe this spring. They are using the Friesen Family Award to finance the trip.

g. **D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation** – Aileen Friesen. The foundation still exists under the leadership of Roy Loewen and grants are still available. Their periodical, *Preservings*, is published twice per year. The upcoming issue focuses on courtship in Mennonite history. PLAN (the Plett Library Access Network) supports literacy and historical knowledge among Mennonite communities. Since 2020 it has supported libraries in Mexico, Colombia, and Bolivia. They go into places that have contacted the Plett Foundation – they don't force themselves into places. Books are mostly in German, but some are English, depending on the community. Anne Froese has been brought in to collect books for the libraries. She has collected many books from Germany. They would like to expand into schools.

h. **Mennonite Heritage Museum** – Jennifer Martens. A highlight last year was their first in-house exhibit, *Unearthing the Vanished*, which tells the story of the Great Terror of the late 1930's. It features new source material as well as information from their archives. It was very successful and is ready to travel to other museums. Another highlight was the annual Mennonite Christmas Market. This was the best one they've ever had with over 2,000 guests. It has become a destination market and was recognized by Abbotsford's mayor as the best market of Abbotsford. The museum held its first fundraiser in the fall. Peter Redekop has carried the funding for 10 years and has now opened it up to donors.

A challenge is that their funding model has changed and this resulted in staff cuts. Richard retired in 2025 and there's no one to replace him. Jennifer is currently managing the museum. Richard is still consulting with MHM and is still president of MHSBC. The Café is open three per days. There is demand for programming that they can't fulfill.

i. Mennonite Heritage Village – Robert Goertzen reported that MHV continues to share the story of the Mennonites who came to Manitoba in 1870s. MHV is a significant tourist attraction.

The exhibit *Mennonite Reflections: Arriving in Manitoba 150 Years Ago* opened during Pioneer days in 2024. It has been extended into this year. They celebrated the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism in June with a lecture by Gareth Brandt and his exhibit *Radical Roots*. He also presented *From Munster to Menno* at the Peace Garden.

A group of seven German-speaking MB churches from Southern Manitoba produced a traveling exhibit, *On Fire for Christ: 500 Years of Discipleship, From the Anabaptists*, which MHV hosted. Many people in this group have family and faith connections in the larger Mennonite community, but there's not a lot of connection with them.

The second stage of new outdoor signage has been installed and the third stage will be installed in spring. These are updated, interpretive panels that are weatherproof. They had 50,000 people come for events such as Canada day, Pioneer days, School programs, weddings and festivals. Winter options are increasing, with a growing number of both indoor and outdoor activities. Challenges include increasing costs, staff wages and insurance premiums which are causing pressure.

Senior curator Garth Doerksen began in 2025. A new exhibit, *Mennonites and Medicine*, covering a time span from the early 1800s to 1930's is in production. Garth Doerksen is navigating through this.

Q: Is there a Mennonite Museum Society? Perhaps we should start one.

j. Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) – There were no reports or representatives present.

k. Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) - No reports or representatives present.

12. Review of financial statements as at October 31, 2025– Jeremy Wiebe.

Statement of operations: the donations columns include an unexpected \$5,000 donation plus some smaller ones. Grant payments were less than the expected \$10,000. There is some holdover still coming to us.

A few highlights in the statements are that interest income was slightly higher than expected. The Hutterian Brethren Heritage Archives joined MAID and paid new member fees. AGM travel disbursements were slightly less than expected. The GST rebate was also less than expected.

Expenditures include MAID operations of \$5,336, GAMEO support of \$300.00, DVCM Conference for \$8,000. The Russlaender documentary spent \$7,500 in 2025, which was less than expected due to the timeline shifting.

MOTION to accept the financial statements as presented: Jeremy Wiebe S: Jake Buhler **CARRIED**.

Budget: - Jeremy Wiebe gave a breakdown of the budget.

The last installment of the Russlaender documentary grant (\$2,525) will be paid provided we meet all the conditions of the grant. Year. With the \$14,573 currently in the Russlaender documentary fund, this amounts to \$17,098. An amount of \$11,533 will be offset by Russlaender fund.

Expenditures are expected to be very similar to last year.

Q: There is interest income of \$350. Can we invest a portion of our funds in 30-day renewable investments? For example: cashflow management with higher interest like GIC's for 30–90 days at 3%?

Comment that we would need a finance committee rather than have Jeremy be responsible for managing investments on his own. There should be more than one person involved.

A: This will be an agenda item for the executive to look at.

MOTION: to accept the budget as presented: Jeremy Wiebe 2: Dave Neufeldt **CARRIED.**

MOTION: to have Hans Werner be our auditor for 2026: Jeremy Wiebe 2: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen **CARRIED.**

13. Nominations committee: All current executive members have agreed to serve for another year.

1. President: Conrad Stoesz
2. Vice President: Laureen Harder-Gissing
3. Secretary: Linda Klassen
4. Treasurer: Jeremy Wiebe
5. Fifth Member: Bruce Guenther

MOTION: that nominations cease and we accept the slate as presented: Ed Krahn, S: Brian Froese, **CARRIED**

We will need another member for the nominations committee.

14. Other business – There was no other business.

15. Next meeting and meeting schedule – The 2027 AGM will be held in Abbotsford, BC, with dates to be determined. Winnipeg will host in 2028.

16. Diversity committee – Laureen Harder-Gissing led this part of the meeting. We added a segment to discuss the diversity committee, originally formed in 2024. Some of the thoughts shared appear below.

- Mennonites are interested in history but not necessarily the faith side. This is not connected to our work. They want Mennonite history from a cultural angle. Not all groups we're talking about would come at this from the same angle. Some might feel uncomfortable around us.

- We have an underrepresentation of other Mennonite groups.

- How do we speak to and engage with a younger generation?

- Stories of new groups into Canada haven't been interlaced with our traditional stories.
- We're an umbrella organization so inviting newcomers falls to the local societies as they are better suited to reach out and invite new people.
- We can extend invitations to conference groups who are not represented here. It's good to "cherry pick" groups we already have connections with. Brethren in Christ have joined us before, do we want to invite them again?
- Another way to develop institutional partners would be to connect with some of the Mennonite museums across the country.
- Old order Mennonites from Ontario are coming to the archives to research their own history.
- Saskatchewan has had meetings with other Mennonite groups in a neutral location. They were well attended. For six years they held events focusing on one Mennonite group each time.
- Does our orientation towards history meet the interests of other groups? Do they want to join us around the table or just pursue their own interest?
- We could create an initiative to bring in youth delegates. The hosting society would invite 2-3 youth to come to our AGM. We could contact churches asking them to recommend some youth. The executive should look into the history of having youth delegates.
- One church used to have an annual bulletin insert featuring a story of a missionary or prominent person. MHSBC is doing this via Facebook and their number of followers has doubled.
- Regarding Mennonites in BC book: there are 16 Mennonite denominations in BC. Some groups have written congregational histories. Old colony and Sommerfelder stories have been documented by others. The Holdeman have 12+ congregations in BC.
- There was some discussion about providing training to create church historians. MHSO has done this in the past. Laureen maintains a webpage for church historians. Conrad will do a webinar on this topic in February for MB churches.
- We must focus on what we're able to do.

17. Motion to adjourn – Jake Buhler. 2:54pm

Minutes respectfully submitted by
Linda Klassen