

Foreword:

Most of the papers in this year's *Journal of Mennonite Studies* arise from the 'Mennonites, Melancholy and Mental Health' history conference, held at the University of Winnipeg on 14-16 October 2010. This conference, the seventh Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM) conference in twelve years, confronted one of the great taboos in our society, an open discussion on the issue of mental illness.

Certainly the topic of mental health history has been controversial. The conference planning committee faced it when it debated the very name of the conference; an early reference to 'Mennonites and Madness' was dropped even though the word 'madness' was recognized as liberationist in the international community. The problem was that 'madness' suggested to some a trivialization of a serious problem. And as discussion proceeded even the term 'mental health' seemed problematic as it suggested an essentialist dichotomy, separating those Mennonites who possessed 'mental health' from those who apparently did not. The debate over terminology signaled the politics and deeply-placed emotions linked to this topic.

The papers in this volume consider the history of mental illness from a variety of perspectives. Some examine ways in which Mennonites have stigmatized the mentally ill, others dwell on theological responses to depression, some focus on ways in which Mennonites have responded creatively to seek healing, and others document events related to depression, trauma, and suicide. Most of the papers are historical in nature, tracing changes in attitude and behavior over time.

The *Journal* begins with a creative piece set in one family's multi-generational sojourn in Ukraine, Germany and Canada. In it, Elsie

Neufeld takes readers on a journey through depression and suicide, and in the process articulates the pain that these unexpected hurdles instilled in the victims of mental illness and their families.

The first three papers in the research section are set in some fashion in the Second World War. In the first, one based in the field of psychosociology, Elizabeth Krahn examines the way in which Mennonite immigrants and their adult children from the Soviet Union spoke about and processed their Second World War-based trauma. Using an autoethnographic approach, Krahn herself, a child of these immigrants, becomes a subject in this account of upheaval and struggle. The next two papers are more strictly historical in nature and focus on the nexus of the Second World War and the mental health movement that swept through the North American Mennonite community. Titus Bender reworks part of his Ph.D. dissertation from the 1960s to trace the growing consciousness among Conscientious Objectors in the United States who worked in mental hospitals and then inspired an increasingly sophisticated response to mental health issues over the next two decades within the wider Mennonite community. Conrad Stoesz, in his survey of the Canadian side of this story, focuses more specifically on the experience of Conscientious Objectors in the mental hospitals; he also finds Mennonite farm boys in a remarkably new and wider world.

Specific moments in the history of mental illness in Prairie Canada comprise the subjects of the next two papers. Margaret Loewen Reimer recounts the tragic story of Heinrich Toews who shot three girls and three male trustees, killing one of the girls, in Altona, Manitoba in 1902; Toews' own writings and his sojourns in Chicago and New York provide the context of an intellectually gifted educator whose mental illness led to a horrific outcome. Erika Dyck recounts how Saskatchewan Mennonites responded to mental illness (and some other health issues) among youth, by establishing the Mennonite Youth Farm at Rosthern; the Farm managed at once to protect the Mennonites' ethnoreligious culture and care for their disadvantaged members.

The following four papers focus on the responses of specific Anabaptist church groups, each one somewhat on the periphery of the wider North American Mennonite community, and each casting the challenge of mental illness in a particular way. Glen Klassen and Charles Loewen examine a 1950s-era initiative of the Manitoba-based Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC, formerly *Kleine Gemeinde*) that eventually evolved into the inter-church Eden Mental Health Services in Winkler. A long history of caring for the weak met the challenges of mid-twentieth century modernization to provide an impetus for innovation. Lucille Marr relates a high profile 1968 suicide in the Brethren in Christ denomination and then an unprecedented

public and theological grappling with mental illness over the next two decades; denominational leaders, Marr argues, effectively countered the shame of silence and stigma of mental brokenness. Steven Nolt outlines how within the last generation, Old Order Mennonites and Old Order Amish in North America have moved from an informal, familial-centric approach to mental health to a robust support of professionalized service that nevertheless incorporate Old Order ideas of modesty and personal relationship. Finally, a paper by Judith G. Kulig and Hai Yan (Ling Ling) Fan examines concepts of suffering among Low German-speaking Mexico Mennonite migrants, mostly of Old Colony Mennonite origin and residing in southern Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario; they argue that mental anguish is held in check by these migrants' beliefs that suffering has a divine purpose."

Taking quite a different tact, Grace Kehler interprets expressions of mental anguish within Canadian Mennonite literature; these expressions arise from a *Gemeinschaft*-based hegemony of silence that echo the anguished voices of dissent within sixteenth and seventeenth century Anabaptist martyrologies.

Two papers by psychologists offer personal reflections on the way Mennonite professionals have approached mental illness. Aldred Neufeld outlines the image, vision and values that undergird the most effective approach to creating institutional responses to mental health needs; it was an approach, he argues, that was adopted by the Mennonite Mental Health Services movement of the 1950s and 60s; the ethos was rooted in a faith tradition but was grafted into contemporary professional practices. John Elias traces the increasingly complex world in which Mennonites live and the intersection of these social changes with an inherited minority status, an ethics-based religiosity and an abiding constellation of social support systems.

Two final pieces are research notes that incorporate newly examined sources to retell the story of two mental health facilities that inspired the modern day network of facilities in Canada and the United States. Helmut Huebert employs reports from a yearbook and selected newspaper stories to enrich the standard history of Bethania Mental Hospital in Russia, while Ken Reddig adds notes from primary materials to the history of Bethesda in Vineland, Ontario, the first North American Mennonite mental hospital.

In the lone "Other Research Papers" section, Gerhard Rempel explores the life of Nazi propagandist, Heinrich Schroeder. Born to Mennonite parents in the Molotschna Colony in Russia, Schroeder emigrated to Germany where he became an articulate and unabashed spokesperson for Hitler's regime; Rempel argues that Mennonites must confront the darker parts of their past, no matter how heinous they might seem.

As always, this issue of the *Journal* closes with two sets of book reviews, once again marking the remarkably rich discourse on Mennonites in Canada and beyond. Special thanks are extended this year to Kathleen Venema who has served as book review editor of literature for eight years with immense professionalism and thoroughness, prodigiously identifying the dozen or so worthy works of poetry and fiction that emanate from Mennonite writers each year and then finding gifted reviewers to report to the wider reading public. A sincere and heartfelt thanks to Kathleen!

Much gratitude are also extended to Brian Froese (history book review editor) and Sarah Klassen, Peter Pauls and Al Reimer for their volunteer work as copy editors

Respectfully submitted,
Royden Loewen