

The BLAZER Digest

Connecting Alumni and Friends of CMU

Fall 2021



Modelling invitational
community

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Cheryl Pauls | CMU President

The call to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15 ESV) is beloved of many. The call’s summons is a blessing. It leads not to equal measures of misery and joy but to growth of well-being in all things—as much when we share suffering as when we share delight. For when we weep together, the burden and sting of pain are lessened. And, when we rejoice together, the bitter grip of envy over another’s happiness holds little sway. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our capacities to laugh, cry, talk, eat, and simply be together are severely constrained, even with remarkable online break-out room connections and new definitions of “seasonal outdoor gatherings.” What does the call to rejoice and weep together have to teach us this season when its expressions are so limited? What might that learning have to do with CMU’s commitment to “modelling invitational community”?

In terms of COVID illness, CMU thus far has been “blessedly boring”; also, we’ve sustained a considerable amount of community living and learning. This year 90% of our main campus classes are fully in person and dorm life is vibrant. We are deeply grateful for these things, and for places to rejoice and weep together. Still, I wonder if the greatest gift and learning in this season reaches elsewhere—into the disheartening pandemic side effect



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of increased polarized convictions and identities, conditions that are ripping families and communities apart. The call from Romans 12 is not about agreeing with others before beginning a conversation. It’s about entering into another’s experiences of joy and sorrow, about being touched by what touches another, about bonds of friendship as a starting place for engaging common and divergent threads of opinion and conviction. With this issue of *The Blazer Digest* I invite you to reflect on how your capacity for “modelling invitational community” has been stretched and, I trust, renewed.

Beyond suspicion

Paul Doerksen | Associate Professor of Theology and Anabaptist Studies

While church and state are separated formally in Canada, interaction between these entities during the pandemic is manifested in the debating of issues like freedom of worship, the legitimacy (or not) of government to impose restrictions, contested understandings of the church's responsibility to be a good citizen, and so on.

One prominent dimension of church/state relations is that of mutual suspicion. British academic and priest Oliver O'Donovan describes this two-fold suspicion: first, the church is wary of the corruption of morality by politicians; second, the state is suspicious that the church wants to corrupt politics for the church's own ends (e.g., dictating morality).

Such mutual suspicion surfaces regularly these days. The first suspicion is evident whenever churches defy government regulations by invoking faith-based rationale for doing so. Vaccine hesitancy and/or opposition, while motivated by any number of reasons across the ideological spectrum, is sometimes seen as an expression of faith—for example, refusing to live in fear of the virus, since “perfect love casts out fear,” or, resisting what is considered an illegitimate exercise of political authority over the person and life of faith. A deep-seated suspicion of government has surfaced.



Government authorities (and others) who express frustration with non-compliant churches suspiciously regard the resistance to directives as the church's illegitimate exercise of authority while ignoring legitimate government authority. This creates an oft-repeated scenario in which government or health officials offer theological advice to the church on the true nature of faith, even quoting the Bible as an authority, to instruct the church, for example, on just what it means “to love your neighbour as yourself.”

Mutual suspicion cultivates destructive practices. In a culture of mistrust, the church may assume that, as the controversial German thinker Carl Schmitt stated, “No secular power is going to tell us what to do, because we deserve freedom of religion—we obey God rather than any human authority”; thus

... Beyond suspicion continued

preventing the possibility of respectful co-operation with legitimate government measures.

A suspicious state may be tempted to assume a certain naivete, narrowness, lack of gratitude, and dearth of understanding on the part of the church regarding what it means to be a good citizen. Thus, the stage is set for antagonism, precluding the constructive possibilities that exist within church/state relations without collapsing into a kind of amorphous civic religion.

The way beyond suspicion lies in attentiveness and discernment that includes self-critical reflection for both church and state.

Mutual attentiveness, including critical self-reflection, can lead to the kind of constructive discernment that opens possibilities for a

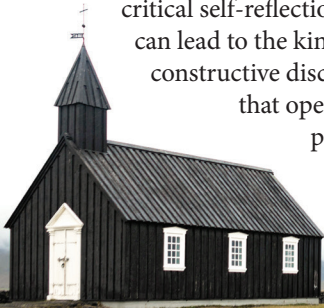
flourishing society. A church that is not committed to a comprehensive suspicion of state authority will not

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decide beforehand to contest everything as a matter of faith, but will be open to co-operation, even initiative and support, while always reserving ultimate loyalty to God.

Government that does not suspect the church of pursuing only power and privilege for itself will resist the temptation to ignore the church or to exercise illegitimate coercive measures against it and will forego the assumption that the church is looking to put some version of theocracy into place.

It's time to move beyond suspicion, to embrace a posture of attentiveness and discernment.



Abram Bergen retires after three decades of service

On his retirement in September, CMU celebrated and honoured Abram Bergen for over 31 years of service. Bergen had an incredible impact, first as a faculty member in youth ministry, then as Director of Enrolment, and finally as a Development Associate with a focus on alumni, church, and donor relations. His integrity and deep respect for everyone cultivated trust and generosity in many. CMU welcomes Reynold Friesen (CMBC '93) as Bergen's successor.





CMU formalizes relationship with Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre

Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

As part of a bundle exchange ceremony, Canadian Mennonite University and Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (SSSC) exchanged bundles to honour and formalize their relationship and academic partnership on September 24.

The bundle ceremony is an Indigenous practice of sharing a collection of items and their stories, which are sacred to the giver, and entrusting them to the receiver. When a bundle is physically passed along, so is the responsibility for the gift and for upholding those stories. It signifies meaningful relationship between groups.

The two institutions have already been making connections for almost a decade. Adrian Jacobs, Keeper of the Circle at SSSC, teaches an Indigenous studies course at CMU and sits on CMU's Indigenous Initiatives Advisory Council along with Kelly Selkirk, an SSSC board member. Groups of CMU students have visited SSSC, learning

and spending time together.

Gathered in a circle, the group participated in a smudge and listened as Jacobs recounted the stories within SSSC's bundle and Dr. Jonathan Dueck, Vice President Academic of CMU, narrated the meaning behind the university's bundle.

"When we engage in ceremony together, we become relatives."

"There's a deep meaning to ceremony," said Christy Anderson, Indigenous Engagement Advisor at CMU. "When we engage in ceremony together, we become relatives."

Dr. Cheryl Pauls, CMU President, expressed gratitude for the exchange and for the relationship between the two institutions, and the people within them. "Our desire is to honour the gift of this relationship and learn together," she said.

CMU honours Senator Mary Jane McCallum with 2021 PAX Award

CMU President Dr. Cheryl Pauls presented the 2021 CMU PAX Award to Senator Dr. Mary Jane McCallum on Saturday, August 21 at CMU’s convocation ceremony, where McCallum also delivered the graduation address.

“She is a dentist, a former residential school student, a Canadian senator, a speaker of English and Cree, a thoughtful, deep listener, and a person of profound insight, grace, and courage,” Pauls said of McCallum. “Her willingness to accept the PAX Award is an honour to CMU.”

A citizen of Barren Lands First Nation in Brochet, Manitoba, McCallum attended Guy Hill Residential School in The Pas, MB for 11 years. She went on to become



a tireless advocate for social justice who has worked for decades to bring health care, specifically dental care, to northern Indigenous communities across Manitoba.

McCallum was the first Indigenous woman dentist in Canada. She holds a Doctor of Dental Medicine from the



University of Manitoba and has worked as a dental therapist, professor, and manager of many community health programs.

McCallum also shares her personal experience as a former residential school student through workshops and presentations. She was appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2017, representing Manitoba in the Upper Chamber. In 2021, she became the Chancellor of Brandon University.

“She embodies a hope-filled imagination that is calling out nothing less than a reconstitution of the entirety of the education, justice, political, healthcare, child and family institutions in the country...” said Pauls. “I consider the time I have spent with her to be amongst the greatest blessings of my life.”

This is the sixth year that CMU has presented the PAX Award, a distinction created to honour people who lead exemplary lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in society.

MSC team publishes book on environmental and social justice in India

Dr. Kirit Patel of Menno Simons College (MSC) with Dr. Aruna Kumar Malik of Gujarat National Law University in India and Dr. Alan Diduck of the University of Winnipeg launched a new book, *Advancing Environmental Justice for Marginalized Communities in India: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities*, in September 2021.



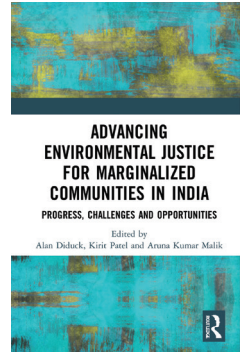
Six undergraduate MSC students contributed to the project, several of them writing chapters in the book.

“Students have always been part of the work I have been doing in South Asia,” Patel says. “I have been lucky

that some of the best minds get attracted to my project and they do really good work.”

After numerous attempts at acquiring funding, Patel and team received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant in 2017 and later, Queen Elizabeth Advanced Scholars (QESII) funding. This enabled them to hire and train students to conduct field research in India.

The book is a culmination of this three-year research project and examines the impacts of Green Benches of State High Courts and National Green Tribunals, the environmental courts of India, on disadvantaged communities in the Tamil Nadu, Kamataka, and Gujarat states.



“Universities like CMU are important. CMU invites students to think about the big picture, to develop critical and constructive thinking, to understand ideas from the context of many disciplines working together, and to learn collaboration with others.

- Mackenzie Nicolle ('18, Social Sciences)



Giving Tuesday

CMU is again participating in Giving Tuesday on November 30. You are invited to join generous donors who have committed to matching donations of up to \$30,000 for faculty support.

CMU professors make a difference in student lives. Be part of encouraging faculty in their work, and watch social media for information on how you can participate. cmu.ca/give

Upcoming dates

November 10: Webinar | Flexible graduate studies for peacebuilding and development

November 12: Mennonite Heritage Gallery Fundraiser

November 14: Mennonite Community Orchestra – Prairie Sunrise

November 18: Webinar | Graduate studies for learning, vocation, and leadership

November 24: Virtual Open House

November 26: Campus Visit Day

December 11: Christmas at CMU (online)

Visit cmu.ca/events for the latest events and information.

Find the latest alumni news at:
cmu.ca/alumni-updates

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