Harvest Time: Modernizing Mennonites and Hutterites with a Prairie Prosperity Gospel

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Assistant Pastor Phil Kleinsasser closed the third Sunday service of Winnipeg's Springs Church with a tithing sermonette as familiar to Springs members as the plan of salvation.[1] The aging ex-farmer in a pair of telltale faded jeans laboured over the details of God's desire to create abundance in all areas of their lives and how it began with their gifts and offerings. He reminded them that he was from an agricultural background, an oblique reference to his upbringing on a rural Manitoba Hutterite colony, and that any farmer knew the principles at work. In a few months' time, the seeds for wheat and barley planted deep in the warm ground would grow into golden fields to be reaped, threshed, and winnowed. Sowing and reaping. He assured them that God's spiritual laws worked in the same way for those who planted their financial seeds and expected them to be multiplied. God wanted to bless them, the

spiritual fields were ready for planting, and Springs Church was good soil.

Many attendees at Springs Church were people with the land in their blood, Mennonites, or, like Pastor Phil, Hutterites, their close theological cousins and co-heirs of the Radical Reformation's commitment to pacifism, community, and simplicity. Their ancestors bled for their unwillingness to bear arms, baptize their children, participate in government, or entwine their lives in what they perceived to be worldly affairs. Since their arrival in the late 1800s, Mennonites and Hutterites had settled the treeless plains of southern Manitoba in communities dug deep in the clay soil in a thick lattice of farms, towns, and grain elevators.[2] These weary pioneers probably never would have imagined that their great grandchildren might look on the same land and see spiritual guarantees and individual gain in the annual rhythm of planting and harvest, want and plenty.

This article examines the significant Mennonite and, to a lesser extent, Hutterite participation at Springs Church, one of Canada's flagship megachurches devoted to a message of wealth and health dubbed the "prosperity gospel."[3] Springs stands as one of a dozen Canadian prosperity megachurches embedded in a transnational network of likeminded preachers, conferences, publishing houses, Bible schools, and omnipresent internet and television media. The prosperity gospel sprang from 1950s and 1960s American Pentecostalism but rapidly became a full-orbed Canadian movement by the mid-1980s with a cadre of celebrities who built megachurch and, often, radio and television ministries to carry their messages across urban Canada.[4] From Toronto's megachurches brimming with recent African and Caribbean immigrants to the Vancouver megachurches stuffed with white suburbanites, the prosperity gospel adapted to diverse audiences in a neoliberal age with theological accounts of more and better.

At first glance, it would seem implausible that a church devoted to the righteous acquisition of worldly blessings would draw large numbers from a people whose theological anxieties historically circled around how to monitor the barrier between the faithful and an unrighteous society. In the years after World War II an encroaching modernity, rural depopulation, and the lure of urban opportunities were battering the high walls of separation that held Hutterites in their bounded communities and scattering Mennonites across a spectrum of accommodations to the new prevailing age of inclusion, adaptation, and, increasingly, theologies that engaged their urban environment.[5] The Anabaptist presence at Springs must be understood within this historical context, for as the

historian Royden Loewen has persuasively argued, new urban contexts brought new attempts to chart the future and retell the past.[6] Just as the rise of town life had brought with it the growth of Mennonite evangelicalism – a host of choirs, Sunday schools, English sermons, and neighborhood outreach able to soften strict denominational parameters and engage an expanding community – so too cities brought their own forms of theological engagement. I argue that three aspects of Springs Church's teachings – its understanding of freedom, abundance, and healing – offered constructive theological frameworks by which Mennonites and Hutterites made sense of the demands and desires of urban life and instructions for how to live beyond the walls of spiritual separation. Further, drawing on sixty-eight commemorative albums assembled to mark significant anniversaries of historic Mennonite towns and churches, I show how Springs Mennonites, in particular, repudiated what they perceived to be symbolic of their spiritual heritage: conformity, simplicity, and suffering.[7]

Freedom and Conformity

Jodie Friesen gestured at her choppy violet hair with mock exasperation and shrugged.[8] "I'm a weird Mennonite," she said with a chuckle, reaching for another gulp of coffee in the atrium of Springs's coffee bar. She bounced in her seat as she tried to summarize what being Mennonite meant to her, laughing as she ran through her favorite Anabaptist quirks, from her family's borscht recipe and harmonized doxology to the popping 'p's of Low German words. She grew up as a spiritual wild child of Blumenort after her parents resettled there, having left their Mexican Mennonite colony as a result of a heated controversy over organ music. Her regular visits to her colony cousins with bonnets and home-sewn dresses, she joked, made them part like the Red Sea in her wake. It was a gentle alienation echoed in her account of growing up in an aging Evangelical Mennonite Church whose teenagers competed for the back pews before leaving, never to return. "The older generation followed rules because they had been given them," she mused, "but we grew up with all this freedom. So much freedom. And we're used to it. We can't go back to the rules. The 'Thees' and 'Thous' don't mean much to us anymore."

Springs Church branded itself as a Spirit Contemporary® church freed from the strictures of legalism, a church designed for people burnt out on religion, advertised by their slogan: Love. Accept. Forgive. (L.A.F.).[9] It was a powerful promise for the many

Mennonites and Hutterites who, like Jodie, no longer identified with the rules that once governed their churches and ensured the uniformity of its communities. Those fresh from the familiarity of ethnic enclaves – Hutterites leaving the colony or Mennonites leaving or visiting from farms or small towns – frequently joined Springs Church as part of their introduction to the city. Most trickled in through family connections, an invitation through a cousin or a sermon from Pastor Leon Fontaine passed on by an aunt, though the bulk of the family remained behind. And with the opening of a satellite location of Springs in Steinbach, the urban heart of the former East Reserve of Mennonite settlement, it was becoming easier and easier to convince others to come along.[10] Jodie celebrated L.A.F. as a correction to her own Mennonite culture, which she admired for its belief that every broken thing can be fixed but grieved that it seemed unable to extend that logic to broken people. She drove in to Winnipeg every Sunday with her grandparents to enjoy the church's pumping rock anthems, coffee shop atmosphere, and youth-driven programming that did not wince at her pierced nose and nonconformist spirit. For the majority of the Anabaptists I interviewed who made Springs their home, the decision to join proved to be a path of rapid assimilation to its vision of a "spirit contemporary" life.

Embedded in the language of spiritual freedom and a departure from legalism was a new set of spiritual laws about what made blessings flow from God's storehouse. Twitter feeds brimming with #nojudgment and #livefree plotted the church's own distance from "traditional Christianity," a phrase it used to account for the Christian world outside of the prosperity orbit and its limited understanding of a true doctrine of faith. In prosperity teaching, faith referred not to simple hope or trust, but to a spiritual force that transformed positive words and beliefs into heaven-sent blessings.[11] Instead of tradition and rules, churches like Springs taught the Christian life as an unfolding consequence (good or bad) of the law of faith, the uniform spiritual principle that brought material rewards into being, tithes into financial return, and illnesses to heel. Faith was a force, a law, and a power. Just as God created light with speech and Jesus commanded miracles with words, preached Pastor Leon, "there is spiritual power in words. It's how God released his power. Take God's promises and speak them. …Your words will begin to bring in the power of God, the angels of God. Speak God's promises over every area of your life."[12]

In keeping with prosperity teaching, Mennonite and Hutterite initiates would learn to live under this new rule of law. Optimism was carefully parsed as the use of "positive confession," the act of

claiming God's blessings by speaking them. A negative word – or thought – was cause for repentance and re-direction. The Springs church store was stacked with Pastor Leon's sermons like *Change Your Mouth and Change Your Life!* and *Imagine Your Future* about how to effectively harness the mind's spiritual energies through techniques such as repetitive affirmations and prayerful visualization.[13] People gently chided each other before the service for saying they were catching a cold, when they should be claiming to "catch a blessing."[14] One of the most obvious signs of participation at Springs was an intensified enthusiasm on social media, with Facebook pages and Twitter feeds bubbling with advice or retweets from Pastor Leon on how to live life to the fullest.[15] "Pumped about God. Pumped about His Church. Pumped about life!" read Chelsea Kleinsasser's biographical caption with dozens of tagged pictures at Springs events. Facebook posts on Springs life leapt off the screen with the cultivated enthusiasm of those who learned to bright-side their outlook. When people spoke about the joyful atmosphere at Springs, they accounted for both a descriptive and prescriptive encounter with positivity.

The freedom heralded by Springs Church marked a radical departure from the memory of the exacting rules that once ordered Mennonite communities. One of the most common features of local histories of Mennonite towns, churches, and even credit unions was their lengthy accounts of the smallest accommodations to modernity. In some, the tone was folksy and the lists seemed quaint, a wink to the modern reader and the eventual impossibility of enforcing bans on cars or unedifying television programs. On the whole, these dense, largely chronological narratives documented the details of every minor disagreement and lingered on division as though the darkest sins were those committed against consensus. The fiftieth Anniversary of the Nordheim Mennonite Church, for instance, solemnly recorded a small difference of opinion over hymnbook preference in 1933 and the yearlong process of voting to keep the book already in use. Records of these small matters kept alive the memory of the power these communities once held to enforce and achieve uniformity. Naturally, in many accounts, the loss of this authority warranted long laments about the incremental changes pressing their modern churches into depravity or, worse, insignificance. Writing on the 100th anniversary of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Plum Coulee, the editors soberly assessed the dawn of the twenty-first century as a frightening new horizon:

> Our grandparents were faced with breaking the virgin prairies … We are facing a more hostile and dangerous frontier: the secular,

> materialistic and technological world with its teeming millions. It is a world of cynicism, bloodshed, drugs, abortion, pollution, race hatred, social apathy and spiritual indifference. Today we dare not weep for a return to the open spaces and simple protected life.[16]

As the community remembered their once officious task of adjudicating a ban on sleigh bells or the drafting of a church constitution as a result of dancing at a party, a touch of nostalgia coloured their careful prose. Rules denoted order, and with it protection from the world outside.[17]

For Springs believers like Garret Froese, conversion would be narrated as a departure from a legalistic past and entry into a culture-affirming present. Froese, the picture of a self-possessed hipster in his v-neck t-shirt and sleeveless vest, happily served as a youth leader and avid volunteer and appeared semi-regularly on their website as a poster child of spiritual transformation. His decision to attend Springs had brought him a world away from the hymns, organ, and somber worship of his Sommerfelder church in the small Mennonite town of Plum Coulee. He had felt bored and disconnected by the church he described as extremely traditional, conservative, and rigid, as opposed to the passionate, vital, and breathless lifestyle he found at Springs.[18] Upon moving to the city for university, Garret soon found a spiritual harbour in an unfamiliar place full of temptations. Now inked with tattoos, studded with multiple piercings, and a graduate of the megachurch's Bible school, he proudly called himself a modern Mennonite.

Springs Church, like all prosperity megachurches, pulsed with an urban imagination that celebrated the divine blessings resulting from this new kind of faith. Their trademarked expression, Spirit Contemporary, referred to the church's commitment to being culturally fluent, up-to-the-moment in its articulation and expression of the theological foundation for its attempts to mirror popular entertainment with plush seating, floor-to-ceiling video projection, well-rehearsed and blaring contemporary music, and an aggressive platform of wall-to-wall media promoting its heavily Instagrammed services. Pastor Leon, the charismatic personality at the heart of Springs, worked feverishly to promote the church's youthful appropriation of modern trends, making the church among the first in the city to stream services online, use their website for direct deposit donations, and launch Twitter campaigns.[19] YouTube videos of Springs Church services advertised its integrated media platforms with a regular segment showing the church connecting with busy and media-savvy people from all walks of life: a dad and

his rambunctious kids gathered around the laptop to watch a sermon, teenagers browsing the Springs iPad app at their lockers, and a young man in a city park scrolling through the church's Facebook page on his smartphone.[20] These new technologies coupled evangelism with consumption, a thoroughly modern faith for a modernizing people.

Springs Church's voracious appetite for cutting edge technology proved to be an attraction for the dozens upon dozens of young Mennonites and Hutterites who loved the church's updated image tailor-made for their media-hungry age. Their Twitter feeds brimmed with selfies, inspirational quotes from Pastor Leon or dark panoramas of worship at Springs NURV (Never Underestimate Radical Vision), one of Winnipeg's largest youth programs.[21] Church, rather than an enclave, was a place of connection, a bridge to a vibrant and sanctified youth culture dripping with pop culture references, top 40-style music, and hundreds of potential Christian friends (or dates). Adults equally admired the church's commitment to cultural relevance and the ease with which it integrated the pragmatism of self-help with a Christian message that was always friendly and applicable to home and work. When interviewees, young and old, chatted about their ability to bring friends to services or the practicality of Pastor Leon's messages, their relief was palpable.[22] Springs promised them a Christian message that transcended the thick walls of their ethnic churches and followed them home, to work, and wherever they traveled. For Mennonites and Hutterites with tightly knotted ethnic webs of family, friends, and associates, Springs represented an invitation to a universalizing faith that promised to work every time, anywhere.

The lure of a placeless gospel was not lost on those from deeply rooted Mennonite and Hutterite communities. The vast efforts to commission and create commemorative histories filled with the recollections of locals were themselves testimonies to anxieties over their slipping memories. For almost sixty years, these ethnic farming communities lived in a world all their own, shaded by uncounted variations of shared commitments. When they parsed their gross differences, dividing lines often fell along colony of origin and theological temperament, which were ordinarily the same thing. Disagreements stamped geography into their very names. Take, for example, the debate over government-mandated public schools that resulted in the split in the Bergthal Mennonite church (itself named after one of the main colonies in Russia). The majority of conservatives who rejected this innovation re-named themselves Sommerfeld Mennonites, only because their new bishop

hailed from Sommerfeld, Manitoba. The hundred or so Mennonite settlements that dotted the province could not agree on topics as large as assimilation and as small as hymnbooks, but they shared a common language, catechism, and pattern of life that fashioned tight bonds between families, neighbours, and churches defined by the land itself. The 125th anniversary album celebrating the settlement of the Steinbach area captured this sentiment with its logo: a tall cross surrounded by a shovel, ax, and scythe, perfectly laid on the grid of farmland demarcating the plots of the old eastern reserve. Story after story recreated their lives, row by row, and all they remembered of tilled fields, painted housebarns, and communal responsibilities. Springs Mennonites and Hutterites who looked back testified instead to a joyless conformity. A new freedom was in their sights.

Abundance and Simplicity

Susan Poetker seemed to relish her role as a greeter for Springs, smiling and shaking hands with newcomers with a pleasing warmth. A polished woman in her sixties, Susan and her entire family had attended Springs together for years and watched the church grow into a sprawling multi-campus megachurch and a nationally-renowned stronghold of teachings on divine wealth. She remembered the time as an evolution in her thinking on prosperity theology since her early years in a Mennonite Brethren church, then gave me an able summary of prosperity as more than hard cash but an abundance of health, strong relationships, emotional well-being as well as financial surplus. This kind of teaching, she explained, had not been taught by her Mennonite community who passively prayed: "Thy will be done."[23] "No!" she exclaimed, "God *wants* Christians to have these things." In her Sunday best with a winning smile, Susan exuded the confidence that Pastor Leon preached every week with sermon titles like "We Were Designed to Succeed" and book titles like "Money – and the Belief Systems that Control It." The evidence of God's love was made material for anyone with the faith to claim it as his or her own.

Springs Church's reputation for its promises of divine wealth placed it squarely at odds with Mennonite and Hutterite accounts of their religious heritage. Interviewees consistently narrated their newfound theology as a radical departure from a Mennonite and Hutterite priority on poverty and economy. As Rachel Rempel, a young mother of three, recounted:

> As I was growing up, my parents began to question the 'poverty mentality' that often goes along with the Mennonite label that they grew up with and in learning for themselves what the Bible says about prosperity, they also taught me and my siblings what the Bible says about prosperity. That was the biggest reason they chose Springs as our home church (and the main reason I continue to go to Springs as an adult) – Springs teaches prosperity … according to the Bible: a well-rounded prosperous life in every area.[24]

The common use of the term "poverty mentality" by Mennonite interviewees, in particular, resonated clearly on multiple registers. In prosperity parlance, it referred to those who created the conditions of their own poverty with their persistently negative thoughts. Springs believers described with regret how other Christians lived incomplete lives by failing to account for the spiritual consequences of their ideas, words, and attitudes. But for those looking back at Mennonite churches they left behind, it also functioned as shorthand for the perceived shortcomings of the whole of Mennonite culture. When asked about their Mennonite heritage, most respondents focused on poverty as the key concept. As one 20-something lamented, it was the "poverty mentality" that locked Mennonites into a theology of "just getting by and not having any more money than is necessary. [But] you can't give what you don't have. My goal is to be prosperous in every area of life, including money, so that I can use what I need to live, and then give the rest of it away to ministries that help people in need."[25]

Springs Anabaptists' denial of poverty (or even simplicity, its close cousin) moved against the grain of Mennonite self-understanding. As every local history carefully detailed, Russia's Mennonite sons and daughters, rich and poor alike, had been stripped of land, earnings, and stability in immigration. The story of Mennonite settlement began with the recounting of this graveyard of past lives. Tales of deprivation – first in immigration and then in settlement – lived a second life in Manitoba Mennonite lore as a marker of genuine faith (though, as some albums observed, considerable economic stratification among Mennonites from subsequent waves of immigration continued to plague efforts to form a common church).[26] During hard times and long economic depressions, church and town albums were stuffed with tales of make-do and can-do anecdotes tinged with pride. When government welfare agents came to the school in the Mennonite settlement of Osterwick with a box of clothes, Anne Peters proudly remembered looking down on "hand-outs" and announcing that she would take nothing, as she had home-sewn clothes.[27] When the effects of good fortune seeped into their homes, meeting minutes recorded fierce

wars against encroaching worldliness waged around everything from the minutiae of white wedding dresses, hemmed curtains, fur on the *outside* of coats or the growing popularity of cars for personal use.[28] It was the many attempts to stem the tides of worldliness that seemed to galvanize Mennonite self-understandings.

For people like Joanie, an ex-Hutterite who left the colony with nothing more than $80 cash and a sewing machine, the sweet financial promises of Springs would be a revelation. Joanie grew up on a colony of fifteen families not far from the city limits, but remembered it as a dark world apart.[29] When we sat down for our conversation, she pulled out a photo of her wedding day, her youthful face smiling in a black bonnet beside a handsome man. "She's a different person," she said softly after a pause, "she was always afraid." She remembered sleepless nights worrying about the disapproval of her father and her God, whose endless list of Do's and Don'ts burdened her heart. The night her appendix burst she was strapped with tubes to a hospital bed that kept her from reaching her bonnet and kneeling on the ground as she had been taught to pray; she lay there convinced that she would die before God heard her prayers. Every night she fell asleep to the hum of the nearby highway picturing the frightening world outside the colony. She and her husband worked hard on the land where all things were held in common, she with the bees and he with the hogs. Sitting beside me on the park bench in store-bought shorts and a tank top, she laughed and shook her head at the memory. "I never sew *anything* anymore."

Joanie had been part of a restless group of a dozen young people on the colony who met together for Bible study and for prayer. She recalled feeling little emotion at Sunday services that were filled with the naked sound of singing, the re-reading of historic Hutterite sermons, and the silence of prayer. This group was discovering in Scripture ideas about speaking in tongues that amazed them and concerned the Hutterite leadership and her father, who confiscated her English King James Bible and threatened to set it on fire. God's language for the Hutterites was *Hutteritsch*, and the interpretation of Scripture was intended for communities, not individuals, and certainly not the young. An emergency meeting of over a hundred Hutterite ministers assembled at her colony to ask the young people to answer for their covert meetings and, one by one, they were questioned before a room of black suits. The ministers suspected the meddling of outside influences – and they were not wrong. Joanie and the others had been passing a secret theological library between them in worn cassette tapes and used paperbacks

of charismatic favorites like Oral Roberts, Kathryn Kuhlman, Andrew Murray, and others. Kenneth and Gloria Copeland's prosperity gospel magazine was shipped to a neighbouring farm for pick up because all religious mail on the colony was carefully screened.[30] The group had even managed to sneak away to see the Copelands' Winnipeg crusade when an elderly gardener, sympathetic to their cause, arranged for their permission to visit town on another errand. Now that they were caught, Joanie was flushed with fear and excitement at the opportunity to testify to her experience of being born again. Much to her horror, some in their little flock recanted under the pressure. Shortly thereafter Joanie and her husband left the colony as exiles with the bitter words of their recriminations ringing in her ears.

The couple attended a number of young churches filled with Mennonites who were experimenting with prosperity theology. It was the 1980s – the adolescence of the prosperity movement – and churches had cropped up across southern Manitoba devoted to its vision of faith, health, wealth, and victory.[31] At first they attended Victory Faith Center, led by Ron and Harmony Thiessen, then Maranatha Christian Center in the Mennonite stronghold of Niverville. It was in those churches that Joanie was learning life outside of the Hutterite world. She had felt humiliated when she arrived at a couple's retreat in a white skirt, ruffled red shirt, and matching jacket to find the other women in t-shirts and jeans, men's clothing as far as Hutterites were concerned. Until then, she had consistently showed up for work at her brother-in-law's construction site in a long wool skirt. But sitting by the water at this retreat, Joanie remembered what it felt like to watch the moving river. Joanie was a woman with simple needs, and she heard them met in God's whispers to her on the riverbank. "Go with the flow," the voice said, "Just like the river. It's OK. Go with the flow." And so she let herself flow with the currents that brought her a pair of women's jeans, makeup and artful curls, and a life of raising her boys in a world unbound by overlapping religious and familial spheres of church, work, and play.

City-bound Mennonites and Hutterites, unmoored from the sacred geography of an ethnic domain, seemed to hold fast to Springs as a new constellation of cosmic rules, spiritual laws of sowing, reaping, and consumption that, unlike the religious codes of house and barn, "worked" in the world. Springs Church's spiritual laws were both the mechanism of positive words that would meet every need and a steady assurance that its believers could keep pace with the pulse of a changing, modern world. It was a far cry from the grim evaluation of modernity pictured on the cover of

Elmwood Bethel Mennonite Church's commemorative album, which showed a towering cross over the blackened Winnipeg cityscape and the caption: "Redeem the time for the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

The prosperity gospel of Springs Church offered good news not only to those assimilating to a new way of life but to the many city-born already at home in this mainstream. For them, Springs offered them a jubilant affirmation of things already enjoyed. Part of the attraction was not riches but enrichment. As Kevin Reimer, a longtime Winnipeg firefighter, explained, Springs allowed him to deepen his spiritual commitments, help raise his children with positivity and nurture his marriage, but it did not mark a radical separation between a simpler past and a fuller present. In sermon series, small groups, and the example of its leaders, Springs promised emotional and theological tools to live, as one sermon dubbed it, *Stop Living in Your Own Limitations.* It was a barely-tamed ambition evident in their atmosphere of deliberate positivity and pursuit of excellence. Messages were not instructive, they were *life-changing*. Spiritual wars were waged against the sins of mediocrity in their congregation. As one interviewee described, it was an expectation of perfection that filtered down to the punctuality and compliance of the lowest parking attendant or chair stacker. The byline of their Christian school, unsurprisingly, read: "Pursuing Christ. Pursuing Excellence." As one interviewee put it, "Springs wants our very best and only your very best. If you can't or won't give that, they won't use you on their team." This was an extension of their performative display of cultural importance, but, further, the signal that believers' church, work, and private lives should be an attractive display which merited influence in the world. In the words of Leon, they should "gr[ow] in favour with both God and man, just as Jesus did." [32]

For all, prosperity theology gave them a language of elevation. Their joyful ambition spoke the language of aggressive evangelism made evident by having "made it" in the city. Testimonies before and after sermons were peppered with the joyous accounts of businessmen who could thank God for a good fiscal year and the resources to devote more to the church. Entrepreneurialism served as a watchword for the deepest kind of demonstrative faith, and the church held regular conference events devoted to fostering it.[33] Mennonite businessmen who elsewhere would downplay the frenzied success of a recent venture or divert people's gaze with a sensible Toyota Avalon (instead of a Mercedes) found that their lives were held up as shining beacons of faith made tangible. For Springs ladies, argued one member, this success could be seen in

the gleaming purse buckles and clicking heels of the gaggle of church elites who hovered around Sally, Leon's wife and Springs co-pastor. Winnipeg, rather than the Leviathan that gobbled up rural children and consumed the holy and simpler desires of folks who saw its wares and charms, was now the testing grounds for those who wanted to, in prosperity parlance, "put God to the test."[34] Just as Leon Fontaine had initiated Pastor's Appreciation Day and accepted the yearly pageant of gifts, lavish demonstrations such as the motorcycle he jubilantly rode around on stage, so too spiritual women and men with lucrative jobs found themselves ushered into the inner sanctum of the church's leadership and could, with pride, add a vanity plate to their gleaming car that read: "PRAYED4."[35]

Mennonites and Hutterites who attended Springs seemed to have grown used to the need to explain the church's ideas about wealth to friends and family. The obvious wealth of Anabaptism built on the memory of suffering, in both local histories and Springs Church members, also prompted constant need for explanation. When Susan Poetker offered her tidy summary of what prosperity theology meant to her, she added with a smile that this was perhaps not so different from her Mennonite upbringing after all. The Mennonites she knew were, on the whole, already quite prosperous. Perhaps, she wondered, it was their regular practice of paying tithes that had acted as the seeds that unconsciously brought them a bountiful harvest. It was an ongoing debate in prosperity circles about whether the wealthy were unknowingly using spiritual laws to their advantage, or if money was not always a sign of a deeper truth. But Susan had certainly pointed to a viable debate played out on the pages of many attempts to reconstruct the Mennonite past. Why had they become wealthy? Remembering the rise of the town of Steinbach brought many of these anxieties to the fore. Their memory albums toyed with the absurdity of transforming "from a place where a church member in good standing could not own a car unless it was a used one or painted entirely black … [to] become a car salesman's paradise."[36] In the early part of the century Peter Dueck, the farmer-bishop of the Steinbach area, had already begun accumulating steady losses in battles against cars, telephones, photography, the use of rifles to put down an animal, voting in municipal elections, and other "matters of assimilation with the world" that would lead to inevitable "arrogance and pride."[37] As albums commemorating sacred anniversaries of churches and settlements came flooding in, their recollections were attempts to build monuments erected to, as one preface described, "recount our own blessings. We have the opportunity to take stock of what our forefathers came for and what we have done with their dreams and

aspirations."[38] But for many the "poverty mentality" of Mennonites was overwhelmingly rhetorical. In discarding a theology of simplicity to commemorate the past, Springs represented just one of many attempts to baptize a material salvation in an already cosmopolitan Anabaptist community.

Health and Suffering

After the eleven-o'clock Sunday service, I picked up a Starbucks latte in the lobby and wandered into the reception area designated for first-time visitors. Jake and Linda, a middle-aged Mennonite couple, greeted me warmly. As we chatted about my project, Linda began to explain how they had applied Springs' teachings on divine health to their family's own difficulties. Their daughter suffered six miscarriages before the family decided to switch spiritual strategies. Rather than pray for their daughter's ability to carry the children, they decided to pray instead for the "seed" inside her; meanwhile, the would-be mother scoured the Bible for verses about children as a basis for positive confession. After another miscarriage, the doctors discovered that a genetic incompatibility caused her body to reject her pregnancies. With new treatment, she bore three children in a row. Linda smiled triumphantly as she declared it a miracle, brought about by the renewed focus of their prayer.

Springs Church's deeply material faith was nurtured in an expectant atmosphere of signs and wonders visible in healed bodies. Their message of faith-filled words declared that not only would God provide economic abundance, but physical restoration as well. Springs offered a host of vehicles for claiming God's promises for healing, but, in particular, Wednesday night healing services that were well attended and regularly drew urban Mennonites from churches all over the city. Testimonies of healing proved to be a common refrain among those who had transferred membership to Springs later in life. It was likely for the very reason that Henry Loeppky gave me one day after the service, his silvered hair a touch out of place in the deafening worship of a typically Sunday morning. "I got healed from cancer," he said and squared his jaw, "and no one in my Mennonite Brethren church believed me." He shrugged. "So here I am."

Springs' aura of expectant supernaturalism stood in sharp contrast to the reluctance of many Mennonite denominations, whose own small waves of Pentecostalism and flash flood of the Toronto Blessing's signs and wonders revivalism had left most not

wet but cold. Springs' certainty that God's healed people who demonstrated the proper use of spiritual principles, particularly positive confession, was a hallmark of their ministry and an attraction for those who sought a new language of supernatural belief.[39] Springs Church advertised their church with these accounts of healing with dozens of YouTube movie clips featuring the miracles of their members: the Wiebes' new baby hooked up to life support cycling through the Springs prayer chains while his mother whispers positive confessions until the baby is restored to health. In another, a Paraguayan colony Mennonite named Lily had been given taped sermons featuring Pastor Leon teaching on how to receive special revelation from God about healing. She listened to the tapes daily while visualizing herself without symptoms and committing Bible verses about healing to memory. One day she felt her symptoms abated as she unleashed the spiritual laws that stilled her Satan-sent symptoms.[40] Dan Martin was shown beside his weary-looking wife, glancing over at her with such tenderness as he recalled her stroke. He spoke largely on her behalf and admitted that things were not the same, but he credited God and the power of their prayers to her improvement and for the remainder of their lives that they could spend together.[41] While other Winnipeg megachurches like Church of the Rock shared a historic Pentecostal claim that God restored bodies to health in this modern age, Springs stood apart in their dogmatic certainty that the righteous would not only be cured: the righteous should never suffer at all.

The claim that the prosperity gospel rescued all from the pain of this world stood at odds with the specter of suffering in Mennonite and Hutterite memory. Mennonites cultivated the memory of their persecuted forefathers of the Radical Reformation and their violent ends, memorialized in the 1660s *Martyrs' Mirror* and given as a perennial Anabaptist wedding present, the sort of book one sets beside the Bible on the coffee table. Local histories took pains to remember the settlers in the same vein, earning their glory, in the words of a sixteenth-century Mennonite martyr, as a "poor, simple, cast-off little flock … despised and rejected by the world." As the centennial album commemorating the Old Colony settlement of Gnadenthal recounted, the lives of new Gnadenthalers were best told through the life of a young settler who arrived in 1924 with four children, 15 cents to his name and $800 in passage debt. His wife and new baby had been detained owing to poor health, and he worked in the North Dakota woods for $1.00 a day to find the money to finance their reunion. The story follows some 13 years of bitter hardship until, at last, the man saw the liquidation of his debts and

the support of his family in the ebbing of the Great Depression. These were common woes, says the writer, as such stories "have been told in almost every household in Gnadenthal. And each story ends with this refrain: '… to God be the honour and the glory for undeserved mercies and goodness.'"[42] Accounts of deferred joys and perpetual faith echoed through the decades and stories of those who brought their stories back to life. When Peter A. Toews died at the age of 89, the Altona farmer and church elder insisted that he be buried in an unadorned, homemade coffin. It was his final protest, noted the author, to a culture of intensifying technology and secularization.[43] Suffering and death, for many, would be the ultimate witness to the Anabaptist faith.

For Springs Church, the greatest authentication of righteousness was the refusal to live out common suffering. Miracle stories of dramatic reversals of fortune and deathbed recoveries peppered services and promotional videos for the difference that Springs could make. In the video testimony of a young woman named Shyle, she responded to her rare form of cancer with a life lived in spiritual confidence that suffering was not God's will for her: "I'm fine. I already know I'm fine. It's like this defense rose up in me. I'm *healed*. I'm going to *live* … I know Jesus already died and already made me healed. And I'm just living it out. I can't wait until the doctor's visit when I go and they say 'Oh my gosh! I can't believe it happened! Your blood is perfect!'"[44] She nodded her head as if punctuating her final words. "It won't just be good. It will be *perfect.*" Still almost a teenager with a prognosis of ten years to live, Shyle set suffering aside as an inevitability for some other breed of faith.

Springs and the Modern Anabaptist

Springs Church represented one of many urban Anabaptist theologies. To be sure, the significant Anabaptist presence at Springs Church was, at one level, entirely unremarkable. With the highest urban concentration of Mennonites in Winnipeg than anywhere in the world,[45] a megachurch planted there was sure to attract an Anabaptist following. Further, it would be inaccurate to characterize Springs as a "Mennonite/Hutterite prosperity megachurch" as very little about the church bore that imprint. The church's leading celebrities came from French-Canadian stock and its theological ancestry was Pentecostal. In many ways, Springs had even attempted to resist any single ethnic group from achieving majority status. Despite their many attempts to attract Mennonite

participants, best seen in their satellite location in Steinbach, the church strategically re-branded itself over the last decade as a national organization with an international and ethnically diverse constituency. (In this, Springs joined many prosperity megachurches in pursuing an international image, both as a reflection of its world-conquering theology and as a recognition that the greatest growth markets could be found among ethnic minorities.) But as Mennonites and Hutterites made up a significant portion of the congregation – the largest ethnic minority by my estimation – it is worth considering the causes and significance of Springs Church as a site of Anabaptist theological reflection.

Through the experiential lens of Springs participants, these three Springs teachings operated simultaneously in the context of Mennonite, and occasionally Hutterite, attempts to historically reconstruct their identity in light of the erosion of their bounded enclaves. In redefining the significance of conformity, poverty, and suffering, Anabaptists at Springs pushed back against key aspects of Mennonite self-understanding. The creeping distance that Mennonites felt from an unchanging past – what Royden Loewen, channeling Herbert Gans, called their post-1970s increasingly "symbolic ethnicity" – had led many urban Mennonites and Hutterites to use their discomfort with their own success as a favorite worry stone.[46] There was comfort to be found in honouring the past by holding present comforts at an arm's length. But for the majority of Springs Anabaptists who were youth or young adults, this valorization of the suffering past was fading from view. Springs youth culture gloried in the seamless vision of a sanctified consumer culture where holy people could turn opportunities in advantages. To Springs enthusiasts like Garret Froese, the advantages were obvious: "To be honest, I don't really see the modern Mennonite in conflict with attending Springs and believing the prosperity concept … Yes, I go to one of those churches that promotes wealth and wellness [but] who wants to go to a church that promotes poverty and sickness?" As Froese walked non-believers through the difference Springs could make, he spoke the tempting language of one who knew the needs and desires of the modern Anabaptist: "I show the person many parts in the Bible that not only says God wants us to be blessed, but that these principles of prosperity are evident in the lives of people who truly followed God."[47]

Springs stood at the end of an assimilationist continuum as an almost complete erosion of the thin partition that once barred Mennonites from the wider Canadian world of *Änglischers*. The

Mennonite social landscape, already cracked open by urbanization, Anglicization, nationalism, and commercialization, had still largely shied away from a sacred consumerism. Their historic anxieties about worldliness – played out every few years in an awkward pageantry around pastor's salaries – reified stubborn longing to remain a people whose peculiar attempts to be peaceful and plain, made them, as the Psalmist says, the quiet in the land.[48] Mennonites and Hutterites at Springs formed a new city folk claiming divine showers of blessings that water financial seeds sown. In their prayers, their words, and their preaching and praise, they turned once more to the land as a testimony and a promise that, for God's chosen people, it was always harvest time.

Notes

1 Congregational visit, Springs Church, Winnipeg, MB, April 1, 2008. Personal experiences referenced in this article stem from a dozen conversations and interviews undertaken between 2008 and 2012 with current and former members of Springs Church, at which time I also engaged in intermittent participant observation. In identifying members, I use people's true names only when they are in leadership or members who identify themselves for the church's online promotional videos. Though I received written consent from interviewees, I have chosen not to use their real names or use clearly identifying markers out of consideration for their practice of positive confession. At times, their theological priority on positive language can make reading their own words, which might be deemed less-than-enthusiastic, to be possibly damaging to their spiritual reputation or personal piety.

2 James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada, 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006). See also John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba* (Steinbach, Man: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000); Hans Werner, *Imagined Homes: Soviet German Immigrants in Two Cities* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2007).

3 See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

4 For how these views migrated from American celebrities into Canadian churches, see Kate Bowler, "From Far and Wide: The Canadian Faith Movement," *Church & Faith Trends* 3, no. 1 (February 2010), http://files.efc-canada.net/min/rc/cft/V03I01/Canadian_Faith_Movement.pdf.

5 See Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

6 Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), esp. chap. 3. See Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[7] *25 Jahre Sargent Avenue Mennonitengemeinde: 1950–1975* (Winnipeg, Man.: Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, 1975); *25 Jahre der Mennonitischen Ansiedlung zu Nord Kildonan 1928–1953* (North Kildonan, Man.: n.n., 1953); *25 Jaehriges Jubilaeum der Steinbach Mennoniten Gemeinde 1968* (Steinbach, Man.: n.p., 1968); *25th Anniversary Album: Burrows Bethel Church, 1961–1986* (Winnipeg, Man.: Burrows Bethel Church, 1987); *40 Years of Grace, 1961–2001: Grace Mennonite Church* (Steinbach, Man.: Grace Mennonite Church, 2001); *The 45 Year History of the Grunthal Bergthaler Mennonite Church, 1936–1981* (Grunthal, Man.: n.p., 1981); *50th Anniversary of the Nordheim Mennonite Church: 1931–1981* (Dauphin, Man.: Dauphin Herald Print, 1981); *50 Jahre, 1930–1980: Lichtenau Mennoniten Gemeinde* (St. Elizabeth, Man.: Lichtenau Mennoniten Gemeinde, 1980); *75th Anniversary Album of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church, 1895–1970* (St. Norbert, Man.: n.p., 1970); *A People on a Journey: North Kildonan Mennonite Church, 1935–2010* (Winnipeg, Man.: North Kildonan Mennonite Church, 2009); *Altona Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church Family 1989* (Altona, Man.: n.p., 1989); *Altona Mennonite Church: 25th Anniversary, 1962–1987* (Altona, Man.: n.p., 1988); *Arnaud Mennonite Church: 1944–1994* (Arnaud, Man.: Arnaud Mennonite Church Yearbook Committee, 1994); Betty Dyck, ed., *Bethel: Pioneering in Faith* (Winnipeg, Man.: Bethel Mennonite Church, 1988); *Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Manitoba: Membership Album*, 1976 (Altona, Man.: The Church, 1976); *Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Morden 1979* (Morden, Man.: n.p., 1979); *Bless the Lord, O My Soul: Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church 50th Anniversary 1949–1999* (Winnipeg, Man.: n.p., 1999); *Blumenfeld, Where Land and People Meet* (Winkler, Man.: Blumenfeld Historical Committee, 1981); *Burrows Bethel Church, 1961–1986: A 25 Year History* (Winnipeg, Man.: n.p., 1986); *Celebrating God's Faithfulness* (Altona, Man.: Altona E.M.M.C., 2001); *Celebrating God's Faithfulness: EMC Churches in Winnipeg, 1950s to 1980s* (Winnipeg, Man.: Evangelical Mennonite Conference Region 7, 1986); *Charleswood Mennonite Church 1986* (Winnipeg, Man.: Charleswood Mennonite Church, 1986); The Committee, *Elim Gemeinde: Grunthal, Manitoba, 1927–1972* (Steinbach, Man.: Martens, 1972); David Friesen, *Journey of Faith: Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church 1895–1995* (Winkler, Man.: Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church, 1995); Dennis Stoesz, *The Story of Home Street Mennonite Church 1957–1982: Responses to the Urban Environment* (Winnipeg, Man.: The Church, 1985); *Die Geschichte der Whitewater Mennoniten Gemeinde in Manitoba, Canada, 1925–1965* (G. G. Neufeld, n.d.); *Die Red River Flut in 1950* (Steinbach, Man.: Derksen Printers, n.d.); Delbert F. Plett, *East Reserve 125: Hanover Steinbach, 1874–1999* (Steinbach, Man.: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society in conjunction with the East Reserve 125 Steering Committee, 1999); Dolores Lohrenz, ed., *Conference of Mennonites in Canada: CMC Souvenir Book* (Winnipeg, Man.: s.n., 1983); *First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba 1981* (Downsview, Ontario: TGG Photographic, 1981); Gerald Wright, *Steinbach: Is there Any Place Like It?* (Steinbach, Man.: Derksen Printers, 1991); *Gnadenthal, 1880–1980* (Winkler, Man.: Gnadenthal History Book Committee, 1982); *God, Working Through Us ... : Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, 1897–1972* (Steinbach, Man.: Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, 1972); *Golden Anniversary of the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church, 1936–1986*

(Winnipeg, Man.: Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church, 1986); *Grace Mennonite Church 20th Anniversary Yearbook* (Steinbach, Man.: The Church, 1981); *Halbstadt Bergthaler Mennonite Church 1984* (Man.: n.p., 1985); Helmut N. Enns, *La Salle Mennonite Cemetery: In Memory of our Fathers and Mothers* (La Salle: n.p., 2003); Henry Neufeld and Debra Rempel, *Sharing the Faith: Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Plum Coulee, 1897–1997* (Plum Coulee, Man.: Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Plum Coulee, 1997); *Heritage Collections: Histories from New Bothwell and District* (New Bothwell, Man.: New Bothwell History Book Committee, 1994); History Book Committee, History Book Committee, Peter Harms, Connie Falk, and Jessie Duerksen, *History of the Killarney Mennonite Church, Killarney, Manitoba 1961–1986* (Killarney, Man.: Leech Print, 1988); *History of the Whitewater Mennonite Church Boissevain, Manitoba: 1927–1987* (Boissevain, Man.: Whitewater Mennonite Church, 1987); Jerry Hildebrand, *Winds of Change: Winkler EMMC: 70 Years of a Church on the Move* (Winkler, Man.: Winkler Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church, 2007); *Jubilate: 60 Years of First Mennonite Church 1926–1986* (Winnipeg: First Mennonite Church, 1991); John Dyck, *Crosstown Credit Union Limited: Serving the Mennonite Community: The First Fifty Years, 1944–1994* (Winnipeg, Man.: Crosstown Credit Union, 1993); John Dyck, *Lena Mennonite Church 1926–1968* (Winnipeg, Man.: Book Committee, 2003); John Wiebe, ed., *Rosenort Fellowship Chapel: 1974–75* (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1975); Julius G. Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein, eds., *Manitoba Mennonite Memories: A Century Past but not Forgotten* (Altona, Man.: Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974); Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G. Toews, eds., *Mennonite Memories: Settling in Western Canada* (Winnipeg, Man.: Centennial Publications, 1977); Lillian Kennel, *History of the Wilmot Amish Mennonite Congregation: Steinman and St. Agatha Mennonite churches 1824–1984* (Baden, Ontario: Steinman Mennonite Church, 1984); *Lowe Farm Bergthaler Mennonite Church, 1905–1980* (Lowe Farm, Man.: n.p., 1980); *Marvelous Are Thy Ways* (Rosemary, Alberta.: Rosemary Mennonite Church, 1961); *Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, Manitoba, 1888–1963* (Winkler, Man.: Mennonite Brethren Church, 1963); *North Kildonan Mennonitengemeinde, 1935–1975* (Winnipeg, Man.: n.p., 1975); Peter Bergen, comp., *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church* (Man.: Sommerfeld Mennonite Church, 2001); *Red River Valley ECHO*, Centennial Section No. 1, Altona, Gretna, Rosenort, Rosenfeld, Lowe Farm, Wed. Nov. 15, 1967 (Altona, Man.); *Reflections: 1933–1983* (Elm Creek, Man.: Wingham Mennonite Church, 1983); *Reflections of Lowe Farm 1899–1999* (Lowe Farm, Man.: Lowe Farm Centennial Committee, n.d.); *The Reinland Mennonite Churches of Manitoba: 50 Years, 1958–2008* (S.l.: Reinland Mennonite Church, 2009); Robert Meyers, *Spirit of the Post Road: A Story of Self-Help Communities* (Altona, Man.: Federation of Southern Manitoba Co-operatives, 1955); *Springstein Mennonite Church: Memories 1938–1988* (Springstein, Man.: Springstein Mennonite Church, 1989); *Steinbach Mennonite Church: 50th Anniversary 1942–1992* (Steinbach, Man.: Steinbach Mennonite Church, 1992); *Our Walk with God, 75th, Elim Mennonite Church, Grunthal, MB* (Grunthal, Man.: Elim Mennonite Church, 2002).

[8] Personal interview, Springs Church, January 7, 2012.

[9] "L.A.F." Springs Church website, http://www.springschurch.com/aboutsprings.php?navigation=1.

[10] Springs Church Steinbach Facebook Homepage, https://www.facebook.com/springssteinbach.

[11] The theological architect of this particular view of faith was E. W. Kenyon (1867–1948). It became a staple of Pentecostal healing theologies and later flourished in the postwar revivals that evolved into the prosperity movement. See Bowler, *Blessed*, esp. chap. 1.

[12] Leon Fontaine, "Isaiah 55:11 – Power of Our Words." Leon Fontaine YouTube Channel, https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=3U9vD2-NqxM.

[13] Leon Fontaine, *Change Your Mouth and Change Your Life*, MP3 audio recording. Date unknown. Leon Fontaine, *Imagine Your Future*, MP3 audio recording. Date unknown.

[14] Personal interview (name withheld), August 1, 2008.

[15] See, for instance, the Springs Church Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/springswinnipeg.

[16] Henry Neufeld and Debra Rempel, *Sharing the Faith*, 10.

[17] *Bless the Lord, O My Soul.*

[18] Interview with Garret Froese, June 14, 2012. See also "Garret's Story," Springs Church Webisodes, May 28, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzcLCGQdzJU.

[19] See Leon Fontaine's Twitter feed at https://twitter.com/leonfontaine.

[20] For this and other similar videos, see the Springs Church YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/ UCnyR5gQz3Iu4VTFn4u 0HHWg.

[21] See, for instance, the interaction of Mennonite and Hutterite teenagers on the Springs Youth Twitter feed, https://twitter.com/SpringsNURV.

[22] Personal interview with Julie Penner, June 21, 2012.

[23] These words echo the language of the Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6:10: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (KJV).

[24] Personal interview with Rachel Rempel, June 29, 2012.

[25] Personal interview with Garret Froese, June 12, 2012.

[26] See, for instance, John Dyck, *Lena Mennonite Church 1926–1968*, 1.

[27] *Osterwick 1876-2004: A People's Heritage Homecoming* (s.l.: s.n., 2004).

[28] See, for example, Irene Friesen Petkau and Peter A. Petkau, *Blumenfeld, Where Land and People Meet* (Winkler, Man.: Blumenfeld Historical Committee, 1981), 4.

[29] Personal interview with Joanie, July 1, 2012.

[30] Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, along with Kenneth Hagin and Oral Roberts, belonged to the founding generation of prosperity titans.

[31] Some Mennonites were influenced by Pentecostal preaching at Alternative Service Camps during World War II and went on to found Pentecostal churches like Bethel Pentecostal Chapel (1958) in Steinbach. See Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition 1874–1982* (Blumenort: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983). The prosperity gospel came to Mennonites, in some cases, in a series of small steps. Evangelical Mennonite churches that split over the charismatic movement sometimes split again when financial miracles were added to the list of expected miracles.

[32] Springs Church Homepage, "Spirit Contemporary: God's Spirit Working Powerfully through Contemporary People," http://springschurch.com/aboutsprings. php?navigation=11.

[33] Springs Conference 2015, "Be Inspired and Equipped to Become a Spirit Contemporary Leader!" Springs Church Website, http://springschurch.com/conference/ (accessed December 1, 2014).

[34] The anxiety over the wealth of businessmen can be seen in accounts of the founding of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), which makes many efforts to connect the wealth of its members to the Mennonite missionary imperative. As the organization's history recounts in the foreword: "I know of no instance where a MEDA member has experienced monetary gain through MEDA activity, but I have known some who have suffered substantial losses" (J. Winfield Fretz, *The MEDA Experiment: 1953–1978* [Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1978], 9).

[35] Fontaine's salary and that of his family members on staff continued to be a lightning rod of controversy. A pastor's salary has been a source of friction in Mennonite history. When bishops and leaders had been chosen in the early days of settlement, they had been selected by drawn straws. But the argument persisted that only wealthier farmers should be chosen since they could sustain the responsibility of this unpaid ministry with greater ease than the poorer among them. When Mennonites began to pay their ministers in the postwar period, they gave them a pittance. They wanted their symbols of faith to live with the simplicity that their Mennonite heritage afforded them. By the 1990s, Mennonite churches had come around to higher pay as a reflection of the specialized education and services provided by these men and women (interview with Ken Warkentin, Head of Mennonite Church Manitoba, June 29, 2012).

[36] Gerald Wright, *Steinbach: Is there Any Place Like It?* , 2.

[37] Royden Loewen, *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists* (Winnipeg, Man.: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 210–36.

[38] *Pioneer Portraits: Mennonite Centennial Hymn-Sing* (Altona, Man.: Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974).

[39] For more on the Mennonite encounter with Pentecostalism, see Douglas Rudd, *When the Spirit Came Upon Them: Highlights from the Early Years of the Pentecostal Movement in Canada* (Burlington, Ont.: Antioch Books, 2002).

[40] "My Story—Lily Fehr," Springs Church, posted September 7, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkV9B1LQkak&list=PLC7F577FFFE7ED609&index=33.

[41] "My Story—Daniel and Aurore Martin," posted September 7, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjHsUbgijTk&list=PLC7F577FFFE7ED609&index=22.

[42] *Gnadenthal, 1880–1980* (Winkler, Man.: Gnadenthal History Book Committee, 1982), 4.

[43] Henry Gerbrandt, "Wealth is Rooted in People," in *Pioneer Portraits*.

[44] "Shyle's Story," Springs Church YouTube Channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aw-_2blMAnU&index=13&list=PLC7F577FFFE7E D609 (accessed December 1, 2014).

[45] Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 36. For an excellent treatment of how work functioned as actual labour and also symbolically in Mennonite self-understanding, see Janis Lee Thiessen, *Manufacturing Mennonites: Work and Religion in Post-War Manitoba* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

[46] Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 65–66.

[47] Personal interview with Garret Froese, June 12, 2012.
[48] Psalm 35:20 (KJV).