



Conference Program

Mennonite/s Writing X

words at work and play

June 12-15, 2025

Canadian Mennonite University
Winnipeg Manitoba

cmu.ca/mennonites-writing

Hours During Mennonite/s Writing X	
	Thursday 9:00 AM – 10:00 PM Friday 9:00 AM – 10:30 PM Saturday 9:00 AM – 10:00 PM Sunday 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
	Thursday and Friday 8:00 AM – 7:00 PM Saturday 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM Sunday CLOSED
	Thursday 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM Friday 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM Saturday CLOSED Sunday CLOSED
	Thursday 9:00 AM – 7:00 PM Friday 9:00 AM – 9:00 PM Saturday 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM Sunday CLOSED

The conference organizers are grateful to Canadian Mennonite University, Research Manitoba, and the Marpeck Fund for their support



Research
Manitoba



Conference planning committee: Robert Zacharias, Andrew Unger, Hildi Froese Tiessen, Sue Sorensen, Casey Plett, Maxwell Kennel, Grace Kehler, Julia Spicher Kasdorf, Ann Hostetler, Jeff Gundy, Paul Dyck, Jonathan Dyck, Nathan Dueck, Dora Dueck, Paul Doerksen, Connie Braun

Conference student assistant: Rhea Thiessen

Volunteers: Chelsea Norton, Logan Nord

Conference coordinator: Micah Enns-Dyck

Welcome to Words at Work and Play

In her 2020 study, *Making Believe*, Magdalene Redekop attributes the surge of creative writing by North American Mennonites in the late 20th century to the “many Mennonites [who] have been willing to play and be serious at the same time.” Indeed, from the martyr ballads and trickster tales of the early Anabaptists through centuries of sermons, hymns, and diaries to the bestselling fiction and poetry of today, creative writing among Mennonites



has always been a type of deeply serious play. At once a form of labour and of entertainment, Mennonite literary work continues to be a source of community and transgression; a means of memory and of revision; a practice of devotion, resistance, lament, and joy. In keeping with the field’s long-standing practice of working across creative and critical boundaries, Mennonite/s Writing Ten will feature presentations that engage with “words at work and play” across a variety of academic disciplines and creative genres.

Conference emblem design by Jonathan Dyck

About the Mennonite/s Writing Conferences

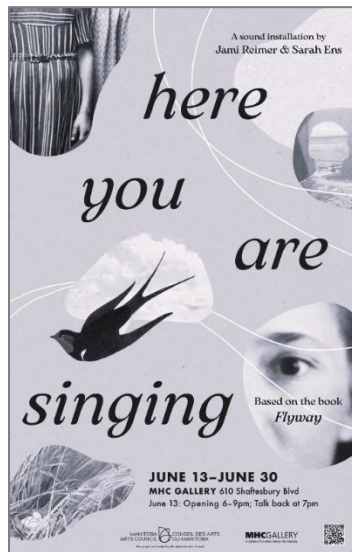
The term “Mennonite/s Writing” was coined by scholar Hildi Froese Tiessen, who strove to emphasize the artists doing creative work alongside the scholars evaluating the field, and organized the first conference. Many key assessments of Mennonite literature have sprung from conference proceedings over the years, including essays in Froese Tiessen’s 2023 book *On Mennonite/s Writing* and within the collection *In Search of a Mennonite Imagination: Key Texts in Mennonite Literary Criticism* edited by Robert Zacharias. The first Mennonite/s Writing conference took place at Conrad Grebel College in 1990 and subsequently eight other conferences have been held: at Goshen College (three times), University of Winnipeg Chair in Mennonite Studies (twice), Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Fresno Pacific University. Mennonite/s Writing X is the first time the conference has been hosted by the Department of English at Canadian Mennonite University.

Special Events

here you are singing

Sarah Ens and Jami Reimer

MHC Gallery (Mennonite Heritage Archive building, south side of campus)



Opening Friday, June 13, 6:00 pm

Artists' talk 7:00 pm

Exhibition continues until June 30

This multichannel sound installation adapts Sarah Ens's book *Flyway*. The collection draws on the tradition of the prairie long poem to meditate on the disappearing tallgrass prairie, the effects of settler-colonialism on this landscape, and Sarah's own Mennonite family history, following her Oma's forced displacement from Ukraine during WWII and eventual migration to Manitoba. Exploring connections between human and ecological trauma, *Flyway* traces questions of

homecoming and homemaking in a time of climate emergency.

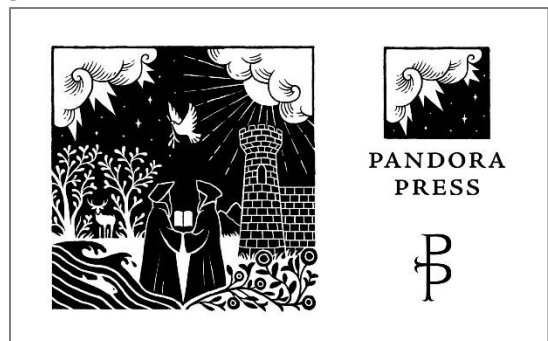
Here You Are Singing stitches together lines from *Flyway* with field recordings of grassland birds, choral singing, music composition, and oral history interviews with Mennonite women—some of whom hold memories from their 1940s migration. By playing with and re-working the words of joy, loss, and faith expressed in *Flyway*, our sound installation invites audiences to interrogate ideas of home while encountering voices that have been silenced or endangered.

CMU Press & Pandora Press Book Party

Friday, June 13 9:15 pm

Marpeck Commons

Pandora Press is an independent publisher focusing on scholarly and popular titles in Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies. Over the past thirty years, the press has published over 100 titles including these series: Mennonite Reflections,



Special Events continued

Anabaptist Texts in Translation, the Bridgefolk Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, the Proceedings of the Goshen Conference on Science and Religion, and more. Under the direction of Dr. Maxwell Kennel (since 2021), Pandora Press has relaunched the Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies series with ten new titles. Website: **pandorapress.com**



CMU Press is a publisher of literary, scholarly, reference, and general interest books at Canadian Mennonite University.

Books from CMU Press address and inform interests and issues vital to the university, its constituency, and society. CMU Press is a member of the Association of Canadian Publishers, the Literary Press Group of Canada, and the Association of Manitoba Book Publishers. This year we particularly celebrate the launch of the Lyrik Poetry Series, honouring Mennonite poets. The first three volumes are *New & Selected Poems of 1 / Sarah Klassen*, *2 / John Weier*, and *3 / David Waltner-Toews*. Director: Sue Sorensen. **Website:** **cmupress.ca**

Places, Please, Act One

Poetry by **Warren Kliewer** devised and performed by **Michèle LaRue Kliewer**

Saturday June 14, 6:30 pm

Laudamus Auditorium

Warren Kliewer was an established Mennonite poet, essayist, and short-story writer before he ran away to join the theatre—as actor, director, playwright, and producer. Those talents and the pull of his heritage inform *Places, Please, Act One*. From a nightmare-ridden scenic designer to a daydreaming gardener, from a bewildered New York playwright to a stubborn Kansas farm wife, from an accident-prone diva to an adventuring child: these 35 poems are tiny one-acts of compelling drama and comedy.

This spoken-word offering intertwines selections from Warren Kliewer's newly published book *Places, Please, Act One: Poems around and about theatres*—once described by Warren as “a glimpse into the private lives of a public art form”—with works from his three previously published volumes (*Red Rose and Grey Cowl*; *Moralities and Miracles*; *Liturgies, Games, Farewells*). **Michèle LaRue Kliewer**'s exuberant performance might well be subtitled “poems around, about, and beyond theatres.”

Conference Schedule

Thursday, June 12

7:00 – 8:00 pm

Book Launch

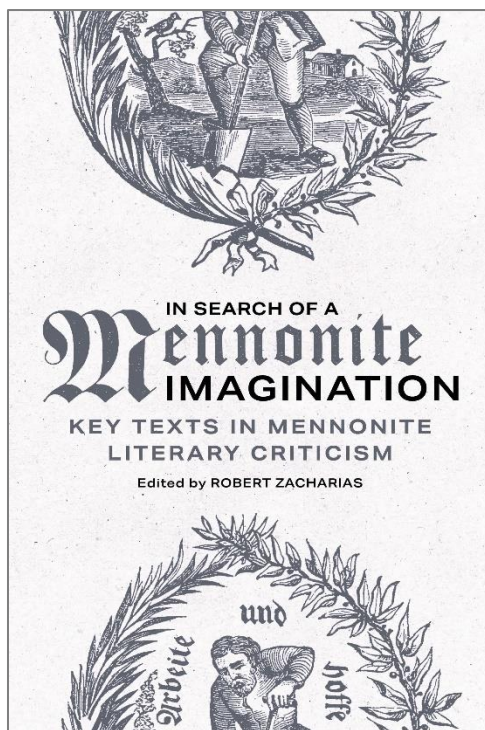
In Search of a Mennonite Imagination:

Key Texts in Mennonite Literary Criticism

edited by Robert Zacharias (CMU Press)

McNally Robinson Booksellers, 1120 Grant Avenue

(free & open to all)



8:00 – 10:00 pm

Conference Opening Reception

CTMS CENTRE FOR
TRANSNATIONAL
MENNONITE STUDIES

hosted by Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies

Marpeck Commons, CMU, 2299 Grant Avenue

(free & open to all)

Registration begins. Book sales at CommonWord.

Welcome from CMU, CTMS, and Research Manitoba. Refreshments.

Conference Schedule

Friday, June 13

from 8:30 am	<p><i>Registration continues at 500 Shaftesbury (main entrance).</i></p> <p>Be sure to collect your copy of <i>Always Breathe</i>, a gift from Victor Enns.</p> <p>Catch up with him at victorenns9.com</p>
9:15 – 10:30 am SESSION 1	<p>1A [C344] Miriam Toews I: On <i>Women Talking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grace Kehler, “Women Laughing: Miriam Toews and the Art of Subversion” Joseph R. Wiebe, “Genealogies of Grace: Mennonite Kinship and the Politics of Relational Responsibility in <i>Women Talking</i>” <p>Chair: Margaret Steffler</p> <p>1B [C167] Words that Divide and Unify: Mennonites and the Language of Grassroots Political Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Melanie S. Mock, “What Happens When Conspiracy Theories Hit Home” Hope Nisly, “GOTV and Resistance in Perilous Times” Shirley H. Showalter, “From College President to Crusading Grandma” <p>1C [C244] Writers and Readers Reflect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> David Elias, “Peter Elias and Voices in the Wilderness” Elsie K. Neufeld, “Work & Play: On Being a Personal Historian” Linda S. Umble, “Looking for Space: A Mennonite Reader on Mennonite Writings” <p>Chair: Jeff Gundy</p>
10:30 – 11:00 am	<i>Coffee Break [Great Hall]</i>

Conference Schedule

Friday, June 13 *continued*

<p>11:00 am – 12:15 pm</p> <p>SESSION 2</p>	<p>2A [C344] Reflection and Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julia D. Rempel, “A Holy Rebellion: Forgiving the Sins of the Fathers” • Bradley Schmidt, “Doing the Work, Playing with Words, and the Preparation of the Novel” • Jonathan Dyck, “Making a ‘Mennonite’ Graphic Novel” <p>Chair: Julia Spicher Kasdorf</p> <p>2B [C167] Invoking Place and Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joelle Kidd, “Wow, Not What I’d Call Music: The Uncanny World of Christian Pop” • James Bergman, “Overcoming Previous Narratives: How Identity is Shaped by Experience” • Geoff Martin, “History Maker” <p>Chair: Nathan Dueck</p>
<p>12:15 – 1:15 pm</p>	<p><i>Lunch [Great Hall]</i></p>
<p>1:30 – 2:45 pm</p> <p>SESSION 3</p>	<p>PLENARY [Laudamus Auditorium] Homecoming: Making Space for Queer Stories on the MennoLit Shelf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan Guenther Braun • K.R. Byggdin • Cale Plett • Casey Plett <p>Chair: Andrew Harnish</p>
<p>2:45 – 3:15 pm</p>	<p><i>Coffee Break [Great Hall]</i></p>

Conference Schedule

Friday, June 13 *continued*

<p>3:15 – 4:30 pm SESSION 4</p>	<p>4A [C167]</p> <p>Dale Suderman: Accidental Maven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniel Born, “Toward a Post-Mennonite Identity: The Writing of Dale Suderman” • John Kampen, “The Radical Power of Friendship” • Adam Schrag, “Things Hidden: The Influence of René Girard in the Works of Dale Suderman” <p>Chair: Chris Huebner</p> <p>4B [C344]</p> <p>Making and Seeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becca J. R. Lachman and Lynn Sommer, “A Third Chair: Contemporary Fraktur for a Most Unusual Time” • Chantel Mierau, “Three Chores: Short Experimental Videos—<i>Obraumche, Busy Napping, and Microfibre</i>” <p>Chair: Paul Dyck</p>
<p>5:00 – 6:00 pm</p>	<p><i>Supper [Great Hall]</i></p>
<p><i>The following evening activities are free and open to all</i></p>	
<p>6:00 – 9:00 pm artists’ talk at 7:00 pm</p>	<p>Exhibition Opening [MHC Gallery, Mennonite Heritage Archives] <i>here you are singing</i> Sarah Ens & Jami Reimer</p>
<p>8:00 – 9:15 pm</p>	<p>KEYNOTE ADDRESS [Marpeck Commons] Translating Self and Other Magdalene Redekop <i>Host: Robert Zacharias</i></p>

Conference Schedule

Saturday, June 14

Saturday daytime conference sessions (except 11 am keynote) are for registered attendees only.	
9:15 – 10:30 am SESSION 5	<p>5A [C344] Miriam Toews II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cassidy Burr, “Pushing Past the Limits of Language: Ethics of Witnessing in <i>All My Puny Sorrows</i>” Rita Dirks, “Menno Culture as Simulacrum in Miriam Toews” Margaret Steffler, “Miriam Toews’s <i>Fight Night</i>: Playful Allusions, Transgenerational Resistance, Joyful Mourning” <p>Chair: Grace Kehler</p> <p>5B [C167] Across the Anabaptist Spectrum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mary Ann Zehr & Fran Martens Friesen, “Cowriting a Memoir: Collaboration, Connection, and California Cabins” Jessica Smucker, “What I Didn’t Learn in Africa” <p>Chair: Maxwell Kennel</p> <p>5C [C244] Writing Past and Present</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kirsten Eve Beachy, “Simple: excerpt from memoir <i>Martyrs and Chickens: Confessions of a Granola Mennonite</i>” Dora Dueck, “Thinking About Oneself: Reflections on Desire and Discovery in the Personal Essay and Memoir” Mary Ann Loewen, “Grandma and Kay: An Intergenerational Memoir” <p>Chair: Andrew Unger</p>
10:30 – 11:00 am	<i>Coffee Break [Great Hall]</i>

Conference Schedule

Saturday, June 14 *continued*

11:00 am – 12:15 pm	KEYNOTE ADDRESS [Marpeck Commons] Mennonite Ruminant, Notes from the Eleventh Province Julia Spicher Kasdorf <i>Host: Hildi Froese Tiessen</i>
12:15 – 1:15 pm	<i>Lunch [Great Hall]</i>
1:30 – 2:45 pm SESSION 6	6A [C344] Word and Vision at Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christopher Dick, “An Allegory for Fighting the Good Fight: J.G. Ewert’s <i>Der Gute Kampf</i>” • Nataliya Venger, “Visual Texts of Henry Pauls: Between Myth, Nostalgia, and Historical Reality” • Eileen R. Kinch, “A Reading from <i>Drawing Near: A Devotional Journey with Art, Poetry and Reflection</i>” <p>Chair: Jonathan Dueck</p> 6B [C167] Tradition, Orality, and Creative Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Di Brandt, “‘Muh muh muh’: Notes Toward a Contemporary Traditionalist Mennonite Darp Poetics, Part 2” • Abigail Carl-Klassen, “<i>Village Mechanics</i>: Tricksters, Hustlers, and Good Timin’ People, Playfulness as the Work of Rebellion and Reformation in the Campos Menonitas of Chihuahua, Mexico” • Julia Reimer, “Reminiscence Theatre as Imaginative Excerpting” <p>Chair: Robert Zacharias</p>
2:45 – 3:15 pm	<i>Coffee Break [Great Hall]</i>

Conference Schedule

Saturday, June 14 *continued*

3:15 – 4:30 pm SESSION 7	<p>7A [C167] Poetics and Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeff Gundy, “Truth, Poetry, and Power, or Said Samatar, the Sayyid, and Makhno” • Chris K. Huebner, “Ay Rembrandt! A Painting, a Poem, and the Question of Voice” • Ruth Rempel, “On Reading Sofia Samatar’s <i>The Practice, Horizon, and the Chain</i>” <p>Chair: Sally Ito</p> <p>7B [C344] On Satire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nathan Dueck, “Satirizing Myself for Fun and Profit” • Sherri Klassen, “The Cocktail Renaissance Comes for the Mennonites” • Andrew Unger, “Towards an Understanding of Mennonite Humour” <p>Chair: Geoff Martin</p>
5:00 – 6:15 pm	<i>Banquet [Great Hall]</i>
<i>The following evening activities are free and open to all</i>	
6:30 – 7:30 pm	<p><i>Places, Please, Act One</i> [Laudamus Auditorium] Poetry by Warren Kliewer, devised and performed by Michèle LaRue Kliewer</p> <p><i>Host: Hildi Froese Tiessen</i></p>
8:00 – 9:15 pm	<p>KEYNOTE ADDRESS [Marpeck Commons] The Meaning of Everything: Experience, Science, Imagination David Waltner-Toews</p> <p><i>Host: Nathan Dueck</i></p>

Conference Schedule

Sunday, June 15

<p>9:15 – 10:30 am SESSION 8</p>	<p>8A [C167] Three (or Four) Poets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeff Gundy, reading from <i>Reports from an Interior Province</i> • Ann Hostetler, reading from <i>Safehold</i> • Julia Kasdorf, “Social Poetics and the Local: a reading from <i>Homeplace</i>” • Connie Braun, <i>Moonroads</i> (poems read by the others) <p>Chair: Dora Dueck</p> <p>8B [C344] On Genre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Doerksen, “Amish as Villain and Victim: Reading Linda Castillo” • Isaac Kuhl-Schlegel, “The Pursuit of Peace in A.E. van Vogt’s <i>Slan</i>” • Joanne Lehman, “Bonnet Girl Meets an Anabaptist: Why I Write Amish Fiction” <p>Chair: Bradley Schmidt</p>
<p>10:30 – 11:00 am</p>	<p><i>Coffee Break & brief optional worship service [Laudamus Auditorium]</i></p>
<p>11:00 am – 12:15 pm SESSION 9</p>	<p>9A [C344] Mediating Mennonite Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maxwell Kennel, “Publishing Anabaptist History: Pandora Press, Mennonite Publishing, and Critical Historiography” • Eileen R. Kinch, “Mennonite Newspapers: Nurturing Community and Faithfulness” • Robert Zacharias, “‘Satan, infidelity, higher criticism, etc.’: On Documenting the Long Emergence of Mennonite Literary Criticism in English” <p>Chair: Ann Hostetler</p> <p>9B [C167] Friesen & Friesen: From No to Yes Patrick Friesen & Ralph Friesen <i>Host: Paul Doerksen</i></p>

About the Keynotes

Translating Self and Other

Magdalene Redekop

Friday, June 13, 8:00 pm

Marpeck Commons

In *Making Believe: Questions About Mennonites and Art* I explored a double Anabaptist legacy—the resistance to art that is part of written Reformation history and an oral trickster tradition that goes against the grain of that history. Here I will explore questions about translation. Translation is from the Latin *translatio*, which, like the Greek word *metaphora*, means “transfer, carry across.” Why does the untranslatable sometimes transfer us to metaphor, so that we hear music and see images? When does the untranslatable carry across from the ineffable into the unspeakable? Why is mistranslation funny? When does it stop being funny? When does what is lost in translation make us laugh? When does it make us cry or recoil in horror? My talk will touch briefly on a range of texts to explore these and other questions.



Magdalene Redekop is Professor Emerita in the Department of English, University of Toronto. For many years the subject of her graduate teaching was comedy in Canadian fiction. Redekop’s publications include *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro* (1992) and *Making Believe: Questions About Mennonites and Art* (2020). Her essays “The Pickling of the Mennonite Madonna” and “Escape from the Bloody Theatre” are key works in the field of Mennonite literary criticism. Presently she is at work on a book entitled *The Remains of an Elegy: My Friendship with Alice Munro*. Dr. Redekop’s conceptual work with the Mennonite *Spielraum* (playroom) contributes a foundational theme of this conference.

Mennonite Ruminant, Notes from the Eleventh Province

Julia Spicher Kasdorf

Saturday, June 14, 11:00 am

Marpeck Commons

Let me meditate on matters of literary representation and “the Mennonite thing,” to borrow a phrase from Robert Zacharias. In various ways, critical and commercial currents create publication opportunities and shape the reception of work by authors marked by ethnicity. As such a writer living in United States, I will offer notes from my own experience of multiculturalism and the politics of representation during the 1990s, and the politics of identity now in operation. I aim to amplify distinct resources and practices from within our cultural traditions to help writers and readers keep on doing the work of literature.

About the Keynotes continued



Julia Spicher Kasdorf, Liberal Arts Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, has published four books in the Pitt Poetry Series, including her 2023 collection, *As Is*. With photographer Steven Rubin, she created *Shale Play: Poems and Photographs from the Fracking Fields*, a documentary project depicting environmental impacts of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing in Pennsylvania. She is working with Rubin on a similar project to show the range of agricultural resilience within thirty miles of her home in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania.

She is the author of *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life* and *Fixing Tradition: Joseph W. Yoder, Amish American*.

The Meaning of Everything: Experience, Science, Imagination

David Waltner-Toews

Saturday, June 14, 8:00 pm

Marpeck Commons

It begins with a young cow bumping against him and licking his coveralls, with manure on his boots, and news broadcasters worried about Mad Cow Disease. As he explains to the broadcasters what such behaviour means, veterinary epidemiologist Waltner-Toews begins a journey in which he questions everything he has been taught about other animals, kinship among species, pandemics, and the nature of the universe. Drawing on his own experiences working around the world, and evidence from genetics, physics, ecology, music, medicine, and poetry, he grapples with a new understanding of what it means, in the words of Torres Straits Islander Kerry Arabena, to be indigenous to the universe.



David Waltner-Toews is University Professor Emeritus in the Department of Population Medicine at the University of Guelph. A member of the Order of Canada, Waltner-Toews is a founding president of both Veterinarians without Borders–Canada and the Network for Ecosystem Sustainability and Health. His books include poetry collections such as the recent *New & Selected Poems of David Waltner-Toews* and *The Complete Tante Tina: Mennonite Blues and Recipes*; the short stories in *One Foot in Heaven*; the mystery *Fear of Landing*; the science titles *Food*,

Sex and Salmonella: Why Our Food Is Making Us Sick; *The Origin of Feces: What Excrement Tells Us About Evolution, Ecology, and a Sustainable Society*; *Eat the Beetles! An Exploration into Our Conflicted Relationship with Insects*; *On Pandemics*; and the memoir *A Conspiracy of Chickens*.

Canadian Mennonite University is an innovative Christian university, rooted in the Anabaptist faith tradition, moved and transformed by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Through teaching, research, and service CMU inspires and equips for lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in church and society.



CMU is located on territory stewarded for generations by the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota, and Métis people. Our campus sits on Treaty 1 lands, where we access clean drinking water from Shoal Lake 39 and 40 in Treaty 3 territory and use hydro power generated on Treaty 5 territory. We benefit from these Treaty relationships every day and are committed to living purposefully as we work towards reconciliation and build meaningful, lasting relationships with Indigenous people and with all of God's creation.

With joy we honour the 25-year story of a remarkable learning community and thousands of alumni whose lives call us forward. Mark your calendar for an extra special Fall at CMU as we celebrate CMU's 25th anniversary on September 19 and 20, 2025.