The Beckoning: Shifting Affinities and Manitoba Mennonites at an Anglican Church

Susie Fisher, *University of Manitoba*

The Beckoning[1]

We are all falling.
This hand's falling too –
all have this falling – sickness
none withstands.

And yet there's one whose
gently-holding hands
this universal falling
can't fall through.

On a warm Sunday morning in early August 2009, on a quiet, wide and winding, elm-lined street in central, residential Winnipeg, the doors of a one-hundred-year-old, red brick Anglican church stand wide open, ready to receive parishioners. This week, two

stanzas from Rilke's poem "Autumn," renamed "The Beckoning," adorn the space above the cornerstone. Like every week, two greeters stand in the busy entranceway distributing the morning's Service Propers, shaking familiar hands, and welcoming visitors. Inside the church it is cool; it smells of perfume and percolating coffee. Ceiling fans generate a gentle breeze, while sunlight illuminates the simple stained glass. Wooden floors and pews creak and echo in unison as people take their seats, and an overgrown Virginia Creeper from the garden outside trails in through an open window. Some congregants sit or kneel in silence to pray; others continue conversations they began outside. The high altar is set for the Eucharist; on either side of the entrance to the apse a cross hangs to commemorate each of the World Wars. Above the arch, permanent, ornate lettering reads: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving" (Psalm 100:4). At exactly 10:30 a.m. a choir forms hurriedly at the back, and the clergy, dressed in long white robes, line up for the processional hymn. The first few notes on the organ bounce off the bare walls, the congregants stand as the clergy walk down the centre aisle, and the service begins with a loud and joyous song.

It is likely that this scene at St. Margaret's Anglican Church is descriptive of any given Sunday morning at Anglican churches across North America. Like numerous Anglican communities in Canada, St. Margaret's has been shaped and reshaped over the past several decades by contemporary issues surrounding the ordination of women, the impact of immigration to Canada, and thus growing ethnic diversity in the church, as well as by questions about the identity and survival of the Canadian Anglican church.[2] As are many Canadian Anglican churches, St. Margaret's is now characterized by female clergy members and the presence of new Canadians and parishioners from places like Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. St. Margaret's has increasingly fewer "cradle Anglican" members, as well as fewer members of British ethnic descent.

It is the busyness of Sunday mornings at St. Margaret's, however, which perhaps best illuminates the fact that this is a growing church community and is therefore quite unlike many other Canadian Anglican churches.[3] In particular, St. Margaret's is home to a growing contingent of university-aged worshippers and young families (in addition to older, long-standing church members), and aims to meet questions of survival and identity head-on with attentiveness to community diversity and dynamism. What further sets this church apart from most Anglican churches in

Winnipeg (and perhaps even in Canada), is that St. Margaret's is regularly attended by a notable number of Mennonites.

While the emergent presence of Mennonites at St. Margaret's has contributed to the growth and vitality of the parish,[4] the paradoxical movement of these Mennonites away from their Anabaptist roots to an Anglican church community raises significant questions about what changes occurring in Manitoba Mennonite communities are influencing this movement, and how this movement complicates the very intricate relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity.

For two months over the summer of 2009, I set out to explore some of these questions. Based on this fieldwork, I completed an ethnographic study of the compositional and congregational changes occurring at St. Margaret's, with a specific focus on the parish's growing Mennonite membership, and their unique ethno-religious identities. I wanted to hear how the Mennonite members of St. Margaret's understood and defined these categories of identity, and what meaning, if any, Mennonite religion and/or ethnicity continues to have in their everyday lives. What I found was that the notable shift in religious or denominational affiliation among St. Margaret's Mennonites provided a privileged opportunity for the specific discussion of the complex, yet intimately related categories of Mennonite religion and ethnicity, despite scholarly and community discourses about their growing disconnect in today's contemporary Canadian culture. My research at St. Margaret's also drew broad attention to sociological trends in secularization, liberalization, and the restructuring of Canadian churches.

St. Margaret's Anglican Church, Secularization, and 'High Church Mennonites'

Under the leadership of Reverend A.W. Woods, St. Margaret's was incorporated as a parish in the Diocese of Rupert's Land in 1910. The present church building, located on the corner of Westminster Avenue and Ethelbert Street in Winnipeg, was erected in 1912. Since the retirement of Rev. Woods following World War I, the congregation has grown and changed under the dynamic leadership of only three successive priests. St. Margaret's is a Low Anglican church, evangelical in its ministry, yet a church, according to Rector Dr. David Widdicombe, with a "growing Catholic sensibility."[5] In its theology and practice, St. Margaret's is departing noticeably from the Protestant tradition. Under the

leadership of Widdicombe, the parish has become "more independent of the diocese than other Anglican churches…and it has been more theologically literate and orthodox than most churches in the diocese,"[6] suggests Widdicombe. A large number of professionals, academics, students, and artists attend the church, which reflects well the neighbourhood in which it is situated. St. Margaret's is one of the largest Anglican parishes in the province and celebrates the emergent presence of many young families and Christians from around the globe, along with a growing number of Mennonites.

It is difficult to say when exactly Mennonites began attending St. Margaret's. Though the number of Mennonites at St. Margaret's has increased over the last twenty years, some of St. Margaret's longtime members are of the mind that "Mennonites have always attended the church."[7] While presumably Mennonites have been present in the congregation since the movement of many Mennonites from rural to urban Manitoba in the 1950s, Widdicombe estimates Mennonites have regularly attended St. Margaret's for about thirty years, for when Widdicombe began his ministry at St. Margaret's, Mennonites were already active in the congregation and in lay ministry. Today, parishioners of Mennonite heritage remain in positions of church leadership and music directorship at St. Margaret's. Other Mennonite members of St. Margaret's, besides those regular attendees, are involved in the church via the choir and broader music program, administrative work, as well as through scripture reading, worship leading, event planning, and childcare.

The fact that an emergent Mennonite population attends St. Margaret's is both acknowledged by its own church community and known by the Winnipeg Mennonite community at large. Indeed, this particular pattern of denominational change is a topic of popular conversation in various Winnipeg circles. In these settings, St. Margaret's is frequently acclaimed as the "fastest growing Mennonite church in Manitoba,"[8] and Mennonites at St. Margaret's are sometimes jokingly referred to as "Manglicans." Jesting aside, St. Margaret's growing membership does stand out against the general decline in membership in Canadian Anglican churches,[9] and its large Mennonite population (nearly half the surnames listed in the parish directory are locally recognized as Mennonite), as well as the continual movement of many Mennonites from their Anabaptist religious communities to an Anglican church, together signify complex re-negotiations of Mennonite identity.

Scholars and sociologists of religion in Canada have long noted that secularization (here understood as the disestablished,

diminished role of Christianity in the public sphere, and thus accordingly the subjectification and privatization of religion in the everyday lives of Canadians), has led to a significant decline in Canadian church attendance and membership in nearly all denominations.[10] Yet, while considerable decline in church attendance and membership has largely reshaped the relationship between contemporary Canadians and the churches, statistics demonstrate that many Canadians continue to identify with the Christian traditions and general beliefs of their parents and grandparents, albeit in a less institutionalized and a more flexible way.[11] For example, sociologist Reginald Bibby reports that Canadian Christians continue to identify with the religious traditions of their parents, celebrate Christian holidays, and communicate Christian beliefs. Christianity remains an important part of people's identities, according to Bibby, despite their limited participation in actual churches.[12] British sociologist Grace Davie has similarly addressed this phenomenon in Britain. In her well-known work, *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, Davie attempts to come to terms with the "conflicting evidence" of decreased church attendance alongside continued religious identity and practice, by arguing that it is indeed possible to "hold together the persistence of religious belief in contemporary [society] alongside the marked decline – though not the disappearance – of religious practice."[13] This paradox, according to Davie and popularly re-stated in analyses of the Canadian context, is "believing without belonging."[14] Others, such as Danièle Hervieu-Leger, have extended Davie's argument to refer to those who continue to identify themselves as Christian, but have increasingly little knowledge of Christian traditions, history, or the Bible. These people "belong without believing."[15] With reference to this type of Christian identity, Canadian scholars also note that rather than emphasizing one's sense of belonging to a particular Christian group or denomination, more often emphasized in conversations about religious identity is one's personal, negotiated, or chosen experience of Christianity – sometimes even alongside some Buddhist, Jewish, or Hindu beliefs, or other denominationally-specific Christian beliefs that might theologically contradict or conflict with those professed to be upheld or central to one's identity.[16] Whatever the case – belonging without believing or believing without belonging – it is clear that the relationship between Canadian churches and contemporary Canadian Christians is changing.

This changing relationship is evident among Canadian Christians in the assumed distinction between one's religious and

ethnic identity, in the lack of knowledge about one's familial religious and ethnic history, fluctuating church involvement, and in changing religious beliefs and practices despite the possible maintenance of a broader familial religious identity.[17] As Paul Bramadat and David Seljak argue, these ideas about the disentanglement of religious and ethnic identity are central to the "liberating impetus" or the importance of choice in the Enlightenment tradition, which is idealized and celebrated in Western societies.[18] Yet, as Bramadat and Seljak also argue, such ideas are not always fully attentive to the multifaceted links that exist between these foci of identification.

Notably, these effects of secularization and modernization on Christian communities and individuals, or more specifically, on the maintenance of cohesive ideas about ethno-religious identity, have not been observed in Manitoba Mennonite communities until recently. Due to their history of segregation and sectarianism, their distinct ethno-religious identity, and a "culture of faith"[19] perhaps most comparable to contemporary Judaism, Mennonites have remained largely united in their broader opinions about Mennonite religion, culture, and identity. At the very least, individuals in this tradition have been willing to count themselves as Mennonite, owing to their intricate knowledge of the cultural practices and convictions in their day-to-day lives that have ethnic and religious ties to Mennonitism.[20] That said, while the Mennonite Church is presently growing worldwide (predominantly in Africa and South America, thus further complicating the discourse about Mennonite religion and ethnicity), the Canadian Mennonite Church is witnessing membership decline. Many believe the transnational nature of contemporary Mennonite faith practices is in part the cause of changing ideas among members about the relationship between the Mennonite Church, religion, and ethnic heritage. Individual religious identities and ethnic backgrounds, amid both rapid social change and the increasingly multicultural Canadian landscape, are being renegotiated to fit a fluctuating and globalizing understanding of what it means to be Mennonite.

Large numbers of Mennonites in Manitoba only began leaving their close-knit, ethno-religious rural communities in search of urban life in the 1950s. Manitoba Mennonites have thus, as a people, remained generally underexposed to the "loosening in the bonds between the social realities into which one is born and one's (increasingly chosen or negotiated) identity…[that became] so central in [post-war] Western society."[21] Nonetheless, the numbers of "non-practicing," "secularized," "ex," "ethnic," and "religious affiliation switching" Mennonites in Canada are increasing.[22]

Historian Royden Loewen's discussion of a survey conducted in Winnipeg, for example, notes that "the number of secularized Mennonites or ethnic Mennonites with no Mennonite religious affiliation in the city [in 2005] was as high as 31 per cent of persons who were identified in some way as Mennonite or of Mennonite background." [23] Loewen argues that the development of religious differences among Mennonites has created diverse ideas about Mennonite ethnicity, and thus about Mennonite identity itself. Though in my study, I consider St. Margaret's Mennonites to be outside the general trend of "Canadian secularization," I did find that many of them understand and talk about their Mennonite religious and ethnic identities in ways similar to those Mennonites who have given up on church affiliation all together. Both Mennonites at St. Margaret's and "secularized Mennonites" similarly claim that their Mennonite identities no longer dictate their friendship circles, their cultural practices, or the church community to which they belong.

Most scholars of Mennonite religion and culture agree that while the Mennonite movement began as a religious one, it developed over time into an historical narrative, and an evolving Mennonite ethno-religious culture. Due to centuries of persecution and political pressure in both Europe and in Russia, following which there were a series of mass migrations, much of the Mennonite historical narrative details processes whereby the Mennonites became an agrarian, sectarian people, a people focused on social justice, nonviolence, and the protection and maintenance of a community with distinct gender roles, a unique language, and religion. In recent history, this narrative also details the development of Mennonite denominational divides, Mennonite relief and aid organizations, thrift stores, Mennonite music, games, foodways, and cookbooks.[24] In urban settings, even Mennonite creative writing, magazines, films, political groups, fair trade craft stores, as well as residences for elderly Mennonites, Mennonite roots tours, genealogical history books, elementary schools and high schools, universities, banking institutions, funeral homes, and restaurants have become part of the Mennonite historical narrative, and are, by extension, representative aspects of contemporary Mennonite life.[25]

Royden Loewen has suggested that in present-day Canada there now exist six major ideas or categories of discourse about the relationship between religion and ethnicity among Mennonites in urban environments. They are: (1) ethnicity is embraced by secular voices who critique, discard, or de-emphasize religion in general; (2) Mennonite ethnicity is celebrated by evangelicals who show

substantial disdain towards traditional Mennonite religious ideals; (3) a more globally-oriented, Anabaptist Mennonite faith is celebrated while Mennonite ethnicity is touted as restrictive and no longer relevant due to the growing number of Mennonites in non-North American countries; (4) Mennonite religion and ethnicity are intrinsically linked; (5) ethnicity is symbolic and exists naturally alongside Mennonite religious identity, yet ethnicity has no religious significance; (6) the term "Mennonite" is used as an identity marker, but neither religious beliefs nor familial background indicate Mennonite ethnic ties, participation in Mennonite traditions or Anabaptist religious ideals.[26] These diverse ideas about the relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity, and what seems in some cases to be a movement towards the separation of these categories of identity, have likely arisen in accordance with the changing nature and location and dispersal of Mennonite communities, changing community involvements, increasingly diverse gender roles, and shifting religious ideals.

Today, the Russian Mennonite historical narrative – which identifies key theological tenets of Anabaptism, tells stories of Anabaptist persecution and martyrdom, forced Mennonite migrations due to intolerance of Mennonite beliefs, times of privilege, and the development of a distinctive cultural identity – continues to inform many people's sense of Mennonite identity in Manitoba. Yet, in urban settings like Winnipeg, these Anabaptist ethno-religious ideals are also often held alongside changing religious beliefs, new cultural connections, and varying roles in the community. While some have argued that upholding Mennonite ethnic traditions and being involved in Mennonite community organizations keeps alive the traditions of the Mennonite church, others argue that Mennonite ethnicity and material culture diminishes the centrality of Christian-Anabaptist doctrine to Mennonite identity.

St. Margaret's Mennonites are affected in complex ways by some of the trends currently shaping Canadian Christianity and contemporary Christian identity. On the one hand, some of St. Margaret's Mennonites, similar to other Canadian Christians, make very clear distinctions between their religious and ethnic identities. Many of St. Margaret's Mennonites also seem to be unaware of the intimate relationship between these two historically linked components of their identities. And, all have varying ideas of what it means (or meant, in some cases) to be a Mennonite. Whether such claims are problematic, uninformed, or otherwise, these ideas about the disconnection of religious and ethnic identity are said to be one of the many byproducts of the changing and messy

relationship between Canadian churches and contemporary Canadian Christian identity.[27] On the other hand however, it does seem as though St. Margaret's Mennonites stand outside of the general trend toward secularization in Canada. Though they no longer identify with the Mennonite churches in which they were raised, they do identify with Christianity in a deep way by participating formally and actively in an Anglican church community. Most also have significant knowledge of Christian history and theology, and nearly everyone I spoke to seemed to have given some thought to their transition into an Anglican church community, especially in light of their ethno-religious backgrounds. That is, though making the change, or choosing to participate in a tradition outside of the realm of their ethno-religious background was often easy, gradual, or even "natural" for St. Margaret's Mennonites, many were aware that such a transition has contributed to some reshaping of their ideas about Christianity, worship, and Christian practice.

In 2007, Widdicombe, rector of St. Margaret's, wrote an article entitled "Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer)" for the Faith & Life section of *Canadian Mennonite*.[28] In this article, Widdicombe asks two key questions. First, "[s]hould Mennonites be concerned that some of their people are being attracted to a liturgical church?" And second, "[i]s there anything to be learned here?" Widdicombe suggests that the attraction of many Mennonites to St. Margaret's "hardly makes for a statistically interesting trend." Given that the church is in Winnipeg, a city historically renowned for being one of the world's largest Mennonite centers,[29] "many of its members are unavoidably going to be Mennonite." "It seems to me," he writes, "there is no cause for alarm when young people from the Free Church tradition fall in love with High Church liturgy. Some of them will go home someday. And, there is heavy traffic in the other direction besides." "In any case," Widdicombe offers lightheartedly, "every major Canadian city needs at least one large High Church Mennonite Congregation."[30]

On a more serious note, Widdicombe also argues here that denominational loyalty is "a thing of the past." While this development might be painful for pastors who feel they are losing their people as well as a specific tradition of worship and belief, some congregations, like St. Margaret's, are "the grateful recipients of the enriching presence of Christians from [different] denominational backgrounds." What is central to the issue at hand, Widdicome notes, is that "the historic liturgies of the church" are increasingly sought after by many Winnipeg Mennonites. These

liturgies, as part of a more Catholic form of worship, he believes, "speak with the authority of the ages" and introduce St. Margaret's men and women of the Anabaptist tradition, to the "resources for faithful Christian thinking and living, which they will need to survive in postmodernity with its designer religions…and [its] narratives of contemporary secularization." Worship at St. Margaret's allows these Mennonites to "trace their histories back to the point where they were last in fellowship with those believers with whom they have since come to have significant disagreements."

Widdicombe's analysis of the situation at St. Margaret's highlights the fact that the discovery of or participation in St. Margaret's liturgically-centered worship, as well as the music program, are two of the most frequently cited reasons Mennonites give for becoming members of the church. In my research at St. Margaret's, I also found that emphasis on an "intellectual approach to the faith," and the attention paid to the visual arts (which was often translated by my informants as the "appreciation of beauty"), were additionally cited as reasons why Mennonites joined the St. Margaret's church community. Although I am not wholly convinced that Widdicombe is correct to assume that because there are so many Mennonites in Winnipeg, they will inevitably be found in a variety of Winnipeg church communities (that is, there is something particular about St. Margaret's that attracts Manitoba Mennonites), and though his comments regarding the authority of Catholic forms of worship might raise questions for some Christians about Reformation politics, resulting denominational divisions, and church allegiances, his reflections on the changes occurring in his congregation are important to consider. After all, Widdicombe has been rector of St. Margaret's for close to twenty years, and as Richard, one of my respondents noted, "David [Widdicombe] knows his people well."

"Manglicans"

For most of my respondents, shifting theological commitments were cited as central to their move to St. Margaret's. Attraction to Anglican liturgy, or the music program at St. Margaret's, the opportunity to teach and minister to others, or the church's emphasis on artistic forms of worship, along with disappointments about "changes" occurring in their former Mennonite churches, were important contributing factors leading to their variable affiliations and identities. By regularly attending St. Margaret's and

participating in the Anglican liturgy, many Mennonites at St. Margaret's feel they have become Anglican. Others have decided to more formally address this change in religious identity by becoming confirmed in the Anglican tradition. However, despite their expressed changes in religious identity, many aspects of my respondents' lives, behaviours and attitudes *do* remain distinctly Mennonite. From the open, well-worn Mennonite hymnal on Richard's piano, to Sharon's continued love of Mennonite food and holiday traditions, or Frieda's concern for social justice, and Daniel's aversion to baptizing his young children, persistent cultural *and* religious features of their Mennonite heritage are evident. To me, this reveals that both ethnic and religious components in the identities of the Mennonites at St. Margaret's are perhaps more intricately woven together than even they feel is indicated by their move away from their Mennonite churches.

Discussing the reasons why these parishioners left their respective Mennonite congregations and the reasons why they are attracted to St. Margaret's draws greater attention to the complexity of this denominational change. While in some circumstances, parishioners began attending St. Margaret's in search of healing, community support, or simply because of a friend's recommendation, in other cases people began attending St. Margaret's in search of a more "traditional" or "historical" Christianity, or more "authentic" faith practices. In each case, however, the move into this Anglican parish has seemingly reoriented these Mennonites' religious identities. Many Mennonite churches are changing rapidly by way of incorporating new or modern forms of music and worship practices, while also attempting to remain attractive to congregants by structurally incorporating elements like gymnasiums and coffee shops, which are believed to be more suited to the lifestyles of modern Christians. Yet, while such attempts are thought to solve issues of spiritual disquietude, some people, like a number of the Mennonites at St. Margaret's, leave these modernizing churches in search of faith practices that seem to them to be more "historically authentic." These themes of general or spiritual unhappiness in the Mennonite church, Mennonite church modernization, and the belief that Anglican worship practices are more "authentic" came through in meetings with my informants, and seem to have considerably influenced their respective decisions to join St. Margaret's.

Equally noteworthy, however, is the observation of the continued influence or involvement of the wider Manitoba Mennonite community in my informants' lives, as well as the spirited attitude held, or comfort expressed among some with

regard to the (new) community of Mennonites at St. Margaret's. Not only were Frieda, Sharon, Daniel, and Richard each introduced to St. Margaret's by other Mennonites, but Daniel, Richard and others experienced a sense of immediate inclusion and comfort in the St. Margaret's community *because* of their Mennonite background and identity. Daniel noted enthusiastically that "the Mennonites have taken over St. Margaret's. It's wonderful!"[31] Frieda also expressed her delight in the "Mennonite influence" on St. Margaret's, especially with regard to the fact that "they serve Paska [a special Mennonite Easter bread] after the Easter service."[32]

During an interview with one of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners, I listened as she very eloquently and thoughtfully tried to verbalize her understanding of her dual (Mennonite and Anglican) identity. Like so many of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners, this woman's religious identity had changed, based on her participation in St. Margaret's. And yet, while she defined herself religiously as an Anglican, her Mennonite identity remained central to the way she understood herself and her life: "I am Mennonite because my parents and grandparents are Mennonite," she said. "My brother and I were raised Mennonite. My Oma and Opa spoke Low German, my Oma cooked us traditional Mennonite food, my dad grew up in a Mennonite town in southern Manitoba, I was raised in a Mennonite church, and our church community and my parents' and grandparents' values inform our household." As she further explained,

> I am doing my Master's degree in theology at Canadian Mennonite University and I still eat farmer sausage, and at Christmas, 'peppernuts'. I have many Mennonite friends. I am still in love with and moved by so many Mennonite hymns. [Long pause.] I think I will always identify myself [based on] where I come from and who my parents and grandparents are. Their faith was a huge part of their lives and mine, like, it informed their choice about where to live, their travel decisions, their worldview and parenting styles; it affected me and made me who I am. It will always be who I am.

Yet, this woman also observed that because she attended St. Margaret's, because she loved the Anglican liturgy, because she had become more confident in what she believed and was "stimulated and challenged" by the sermons at St. Margaret's, and found "comfort and connection" in the liturgy and in the Eucharist, she "identifies more strongly as an Anglican than [she] ever identified as a Mennonite." As she further noted, "there are also so many physical ways in which I connect with St. Margaret's. I would feel as though I hadn't really worshipped if I hadn't taken

communion during the week, because with the Mennonite church it is only practiced a few times a year sometimes – this to me now seems astonishing." Throughout our interview, it became increasingly clear that for this woman, identifying herself as both Mennonite and Anglican was not, and had never been, a problem. She, like so many of St. Margaret's Mennonites, felt at home in both the Mennonite world and in an Anglican church; Mennonitism and Anglicanism were each important parts of what made this woman who she was. Though her religious identity in particular had been changed, she could not imagine leaving her Mennonite heritage behind.[33]

My fieldwork at St. Margaret's revealed what other scholars have also increasingly noted: that there are a growing number of Mennonites who identify strongly with what they understand to be "cultural" components of their Mennonite heritage, but do not consider themselves to be religiously Mennonite. For these individuals, food, community, certain types of music or dress, and familial heritage now best represent Mennonite identity. While these individuals do continue to demonstrate a great deal of concern regarding matters of social justice and simple living, these (once specifically Mennonite religious) ideals are not (or are no longer) thought to be tied to religious identity. It is possible, these individuals feel, to be culturally Mennonite without being religiously Mennonite. The story of this evolving cultural Mennonite identity, however, does have a complicated past. [34]

Ideas about Mennonite identity have developed over time and are often said to be the result of Mennonite migrations from rural to urban environments. Not only do more Mennonites than ever before live in cities, (as opposed to the small Mennonite rural towns and villages which likely informed a stronger, unified sense of peoplehood and a combined ethno-religious identity), but an increased exposure to alternate religious traditions and ethnic customs in these urban environments, as well as the general North American "ethic of choice," have reshaped the way Mennonites negotiate their sense of individual and community identity. Moreover, Mennonite churches and congregations are also changing rapidly due to church modernization (which often involves a diminishment in the number of traditional "Mennonite hymns" that are sung, the incorporation of rock bands, and fewer services in German, among other things). As conversations with my informants revealed, for longtime Mennonite church members, these changes also often accompany frustration, a lack of spiritual satisfaction, and even disinterest in the broader Mennonite tradition. Some Mennonites, like St. Margaret's Mennonites, decide

to seek out a place in alternate Christian denominations, while many others choose to leave Christianity behind altogether. Moreover, immigration to North America has changed the congregational make-up of many Mennonite churches, and has contributed to greater debate about the very existence of a "Mennonite ethnicity."

The shifting relationship between religious and ethnic identity among Mennonites is not unlike the changing relationship between religion and ethnicity that has been occurring in other churches and denominations across Canada specifically, and North America more generally, for quite some time. As in these other churches and denominations, it is clear that at St. Margaret's immigration, multiculturalism, and secularization have reshaped the ethnic make-up of the parish and have, perhaps to a greater extent, transformed the definition of Anglicanism.[35] All of the changes occurring within Mennonite and Anglican communities in Manitoba have indeed contributed in varying ways to St. Margaret's parishioners' discussions about, and understandings of, the categories of religion and ethnicity in their lives.

In his article "On Being a Mennonite Catholic," Ivan J. Kauffman discusses his decision to switch from the Mennonite church in which he grew up, to a Catholic church. He admits that at the time he switched from one denomination to the other, he believed his Mennonite past and his increasingly Catholic sentiments could not coexist; he was "30 years old and at that state in [his] life when [he] believed it was possible to put one's childhood in the past and start over again." Though he "did not underestimate the difficulty, [he] believed that if one had enough determination and courage it was possible." Today however, just as my interviews with many of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners revealed, Kauffman has come to believe that "it is virtually impossible to be an ex-Mennonite."[36] He argues that

> [a]nyone who grew up in the Mennonite community's unique family environment has been so deeply shaped by that experience that it is virtually impossible to live without constant reference to it and the unique values it has imprinted on us. The alternative is to pretend one has no past, but that option is perhaps psychologically impossible, since it is the equivalent of trying to build a house without any foundations under it. North American culture tells us, "you can be anything you want to be," which may be true when referring to the many opportunities open to us. But that truth, I am convinced, must be balanced by another reality that is just as true: You can only become what your childhood and adolescence have prepared you to be.[37]

The fact that Kauffman was born into one community and then left it in early adulthood for another community is not unusual in today's day and age. He is of the mind that when North American Mennonites leave, they do not leave their past behind.

Kauffman's discussion reminds us of the powerful forces of individualism and choice (often associated with secularization), the social construction of identity, and the power of religion and ethnicity to inform our sense of self. Like Kauffman, St. Margaret's Mennonites have been influenced considerably, whether they recognize it or not, by the forces of secularization, migration, modernization, and the loosening of the bonds between religion and ethnicity, increasingly popular among contemporary Canadian Christians. Despite these forces, however, St. Margaret's Mennonites cannot completely abandon the Mennonite parts of their identity, which were formed in a Mennonite world, and where many of their familial relationships or friendships still lie.

Conclusion

St. Margaret's Mennonites have maintained some of the cultural and religious traditions of their heritage. At the same time, they have also adopted Anglican religious identities. The religious and ethnic components of their identities interact and intermingle in multifaceted ways to create something that appears from the outside to be new and emergent – an identity that is neither traditionally Anglican nor Mennonite (Manglican?), but one that reflects well the changes occurring between the categories of religion and ethnicity in the lives of many other Canadian Christians. The insights of the community at St. Margaret's have certainly allowed me to bring to light some of the complexities of religious and ethnic identity among contemporary Christian Canadians. Yet, the portion of the poem by Rilke, which hung outside St. Margaret's for the part of the summer I conducted my fieldwork, also became a constant, significant, and humbling source of insight for me as my research progressed.

This poem, wherein Rilke elucidates the moving nature of God's summoning, encouraged me to think more directly about the human yearning for truth, the universality of doubt (falling), the common struggle many face to discover, develop, and come to terms with religious identity, and the power of faith in the lives of contemporary Christians, notwithstanding the influences of familial background, culture, and ethnicity. In conversations with the people of St. Margaret's about ethnicity, family history, marriage,

prayer, baptism, children, and times of spiritual struggle and joy, Rilke's words allowed me to nurture a sensitivity to the seriousness of belief and of religious identity and change in people's lives. Despite my interest in the way St. Margaret's Mennonite members construct and/or negotiate changes in their ethno-religious identities, Rilke's poem, alongside the time I spent with parishioners, helped me to better recognize that the way these people identify and describe the changes in their religious lives is secondary to the fact that St. Margaret's is, for them, a sacred space in which they are called to become "more theologically robust," where they "feel Christian," have "powerful worship experiences," and are moved to "cultivate a stronger faith." At St. Margaret's, it seems discourses of ethnicity, heritage, and denominations are cast aside in worship, as parishioners unite in recognizing they are held in their universal yearning. And here, they attune their ears to the gentle Beckoning.

Notes

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1 This selection of stanzas from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Autumn" (published in the early 1900s), was prepared and renamed by Gail Dueck, a parishioner at St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. These stanzas adorned the space above St. Margaret's cornerstone during the latter half of the summer of 2009.

2 Wendy Fletcher, "Canadian Anglicanism and Ethnicity," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 152-153.

3 Alan Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada: Controversies and Identity in Historical Perspective* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 143.

4 David Widdicombe, "Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer)," *Canadian Mennonite* 11:5 (2007), http://legacy.canadian mennonite.org/vol11-2007/11-05/index.php, (accessed March 2015). In this article, David Widdicombe, rector of St. Margaret's, is vocal about the fact that St. Margaret's Anglican Church is the "grateful recipient of [an] enriching presence of Christians from many denominational backgrounds," as opposed to other pastors and congregations "who worry that they are losing their young people – or that a tradition of worship and belief might be losing its future."

5 David Widdicombe, personal interview, November 19, 2009.

6 Ibid.

[7] Eric Parsons, personal interview, October 23, 2010.
[8] Andrew Siebert, "Why does the Mennonite Cross the Liturgical Road?" *Canadian Mennonite* 11:5 (2007), http://legacy.canadianmennonite .org/vol11-2007/11-05/index.php, (accessed March 2015).
[9] Wendy Fletcher, "Canadian Anglicanism and Ethnicity," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 139.
[10] See for example Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) and Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005).
[11] Warren Clark and Grant Shellenberg, "Who's Religious?" in *Canadian Social Trends* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue Number 11-008: Summer 2006).
[12] Reginald Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada's Churches can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 7-17.
[13] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 8.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Danièle Hervieu-Leger, "The role of religion in establishing social cohesion," *Eurozine* (August 2006), http://www.eurozine.com/articles /2006-08-17-hervieuleger-en.html, (accessed September 2009).
[16] Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 15. See also Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987), 73-6.
[17] Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," 15.
[18] Ibid., 19.
[19] Margaret Loewen Reimer, *One Quilt, Many Pieces: A Guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2008), 15.
[20] Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 14.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Loewen, "The Poetics of Peoplehood: Religion and Ethnicity among Canada's Mennonites," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 347.
[23] Ibid.
[24] For an interesting study on the discourse of Mennonite cookbooks and their influence on Mennonite history and contemporary Mennonite culture and religion, see Matthew Bailey-Dick, "The Kitchenhood of all Believers: A Journey into the Discourse of Mennonite Cookbooks," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (April 2005), https://www.goshen.edu/ mqr/pastissues/apr05bailey .html, (accessed March 2015).
[25] Loewen, "The Poetics of Peoplehood," 338-343.
[26] Ibid., 348-356.
[27] Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," 18-19.
[28] David Widdicombe, "Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer)," *Canadian Mennonite* 11:5 (2007), http://legacy.canadian mennonite.org/ vol11-2007/11-05/index.php, (accessed March 2015).

[29] Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1990), x-xi.

[30] Widdicombe, "Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer)," *Canadian Mennonite* 11:5 (2007), http://legacy.canadianmennonite.org/vol11-2007/11-05/index.php, (accessed March 2015). See also The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, "FAQ," *The Anglican Church of Canada*, http://www.anglican.ca/search/faq/031.htm. According to the "FAQ" section on the website dedicated to and operated by *The Anglican Church of Canada*, the terms "High" Church and "Low" Church refer to "different 'parties' or schools of churchmanship within the Church of England/Anglican Communion. 'High' Church is the older of the two terms historically and was first applied, in the late seventeenth century, to those individuals who were opposed to the Puritan wing of the Church of England. Later, and more famously, in the nineteenth century, ['High' Church] was applied to the Anglo-Catholic or Tractarian movement in England from 1833 onwards." The term "Low" Church finds its beginnings in the early eighteenth century. "The 'Low' Church or Evangelical party placed great emphasis on preaching, personal piety and the authority of scripture…This party also gave much less importance to the orders of priesthood and episcopacy."

Officially, St. Margaret's is considered to be a "Low" Anglican Church. However, by referring to St. Margaret's Mennonites as "High Church Mennonites" Widdicombe likely intends to communicate the fact that the Mennonites at St. Margaret's, as opposed to those Mennonites who remain in the Mennonite church, place greater emphasis on liturgy and the sacraments, and especially the weekly or daily celebration of the Eucharist. As well, St. Margaret's Mennonites might emphasize, or be more supportive of church hierarchy (deacon, priest and bishop) and "place importance on apostolic succession and the historical continuity of Anglican bishops with the early church," unlike typical Mennonites who are often suspicious of things like the sacraments and apostolic succession. Yet, as *The Anglican Church of Canada* also stresses, the terms "High" and "Low" Church have come to have "a negative or pejorative flavor." Accordingly, both terms are rarely used to describe Anglican communities in Canada. It is unlikely that Rector David Widdicombe intended to use the phrase "High Church Mennonites" to indicate that St. Margaret's Mennonites are more spiritually sophisticated or educated than their "Low Church Mennonite" friends, family, and community members. However, the idea that the phrase could indeed connote this different usage of "High Church", or could be used to describe the way St. Margaret's Mennonites think of themselves and are thought of in the wider Winnipeg Mennonite community, was recently pointed out by a Winnipeg Mennonite friend and colleague. Though further research would need to be conducted in the Winnipeg Mennonite community to confirm my colleague's speculation, it is nonetheless an interesting point to consider when reviewing the life stories of my informants.

[31] Daniel Siebert, personal interview, August 2009.

[32] Frieda Neufeld, personal interview, July 2009.

[33] Katie Reimer, personal interview, September 2009.

[34] The fact that many Mennonites identify strongly with the cultural components of Mennonitism and not with the religious components, has become a topic of serious debate among Mennonites in Manitoba. This

debate surfaced in a considerable way during the mid-1980s, when those Mennonites who wished to celebrate the cultural and ethnic features of their Mennonite identities and heritages began participating in Winnipeg's Folklorama festival by developing and running a Mennonite pavilion. The pavilion offered "copious amounts of hearty Mennonite food, entertainment in the form of music and singing, as well as a walk-through display of Mennonite history and culture, as well as a special display of Mennonite arts and crafts (Al Reimer, "Mennonite Pavilion Again." *Mennonite Historian* 6: 3 (1980): 6-7). However, because Folklorama is a festival meant to celebrate the foods, artwork, dances, and cultural traditions of Winnipeg's many national and cultural groups, much of the broader Winnipeg Mennonite community felt a Mennonite pavilion misrepresented Mennonites. Those who criticized the Mennonite pavilion at Folklorama argued that the pavilion represented an inappropriate and invalid attention to Mennonite "culture." These people argued "Mennonites were to be defined not by a distinct cultural tradition, but rather by a particular faith or theology" (Gerald Gerbrant, "Who is a Mennonite?" *Canadian Mennonite* 9:21 (2005): 6.) After only a few years, the Mennonite pavilion disappeared from Folklorama.

[35] The Mennonite presence at St. Margaret's has influenced the parish beyond the simple incorporation of Mennonite culture and foodways. In a recent interview with Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer (February 2015), Lay Pastoral Associate at St. Margaret's, it was suggested that Mennonites (particularly those from the Evangelical tradition) have reshaped the quality of worship participation, by bringing an intensity to worship that is not common among "cradle" Anglicans. Mennonites also bring a musicality that is not present within cradle Anglican parishes. Pinto Gfroerer also believes that the presence of Mennonites at St. Margaret's has increased the drive for a more Congregationalist leadership approach, and dictated the higher emphasis on lay leadership. "People are more willing to get involved in worship than in other Anglican parish," she argues. St. Margaret's gives to Mennonite Central Committee and participates in social justice projects (like "Just Growing") because of the influence of Mennonite attendees. Finally, particularly around matters of pacifism and the theory of "just war," the Mennonite presence has pressed leadership to be careful in its articulation of the Christian relationship to war and its engagement with "the political."

[36] Ivan J. Kauffman, "On Being a Mennonite Catholic," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* April (2002): 235.

[37] Ibid., 235.