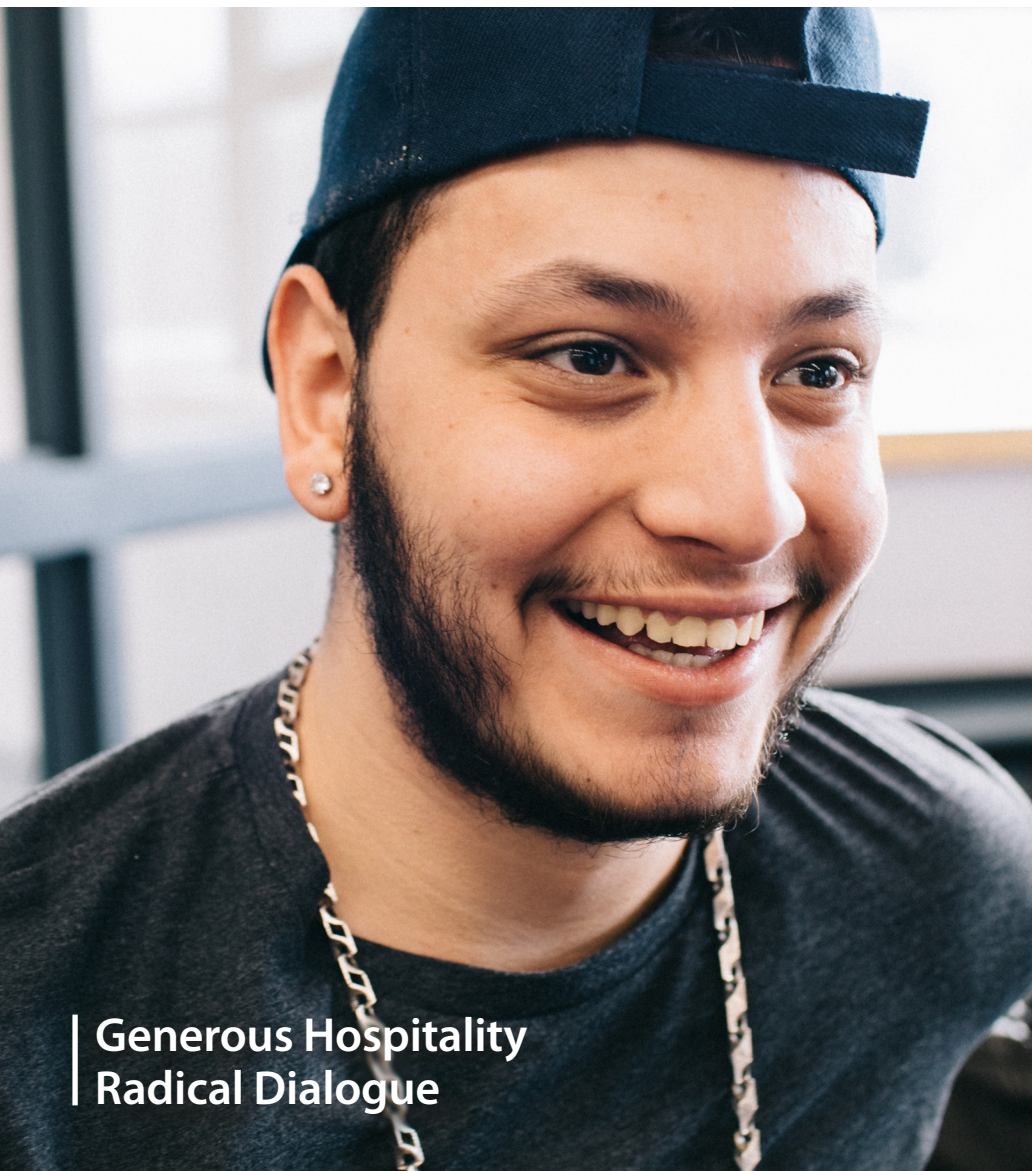


The **BLAZER** Digest

Connecting Alumni and Friends of CMU

Summer 2021



| Generous Hospitality
| Radical Dialogue

Generous hospitality, radical dialogue

Cheryl Pauls | CMU President

This spring when we hear the date, January 6, most of our minds do not go first to the Epiphany carol we (maybe) sang alone this pandemic year. Rather we recall the storming of the US Capitol as we witnessed on television. That day I attended a virtual conference of university leaders, many American. Our agenda was revised to open space to ponder how the January 6 event might best be addressed on campuses all over. Deep wells of courage and wisdom emerged in the conversation.

Here's what I heard:

Freedom of speech and self-expression need to be exercised not only by saying what you think, but by doing so in ways that honour whoever is listening. It is urgent that we as a collective humanity find ways to rebuild commitments to one another. We need to work at this on each of our campuses, and everywhere we go. What if we were to see speech as a gift-giving practice of dialogue? What if we were to begin more conversations by sharing something that makes us vulnerable? What if through our expressions of honour and trust we would invite others to share what's at stake for them?

I learned a lot from that conversation. It opened my eyes to see more of what CMU seeks to be and do with the



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commitment, “Generous Hospitality, Radical Dialogue.” The notion of speech as a gift-giving practice rooted in relationships of honour was especially apt on Epiphany, when the church attends to the light of God that is come and the gifts of the Magi. I often see such gift-giving wisdom emerge through trust-filled, vulnerably-laden, generous speech at CMU and with many surrounding friends and communities. Yet our learning needs to go on every day. I pray the stories in this issue of *The Blazer* will encourage our way.

CMU approaches student wellness with generous hospitality

Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

The coronavirus turned students' lives upside down. It completely changed life in the classroom, on the court, and in dorm rooms, significantly impacting students' mental health. But CMU's response to supporting students through challenging times didn't change. "The best solution is a



community that cares," says Dean of Student Life Charlie Peronto. Luckily, that is who CMU is at its core.

"To be generously hospitable is about the welcome of students across the mental health and physical health spectrum. We make our education accessible, but we also make our education *hospitable*," Peronto says.

At CMU, that means continuing to develop strong relationships. Earlier this year, the student life staff called every single CMU student to check in with them. Delmar Epp, Associate Professor of Psychology, had more one-on-one meetings with students than ever before, thanks to online platforms. "I think this is where we really stood out over this last year, by trying to make ourselves available for people," says Epp.

CMU also implemented a host of new initiatives to promote student wellness. They developed their recreation programming to include dance, yoga, cycling, and running. An art therapist joined CMU's team of volunteer counsellors for the first time and over 70 student leaders were trained in peer support. Community groups formed as a space for students and faculty to connect around topics and activities outside of the classroom.

"We try to consistently work to not speak about mental health as its own thing," says Peronto. Since mental health is inseparable from other aspects of health, strategies for promoting it need to be holistic and diverse. "We took a multi-faceted approach . . . and that's the approach we're going to continue to take."



... wellness with generous hospitality continued

These are all resilience-building activities that fit into the discussion going on in the field of positive psychology, says Epp. “That is . . . what mental health or psychological health is really all about. It’s not trying to get people from some very negative place back to zero. It’s trying to get them to plus 10!”

But it wasn’t only the staff and faculty looking out for the well-being of the CMU community this year. “We have been the recipients of great generous hospitality from our students,” says Peronto. “The outpouring of care from students this year and the consistency of students asking if there is anything they can do to help their peers or us... they cared for our wellness in lots of ways.”

How this tax season has impacted poverty

Jerry Buckland | Professor of International Development Studies

Usually, many low-income Canadians anticipate an income tax refund, putting a positive spin to the tax season. But this past tax season many people with low incomes were nervous, and rightly so. But why?

Part of the reason is explained by the phenomenon of social exclusion—how people with low incomes are often prevented from getting the supports and services needed to help them to survive and reach their goals. The current pandemic and associated economic recession have increased social exclusion, making it even harder for this vulnerable population. Just as we have become more acutely aware through the pandemic of how racism divides people, we can see how economic inequality divides. And, of course, these processes can reinforce one another.

The Canadian Financial Diaries research project is investigating social exclusion and its financial impact on low-income people. Our research



Social exclusion leaves some of the most vulnerable in society to be least protected.

discovered that low-income Canadians depend on tax refunds to help balance their budgets and save a bit of money for unexpected challenges.

Social exclusion leaves some of the most vulnerable in society to be least protected. We should consider how we, through our government and civil society, respond to people in need. The diaries project shows that low-income people are every bit as rational and hard working as others, but face unique

challenges, including structures that exclude them from benefits available to others. People value being in control of their finances, instead of being controlled by their finances.

Each year the federal government forgoes billions of tax revenue dollars to encourage middle-income Canadians to save for retirement through registered products. Why not establish a similar program to enable low-income

Canadians to save, like a matched savings program as modelled by SEED Winnipeg?

By addressing social exclusion, barriers can be reduced and opportunities increased, helping our vulnerable and low-income citizens live better lives. It's time for some radical dialogue.



CMU completes 2020-21 academic year

The quality of CMU education has continued through a time of radical pandemic disruption. CMU studies are always about personal relationships and formation, as learned through following Jesus and paths of discipleship that are central to all learning and life. Through a combination of in-person and online learning, students have continued to receive exceptional instruction from caring and attentive faculty.

CMU proudly acknowledges the diligence, care, and compliance with public health orders displayed by all members of CMU community. With

152 students living on campus in addition to commuters and employees, not a single case of COVID-19 transmission or infection took place in the residence facilities or elsewhere on campus.

For the upcoming school year starting September 2021, CMU is planning for primarily in-person classes, with some accommodation via hybrid/online formats where needed, per public health orders.

For more information as it develops, please visit: cmu.ca/covid-19

New initiatives lead to meaningful agency for CMU's Indigenous community

How do Indigenous students experience CMU? What does it look like to be a community engaged in ongoing reconciliation and to be on-campus allies with Indigenous students and staff? As these questions challenge the CMU community, initiatives to further welcome and include Indigenous voices are gaining momentum.

One stakeholder in these initiatives, hired to provide institutional support with Indigenous initiatives and to teach courses in Indigenous Studies is Christy Anderson, Instructor and Indigenous Engagement Advisor.

Anderson, a CMU alumna (2011) says, “there were no Indigenous history classes or real conversations about colonization. Now, there is more happening to build awareness of our shared Indigenous-settler histories. CMU is doing more for Indigenous students in terms of resources and programming.”

Something that hopefully can come is the ability to equip non-Indigenous allies so they can educate others.

Beyond offering Indigenous perspectives as a lecturer, Anderson is facilitating a workshop where CMU professors and student life staff can learn about anti-racist practices, decolonizing ed-



ucation, and how to become better allies who actively shape students' experiences.

Many of the Indigenous initiatives on campus have come from the Indigenous Student Group, led by students Bryna Link, Nicole Ternowesky, and Peeta/Indigo.

The group's impact on projects such as the new Indigenous student lounge, and a four-day ceremonial fire in the Assiniboine Forest commemorating MMIWG (Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls), and planned construction of a tipi have proved transformational for many Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the CMU community.

Ternowesky, a fourth-year student in Peace and Conflict Transformation Studies, shares that “the pandemic put a halt to a lot of our plans, but when restrictions allowed we held a smudge, led a beading workshop, spoke at about Indigenous experiences on campus, and were able to gain greater visibility in the student body by becoming an official part of student council.”

“Something that hopefully can come is the ability to equip non-Indigenous allies so they can educate others,” says Ternowesky. “We invite non-Indigenous students to join us, but we also invite them to not be paralyzed by shame or guilt. We ask that they know what happened in Canada and to work towards doing better.”

Terry Schellenberg

– Schellenberg retired from CMU as Vice President, External on April 30 after 12 years as a part of the CMU executive team.

CMU is grateful for his hard work and gifts of vision and leadership that he brought to the university while cultivating trust throughout its diverse surrounding communities. Sandy Koop Harder is Schellenberg’s successor.



CMU Centre for Career and Vocation (CCV) receives grant for student work-integrated learning – CCV was the recent recipient of funds to

As a meaningful way to support Indigenous students, CMU recently partnered in June with Indspire, an Indigenous national charity, to maximize funding for Indigenous students at CMU.

“CMU has come a long way since I was a student—but this is a journey, not a destination,” says Anderson. “We still have much work to do.”

support work-integrated learning at CMU. Through Magnet, part of the Government of Canada’s Student Work Placement Program, CCV will receive over \$50,000 to finance the student employment program at CMU. The grant and resources Magnet provides will help CMU develop and professionalize its work-integrated learning placements on campus and connect students with practicum placements and summer jobs beyond the university.

So What?

A Podcast – Launched in January 2021, So What? is a monthly CMU podcast that draws out key ideas from

public events at Canadian Mennonite University. Host Jonas Cornelsen (CMU ‘16) guides you through these discussions by asking, ‘So What?’ Look for episodes wherever you get your podcasts, including Spotify, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Music.



Gifts in wills

The mission of CMU is to inspire women and men for lives of leadership, service, and reconciliation. Use your will power to make this possible for years to come. Alongside gifts to your loved

ones, a gift in your will to CMU lives on in students who will shape the church and society. Join the others who have planned gifts in their wills.

cmu.ca/giftsinwills



If you or your organization are interested in joining CMU's e-newsletter distribution list, **Through this place**, please visit cmu.ca/newsletter to sign up. We'll email you a monthly newsletter telling the stories of CMU's faculty, students, and alumni as well as the latest CMU news and event information.

Upcoming dates

CMU Golf Classic: July 7

Class of 2021 Convocation: August 21

First day of classes, Fall 2021: September 8

Xplore: A 55-Plus Enrichment Program, Fall 2021 classes start October 5

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

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

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