

“HIGH CHURCH MENNONITES?”
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND ETHNICITY
AMONG MANITOBA MENNONITES
AT AN ANGLICAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to the debate about the cultural construction of ethnicity and its relationship to religion in Canada by examining the multifaceted identities of Mennonite women and men who attend an Anglican church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the St. Margaret's church community, I contend that this rare denominational shift from Anabaptism to Anglicanism complicates the construction and maintenance of these parishioners' ethnic identities, and provides a privileged opportunity for an exploration of the possibility of disconnection between the intimately related categories of Mennonite religion and ethnicity. Pertinent to my study is an analysis of the factors influencing and sustaining my informants' denominational change. However, my informants' knowledge of St. Margaret's through discourse in the Mennonite community, and the feelings of comfort expressed with regard to the Mennonite community at St. Margaret's, as well as their maintenance of many Mennonite religious and cultural traditions, despite the fact that they have become Anglican, indicates that many Mennonite features remain central in the lives of these people. My research draws attention, therefore, to the complex ways Mennonite members of St. Margaret's understand and discuss their transition into an Anglican church. I explore these discussions of identity within the framework of widespread debate about Mennonite ethnicity in North America, and in the context of recent scholarship which finds the categories of religion and ethnicity in Canada to be at once intimately related, increasingly fluid, subject to individuality, and affected by social change. I also situate my research in the context of predictive theories of secularization in Canada and in the context of debate about types of changes occurring in Canadian church communities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Beckoning

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.

Rainer Maria Rilke¹

On a warm Sunday morning in early August 2009, on a quiet, wide and winding, elm lined street in central, residential Winnipeg, just steps from the neighbourhood bakery, the doors of a one-hundred year-old, red-brick Anglican church stand wide open, ready to receive parishioners. This week a translation of Rilke's "The Beckoning" poetically adorns the space above the cornerstone, and like every week, two greeters stand in the busy entranceway, handing out the morning's order of service, shaking familiar hands and welcoming visitors. While waiting to enter, friends reunite and talk excitedly of their weekends and summer plans, and children play on the well-tended lawn. The bicycle rack is virtually full, nearby street parking space grows limited, and many neighbourhood residents on foot (both old and young) move towards the building. Inside the church it is cool and dark, and smells of perfume and percolating coffee. The

¹ Translated by Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer, Lay Pastoral Associate at St. Margaret's Anglican Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba. This passage hung outside St. Margaret's during the latter half of the summer of 2009.

ceiling fans generate a gentle breeze, the sunlight illuminates only the simple stained glass windows, and the wooden floors and pews creak and echo in unison as the people take their seats. Some congregants sit or kneel in silence to pray while others less quietly continue conversations they began outside. The Eucharist table is prepared and centered under the apse archway; on either side of the entrance to the apse a cross hangs to commemorate each of the World Wars, and above, in permanent, ornate lettering it reads: “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving” (Psalm 100:4). At exactly 10:30am, the choir forms hurriedly at the back and the clergy, dressed in long white and black 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.

Despite certain stylistic or organizational variances, it is likely that this scene at St. Margaret’s Anglican Church is descriptive of any given Sunday morning at Anglican churches across Canada. Even beyond the aesthetics of Sunday morning, one can see that like many other Anglican communities in Canada, St. Margaret’s has been shaped and reshaped, over the past several years, by contemporary issues surrounding the ordination of women, the impact of immigration to Canada, and thus growing ethnic diversity on the church, as well as by questions about the identity and survival of the wider Canadian Anglican

church.² Similar to many Canadian Anglican churches, St. Margaret's now boasts female clergy members and the presence of new Canadians and parishioners from places like Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Sudan. St. Margaret's also has fewer and fewer "cradle Anglican" members, as well as fewer and 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 St. Margaret's is a growing church community, and is therefore quite unlike many other Canadian Anglican churches.³ In particular, this Winnipeg parish is home to an increasingly large 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, reflecting well the character of the neighbourhood surrounding the church. Wolseley is a distinctive Winnipeg neighbourhood, well-known for its colourfully painted character homes, its nearness to Winnipeg's inner city, and its diverse mix of politically engaged, academic, and artistic residents. In response to this unusual and observable Anglican church growth, it is convincingly suggested on the St. Margaret's website that emphasis on academics, the arts, outreach and activism together contribute to the attraction of young and neighbourhood people

² Wendy Fletcher, "Canadian Anglicanism and Ethnicity," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 152-3.

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

to the church, while the maintenance of traditional Anglican theology and patterns of worship help the church to retain long-standing parish members.⁴ Yet, what one also learns rather quickly, after spending some time at St. Margaret's, and what further sets this church apart from most Anglican churches in Winnipeg (and perhaps even in Canada), is that it is regularly (and increasingly) attended by many, many Mennonites.

While the emergent presence of Mennonites at St. Margaret's has, in recent years, contributed extensively to the growth and vitality of the parish,⁵ the seemingly paradoxical movement of these Mennonites away from their Anabaptist roots to an Anglican church community raises significant questions about what changes occurring or forces in Manitoba Mennonite communities are influencing this movement, and about how this movement complicates the very intricate relationship between Mennonite religious and ethnic identity. For two months over the summer of 2009, I set out to explore some of the changes occurring at St. Margaret's. Based on these two months of fieldwork in Winnipeg, this thesis is an ethnographic study of the compositional and congregational changes occurring at St. Margaret's Anglican Church, with specific focus on St. Margaret's growing Mennonite membership. I will demonstrate that because one's Manitoban Mennonite identity is so often assumed

⁴ St. Margaret's Anglican Church, <http://www.stmargarets.ca/category/about>.

⁵ David Widdicombe, "Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer)," *Canadian Mennonite*, 11:5 (2007). 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." In Chapter Two, I deal with this article in greater detail.

to permeate the food one cooks and eats, the languages one speaks, the neighbourhood in which one lives and the church one attends, the growth in Mennonite membership at St. Margaret's draws attention to the complexity of the categories of Mennonite religion and Mennonite ethnicity, the construction and maintenance of Mennonite ethnic identity, and the relationship of Mennonite ethnicity to changing religious identity. In this thesis I am particularly interested in how the Mennonite members of St. Margaret's understand and define these categories of identity. What I argue throughout is that this shift in religious or denominational affiliation provides a privileged opportunity for an exploration of possible disconnections between the intimately related categories of Mennonite religion and ethnicity.

In the pages that follow, I explore the relationship between religious and ethnic identity among St. Margaret's Mennonites within the context of both Mennonite and Anglican church theology and structure, widespread debate about Mennonite ethnicity in North America, and in the context of recent scholarship which finds the categories of religion and ethnicity in Canada to be at once intimately related, increasingly fluid, subject to individuality and affected by social change. My study also considers broader changes occurring in church makeup across Canada, denominational discourses of loss, and theories about secularization and its influence (or lack thereof) on Canadian church attendance, structure, and change. Perhaps most importantly, my exploration of St. Margaret's Anglican Church is guided by and rooted in the stories and

experiences of St. Margaret's congregants and clergy. During my two-month stay in Winnipeg, I met many people in this church community who happily discussed with me the changing shape of St. Margaret's, their evolving ideas about what it means to be a Mennonite in Manitoba, as well as the many life events that are often coupled with denominational changeover, or more extensive transformations in religious identity. Their insights have allowed me to bring to light some of the complexities of religious and ethnic identity among contemporary Christian Canadians.

Yet, the poem by Rilke quoted in the epigraph, which hung outside St. Margaret's for the part of the summer, also became a significant and humbling source of insight for me as my research progressed. This poem forced me to think about the universality of doubt, or about the commonality of the struggle many face to discover, develop, and come to terms with religious identity, apart from familial background, culture and ethnicity. As I talked to the people of St. Margaret's about ethnicity, family history, marriage, prayer, baptism, children, and times of spiritual struggle and joy, Rilke's words in particular allowed me to better cultivate a sensitivity to the power, delicacy and the seriousness of religious identity and change in people's lives. Despite my interest in the way St. Margaret's Mennonite members construct and negotiate changes in their ethno-religious identities, Rilke's poem and the time I spent with these members of St. Margaret's, helped me to recognize that the way these people identify and describe themselves and the changes in their religious lives is secondary to the

fact that St. Margaret's is for them, a church and community in which they "feel more religious," or have "powerful worship experiences," and are moved to "develop a stronger faith."

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Scholars of religion in Canada are beginning to investigate more closely the points of connection between religion and ethnicity in the lives of Canadians. Central to such explorations are efforts to highlight the ways individuals and groups of people negotiate the dimensions of their religious and ethnic identities that have been constructed for them by the communities in which they live and participate, in accordance with those dimensions of identity popularized or appropriated by contemporary, multicultural, Canadian life.⁶ It is therefore important, such scholars recommend, to begin exploring the ways members of ethnic and religious groups define these categories and how such categories affect and shape their lives.⁷

While these experts on religion and ethnicity in Canada suggest that there exists no one relationship between these categories of identity, they argue at the same time that Canadians are growing less aware of factors linking these categories, despite any plurality of relationships between them. Increasingly rare, therefore, is an understanding among contemporary Canadians of the influence of

⁶Paul Bramadat, "Beyond Christian Canada: Religion and Ethnicity in a Multicultural Society," in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005), 18.

⁷Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 20.

their ethnicity on their religious identity, and vice versa.⁸ In their introductory chapter to a recent collection of essays exploring these connections in multiple religious traditions across Canada, editors Paul Bramadat and David Seljak argue for example, that with increased immigration and multiculturalism in Canada, as well as with the privatization of religion, secularization, and the popularization of individualism, the blurred boundaries, or delicate and complex intersections between the categories of religion and ethnicity are more difficult to see.⁹ More often than not, Bramadat and Seljak contend, people in Canada are raised with an understanding of how their religious tradition differs from their ethnic or cultural heritage. As religious and cultural traditions change over time—with immigration, multiculturalism and globalization—it is also common to witness disagreement within groups about what it means to be religious and how, or even if it is possible, to describe themselves as “ethnic.”¹⁰ Accordingly, social scientists are beginning to question whether ethno-religious groups are losing their sense of identity and cohesion, as individuals from these communities are increasingly “exposed” to become a part of contemporary Canadian life. Are divisions between religious and ethnic identity possible, and if so, under what circumstances do such divisions occur? How does a change in religious identity affect ethnic identity? How do communities and individuals negotiate these

⁸ Paul Bramadat, “Beyond Christian Canada: Religion and Ethnicity in a Multicultural Society, 18.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Ibid.

separations between religion and ethnicity? And, what complex assumptions about the categories of religion and ethnicity do claims of separation imply?¹¹

More recently, scholars have also turned their attention to the dramatic transformations occurring in the ethnic make-up of many Canadian churches.¹² These studies document simultaneous religious decline and resurgence within a variety of churches, in efforts to highlight what they argue to be an important aspect of the extreme complexity of church growth and deterioration in Canada. Though most of these studies typically focus on ethnic minority communities and the role that increasing immigration to Canada plays in the community make-up of Canadian churches, I argue here that cross-denominational change, among members of some ethno-religious groups with relatively long histories in Canada, must also be considered in discussions of church growth and decline in Canada. My research contributes to these discussions of religious and ethnic identity in Canada, church growth and ethnic make-up, by drawing attention to the changes occurring in one particular Canadian church community. This study of Mennonites attending St. Margaret's Anglican Church focuses on cross-denominational change and the impact of such change on theories of church resurgence in Canada, as well as the ethnic composition of Canadian churches, and the resulting relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity as a result of denominational change.

¹¹ Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, "Toward a New Story about Religion and Ethnicity in Canada," in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005), 225.

¹² See Bibby 2004, Fletcher 2008, Bramadat and Seljak 2005, 2008.

My study is similarly embedded in both academic and community debate about the nature of the relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity. This topic has stimulated both historical and contemporary scholarly concern. Mennonite historians and community members typically agree that the connection between religion and ethnicity among Manitoban Mennonites became more complex with the movement of many Mennonites away from close-knit, rural prairie communities to an urban centre (Winnipeg) in the mid 20th century, there is fundamental disagreement among scholars and community members alike, about the issue of whether Mennonites are “both an ethnic and a religious group, solely a religious group, or singularly an ethnic group.”¹³ With the rural to urban shift among many Mennonites, the religious and ethnic components of Mennonite identity became more distinct from one another as Mennonites were exposed to, and asked to identify themselves in, a world of religious and denominational diversity, multiculturalism, liberalization, and secularization. Accordingly, there became many varying ways to “be” a Mennonite. Today, neither scholars nor members of the Mennonite community can agree upon one, inclusive definition of Mennonite identity.¹⁴ While in many ways it seems Mennonite history has produced all the features of an ethnicity, with which many Mennonites identify, many Mennonites also argue that the religious ideals emphasized in the

¹³ Loewen, “The Poetics of Peoplehood,” 332.

¹⁴ See for example Driedger 1988, Klassen 1994, Loewen 2008, Urry 2006.

Mennonite tradition—Jesus’ teachings on humility, service and pacifism—“stand in opposition to ethnicity.”¹⁵

The Mennonite world, in Manitoba and beyond, is changing rapidly and significantly.¹⁶ Questions such as: “what is a Mennonite?” and what makes a Mennonite?” are becoming increasingly difficult to answer. In addition to disputes about Mennonite religion and ethnicity, church modernization and liberalization, debates about homosexuality and same-sex marriage, as well as efforts to encourage Mennonite youth church participation, are creating theological and structural tension in the wider church. And yet, despite these debates about Mennonite identity and divisions in the church, most urban Canadian Mennonites do communicate a strong sense of peoplehood,¹⁷ and identify in some way with Mennonite religious traditions, Mennonite cultural customs, or both.¹⁸ Scholars have found that urban Canadian Mennonites continue to distinguish themselves by their shared genealogical or religious history, some still speak Low German dialects or High German, and others cook traditional Mennonite foods, while many actively involve themselves in choirs, both inside and outside church. Winnipeg Mennonites also often live close to

¹⁵ Loewen, “Poetics of Peoplehood,” 330.

¹⁶ Ibid. According to Loewen, there are now more Mennonites in Africa than in North America, an equal amount in India and in Canada, and fewer Mennonites in Europe--despite it being the birthplace of the tradition--than in any other continent.

¹⁷ Using the term “peoplehood” to describe Mennonite identity was popularized by James Urry in his recent work *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press). In the introduction to his work, Urry argues that concepts of religion and ethnicity do not properly capture the deep sense of Mennonite “being and belonging,” founded upon and informed by faith and culture.

¹⁸ Ibid.

other Mennonites, emphasize the importance of community, are concerned with peace, nonviolence, social justice, voluntary service and sustainability, and participate in ethno-religious specific institutions like Mennonite schools, universities, churches, aid organizations and banks.¹⁹ In the context of debate and change in the Manitoba Mennonite world therefore, this ethnography aims to document some of the ways Mennonites think about, talk about and negotiate their varying Mennonite ethnic and religious connections, while attending and participating in St. Margaret's Anglican Church.

LOCATION

Winnipeg is the capital city and major urban centre in the vast, large, and sparsely populated prairie province of Manitoba. Located in the south-eastern corner of the province, at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, Winnipeg is home to over half of Manitoba's residents and is, with a population of 694, 668 people, by far the largest city in Manitoba.²⁰ The city is known for its extremely cold, long, and dry winters, hot summers, popular seasonal festivals, its noticeably flat land and big sky, its large First Nations population, and its simultaneously urban and rural geographical and community characteristics. Both the Mennonite and Anglican churches have long and complex histories in the province of Manitoba, though Winnipeg is considered to be one of the world's

¹⁹ Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1990), x-xi.

²⁰ The City of Winnipeg: Official City of Winnipeg Homepage, <http://www.winnipeg.ca>.

largest Mennonite centers.²¹ According to the 2001 Canadian Census there are approximately 46,140 Anglicans and 18,240 Mennonites living in Winnipeg, though these statistics reflect only the way people identify themselves, as opposed to their regular church attendance and involvement.²² The majority of Manitoba's 59,240 Mennonites continue to live in rural, historically Mennonite prairie towns, spread across the southern half of the province.²³ In Chapter Two I discuss in greater depth the relationship between Winnipeg, Manitoba and the Anglican and Mennonite churches.

FIELDWORK

The fact that there is a growing number of Mennonites attending St. Margaret's is not unknown to its church community or the Winnipeg Mennonite community at large. Indeed, this particular pattern of denominational change is a topic of popular conversation in various Winnipeg circles. I have lived most of my life in Winnipeg, with the exception of a few months of travel and my more recent move to Ontario for graduate school, and have also participated in several of these conversations about St. Margaret's. For many years I lived in the Wolseley neighbourhood—home to many Mennonites—and the area in which St.

²¹ Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg*, xi.

²² In her work *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), Grace Davie suggests that a significant number of Christians in Britain claim to belong to specific religious traditions, but rarely, if ever, participate in religious institutions. This theory has been similarly applied to Christians in North America by a number of scholars.

²³ Statistics Canada, *Selected Religions for Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 20% Sample Data*, <http://12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products.highlight/Religion>.

Margaret's is situated. I also have a longtime connection (by way of friendships, marriage and schooling) to the Winnipeg Mennonite world, and as a university student I was closely linked to the particular departments full of Mennonite members of St. Margaret's. Accordingly, I have long been aware of the discourse surrounding the noticeable and increasing presence of Mennonites, both young and old, at St. Margaret's. In these social situations, St. Margaret's was frequently acclaimed as the "fastest growing Mennonite church in Manitoba,"²⁴ and the Mennonites at St. Margaret's were (and continue to) be referred to jokingly as "Manglicans." Before beginning fieldwork, I attended a number of my adult, Mennonite friends' baptisms at St. Margaret's, was involved in a largely Mennonite wedding at the church, and was invited on numerous occasions to St. Margaret's Sunday evening services, particularly popular among the church's university-aged congregants, and celebratory services such as Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday, only to find many familiar Mennonite faces in the congregation.

More concretely, the 2008-2009 St. Margaret's phone directory lists nearly 200 congregants with typical Manitoban Mennonite surnames out of a total of approximately 400 church members, and I have been assured that both numbers are gradually increasing. Though Dr. David Widdicombe, rector of St. Margaret's, argues in a recent article written for *The Canadian Mennonite* that the number of Mennonite congregants at St. Margaret's "hardly makes for a

²⁴ Andrew Siebert, "Why does the Mennonite Cross the Liturgical Road?" *Canadian Mennonite* 11:5 (2007).

statistically interesting trend,” and that due to the large number of Mennonites in Manitoba, it is inevitable that some of them would come to St. Margaret’s seeking temporary or permanent denominational change,²⁵ I argue that St. Margaret’s remains distinctive. Not only does St. Margaret’s growing membership stand out against the general decline in membership in Canadian Anglican churches,²⁶ its large Mennonite population, and the movement of many Mennonites from their Anabaptist religious communities to an Anglican church community, signify very possible and complex re-negotiations of Mennonite identity.

For two months over the summer of 2009, and for a weekend in October, I returned home to Winnipeg and to Wolseley, in efforts to reacquaint myself with the discourse surrounding the growing number of Mennonites at St. Margaret’s, and to talk to people at the church about the changes occurring in their congregation. My involvement and participation in this church community took shape in a number of ways throughout the summer. Having gained the support and approval to carry out ethnographic research in the church from Rector David Widdicombe six months prior, and having a few close connections with members of St. Margaret’s and with the broader Manitoba Mennonite community, I found it very easy to spend time at St. Margaret’s, to relate to and communicate with the people I interviewed, and to become a familiar face in the church community. As Pamela Klassen so eloquently states in her discussion of her own scholarship and

²⁵ David Widdicombe, “Embracing People of the Book.”

²⁶ Wendy Fletcher, “Canadian Anglicanism and Ethnicity,” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 139.

connections to the Manitoba Mennonite world, “I have the links...to bridge the distance between [St. Margaret’s Mennonite congregants] and me.” In particular, my connections “allowed a certain easy familiarity to develop between [my informants] and myself, despite the many differences between our religious lives stemming from age, family and education.”²⁷ Though I have no direct Mennonite familial heritage and do not regularly attend a Mennonite church, I am married to a Mennonite man and many of my friends and in-laws are significantly involved in the broader Mennonite church community.²⁸ Like Klassen, I am at once an insider and an outsider in the Manitoba Mennonite community. And, it is perhaps my peripheral place in this community that allowed St. Margaret’s Mennonites to speak freely to me as somebody who understands the complexities of Mennonite life and identity, and also as someone who would empathize with their theological deliberations, negotiations of identity and spiritual changes of heart.

Over the course of the summer, I attended nearly every Sunday morning service, as well as some Sunday evening services throughout July and August. I also stayed for coffee or to chat with parishioners after most morning services.

²⁷ Pamela Klassen, *Going by the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994), 19-20.

²⁸ In her essay “Writing against Culture,” in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 137-62, Lila-Abu Lughod describes herself as a “halfie,” or as someone whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage.” She argues that “halfies, by the way their anthropological practice unsettles the boundary between self and other, enable to reflect on the conventional nature and political effects of this distinction and ultimately to reconsider the value of the concept of culture on which it depends.” To use Abu-Lughod’s language, I consider myself to be somewhat of a halfie; a member of the Winnipeg Mennonite community, yet ethnically and religiously set apart from this community.

All of this time spent at St. Margaret's provided me with wonderful opportunities for participant observation and engaging in conversations with church members about the church and church community, as well as for finding participants willing to be more formally interviewed. I also worked as a volunteer researcher for the parish's Centennial Book, through which I learned a great deal about St. Margaret's rich history in Winnipeg, and got to know several of St. Margaret's longtime members overseeing the book's research process.

In addition to these involvements, I spent a great deal of time in the homes and favorite coffee shops of the people I interviewed. These times in particular often revealed a great deal about the unsaid details of the daily lives of St. Margaret's Mennonite congregants. Mennonite magazines on coffee tables, open Mennonite hymnals on pianos, needlepoint artwork depicting well-known Low German poems and phrases together drew my attention to the parts of congregant lives that remain ethnically and religiously Mennonite, often despite expressed changes of identity. Invitations to share in these "extensions" of the St. Margaret's community, via its congregants, also allowed me to observe the influence of the unique character of the Wolseley neighbourhood on St. Margaret's. As well, at the beginning of August I was fortunate to attend and be involved in a Mennonite wedding at St. Margaret's. This experience heightened my awareness of the complexity of this confluence of traditions, and allowed me to witness the ways that Mennonite ethnic identities, familial Mennonite connections, and Anglican religious identities are together and continuously

negotiated and renegotiated in some of life's most significant moments. I reflect further on these more muddled observations of the relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity in Chapter Three.

I conducted the majority of my interviews in person, though after returning to Hamilton in September, I conducted three interviews by email when meetings were not possible in July or August due to busy summer schedules. I also managed to schedule two in-person interviews during a visit to Winnipeg in October and one in February. All of the Mennonite congregants I interviewed are from diverse Russian Mennonite (or partially Russian Mennonite) backgrounds, and of both Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite churches.²⁹ I was also able to interview three members of St. Margaret's clergy and a group of Mennonites hoping to start a Mennonite church that would parallel the worship patterns and structure of St. Margaret's, but would maintain core Anabaptist theological beliefs.

²⁹ In this thesis, I do not go into significant detail about denominational or conference divides within the wider Mennonite church. Instead, I focus on the theological and ethnic features of Mennonitism that unite Mennonites, regardless of their specific denomination. In Chapter One, I highlight some of the most common ethnic and religious components of Mennonite identity.

In Manitoba, most Mennonite churches are part of either the Mennonite Brethren or General Conference. For a discussion of the history of each of these conferences, see the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, <http://www.gameo.org/>. Also, in his article "Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Theology: A Common Centre, a Single Foundation," *Direction* 13:1 (1984), 67-90, Walter Unger notes that the differences between Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite churches are "more imagined than real." General Conference churches are often said have more "lax" church discipline, greater congregational autonomy, and baptize members with a sprinkling, or pouring of water, whereas Mennonite Brethren churches have debated whether waterless baptism, baptism by immersion or by sprinkling was best. Despite these perceived differences, Unger notes that in their confessional statements and practice both Mennonite Brethren and General Conference churches hold the "cardinal tenets of Christian faith and Anabaptism in common."

DISCUSSION OF CHAPTERS

In order to provide the proper historical context for my discussion of the Mennonite congregants at St. Margaret's Anglican Church, I briefly chronicle, in Chapter One, the denominational beginnings of the Mennonite tradition, and the presence of Mennonites in Canada, with particular focus on the relationship between the Mennonites and the province of Manitoba, and the city of Winnipeg. In this chapter, I introduce some of the core theological tenets of the Mennonite tradition and discuss some of its historically central ethnic and cultural features. I also note some of the political, structural, congregational and theological changes currently the wider North American Mennonite church. I end with a brief discussion of St. Margaret's history in Winnipeg. Drawing attention to these historical, theological, and ethnic features of Mennonitism, as well as addressing briefly the history and characteristic features of St. Margaret's and the wider Anglican church, helps bring to light the significance and distinctiveness of the congregational changes occurring at St. Margaret's.

In Chapter Two, my focus turns to my fieldwork in Winnipeg and to the religious histories and life experiences of the people who work at and attend St. Margaret's Anglican Church, drawing particular attention to the life stories of St. Margaret's Mennonite congregants. Alongside careful retellings of my informants' stories, as well as of my own observations and experiences at the church, I investigate at length the reasons behind and factors contributing to their changing denominational affiliation. This chapter explores my informants'

theological negotiations, their discussions of religious and ethnic identity, as well as their ideas about their connections, or lack thereof, to the broader Manitoba Mennonite community. I draw attention here to the patterns, differences and similarities that emerged in my informants' stories and discussions of religious identity. Central to this chapter is a discussion of Anglican Church liturgy, music, the Arts, and the intellectual approach to Christianity at St. Margaret's, and the importance of these things in the religious lives of the people I interviewed.

In Chapter Three, I discuss what my informants' ideas about their Mennonite identities might contribute to the broader discussion of the complexity of the connections between religious and ethnic identity in Canada and in the broader Manitoba Mennonite world. I also briefly discuss patterns of church attendance in Canada, predictive discussions of secularization in Canada, and the changing ethnic makeup of Canadian churches, in relation to the changes occurring at St. Margaret's, its surrounding community, and the Canadian Anglican and Mennonite Churches.

To conclude this thesis, I revisit my attendance at a (largely) Mennonite wedding at St. Margaret's. I use this experience to frame my discussion of the influence and centrality of ethno-religious community in the lives of my informants, despite their changing church affiliations and identities.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF MENNONITE IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and sociologists of religion in Canada have long noted that secularization, (or at least 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.¹ 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.² Sociologist Reginald Bibby for example, 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 peoples' identities, according to Bibby, despite their limited participation in actual churches.³ British sociologist Grace Davie has addressed this same phenomenon in Britain. In her

¹See for example Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) and Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005).

² Warren Clark and Grant Shellenberg, "Who's Religious?" in *Canadian Social Trends* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue Number 11-008: Summer 2006).

³ Reginald Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada's Churches Can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance*, (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 7-17.

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.”⁴ This paradox, according to Davie, and popularly restated in analyses of the Canadian situation, is “believing without belonging.” 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.”⁵ In 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 contradict or conflict with those professed to be upheld or central to one’s identity.⁶

Whatever the case—belonging without believing or believing without belonging—it is clear that the relationship between Canadian churches and

⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 8.

⁵ Danièle Hervieu-Leger, “The role of religion in establishing social cohesion,” *Eurozine*, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-08-17-hervieuleger-en.html>.

⁶ Bramadat and Seljak, “Charting the New Terrain,” 15. See also Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987), 73-6.

contemporary Canadian Christians is changing. As in the case of my own family, some of the ways this changing relationship is most evident among Canadian Christians is in the assumed disconnection between one's religious and ethnic identity, or in the lack of knowledge of one's familial religious and ethnic history, changing church involvement, and in changing religious beliefs and practices, despite the possible maintenance of a broader familial religious identity.⁷

For example, despite some direct ethno-religious ties to the Anglican Church on my mother's side, I know very little about the history of these familial church connections, key Anglican theological tenets, or the Church's denominational beginnings in Britain. This lack of knowledge is perhaps due to the fact that my parents were decidedly uninvolved in any church community; and is probably also related to my mother's disdain for what she describes as the "monotonous, stand-up-sit-down traditions" of the Anglican Church in which she (occasionally) participated as a young girl. Yet, while ours was a "secular" household—in the sense that my sister and I were not baptized as infants, we never attended church and were not formally affiliated with a specific church or denomination—stories about my parents' own upbringings already reflect waning church involvement, as compared to the church involvement of their parents and grandparents. At most it seems my parents, as children, attended worship services on Christian holidays and participated in the church simply through their respective denominational rites of passage (baptism, confirmation). I suspect that

⁷ Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," 15.

this lack of involvement has led to our collective lack of knowledge regarding the connection of our “religious beliefs” and our family history. Today, though both my mother and father are somewhat sympathetic to the broader Christian tradition, and though both identify loosely with their parents’ denominational affiliations, neither identify with Christianity in a “traditional” way, and my sister and I were encouraged by our parents to explore the traditions and beliefs of other cultures and religious groups. According to scholars Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, both of my parents can be described as “cultural Christians.” My parents, and by extension my sister and I, are people who “identify with Christianity, but avoid Christian practices and are not familiar with the Bible, or Christian history.”⁸

This tale of my family’s generationally-diminishing relationship to the church, more generally, and to our ethno-religious heritage(s) more specifically, is similar to the stories many other longtime Canadian families could tell about the relationship between religious identity, ethnicity, and knowledge of denominational history, practice and belief in their own lives. Like many other Canadian cultural Christians, my family’s religious history has little to do—so it seems—with my ethnic identity or cultural hobbies and interests, and nor does my ethnic identity tell me a great deal about the church I should attend. As Bramadat and 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

⁸ Ibid., 15.

Enlightenment tradition; a tradition both idealized and celebrated in Western societies.⁹ 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, the above 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 Mennonite communities in Manitoba until recently. Due to their history of segregation and sectarianism, and to and their distinct ethno-religious identity, or “culture of faith”¹⁰ perhaps most comparable to Judaism, Mennonites have remained largely united in their broader opinions about Mennonite religion, culture and identity. They have at least been willing to count themselves as Mennonite owing to their knowledge of intricate ethnic and religious ties to Mennonitism.¹¹ Today however, while the Mennonite Church is technically growing worldwide, (predominantly in Africa and South America and thus further complicating the discourse about Mennonite religion and ethnicity), the North American Mennonite Church, and the Canadian Mennonite Church more specifically, is not immune to membership decline and changing ideas among members about the relationship between the Mennonite Church and their religious

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Margaret Loewen Reimer, *One Quilt, Many Pieces: A Guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2008), 15.

¹¹ Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 14.

identities and ethnic backgrounds, amid rapid social change and the increasingly multicultural Canadian landscape. As I will discuss further, Mennonites in Manitoba really only began to leave their close-knit, ethno-religious rural communities for urban life in the 1950's and as a result, scholars suggest that Manitoba Mennonites have generally remained 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 has become] so central in Western society.”¹² Nonetheless, the number of “non-practicing,” “secularized,” “ethnic” and “religious affiliation switching” Mennonites in Canada is indeed growing.¹³ 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.” Importantly, Loewen argues that the development of religious differences among Mennonites has also created diverse ideas about Mennonite ethnicity, and thus Mennonite identity.¹⁴ Though in my own study, I consider St. Margaret's Mennonites to be outside the general trend of “Canadian secularization,” I found that many of them understand and talk about their Mennonite religious and ethnic identities in ways similar to those Mennonites

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Loewen, “The Poetics of Peoplehood: Religion and Ethnicity Among Canada's Mennonites,” in Paul Bramadat and David Seljak *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 347.

¹⁴ Ibid.

who have given up on church affiliation all together. The Mennonites at St. Margaret's and secularized Mennonites, similarly claim that their Mennonite identities no longer dictate which church community they belong to.

St. Margaret's Mennonites are affected by some of the trends currently shaping Canadian Christianity and contemporary Christian identity in many complex ways. On the one hand, I will demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three that many of St. Margaret's Mennonites, like other Canadian Christians, make very clear distinctions between their religious and ethnic identities, that 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 finally, that all have varying ideas of what it means (or meant, in some cases) to be a Mennonite. In their work on religion and ethnicity in Canada, Bramadat and Seljak argue that the distinctions and divisions people make between their religious and ethnic identities are problematic, uninformed, or even artificial; peoples' claims are not attentive to the fact that the categories of religion and ethnicity are most often historically and intimately connected. Yet, whether such claims are problematic, uninformed or not, these ideas about the disconnection of religious and ethnic identity, as previously discussed, are said to be one of the many byproducts of the changing and increasingly complex relationship between Canadian churches and contemporary Canadian Christian identity.¹⁵ On the other hand, however, it does seem as though St. Margaret's Mennonites stand outside of

¹⁵ Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," 18-19.

the general trend toward secularization in Canada. As I will also demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three, though St. Margaret's Mennonites no longer identify with the Mennonite churches in which they were raised, they do identify with Christianity in a traditional 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 thought at least a little bit about 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 my informants, many were aware that such a transition has contributed to some reshaping of their ideas about Christianity and Christian practice.

Given that St. Margaret's Mennonites seem to be simultaneously affected and unaffected by some of the current trends shaping contemporary Christian identity in Canada, it is important to situate this group of Mennonites within the broader Manitoba Mennonite tradition. The following questions are thus central to a discussion of Mennonite identity amidst broader discussions about Canadian secularization, multiculturalism and changes occurring in churches across the country. How does the historical relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity contribute to the ideas held among St. Margaret's Mennonites about their own religious and ethnic identities? What does it mean to be Mennonite in contemporary Canada? And perhaps most importantly, how have Mennonite

history and contemporary Canadian culture allowed for these explicit divisions between ethnic and religious identity?

The ideas about Mennonite religion and ethnicity held among St. Margaret's Mennonites are not unlike those most often popularized and debated in contemporary Winnipeg Mennonite circles. More specifically, diverse opinions about the nature of Mennonite religious and ethnic identity exist in this Anglican Church setting, just as they now do in Mennonite communities. In this chapter therefore, within the framework of a discussion of Mennonite history, I will show how Mennonite history and a constantly evolving Canadian Mennonite culture have together created disparate Mennonite ideas about what it means to be Mennonite. I take seriously Mennonite historian Royden Loewen's assertion that Mennonite history has "produced all the features of ethnicity," and that Mennonite religion and ethnicity have been "established by time, tempered by space, and conditioned by social interaction."¹⁶ I argue along with Loewen that Mennonite history and contemporary culture have produced and conditioned a number of Mennonite religious and ethnic consciousnesses, and thus that knowledge of Mennonite religious and cultural history is central to an analysis of Mennonite ideas about religion and ethnicity. By ending this chapter with a discussion of the history of Mennonite involvement at St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg, I will be able to more concretely demonstrate how varying historical Mennonite consciousnesses and narratives of religion and ethnicity have

¹⁶ Loewen, "The Poetics of Peoplehood," 332.

informed, structured and complicated the changing identities of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners.

A FOUR-PART MENNONITE HISTORY

PART ONE: RADICAL ANABAPTIST BEGINNINGS

For true evangelical faith cannot lay dormant;
but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love;
it clothes the naked; feeds the hungry;
consoles the afflicted; shelters the miserable;
aids and consoles all the oppressed;
returns good for evil; serves those that injure it;
prays for those that persecute it.

-Menno Simons, 1539¹⁷

The Mennonite Church, like the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Reformed Church, is historically rooted in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation in Europe. The official beginning of Anabaptism is said to have involved two, simple liturgical acts: the believers' baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist, both of which occurred spontaneously among friends, in a farm kitchen near Zurich in 1525.¹⁸ Eleven years later, in 1536, a Dutch man and former Catholic Priest, Menno Simons, was asked to provide leadership to a small group of Swiss Anabaptists. His writings became central to Anabaptist thought, and his followers identified themselves as the "Mennists," which was later modified to the "Mennonites."¹⁹ More specifically, Mennonites trace their beginnings to the Anabaptist movement (generated by the

¹⁷ Menno Simons, excerpt from *Why I Cannot Cease Teaching and Writing*, 1539.

¹⁸ John Rempel, "Mennonites," in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, eds. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 545.

¹⁹ Derek Suderman, "Who are the Mennonites?" in *The Mennonites in Canada*, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Digital Library, posted 1998, <http://www.mhsc.ca/>.

Reformation), out of which groups such as the Hutterites and the Amish also emerged. In that time of widespread political, social and religious upheaval, the Anabaptists sought to radically redefine the church as a “community of believers,” separate from the confines of the state.²⁰ Central to the Anabaptist ideal of the separation of church and state was the seemingly simple act of “believers’ baptism,” which occurred upon one’s voluntary profession of faith, in stark contrast to the dominant, state-controlled Roman Catholic ritual of infant baptism.²¹ What is more, this “communitarian” view of the church emphasized the separation of Christ’s followers from the rest of the world; Anabaptist teachings thus called followers to live and worship in small communities, which were believed to constitute or bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.²²

To avoid state persecution and intolerance of their revolutionary beliefs, early Anabaptists met in private homes and later in secluded forests and caves, where their Christ-centered beliefs and a new vision of Christianity took a more formal shape. During this time, Mennonites continued to develop a distinctive theology based on Christ’s teachings surrounding peace and love; they practiced nonviolence and nonresistance, lived simple communal lives, and shared economic resources, when it was possible. These characteristics became increasingly pertinent to Mennonite identity in Europe. Yet, as the Mennonite

²⁰ Rempel, “Mennonites,” 545.

²¹ Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the 16th Century* (USA: Fortress Press, 1970), 19-20; see also Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1955).

²² Royden Loewen, “The Poetics of Peoplehood,” 333.

movement grew, and as knowledge of radical Anabaptist theology spread, Anabaptist persecution intensified. Because the sixteenth century Anabaptist quest for religious identity “steered a course...neither Catholic nor [wholly] Protestant,” Mennonites were “persecuted on every side.”²³ Approximately five thousand Anabaptists, over the course of the sixteenth century, were tortured and martyred.²⁴

Seeking religious freedom, many Mennonites eventually dispersed throughout Europe (namely throughout the Netherlands, England, northern Germany, southern Russia, Prussia, northern Switzerland, and the Alsace). The Mennonites became a quiet, migratory and agricultural people. They were “die Stillen im Lande,” or the “Quiet in the Land,” (source?) forced because of persecution to keep to themselves, live rurally and travel continually to more tolerant lands. As I will demonstrate further, most Mennonite migrations, (over the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), were based predominantly

²³Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict: Studies in Religion and Society Vol. 19* (Lewiston and Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 21.

²⁴Royden Loewen, “The Poetics of Peoplehood,” 333. Loewen notes that the publication of Thieleman van Braght’s *Martyrs’ Mirror* in 1660, a text depicting and retelling the stories of some famous Anabaptist executions, was and has since been central to the formation of Mennonite religious identity. Accordingly, many Mennonites, he claims, have called the time of sixteenth century Anabaptist radicalism the “golden age” of Mennonite religious commitment. As an example of contemporary Mennonite attitudes towards the sixteenth century Anabaptist martyrs, I think back to the day I told my husband’s Mennonite grandmother about my research on the growing number of Mennonites attending St. Margaret’s Anglican Church. She appeared quite distressed and responded hastily, saying that St. Margaret’s Mennonites had forgotten the fact that their Anabaptist ancestors were martyred for their beliefs in adult baptism, pacifism and other tenets of their faith. For my husband’s grandmother, the stories and images depicted in the *Martyrs’ Mirror* are part of the foundation on which she rests her Anabaptist identity. Others, however, have been more critical of the relationship between the themes in the *Martyrs’ Mirror*, the formation and maintenance of Mennonite identity, and contemporary ideas about martyrdom. See for example Jacob Peter Letkemann’s Master’s Thesis from McMaster University, *A Critical Evaluation of the Anabaptists Conception of Martyrdom in the Martyrs’ Mirror* (2004).

on regional promises of farmland, religious freedom or exemption from military service. Most importantly, these migrations, together with a history of sectarianism, persecution and martyrdom, set the stage “for the evolution of [Mennonite] ethnicity,”²⁵ and allowed the Mennonites to “appropriate their own history as part of their Protestant sub-identity.”²⁶

PART TWO: MENNONITES IN RUSSIA

The majority of Manitoba Mennonites, including most of the Mennonite members of St. Margaret’s with whom I spoke, have traceable family and religious histories rooted in southern Russia and present-day Ukraine.²⁷ As opposed to the Swiss Mennonites who migrated to southern Germany and later to Pennsylvania, Dutch Mennonites traveled to northern Germany, England and Poland before arriving in Russia, where their near-one-hundred-year stopover shaped a rich and distinctive chapter of Mennonite ethno-religious history. In Russia, the Dutch Mennonites became the Russian Mennonites. In 1763 Catherine the Great (or Catherine II) promised farmland, among other things, to foreigners who would agree to inhabit the expanding regions of New Russia. In 1788 the Russian Tsarina formally extended this invitation to the Dutch

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 334-5.

²⁷ It has recently come to my attention that it is common among Manitoban Mennonites to have family history books which trace genealogies, re-tell life stories of faith, hardship and the migrations which brought their ancestors to North America and display pictures of relatives across many generations. One could argue that these books help to reinforce a sense of ethno-religious identity among Mennonites. Not only do these books educate the present generation’s readers about the historical distinctiveness of Mennonite identity, but they also help to strengthen community and familial ethno-religious boundaries.

Mennonites, known to be excellent agriculturalists, and offered them religious tolerance, autonomy, and military exemption in exchange for building and settling colonies in her empire. Subsequently, between 1788 and 1804 the majority of Dutch Mennonites migrated to southern Russia where they eventually set up extensive colonies. Because of their Russian civil liberties, the Mennonites became a thriving, prosperous and affluent group of people.²⁸

Taking advantage of their newfound religious freedom and autonomy, Russian Mennonites were able to focus on the development of their agricultural communities and the maintenance of their community boundaries. Though some Mennonites did remain landless peasants, many Mennonites in Russia, within their own “mini-commonwealth” as some have called it, became successful business people, entrepreneurs and farmers.²⁹ More specifically, their privileges in Russia allowed them to acquire wealth and power and to become “worldly, industrial, and bourgeois,”³⁰ and their distinct ethno-religious culture was shaped accordingly. Russian Mennonites were able to concern themselves with the organization and operation of their own farmland, businesses, schools and churches, while their physical separation from other Russian settlements and major cities also allowed them to continue speaking their German and Low

²⁸ James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada 1525-1980*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 95-6; see also *The Global Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online* at <http://www.gameo.org/>.

²⁹ Loewen, “The Poetics of Peoplehood,” 335; see also E.K. Francis, “The Russian Mennonites: From Religious Group to Ethnic Group,” *American Journal of Sociology* 54 (1948):101-7.

³⁰ Klassen, *Going By the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1994), 7-8.

German languages, to further develop and maintain their distinct foodways, clothing styles, architectural designs and to take up other cultural practices like singing and quilting. Mennonite community rituals and social customs, many still familiar in Mennonite communities, also took shape. Emphasis on community care, events surrounding rites of passages and the church year, and distinct gender roles structured Russian Mennonite daily life.³¹ One former resident of a large Russian Mennonite village called Grigorievka described the years between settlement and World War I as the village's "golden years."

This was evident everywhere: from the well-appointed houses, the barns and sheds; also from the good, practical agricultural implements and the beautiful horses and cattle which filled the barns. At the street most farmers had well built, painted fences which together with the wild pear trees, presented a beautiful vista. The paths on either side of the street were raised and well kept.³²

The broader Russian Mennonite *gemeinschafft*, but for its core religious tenets, was markedly different from the migrant, persecuted Anabaptist communities of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, and the Mennonite communities of Russia began to more closely resemble the rural North American Mennonite communities that would develop over the course of the twentieth century.

PART THREE: RUSSIAN MENNONITES MIGRATE TO NORTH AMERICA

Between the 1870s and 1940s, there were three major group migrations of Russian Mennonites to North America, each of which was the result of political

³¹ Ted Friesen and Elisabeth Peters, ed., *Memories of Grigorievka* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1998), 25-35.

³² George F. Loewen, trans. John Dyck, "Memories of the Village of Grigorievka 1889-1926," in eds. Ted Friesen and Elisabeth Peters, *Memories of Grigorievka* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1998), 14.

reform, revolution or war. During this seventy-year time frame, the majority of Russian Mennonites immigrated to North America, and to the Canadian province of Manitoba more specifically, where they were (once again) promised farmland, religious tolerance, military exemption, and exemption from state schools. In Manitoba the Mennonites settled on two land reserves, still known as the East Reserve and the West Reserve, located in the southern part of the province. While the early 1870s in Russia were characterized by reform and political instability, the Canadian government sought at the same time to populate rural areas with agriculturally-able European immigrants. As Russian Mennonites grew increasingly wary of their elevated socio-political status in imperial Russia, and as the Russian government threatened to withdraw or modify some of the special privileges they were originally afforded by Catherine the Great in 1788, the Canadian government's encouragement of the Mennonites to "transplant" their communities and farm villages onto reserved, undeveloped prairie land blocs in Southern Manitoba and elsewhere, seemed an attractive offer.³³ Thus, in 1874, 7,000 Russian Mennonites, en masse, migrated to Manitoba and founded what would later become some of the largest Mennonite settlements in North America.³⁴ These Mennonites were known as the Kadanier.

³³ Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870's* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 3-4; see also Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, 1.

³⁴ John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba* (Steinbach: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000), 3.

Life for those remaining Mennonites in Russia however, grew increasingly difficult. At the onset of the Russian Revolution and the First World War, the Mennonites were again a persecuted people. Between 1918 and 1929, Russian Mennonites were not only exposed to battles between anarchists and the Red and White Armies, but their villages were attacked, looted and destroyed, women were raped, and entire families were killed by bandits as part of the larger assault on Russian colonialism.³⁵ Historians have noted that it was likely a combination of Mennonite religious beliefs, their separation and social status, as well as their “German” identity, their material wealth and social status that contributed significantly to attacks on their villages and communities.³⁶ During this time, some Mennonites abandoned their pacifist beliefs and “took up arms” to defend their families and villages. Nonetheless, these displaced and persecuted Mennonites eventually obtained refugee status, and by 1929 nearly 20,000 had fled their Russian colonies for Canada, where they were to be cared for by the Canadian Mennonites, according to an informal agreement between the Canadian government and the Canadian Mennonites.³⁷ This second group of Mennonite

³⁵ Al Reimer, trans., ed., *A Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), 1-5. The Russian Revolution was a horrific time for Mennonites in Russia. Dietrich Neufeld’s now famous work *A Russian Dance of Death* (1930) details the traumatic period of the Revolution from a Russian Mennonite perspective, by way of woodcut and diary entries. The Mennonites were caught in the chaos of constantly shifting regimes and German and Russian political alliances, as well as the battles between the Red and White armies, their destroyed villages, and collapsing religious ideals of pacifism.

³⁶ Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 138-9; see also Klassen, *Going by the Moon and the Stars*, 8.

³⁷Ibid.

migrants was known by the Kadanier Mennonites, or the first group of migrants, as the Russländer.

Again, those who remained in Russia were faced with persecution and socio-political instability. Under Stalin's rule, Mennonites were deprived of their land and wealth, as well as their social and religious institutions. Many Mennonite men were either killed or sent to Siberian labour camps; children grew up without formal religious practice or education, and women, many of them widows, were left alone to maintain what was left of colony life. By the early 1940's, in the midst of World War II, protection was sought from the Nazis, who were beginning to occupy Mennonite regions the Soviet Union, and so began yet another dark time in Russian Mennonite history. This time was particularly difficult for those single and windowed Russian Mennonite women who, as Pamela Klassen has argued, were forced to live with a "contextual morality."³⁸ Klassen's ethnographic work *Going by the Moon and the Stars*, which provides readers with a feminist interpretation of two women's accounts of this time in Russian Mennonite history, reveals that living in "contextual morality" for these women meant becoming Nazi assistants, mistresses, abandoning their pacifist beliefs, and dealing at the same time with rumors of Nazi killings of Jews.³⁹ In 1943, as the Soviet army approached Russian Mennonite and German occupied territory, many Mennonite women and children fled with the Nazis to Germany, on foot. The "Great Trek" to Germany was grueling, and many people died.

³⁸ Klassen, *Going by the Moon and the Stars*, 8-9.

³⁹ Ibid.

While some Mennonites did eventually arrive in Germany, the majority were captured by Russians and forced to resettle in very remote parts of the Soviet Union. Claiming refugee status at the end of the war, and with the help of the newly-formed Mennonite Central Committee world relief organization, many Russian Mennonites, the majority women and children, migrated to South America until a few years later, when Canada and Mennonite farm settlements in Manitoba could accept them.⁴⁰ Feminist historian Marlene Epp has written extensively about the North American lives of these female Mennonite migrants. In post-war Canadian Mennonite communities, this diaspora of “women without men,” many of them mothers and widows, significantly challenged the traditional structure of churches, households and Mennonite gender roles. Though these women took on traditional female roles as mothers and care providers, they also had to generate household income, provide protection and spiritual guidance for their families and ensure their children were theologically and agriculturally adept—roles which were traditionally masculine in Mennonite communities. Epp argues that these women and their new societal and familial roles accordingly reshaped female Mennonite identity for Mennonite women over the next several generations.⁴¹ Epp further suggests that the female Mennonite migrants of the 1940’s, like those of other migration waves, acted as “cultural carriers,” which helped in important and nuanced ways to reinforce Mennonite ethnic and

⁴⁰ Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 140.

⁴¹ Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 54-56.

religious survival, adaptation and creativity, thus ultimately ensuring community survival in new and foreign lands.⁴² I will address this idea further in the section of this chapter where I discuss the development of an urban Mennonite ethno-religious identity and changes in the broader Mennonite Church, and the centrality of Mennonite women's traditional and non-traditional gender roles and hobbies to these developments and changes.

PART FOUR: MENNONITE MIGRATIONS TO THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

Good Housekeeping

On Wednesday night
the young people go to church.
They eat platz and give testimonies.
The girls have long golden hair.
Their cheeks are rosy from harvest
and dresses cover their knees.
When the young people sing together
it is heaven above and earth below
with sopranos and basses.

But my Hänschen
goes to dance in the city.
He has a girl friend.
She smears grease on her lips.
Her blond hair is cut and curled
and her knees are bare
like a young calf.
When they dance
their legs are noodles
and the music is a tractor.
The girl friend says it is not a shame
for a woman to cut her hair.
She thinks Mennonites are like Hutterites
and has never heard of roll küchen.
What good can come of that?
-David Waltner-Toews⁴³

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Excerpt from David Waltner Toews, *Good Housekeeping* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983).

Until the mid twentieth century, the majority of Manitoba Mennonites lived in farming communities located in either the East or West Reserves, which had been settled by their Russian Mennonite ancestors nearly one hundred years prior. Mennonites ran and attended their own schools and churches; they also owned, operated and supported their own businesses, farms, and other institutions, and accordingly had little reason to interact with the “outside world,” or the “English,” as urban, non-Mennonites are still so often called. The East and West Reserves in the southern Manitoba prairies existed as complex, ethno-religious, agricultural enclaves—these communities experienced minimal infiltration of urban, western ideals and lifestyles. Yet, as governmental reforms in Manitoba concerning provincial educational standards saw the closure of Mennonite-run schools, as families and communities dealt with the loss of many Mennonite men who joined the military in the Second World War, and as new farm technologies and the economic restructuring of rural societies challenged the simplicity of rural Mennonite life, Mennonite families began to migrate to nearby towns and cities.⁴⁴ By the 1970’s the majority of Manitoba Mennonites lived in towns or cities. Though rural Manitoba Mennonite communities still exist, the “discourse of loss” was (and still is) prominent among rural community members. These people fear that Mennonite theological ideals and traditions, such as the simplistic lifestyle and the ethno-religious “community of believers,” are being forgotten with the migrations of many Mennonites to the city of Winnipeg. As described in the

⁴⁴ Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 202.

poem heading this section, Mennonites often bemoan the fact that their religious and cultural traditions have been subject to significant change, and community members witnessed the disappearance of their traditions as entire families settled in non-Mennonite, urban settings. Over time however, the traditions and lifestyles typical of modern Western cities have also contributed to the re-shaping of rural Manitoba Mennonite communities; the majority of Mennonites are no longer agriculturalists, most Mennonite families own televisions and computers and vehicles, most no longer dress in distinctive, conservative attire.

Following migration to the city, Mennonite churches, at first, continued to be central to Mennonite community development and stability and direct ties to rural Mennonite communities continued to inform Mennonite sense of peoplehood. Nonetheless, historically pertinent to Mennonite religiosity and culture are the invisible boundaries drawn between their rural, tight-knit communities and the outside world, thus, as these boundaries were crossed and erased, urban Mennonites soon became more culturally diverse. In this context, alongside new and varying class affiliations, new religious ideals, new professions, and in a world of symbolic ethnicities, there arose new ways of and diverse ideas about being Mennonite. While for some, Mennonitism remained a unique blend of religion and ethnicity, for others, being Mennonite simply became a part of their familial ethnic history and their distinct Anabaptist religiosity waned along with their participation in the broader Manitoba Mennonite world, or their increasing participation in different Christian

denominations. These people held onto some of the distinctive cultural facets of life in rural Mennonite communities (such as quilting, methods and types of food preparation, music, and language) and passed them on to their children and grandchildren as “culturally” Mennonite. Yet, some people also argued that Mennonites should be defined not by their distinct cultural traditions, but by their particular faith and theology.⁴⁵ No longer segregated from urban Canadian society, or no longer living in rural, self-sufficient ethnic enclaves, and as witnesses to a growing multicultural Mennonite world, these Mennonites argued from a theological and biblical standpoint that to identify themselves as a cultural or ethnic group stands in opposition to Jesus’ mission, which was focused on “redefining the people of God in non-ethnic terms, preparing a faithful remnant to break through ethnic barriers, and laying the foundation for a multi-ethnic church.”⁴⁶ Though, as I noted in the introduction to this chapter, Winnipeg Mennonites, due to their large numbers and ongoing ties to the Mennonite countryside, have historically been more ready to count themselves as Mennonites,⁴⁷ each of these discussions about the contours and complexities of Mennonite identity can be found in Winnipeg Mennonite circles.

⁴⁵ Gerald Gerbrant, “Who is a Mennonite?” *Canadian Mennonite Magazine* 9:21 (2005).

⁴⁶ “A Symposium on Faith and Ethnicity Among the Mennonite Brethren: Summary and Findings Statement,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988), 54.

⁴⁷ Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 10.

**THE MENNONITE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AND URBAN MENNONITE
CULTURE: THE COMPLEXITY OF CONTEMPORARY MENNONITE IDENTITY**

TRANSPLANTERS OR CREATORS?

Geographers, anthropologists and historians have frequently commented on the importance of the three mass Russian Mennonite migrations to ideas about Mennonite ethnic and religious identity in North America. On the one hand, many scholars of Mennonite history and culture have argued that the Mennonite migrants to North America were “transplanters.”⁴⁸ Seemingly “adept at institutional completeness,”⁴⁹ they transferred their communities, institutions, culture and religion from the Old World to the North American prairies where they more or less maintained, or tried to maintain, their “sacred canopy.”⁵⁰ The distinct ethno-religious characteristics of Mennonite settlement and identity in North America were also emphasized in newspapers detailing the Mennonite migrations to Manitoba. Mennonites were written about in the *Manitoba Free Press*, for example, as a people merely searching for a place wherein they could maintain and protect their Anabaptist, pacifist ideals and institutions, while living in self-sufficient, German-speaking agricultural communities. Central to Mennonite identity, or so most assumed, was the formation of a community and community boundaries identical to those they had formed in the Old World; here

⁴⁸ See Driedger (1988); Loewen (2001); Warkentin (2000).

⁴⁹ Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 5.

⁵⁰ Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 38. Driedger here uses Peter Berger’s popular notion of the “sacred canopy,” to describe the ethnic and religious community boundaries built by the Mennonites upon migration to North America.

their distinct religiosity and ethnic ways of life could be maintained.⁵¹ Known predominantly by their public face, the Mennonites were a people of sectarian institutions and strict religiosity—their religious and ethnic identity one and the same.

More recently, historians such as Royden Loewen and Marlene Epp have argued that by looking closely at the everyday lives of Mennonite migrants to North America—or by studying records of their daily activities, their gender roles, habits and social interactions—it is clear that the Mennonite migrants to rural North America, and later to urban North America, participated in the recreation of Mennonite religion and culture through the “processes of encountering new worlds and unforeseen circumstances.”⁵² According to these scholars, Mennonite migrants have never really been “transplanters,” but were “creators.” In two of his studies of Mennonite diarists, for example, Royden Loewen argues that it is impossible to understand Mennonite migration to North America as one general or cohesive narrative. Instead, through something as simple as one person’s or family’s narrative, we can see that the complex work of social and cultural (re)construction was involved in this migration, as in any. “Immigrants chose old, inherited viewpoints, practices and symbols to make sense of new realities in the North American grasslands,”⁵³ he further suggests. They also learned new practices and attitudes, as well as discarded those which were no

⁵¹ Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 4, 33-35

⁵² Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 4-5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6

longer useful for the process of religious, social and cultural community construction. When many Mennonites later moved to North American cities, similar processes of (re)construction occurred. That is, to ensure the survival of particular traditions and religious values, Mennonites in North America, over time, were continually compelled to make creative changes to their community lives and ideals. In this way, the religious and cultural narratives of Mennonites in Manitoba, over several generations, have become “kaleidoscopic,” as Loewen calls them; they are filled with “overlapping trajectories” and diverse ethno-religious ideas about what it means to be Mennonite in Manitoba.⁵⁴ The title of Margaret Loewen Reimer’s recent publication on Mennonites in Canada, *One Quilt Many Pieces* (2008) is perhaps a description most fitting for this diversity of ideas among Mennonites about Mennonitism.

MENNONITES AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

One of the clearest ways the complexity of diverse and changing ideas about Mennonite identity can be noted is in discussions of Mennonite men and women’s traditional church, community, and familial roles, for thoughts about Mennonite identity in Manitoba have differed and changed considerably among Mennonite men and women throughout Mennonite prairie settlement history. These changes, like many other changes in the broader Canadian Mennonite world, are arguably also related to larger modernizing trends in Canadian society.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

In most early, rural Manitoba Mennonite communities, it was customarily the men who concerned themselves with matters of the Church, and the women who were responsible for the care of children and the upkeep of their family homes. Some have argued that women's roles as homemakers did not exclude them from Mennonite community spiritual life. Women (as mothers) were often responsible for the spiritual education of their children, and the family (the women's sphere of influence), which was considered to be an extension of the Mennonite sacred institution which shaped was shaped by the local church. Women's roles as homemaker, therefore, and as subordinates in the broader church and community structure, allowed for the development of diverse and gendered ideas about being Mennonite.⁵⁵ In other words, because women were most often excluded from men's theological, or doctrinal discussions in the institutional structures of the church, women's lives as Mennonites were uniquely defined by the complex intertwining of their cultural responsibilities, their "history as a particular people,"⁵⁶ and the ways they understood, practiced, passed on and experienced their religion. Though women's ideas about Mennonitism have become increasingly multifaceted as gender roles traditionally adhered to in Mennonite communities and homes (both rural and urban) are no longer as widely (or perhaps as rigidly) upheld, and as Mennonite women in Canada have taken on formal leadership roles in Mennonite religious institutions, many continue to

⁵⁵ Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 61, 117.

⁵⁶ Pamela Klassen, "What's Bre(a)d in the Bone," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68:2 (1994), 229.

argue, as Magdalene Redekop does poetically, that “Mennonite identity, as defined upstairs by the men, may be built on the bodies of the women who offer their labors in the church basement.”⁵⁷

In her article “What’s Bre(a)d in the Bone: The Bodily Heritage of Mennonite Women,” Pamela Klassen suggests that for Mennonite women, Mennonite self-understanding has often been drawn from the “material specificity” of family life. While Mennonites have historically argued that the ethno-cultural aspects of life are “harmful to the revelatory task of Christianity,” Klassen and others argue that such material specificities are a “fundamental layer of [Mennonite] sacred experience, which continues to shape [Mennonite] present and future.”⁵⁸ With particular focus on Manitoba Mennonite women’s habits and customs surrounding food, Klassen considers the significance of cooking, eating and feeding others to “how Mennonite women have done theology.”⁵⁹ She argues that Mennonite women’s roles as the makers of food are viscerally and “intricately linked” with Mennonite history and change; from the inherited memory of famine in Russia to the continued need to feed large families and more recent concerns with feeding those less fortunate and using food resources responsibly, Mennonite women’s “romance with food” has played an important role in shaping Mennonite communities. More specifically, Klassen argues that

⁵⁷ Magdalene Redekop, “Through the Mennonite Looking Glass,” in *Why I Am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity* (Kitchner: Herald Press, 1988), 243.

⁵⁸ Pamela Klassen, “What’s Bre(a)d in the Bone,” 230.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

Mennonite women from all groups have participated in constructing and reconstructing identity through their work in the kitchen... Cooking varenike and borscht—keeping alive the ethnic customs and the church—has been an important element in the invisible glue holding together Mennonite families and communities.⁶⁰

While it has come to the attention of scholars more recently that women, at times, found their roles as homemakers restrictive, Klassen suggests that when women were denied participation and creativity in the formal realms of the church, food and food-making, as well as their sewing and handwork, became central venues for their religious expression and experiences. Food-making and quilting, though mundane parts of household maintenance, have historically been Mennonite women's primary means of caring and nourishing, of ensuring the physical and spiritual continuance of their communities, and of demonstrating their love and God's love for family, church and community. The material culture of Mennonite women has given "women opportunities to minister to others."⁶¹ Cooking, clothing, and sustaining one's family, as ritual acts, are also sacred acts, just like preaching a sermon.

As was previously mentioned, Mennonite women's traditional ideas about Mennonite identity, held in connection with their domestic responsibilities, have changed considerably over time. Though domestic creativity remains an important signifier of female Mennonite ethno-religious identity for many, and though some Mennonite women continue to live and work as homemakers, many

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 244. Klassen is here using both Robert Orsi's (1985) and Susan Starr Sered's (1992) discussions of the spiritual significance of food and food-making among Italian-American Catholics and Middle Eastern Jewish women to support her idea of the sacredness of food and cooking among Mennonite women.

aspects of Mennonite culture and religion traditionally upheld by women are now often also upheld by Mennonite men. That is, Mennonite men willingly and happily take part in the preservation of Mennonite culture or even “domestic religiosity” by learning to cook traditional Mennonite food, by participating in handiwork, and most importantly, by identifying these aspects of material Mennonite culture as central to their religious and/or ethnic Mennonite identities. In chapter three I will demonstrate that a number of the Mennonite men who attend St. Margaret’s note that Mennonite food is particularly central to their Mennonite ethnic or ethno-religious identities.⁶² By involving themselves in and identifying themselves by the material aspects of Manitoba Mennonite ethno-religious culture, many Mennonite men are participating in the recreation of Mennonite identity; these men are no longer primarily concerned with church structure and religious doctrine. Further, many positions in Mennonite churches that were once male-dominated are increasingly being filled by women. Although, as Marlene Epp notes in her recent work detailing the intricate history of Mennonite women in Canada, it was only in the last two decades of the twentieth century that Mennonite women became ministers and/or exercised leadership in Canadian Mennonite churches and communities, many Mennonite

⁶² For our wedding, my husband and I were gifted, following Mennonite tradition, with a beautiful, colourful, hand-stitched, quilt. When it was presented to us, my husband’s aunt described to our guests how central quilting has always been to Mennonite women’s identity, but also how much they enjoyed creating the quilt with many members of the family, including a couple of men (my husband’s grandfather and uncle), who were thrilled to participate in the quilt’s creation. See Daniel Born, “From Cross to Cross-Stich: The Ascendency of the Quilt,” in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 79:2 (2005) for a discussion of the iconic importance and changing symbolism of the quilt to the “Mennonite imagination.”

women today identify more strongly with Anabaptist theology and Mennonite church doctrine than they ever identified with Mennonite material culture, particularly in urban environments. With the onset of the 1950's and Canadian women's increased activity outside of the home—in the workforce or in higher education—significant debate about women's involvement in the church was initiated. Several years later, it was the feminist movement of the 1970's that “ultimately pushed open the door to [Canadian Mennonite] women in official church ministry positions.”⁶³

Today, many Mennonite women in Canada have little knowledge of traditional Mennonite recipes, many have never operated a sewing machine, and many Mennonite women hold university degrees and work outside of the home. Some of these women hold undergraduate and graduate degrees in Anabaptist theology, while others have been formally trained as ministers and leaders in their Mennonite churches. Many of these women might consider Anabaptist theology and doctrine (as opposed to Mennonite material culture) to be central their

⁶³ Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 178. Of course, with the feminist movement of the 1970's, women's changing roles and involvements in the Mennonite church went beyond, or were not limited to, church ministry. In 1972, for example, four Mennonite women from a small town in Manitoba founded a network of thrift stores that have since raised over \$100 million dollars for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). These four women were (and still are) involved in the development, business, volunteer recruitment, and management of the MCC thrift store network in Canada. There are now over 100 stores in the US and Canada. Under the direction of these four Mennonite women, the thrift stores have contributed significantly to the development of MCC, an international aid organization, and have helped these women to demonstrate the centrality of the Anabaptist ideals such as social justice and voluntary simplicity in their lives. For a more detailed description of the history of MCC thrift stores, see Gladys Terichow, “Tea Party Marks Beginning of MCC Thrift Shops,” *The Chronicle: Chortitzer Mennonite Conference* 27:4 (2007), 12-13.

Mennonite identity; these women have accordingly participated in the reconstructing of traditional, gendered ideas about what it means to be Mennonite.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ST. MARGARET'S ANGLICAN CHURCH: A SMALL COMPONENT OF THE WINNIPEG MENNONITE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE?

Under the leadership of Reverend A. W. Woods, St. Margaret's Anglican Church 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, Manitoba, was erected in 1912, which now makes it close to 100 years old. Since the retirement of Rev. Woods following WWI, the congregation has grown and changed under the dynamic leadership of three successive priests.⁶⁴ Today St. Margaret's is a low-Anglican church, an evangelical church and a church, according to Rector David Widdicombe, with a "growing Catholic sensibility." More specifically, in its theology and practice, St. Margaret's is departing considerably from the Protestant tradition. In an interview with Widdicombe, he further suggested that historically, St. Margaret's has been "more independent of the diocese than other Anglican churches...and it has been more theologically literate and orthodox than most churches in the diocese." There are a large number of professionals, academics, students and artists who attend the church. As well, the church is one of the largest Anglican parishes in the province and boasts the emergent presence of many young

⁶⁴ St. Margaret's Anglican Church. "Parish History," <http://www.saintmargarets.ca/286/>.

families, Christians from Pakistan, Sudan and Sierra Leone, and 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 significantly over the last twenty years, some of St. Margaret's longtime members have suggested that "Mennonites have always attended the church."⁶⁵ While one could perhaps speculate that Mennonites have been present in the congregation since the movement of many Mennonites from rural to urban Manitoba in the 1950's, Widdicombe, from the perspective of the parish Priest, suspects Mennonites have attended St. Margaret's for about thirty years. This estimate is based on the fact that he has been rector of St. Margaret's for twenty years and that when he started, there were already Mennonites active in the congregation and in lay ministry. Today, Mennonites participate actively in the church in a variety of ways. More specifically, in positions of leadership, there is one Mennonite reverend who works as an Honourary Assistant, another who works as the Lay Pastoral Associate, and David Widdicome's wife, a Mennonite, works as the Parish Liturgist and Music Director. Other Mennonite members of St. Margaret's, besides being regular attendees, are involved in the church via the choir and broader music program, as well as through scripture reading, worship leading, event planning and childcare.

⁶⁵ Eric Parsons, personal interview, October 23, 2010.

I will explore the presence of Mennonites at St. Margaret's within the context of the Mennonite historical narrative and some of the changes occurring among Mennonites and within Mennonite communities in North America in the following two chapters. Central to this exploration will be a discussion of the reasons why Mennonites suggest they attend St. Margaret's, the changes occurring in the Mennonite communities in which they grew up, and what changes they have observed in their religious lives and identities since they began attending.

CONCLUSION: THE VARIETIES OF URBAN MENNONITE IDENTITY

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that a history of sectarianism, multiple migrations, the growing presence of Mennonites in urban environments, and changing gender, societal and community roles, alongside the broader forces of secularization, modernization, urbanization and globalization, have together created and recreated numerous ideas about the components of Mennonite identity. More specifically, all of these factors, as part of the North American Mennonite historical narrative, have influenced the reshaping of Mennonite identity and culture in Canada, and are contributing in numerous, complex ways to the growing diversity of ideas about and approaches to being Mennonite, as well as changes in opinion about the relationship between Mennonite religion and ethnicity, particularly in urban environments.

Most scholars of Mennonite religion and culture agree that though the Mennonite movement began as a religious one, it developed over time into a historical narrative that became central to an evolving Mennonite ethno-religious culture. Due to Mennonite persecution in Europe and many, many migrations, much of the Mennonite historical narrative details processes whereby the Mennonites became an agrarian, sectarian people, and a people focused on social justice and nonviolence, and the protection and maintenance of a community with distinct gender roles and responsibilities, 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.⁶⁶ In urban settings, even Mennonite creative writing, magazines, films and politics, 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, aspects of Mennonite culture and identity.⁶⁷ Royden Loewen has suggested recently 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

⁶⁶ 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).

⁶⁷ Loewen, "The Poetics of Peoplehood," 338-343.

embraced, yet Mennonite ethnic and religious traditions are critiqued, discarded, or de-emphasized; (2) Mennonite ethnicity is celebrated while substantial disdain is shown 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.⁶⁸ 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 tells of the key theological tenets of Anabaptism, stories of Anabaptist persecution, 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. Yet, in urban settings like Winnipeg, as

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 348-356.

Paul Bramadat and David Seljak suggest about the changing relationship between Christianity and contemporary Canadian religious and ethnic identity, 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 material culture diminishes, or takes away from the emphasis on Anabaptist doctrine as central to Mennonite identity.

The following two chapters will draw attention to the ways these changes are negotiated and talked about among the Manitoba Mennonites who attend St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg.

CHAPTER TWO
CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS IDENTITY
AMONG ST. MARGARET’S MENNONITE PARISHIONERS

Many Mennonite congregations today are hungry for a more authentic faith, a deeper sense of God’s presence in worship, and a clearer understanding of how the gospel matters in daily life. Although the details differ widely, many of those same congregations are tempted by the illusion that this spiritual disquietude can be resolved with a fresh technique, an innovative plan, or a new strategic initiative. Church foyers are filled with glossy brochures for leadership training on transformative mission and seminars offering strategies for reaching the unchurched. Church libraries are stocked with books bearing titles like *The Changing Face of Mission*, *The Seven Habits of a Growing Church*, and *Spirituality for the Busy Believer*. Countless congregations have struggled to retain their young people by introducing new types of music or jazzing up the sermon with clips from recent movies or retrofitting their buildings with coffee shops and fitness centers, in the hopes that being “relevant” to current cultural tastes will generate an authentic spirituality.¹

John D. Roth

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Dr. David Widdicombe, rector of St. Margaret’s Anglican Church in Winnipeg, wrote an article entitled “Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer)” for the Faith & Life section of *Canadian Mennonite Magazine*.² In this article, Widdicombe sets out to address popular discourse in the broader Winnipeg Mennonite community about the growing number of Mennonite worshippers, both young and old, in his congregation. He asks two key questions. First, “Should Mennonites be concerned that some of their people

¹ John D. Roth, *Mennonite Worship and Witness*, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009), 17-8.

² David Widdicombe, “Embracing People of the Book (of Common Prayer),” *Canadian Mennonite Magazine* 11:5 (2007).

are being attracted to a liturgical church?” And, secondly, “Is there anything to be learned here?” In response, perhaps meant mostly to appease the worries of concerned Mennonites, 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,³ “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 suggests more lightheartedly, “every major Canadian city needs at least one large High Church Mennonite Congregation.”⁴

³ Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg*, (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1990), x-xi.

⁴ Widdicombe, “Embracing People of the Book.” 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

On a more serious note, Widdicombe also argues here that denominational loyalty is “a thing of the past,” and that 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, Widdicombe notes, is that the historic liturgies of the church are being increasingly sought after by many Winnipeg Mennonites. More specifically, these liturgies, as part of a more Catholic form of worship, “speak with the authority of the ages” and introduce St. Margaret’s Mennonite 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.” Also, Widdicombe explains, the liturgy at St.

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 to describe Anglican church 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.

Margaret's helps Mennonites "return to the theology and practice of the undivided church."

In an interview with Widdicombe in the summer of 2009, two years after the article discussed above was written, I asked him to comment again on why he thinks Mennonites attend St. Margaret's. He noted several reasons that were echoed by St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners throughout my fieldwork in the parish. "Mennonites are attracted to the liturgy at St. Margaret's" he said. "Many Mennonites are also attracted to the traditional music program of the parish." And, though he also alluded to the fact that [Mennonite] word of mouth about St. Margaret's certainly plays a part in how many Mennonites hear about St. Margaret's, he suggested that "more philosophically one could also speculate about the loss of identity in the urban Anabaptist community."

Most notably it seems Widdicombe's analyses of the situation at St. Margaret's do bring to light the fact that the discovery of or participation in St. Margaret's liturgical forms of worship, as well as the music program, are two of the most frequently cited reasons Mennonites suggest they have become members of the church. Throughout my summer 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 (as he suggests in his article) that because there

are so many Mennonites in Winnipeg, they will inevitably be found in a variety of church communities there, 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."

Widdicombe's reflections aside however, it was during conversations with St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners—about what they love about the church, how they heard about it, and why they continue to attend—that I became most significantly aware of the complex relationship between this denominational change and my informants' ideas about their Mennonite identities. Though I was most often interested in hearing about the ways St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners discussed their religious and ethnic identities in relation to their changing church attendance, I quickly learned that the ways St. Margaret's Mennonites identify themselves and/or describe the changes in their ethno-religious lives was most often secondary to the fact that they attend St. Margaret's because it is a church community in which they feel they have been able to acquire "a more profound sense of worship," can "worship in a truly sacred space," or have "developed a stronger faith." Many also suggested that they attend St. Margaret's because it is a place where they feel "more personally

connected to God” and “theologically engaged” through various church rituals and traditions. In a broad sense, I argue in this chapter that it is important to examine the reasons *why* Mennonites attend St. Margaret’s before discussing, in significant detail, the changes in their ethno-religious identities that have ensued due to their continued attendance and love of the church. This approach helps draw attention to the inter-dynamic process of denominational change. Most importantly, this approach helps draw attention to the fact that some of the changes occurring in Manitoba Mennonite churches and communities, as well as those changes occurring in perceptions of Mennonite identity as a result of processes like denominational change, are inter-dynamic and constantly reinforcing factors.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that together, Widdicombe’s analyses and the stories shared by my informants raise important questions about the causes of denominational switching, the loss of cohesive, urban Mennonite identity, and the growing attraction among Mennonites to liturgical forms of worship. More specifically, in this chapter I look carefully at the reasons why some of my respondents attend St. Margaret’s. Though all of my respondents shared many varying motivations for their attendance, I focus here on the four reasons most frequently addressed in interviews: St. Margaret’s liturgy, music, intellectual approach to the faith, and emphasis on the arts. Central to this chapter therefore, are the life stories of four of St. Margaret’s parishioners (Richard,

Karen, Fiona and Matthew),⁵ for whom one of each of these reasons has been particularly pertinent to their transition out of the Mennonite Church and into St. Margaret's. Finally, this chapter focuses on my respondents' reasons for attending St. Margaret's in light of some of the changes currently shaping Mennonite Church communities in Manitoba and more broadly, in North America. As well, I note how the Anglican tradition, and St. Margaret's more specifically, have dealt with or perhaps avoided some of the suggested "problems" or changes my informants encountered in their former Mennonite congregations.

The conclusion to this chapter introduces, briefly, the central topic of Chapter Three. Here, I draw attention the fact that the majority of my informants maintain their Mennonite identities in several ways, despite becoming Anglican. I discuss the possibility that my informants' knowledge of St. Margaret's through several Mennonite communities in Winnipeg, as well as the feelings of comfort they expressed with regard to the community of Mennonites at St. Margaret's, have been important, although perhaps not explicit guiding forces in their processes of denominational change. With this discussion of the continued presence of Mennonitism in the lives of St. Margaret's Mennonites, and with some speculation about their participation in the formation of a new ethno-religious community, I introduce the complexity of their "Manglican" identities,

⁵ To protect their anonymity, I have changed the names and some identifying features of my respondents.

as well as the questions that emerge, concerning the changing parameters and components of Mennonite identity in Winnipeg.

MEETING ST. MARGARET'S (MENNONITE) PARISHONERS

My first day of official fieldwork at St. Margaret's began on a Sunday in early July, 2009. On that day, I sat in the middle of a pew on the left hand side and close to the back of the small church in a place with an excellent view of the pulpit, in a sunspot and directly underneath the breeze of a whirling ceiling fan. This was the place which would, over the course of the summer, become my regular Sunday morning spot. The young couple who sat to the left of me smiled kindly and said hello, while the older gentleman to my right, helped guide me through the order-of-service once it had begun. Over the course of the service, three parishioners read passages from the New and Old Testaments, four hymns were joyfully sung, and the children filed out and down the basement stairs for their own scheduled time of worship, and then up and in again holding colourful drawings. During the sermon I watched and listened as David Widdicombe, tall on the pulpit, engaged his parishioners with the story of Herod and John the Baptist in the Gospel of Mark.⁶ The intonations of his voice, sometimes playful and at other times serious, were synchronized with the bouts of laughter and moments of quiet and stillness in the pews. Following Widdicombe's twenty-minute sermon, after several hymns were sung and the liturgy was complete, and

⁶ All sermons at St. Margaret's are recorded and later uploaded onto the parish website. This particular sermon can be found here: http://remote.saintmargarets.ca/mp3/clip_594.mp3.

after we had sat and stood and kneeled, the time came for community announcements. Because I was planning on being “a part” of the St. Margaret’s community for the summer, I stood up nervously at the front of the church to introduce myself formally to the congregation, as well as to explain a bit about my project, my connections to the Winnipeg Mennonite world, and my summer-long presence at St. Margaret’s. Not only did I feel this formal introduction would help me make contacts at the church, I also felt it would help bridge the “anthropological gap” between myself and the St. Margaret’s community.

Upon sitting back down, I met Richard Klassen, one of St. Margaret’s Mennonite parishioners, who later became one of my most involved and interested respondents. Reaching back, with a smile and a nod, from two pews ahead of mine, he handed me a white card, printed with his name and contact information, and on which he had handwritten: “Contact me. Formerly of the Mennonite Brethren Church.” The story of Richard’s decision to switch from a Mennonite church into St. Margaret’s, which I heard over coffee a few weeks later, is based on his attraction to the music and choral program at the parish, and his opinion that many Mennonite churches in Winnipeg no longer uphold the traditional music programs that were once so central to Anabaptist communities. His story helped me to understand some of the reasons why the music program at St. Margaret’s is of fundamental importance to the Mennonites who attend the church.

Following the service, an old acquaintance of mine from a class I took at Canadian Mennonite University rushed over to me and re-introduced herself from the parish isle. Soft-spoken and nervous, Fiona Siebert reached out to shake my hand. She did not want to chit chat; she seemed in a hurry. “You can find all my information in the directory,” she said, quickly. “I don’t know if I’d be much help, but you can definitely interview me.” She rushed away, smiling and nervously waving. Though it was not until autumn that I was finally able to track Fiona down, our interview, over breakfast in her Wolseley home, became a significant resource for my understanding of St. Margaret’s emphasis on the visual arts and why this is important for many of the Mennonites who attend the church.

A few moments after I spoke with Fiona, and while trying to stand casually at the back of the church and decide whether or not to leave, I was privileged to meet two more of St. Margaret’ Mennonite parishioners whose stories have also become central to my understanding of some of the reasons why Mennonites attend St. Margaret’s. One of these people was Karen Fransen, who made a point of stopping to welcome me and introduce herself, on her way out of the church. She was wearing a lovely, blue patterned summer dress and her eyes were bright and kind. She took out a pen and wrote down her contact information on my orange order-of-service insert. I later learned that for Karen, St. Margaret’s liturgical worship has been a guiding force in her decision to continue attending the church.

Finally, a man about my age, who did not introduce himself, handed me the contact information of Matthew Bender, a PhD Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He told me that Matthew (a Mennonite) had been a member of St. Margaret's when he lived in Winnipeg and also implied that Matthew would be an excellent person to interview. Once I returned to Ontario at the end of the summer, I contacted Matthew and he enthusiastically answered my interview questions by email. Matthew's responses clarified for me why St. Margaret's emphases on leadership, intellectualism and theological learning have together allowed him to transition easily into an Anglican parish.

The life stories of the first four parishioners I met (or to whom I was introduced) at St. Margaret's became important to my understanding of the diversity of reasons why Mennonites attend this popular, Winnipeg Anglican parish. Therefore, below in four sections, I re-tell some of the stories of Richard, Karen, Fiona and Matthew by focusing on the factors they see as central to decisions to leave their respective Mennonite churches and become members of St. Margaret's. Focusing on the reasons why these parishioners left their respective Mennonite churches and the reasons why they are attracted St. Margaret's also draws attention to the deep complexity of denominational change.⁷ While in some cases, parishioners began attending St. Margaret's in

⁷ There is an extensive body of literature within the social sciences, addressing the phenomenon of denominational switching in a variety of religious traditions. Though I will make reference to some of these studies in this chapter and the next, it is perhaps important to note that they differ vastly from ethnographic works in that the latter have the capacity to address individual peoples' perceptions of their own denominational changes. Sociological or scientific studies most

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 an Anglican parish has seemingly reshaped and reoriented these Mennonites' religious identities.

As Roth points out in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter, 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," many people, like some of the Mennonites at St. Margaret's, leave these modernizing churches in search of faith practices that are 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 each came through in meetings with my informants,

often draw on statistical data detailing numbers of "switchers" and "stayers" and the most common internal and external "predictors" or attitudinal changes among those making such changes. See Sands, Marcus and Danzig, "The Direction of Denominational Switching in Judaism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45:3 (2006): 437-447 and Gay, Lynxwiler and Peek, "The Effects of Switching on Denominational Subcultures," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40:3 (2001): 515-525 for recent examples of the types of statistical research being conducted on "stayers" and "switchers" in North American religious communities.

and have considerably influenced my informants' decisions to join St.

Margaret's.⁸

RICHARD'S STORY: A MENNONITE IN AN ANGLICAN CHURCH CHOIR

I had two meetings with Richard over the summer of 2009. Our first meeting took place in a small coffee shop in East Kildonan, an older, residential area of Winnipeg that has, since 1928, been home to many Mennonites.⁹ Our second meeting, though brief, was at his home in the same area. Richard was extremely enthusiastic about being interviewed. Not only did he telephone me twice to confirm our interview time and place, but during our first meeting, which lasted well over two hours, he launched excitedly into answers for each of my questions with a story about a particular time or event in his life. He was also always eager to make me laugh, offer advice about my thesis, and introduce me and my project to his neighbourhood friends and coffee shop regulars.

During this first meeting, while drinking hot coffee and sitting across from one another at a small table in the corner of the busy coffee shop, Richard told me

⁸ For a discussion of this notion of “the quest for authenticity” both among individuals and among anthropologists, see Ellen Badone, “Crossing Boundaries: Exploring the Borderlands of Ethnography, Tourism, and Pilgrimage,” in Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman eds., *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 180-89. In her chapter, Badone builds upon earlier discussions of authenticity (citing Graburn 1995; MacCannell 1976; Bruner 1991; and Taylor 2001) and argues that authenticity is “not an absolute value but rather a culturally and historically situated ideal that is *believed* to exist by individuals or groups of individuals in specific social settings.” At the same time however, Badone also notes that it is important to remember that “the quest for authenticity can remain a powerful motivating force for on-the-ground behavior...” (182). My own discussion of this “quest for authenticity” among St. Margaret's Mennonites takes seriously Badone's points. I argue therefore, not that St. Margaret's provides its Mennonite parishioners with a more historically accurate or authentic version of Christianity, but that such beliefs among some of my informants have been motivating forces in their decisions to change church communities.

⁹ Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg*, 28-33.

all about his life. I learned that he was born and raised in a small, predominantly Mennonite town in Southern Manitoba, that he “grew up” attending a Mennonite church, was baptized in this church at the age of fifteen, that he has been married for forty years, and that has two grown children who were also was raised and baptized as young adults in a Mennonite church in Winnipeg. I learned that he met his wife (or the young woman who would later become his wife) in the ninth grade at their town’s local bible school, that he worked for much of his adult life as a teacher and though he is retired now, Richard occasionally does some supply teaching. I also learned, when talking more about his religious life, that though Richard considers himself a Mennonite, he has, for many years, had a difficult time finding a Mennonite church and a church community in which he feels “spiritually at home.”

Despite Richard’s difficulty with finding a supportive and spiritually enriching Mennonite church community, there are many things about himself and his life that he was quick to identify as Mennonite. “I am quite proud of my Mennonite background,” he said during our interview, grinning. Not only is Richard a descendent of Russian Mennonite immigrants, but his life has been “heavily influenced by both Mennonite culture and religion.” Throughout our interview, Richard spoke about the influence of Mennonite church doctrine and the wider Mennonite church community on his upbringing. Though nobody in his direct family “ever had to choose conscientious objection,” he noted, they (as a family) lived “a non-conformative life,” practiced pacifism and advocated the

practice of adult baptism. He and his siblings were also educated at a popular Mennonite bible school, his mother cooked “wonderful Mennonite food,” and his wife, who is apparently a “very, very good cook,” also cooks Mennonite meals. As well, Richard and his wife spent some years doing voluntary service work for the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Pennsylvania. He also recognizes that the decision he and his wife made to live in the East Kildonan area of Winnipeg was influenced by the fact that there are several Mennonite churches nearby, and by the fact that there are a large number of Mennonites living in the area. Yet, when I asked Richard whether he identifies himself as a Mennonite, based on all these “Mennonite things” in his life, but also given of his present (Anglican) church community, his answer was complicated.

R: You see, Susie, in my family life, my marital life and my home devotional life I do consider myself a Mennonite. I really do. I still hold to Mennonite doctrine.

S: And what about in your public life? How might you identify yourself to strangers, for example?

R: Well, to strangers I would say I was a Mennonite. Or, no. You know, I would say, and what I think I’ve said before, is that I am a Mennonite who attends an Anglican church. [Long pause] In reality, I guess that makes me a non-active Mennonite. I suppose I’m not really a Mennonite if I don’t participate as a member of a Mennonite congregation.

Just as he had indicated in the brief note on the business card he gave to me on my first official fieldwork day at St. Margaret’s, Richard considers himself to be a “former member” of the Mennonite church. And, while he recognizes that that this change in church affiliation has not affected every facet of his Mennonite life and identity, it has indeed altered the way he talks and thinks about the completeness of his Mennonite identity.

Richard's decision to begin attending St. Margaret's was brought on by a few key life experiences. Namely, Richard discussed his time as a volunteer for MCC in Pennsylvania, and being encouraged by a friend to begin attending a charismatic church, which fostered his desire to try new churches and different denominations later in life. Though Richard enjoyed the different worship style and character of this charismatic church, he soon became "disillusioned with [his] faith and with Christianity," more generally. This time of disillusionment began when he met and befriended several "drug-addicted people filled with hurt" through his MCC work. At this time, Richard "went against the church"; he no longer read the Bible and he found it difficult to pray.

A few years later, however, upon returning to Manitoba, and with the encouragement of his father and wife, Richard began attending a Mennonite church once again. He continued to attend this church for many years, until various changes in this church's organization and church community forced him to seek out a place "more suitable for his spiritual life." When I asked Richard about the changes he thought were occurring in this Mennonite church, he noted that there seemed to be a fixation on the preservation of Mennonite life, ethnicity and tradition (or a lack of open-mindedness about incorporating changes that would help include people from other backgrounds). Simultaneously however, there was a concern with adapting the church worship style and structure (through the incorporation of a rock band and a decrease in singing traditional worship songs from the Mennonite hymnal and the choir program) to meet the needs of

young Mennonites. According to Richard, “traditional, Mennonite music”¹⁰ and participation in Mennonite church choirs have been central to his most positive and moving worship experiences in the Mennonite church, and thus the latter of the two changes occurring in this Mennonite church was particularly pertinent to Richard’s desire to seek a change in church community. Though the traditional music program at this Mennonite church changed slowly over many years, Richard eventually felt that he needed to find a church where he could participate in a choir and worship by singing hymns in a more “traditional” way.

Accordingly, Richard began attending St. Margaret’s in 2006. “I came to St. Margaret’s because of what I had heard from some friends about the music and the choirs,” he said. “I joined the choir very early on; almost immediately after I began attending. I love the choice of hymns each service, and I love singing in the choir. I find the music to be religiously moving,” Richard further explained. And, though there are several things about St. Margaret’s that Richard wishes he could change, or about which he feels the need to “hold his nose,” he continues to attend St. Margaret’s because of the beautiful music and the opportunity to participate in a church choir. “It is important for me to be in a choir. It is important for me to sing. This church has really been a godsend.”

¹⁰ See Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver, eds., *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music* (Kitchner: Pandora Press, 2005) for several discussions of the difficulty of defining “Mennonite music” and the broad and changing meanings associated with the term.

**MY LIFE FLOWS ON IN ENDLESS SONG (HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SINGING):¹¹
MUSIC AND RICHARD'S RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

Like many of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners, Richard spoke continually about the importance of music, or more specifically "traditional music," to his religious life and identity. Through these references, it became clear to me that the opportunities Richard and others have been given to participate in a choir and sing "traditional" hymns at St. Margaret's have been central to their decisions to continue attending this Anglican parish. But, where does this deep attraction to music come from? What does Richard mean when he speaks about "traditional music"? Why, for Richard, is "traditional music" a central component of Christian worship? And, finally, how has Richard's involvement in the music program at St. Margaret's aided him in the (re)construction of his religious identity?

For many Canadian Mennonites, and especially for older Mennonites like Richard, "traditional Mennonite music" refers to four-part, a cappella hymn singing and the prominence of music from either the *Mennonite Hymnal* or *Hymnal: A Worship Book* in Sunday morning church services.¹² Though some Mennonites suggest that this definition of Mennonite music is problematic and overlooks new "Mennonite music," (such as the growing tradition of Mennonite artists who write and perform folk or rock music, or the new collection of "world

¹¹ This particular hymn, though not of Mennonite origin, is perhaps one of the most popular hymns in Mennonite communities. This hymn is sung at Mennonite funerals, weddings, and quite frequently on Sunday mornings. See *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottsdale, Herald Press: 1992), 580.

¹² Maureen Epp, "Introduction," in Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver, eds., *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2005), 9.

music” hymns used in many Mennonite congregations today), most Mennonites would agree that traditional choral music and four-party, harmonious hymn singing have traditionally been of great significance to Mennonite life and worship. In a recent collection of essays addressing the relationship between Mennonites and music, Katie J. Graber even suggests that singing, discourse about singing, and community acknowledgement of the importance of the hymnal are factors that together generate a definition of “Mennonite-ness,” or Mennonite identity.¹³ As Graber here more broadly indicates, hymns and hymn singing have both historical and contemporary significance in Anabaptist-Mennonite communities. Not only has hymn singing been central to Anabaptist worship and identity since the time of the Reformation, when small groups of Anabaptists worshiped and sang hymns in secluded forests and caves to avoid persecution, but music and hymn singing remain important parts of education, worship, and home life in many Mennonite communities.¹⁴

However, just as Richard described in our interview and as John D. Roth notes in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter, music and traditional hymn singing in Mennonite churches are indeed changing. Whether rock bands are

¹³ Katie J. Graber, “Identity and the Hymnal: Can Music Make a Person Mennonite?” in Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver, eds., *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2005), 64-80.

¹⁴ See for example <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/events/past.htm>. The Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools (CAMS) holds a music festival in a different Canadian city every four years. Students from Mennonite schools across Canada travel to participate in a mass choir concert that is recorded on CD’s and then distributed for purchase to Mennonite churches and community organizations. Participation in a school choir and music theory classes is also often mandatory at Mennonite schools in Canada. As well, in many Canadian Mennonite families it is customary to sing grace before eating. These short songs are often beautifully sung in four-part harmony.

being formed to lead new songs and forms of worship music, or whether instruments like guitars, violins, hand drums and keyboards are introduced to guide the singing of traditional hymns, four-part a cappella hymn singing and choirs in many Mennonite churches, are becoming less and less common, much to the dismay of many Mennonites. In search of “traditional music” or music that is more “authentically Christian,” many Mennonites like Richard are beginning to seek out church communities in which they can participate in choirs and wherein there is an emphasis on hymn singing (with little to no instrumental interjection). In her article “Why are Mennonite Brethren Joining Liturgical Churches,”¹⁵ Dorothy Siebert, whose Mennonite sons attend St. Margaret’s, explains that when she was young, singing in the Mennonite church choir was a “rite of passage for every member.” Yet, as she further explains, “when [the church] modernized with worship teams, church choirs became obsolete. Now the pendulum swings back.” Like Dorothy’s sons, Richard enjoys attending St. Margaret’s because of the church’s “traditional” music program. As was revealed in several of my interviews, and according to Rector David Widdicombe, this passion for music is a common reason why many Mennonites quickly feel at home in an Anglican church.

Notably, choral music and hymn singing in church have also long been central parts of Anglican worship. In A.M. Allchin’s study “Anglican

¹⁵ Dorothy Siebert, “Why are Mennonite Brethren Joining Liturgical Churches?” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 43:1 (2004).

Spirituality” for example, he notes that Anglican theologian Richard Hooker, in praise of musical worship, insisted that

it is the whole man who is caught up into this activity of worship, not heart alone, nor mind and will alone, but all together in a movement in which the body and sense have their part...[Music] touches the heights of the spirit by touching the senses and emotions. It stoops to our bodily nature in order to arrive at the inmost secrets of our spiritual being.¹⁶

Thus, in line with this thinking and with the guidance and leadership of Ruth Widdicombe (a woman of Mennonite background and the wife of Rector David Widdicombe) St. Margaret’s choirs and hymn singing are considered by parishioners to be a central component of worship, ministry and community identity at St. Margaret’s. More specifically, under the heading “Worship” on the St. Margaret’s website it is suggested that, “[m]uch of what makes St. Margaret’s worship service distinctive is the great depth and breadth of the music. [It is] the beauty of our songs that lift our voices to heaven weekly.”¹⁷

Richard’s participation in the St. Margaret’s church community has fulfilled (at least, for the time being) his spiritual longing for traditional choral music and hymn singing as part of his weekly community worship experience. For Richard, the “traditional” music program at St. Margaret’s (that is, the singing of four-part harmonies and classic hymns) has allowed him access to what he considers to be a more “authentic,” form of Christian worship, perhaps because of his upbringing in a Mennonite Brethren church, household and community. Both

¹⁶ A.M. Allchin, “Anglican Spirituality,” in Stephen Sykes and John Booty, eds. *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1988), 320.

¹⁷ St. Margaret’s Anglican Church, “Worship,” <http://www.saintmargarets.ca/worship-...rooted-in-liturgical-worship/>.

his attendance at St. Margaret's and participation in Anglican worship rituals have contributed to Richard's realization of the significance of music to his religious identity. Richard's involvement in St. Margaret's Anglican Church has also helped him to think more specifically about the components of his Mennonite identity and how attending an Anglican church has reshaped his religious identity. As our extended first interview conversation revealed, there is much about Richard and his life that remains Mennonite, despite his not being completely certain whether he is a practicing Anglican or a "non-practicing Mennonite." Our second meeting, which took place briefly in Richard's home while I dropped off a book he had loaned me over the summer, also revealed the continued influence of Mennonite traditions in his life; while peering into his cozy living room I noticed the Mennonite hymnal open and well-worn on his piano. Yet, as Mennonite churches incorporate new music types, and as some Mennonites like Richard, find changes like these to be spiritually dissatisfying, alternative churches are sought out, and Mennonite identities seem to change (even if ever so slightly) alongside these transitions into new church communities.

KAREN'S STORY: DRAWN TO LITURGICAL WORSHIP

I did not have the chance meet with Karen Fransen for an extended period of time, while I was conducting fieldwork at St. Margaret's. Though I chatted with her after a few Sunday services, her summer schedule during most weeks was filled with travel plans, cottage time, weddings and work. Fortunately however, Karen was more than willing to answer my interview questions in

writing. She took the time to answer each question by email with great care and detail, and was always happy to clarify her answers on Sunday mornings or by telephone.

Karen, age 54, was born and raised in Winnipeg. She works part time as a tutor, has a degree in Education from the University of Manitoba, and has been married for thirty-one years. Though she was born to Irish/Scottish/English/French/German parents, she was adopted and raised by “Soviet-born Germanic Mennonite” parents. Despite being adopted into a Mennonite family, she identifies her upbringing and background as Mennonite; “I was raised Mennonite in name, and largely in practice,” she wrote. Karen grew up attending a large Mennonite church in Winnipeg, and it was here that she was baptized at the age of seventeen. While she was growing up, her parents promoted Anabaptist ideals, (though she noted that some of these ideals, like non-materialism, were not always rigidly upheld). Her mother prepared and cooked many Mennonite foods, and their family was surrounded and supported by an extensive Mennonite community. “My parents had no atheist friends and very few Catholic friends,” she noted more specifically. “Everyone we knew was Mennonite.” Karen also married a Mennonite man, and they raised their two children (who are now adults) in a Mennonite church and community. Karen and her husband have many, close Mennonite friends, and their family retains many Mennonite traditions and food habits. Not only does Karen’s family open Christmas presents and sing their favorite Mennonite hymns on Christmas Eve (a

Germanic-Mennonite tradition) and sing their favorite Mennonite hymns, but she and her daughter also make a point of baking Mennonite cookies and breads on special “church year” occasions like Christmas and Easter. Karen also feels committed to pacifist ideals and is only just beginning to understand the theological justification for infant baptism. Yet, while there seem to be many distinctly Mennonite parts of her family life, history and identity, Karen described that over the past six years, there has been a marked decline, or loss in the number of Mennonite traditions and practices in her life. “Since my parents died,” she wrote, “there has been a substantial loss of Mennonite tradition for my family. But, this seems to have had as much to do with my parents’ deaths as my move to the Anglican church, which happened between their deaths,” she wrote.

During the emotionally difficult time following her father’s death and her mother’s slow demise, Karen felt she needed to find a church and church community where she could “get a sense of worship, a sense of family and belonging, intellectual and spiritual stimulation, comfort, [and] strength to continue being Christian in an increasingly secular world.” All of this was missing from my Mennonite church,” she wrote.

I used to leave church angry so much of the time because of [peoples’] bickering, gossiping and focus on coffee time and clothes and expensive houses and vacations. The lack of adherence to Mennonite principles, or in fact Christian principles was very disturbing to me. The lack of compassion for other people, the cliqueishness etc. interfered with my ability to worship and be fed spiritually. I needed a new start.

Unhappy with her longtime Mennonite church, and in search of a new church and church community, Karen and her daughter (age 30) began attending St.

Margaret's together, where they enthusiastically experienced and embraced new, rich worship traditions and a new community of Christians. Today, both Karen and her daughter have become confirmed Anglicans. "I define myself as Anglican," wrote Karen. "On my last hospital bracelet it even stated Anglican for my religion." In particular, Karen was attracted to St. Margaret's liturgical worship, and it is predominantly because of the "spiritually fulfilling liturgy" that she decided to become confirmed, and continues to attend St. Margaret's today. "I attend St. Margaret's because of the liturgy; it's the sense of worship, the frequency of the Eucharist [and] the hymns." Karen wrote. "My priest [David Widdicombe] says that the most important reason to attend church is to worship. That was missing from my last church and is very present here [at St. Margaret's]."

THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE: LITURGICAL WORSHIP AND KAREN'S RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Etymologically, the term liturgy stems from the Greek words *leit*, public, and *ergon*, to work, and thus refers specifically to "the work of the people."¹⁸ Though Anglican Church history has been characterized by Protestant liturgical reforms since its denominational beginnings in the 1530's, Anglicanism is considered today to be one of the few liturgically-based Christian traditions,

¹⁸ Katherine Barber, ed., "Liturgy," in *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 838.

unlike the Anabaptist traditions.¹⁹ That is, similar to worship in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, Anglican worship is centered on the liturgy, or the prescribed patterns, forms, music, texts and words through which public worship is carried out.²⁰ However, Anglicanism itself still maintains marked theological differences from Catholicism and Orthodoxy. According to one scholar of Anglicanism, the liturgy is particularly central to the Anglican experience and understanding of the Gospel. As a gathered and common act of worship, participation in the disciplinary action of the liturgy, according to Louis Weil helps parishioners to “*celebrate the faith.*”

[The liturgy] lifts it up through words and signs in a corporate experience which expresses the faith which has summoned the people to gather. Yet it also nourishes that faith, and sends the people forth to live it in their daily lives. It is a transforming experience... a common act of praise and participation in the Trinity.²¹

Anglican liturgy also differs minimally between congregations around the world. Though some parishes use different liturgical resources, many Anglicans describe participation in the liturgy as a feeling of being in one, big worship community; the liturgy, for many people, seems to exist across both time and place.²² The liturgy most often includes several opening prayers, the Lord’s Prayer, the

¹⁹ Bryan D. Spinks, “Anglicans and Dissenters,” in Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 492.

²⁰ William P. Haugaard, “From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century,” in Stephen Sykes and John Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: Fortress Press, 1988), 22.

²¹ Louis Weil, “The Gospel in Anglicanism,” in Stephen Sykes and John Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: Fortress Press, 1988), 55-6.

²² Anglican church of Canada, “Liturgy,” <http://www.anglican.ca>.

Eucharist,²³ slow, harmonious, prayerful chanting, a series of movements (standing, kneeling, sitting), and a series of scripture readings.

Like the majority of Canadian Anglican churches, St. Margaret's is consciously "rooted in liturgical worship."²⁴ What is more, according to the St. Margaret's website, the liturgy is particularly central to the congregation's worship experience as a whole, for it is "the communal participation in Christ's own prayer addressed to the Father in the Holy Spirit."²⁵ Though the celebration of the Eucharist rotates between the Sunday morning and evening services, and though on special occasions a different service proper (order of service) is used, the liturgy at St. Margaret's remains the same each service, but for the inclusion of different songs and bible passages. Many parishioners, like Karen, whose Mennonite church background did not include the participation in consistent, structured, liturgical worship, perceive the liturgy as the central, most enjoyable part of their worship experience at St. Margaret's. Throughout my time at St. Margaret's the liturgy was also often cited by Mennonite parishioners as the primary reason they continue to attend the church. "It is so refreshing to be in a

²³ In all Christian denominations, the Eucharist, or Holy Communion commemorates the bible's retelling of Jesus and his disciples' Last Supper. All baptized Christians are normally invited to partake in drinking a sip of wine and eating a small piece of bread in remembrance of Jesus' blood and body. Though the majority of churches celebrate the Eucharist at least once, weekly, Mennonite churches celebrate only a handful of times each year, fearing that rituals become meaningless if practiced too often. Catholics believe that the bread and wine taken during the Eucharist miraculously turns into Jesus' body and blood once ingested. This concept is known as transubstantiation. Protestants take the bread and wine simply as symbols of Jesus' body and blood.

²⁴ St. Margaret's Anglican Church, "Worship," <http://www.saintmargarets.ca/worship-...rooted-in-liturgical-worship/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

church community where the overall spirit stays the same. The liturgy abides,” wrote Karen.

In particular, it is the frequency of the Eucharist, as part of the liturgy, which has been especially pertinent to Karen’s decision to continue attending St. Margaret’s. In response to one of my interview questions Karen wrote: “I was told in my Mennonite church that having Communion so often would make it meaningless and empty. In fact, the reverse has been true. The more often I have it, the more I want it. It refreshes me and sets me back on the road and feeds my soul.”

Matthew Bender, another parishioner at St. Margaret’s, suggests in an article written by his mother for the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* that the attraction of Mennonites to liturgical churches is based on “the historical link that a liturgical church has with the past.” Roman Catholic church liturgy is thought to be the closest to early Christian practice. While the Anabaptist tradition broke away from this historical continuity some Mennonites, like St. Margaret’s Mennonites, are returning to what they perceive to be the closest Protestant version of the Catholic liturgy. His mother, Dorothy Siebert, writes that for Matthew “the liturgy and early church doctrine provide a ‘deeper foundation’ for his beliefs than an ‘arbitrary selection’ of biblical passages.” “Ironically,” she continues, “although our forefathers rejected liturgy as too restrictive, it is in liturgical churches that some Mennonites find greater freedom.” Based on further interviews, Siebert also notes that many Mennonites who have joined liturgical

churches (Anglican, Orthodox and Catholic churches) “feel less pressure to conform; the emphasis [in these churches] is on the sacrament²⁶ and not on a covenant²⁷ to which one has to adhere in order to belong,” as it is in Mennonite churches.²⁸

As can be noted from Siebert’s article, the Mennonites at St. Margaret’s are not the only Mennonites in Winnipeg seeking church communities centered on, or structured by liturgical worship practices. While conducting fieldwork at St. Margaret’s over the summer of 2009, I was also introduced to a group of Mennonites in the beginning stages of developing the first liturgical Mennonite church in the city; I was fortunate to meet with a small group of the church’s founding/ development committee in late July.

In the sunny, inner city living room of founding member Stephen Nighswander-Rempel, over iced tea and chocolate chip cookies, the development committee members spoke to me passionately about the “need” in the Manitoba Mennonite world for renewed Mennonite worship practices. More specifically, the group suggested that there is an attraction among many Mennonites to worship with a liturgical influence. Based on their observations, they have come

²⁶ In the Anglican church, as in other Protestant churches, the two central sacraments are baptism and The Lord’s Supper or celebration of the Eucharist. A sacrament is something which is believed to have been instituted by Jesus and which symbolizes grace and possesses mysterious significance. For a discussion of “Sacramental Theology” see The Anglican Church of Canada, “Sacramental Theology,” <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/relationships/sbr/11.htm>.

²⁷ According to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, “Covenant Theology,” http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/covenant_theology, a Covenant in the Mennonite church is the voluntary covenant or agreement made that the believer enters into with God at the time of baptism. Baptism is a symbol of this covenant as opposed to a sacrament.

²⁸ Siebert, “Why are Mennonite Brethren Joining Liturgical Churches?”

up with three questions central to their discussions about the development of a liturgical Mennonite church. These are: “What does liturgical mean?” “What is the attraction?” and “How can liturgical practices enhance [Mennonites’] worship experiences?” Broadly, the group argues that development of liturgical worship services rooted in Mennonite theology and history will address a growing “spiritual need” in the broader Manitoba Mennonite world, prevent spiritually unsatisfied members from leaving the church, create consistency in worship experiences and resources, and allow Mennonites to develop a greater sense of Christian history and continuity. More specifically however, the development committee hopes that “creat[ing] a space for contemplation and spiritual nurture through the consistent use of ritual, silence, and celebration of the Lord’s Supper,” that is publically supported by Mennonite Church Manitoba, will allow Mennonites to bridge the gap between “the ancient church, contemporary ideas of worship and Anabaptist theology.”²⁹ Though early Anabaptists rejected the sacramental practices of infant baptism, institutional hierarchy and the celebration of the Eucharist by an ordained priest, and though many Mennonites have since become skeptical about formal liturgical rituals, some Mennonite congregations have tried to revitalize community worship by implementing some “high church” worship practices. According to John D. Roth, “these congregations tend to structure their worship themes around the common lectionary readings and the liturgical seasons of the church year. They often incorporate art and dance in to

²⁹ Winnipeg Liturgical Mennonite Church, “Home,” <http://www.wlmc.ca/index/html>.

the worship space and may supplement their hymns with music from the Taizé or the Iona communities.”³⁰ While these liturgical or “high church” initiatives have often met conflict and resistance within Mennonite communities, Roth further notes that “the intensity of debate in many Mennonite congregations over what happens on Sunday morning is an indication that something important is at stake.”³¹

Nonetheless, *Winnipeg Liturgical Mennonite Church* (WLMC) has, since my meeting with the development committee last summer, been incorporated into the wider conference of Manitoba Mennonite Churches, or is supported by Mennonite Church Manitoba, and has a growing number of regularly-attending parishioners.³² The church website suggests that the community as a whole is “open to learning from other Christian traditions,” but also that members are “committed to understanding themselves as Anabaptists.” Most importantly however, the church, which is run for the time being out of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, offers monthly worship services “rooted in church history and liturgy.” These services are structured by “one main service

³⁰ John D. Roth, *Mennonite Worship and Witness*, 67. See also <http://www.taize.fr/> for a detailed description of the Taizé Community in Burgundy, France. This is a monastic community of both Protestant and Catholic individuals, with a strong commitment to bringing about peace and justice through meditation and prayer. Many people visit the Taizé Community each year to participate in communal work, Bible study and prayer. See <http://www.iona.org.uk/> for a detailed description of the Iona Community, which like the Taizé Community, is an ecumenical Christian community which promotes peace and justice by way of worship. The Iona Community is Iona Community is located in Scotland.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Though WLMC is the first liturgical Mennonite congregation within the conference of Manitoba Mennonite churches, the incorporation of liturgical Mennonite churches into other provincial conferences is a growing trend. See <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/links/area.htm> for a comprehensive list of Mennonite churches in Canada, including several liturgically-centered churches.

liturgy, which is customized slightly for each service, and based on the week's lectionary readings."³³ According to the WLMC website, the services are designed based on four practices, all of which are not typically found in Canadian Mennonite churches: (1) a contemplative atmosphere which aids worshippers in experiencing calm and reflection; (2) physical movement—sitting, standing and kneeling—that allows parishioners to better engage in the content of the worship experience, thus heightening their spiritual and theological understanding; (3) repetition of prayers, poems and songs that allows deeper weekly/monthly reflection on the words being said and commits them to memory; (4) increased opportunity for worshippers to take Communion. The frequency of the Eucharist gives Mennonites “more opportunities to spend a few moments at the threshold of the most intimate connection to [their] faith, that is, the intersection of individual and community, history and future, earthly and divine, worshipper and God.”³⁴ With these four practices, WMLC aims to attract Mennonites who are seeking liturgical worship, and reincorporate those Mennonites who have left the wider Mennonite church to find it. “Ideally it would be great to work with St. Margaret's priest, David Widdicombe,” said one member of the WMLC development committee. “He won't return our calls though. I mean, it's understandable. His church is thriving. Why would he want to risk losing his new members?”

³³ Winnipeg Liturgical Mennonite Church, “Who We Are.”

³⁴ Ibid.

Nearing the end of the summer and the end of my fieldwork at St. Margaret's, I had a brief chat with Karen after a Sunday morning service. I asked her if she would ever consider joining a liturgical Mennonite church, based on her expressed love of liturgy, her Mennonite background and my new knowledge of the beginnings of WMLC. "No," she said immediately. "I can imagine that some people who have left would go back to a liturgical Mennonite church, but I won't. I have a new home," she said, smiling. Like Richard and his love of St. Margaret's traditional music program, Karen's attraction to liturgical worship has fostered her transition out of a Mennonite church and into an Anglican parish. Karen's experiences at St. Margaret's have been life-changing; not only has her decision to attend St. Margaret's allowed her to re-think her religious identity, but she has committed formally to the Anglican Church through the Anglican ritual of confirmation. Though her upbringing in a Mennonite Brethren household still influences, in part, her family and community life, these influences no longer dictate Karen's religious identity. Over the last six years of attending St. Margaret's Karen has developed "a greater understanding of what it means to be Mennonite." She wrote, "Mennonite customs are not a faith identity; one does not imply the other."

FIONA'S STORY: LEARNING TO APPRECIATE BEAUTY AND EXPERIENCING HEALING AT ST. MARGARET'S

I interviewed Fiona on a Saturday morning in October 2009, while on a short trip to Winnipeg. We met for breakfast at her house in Wolseley, just a few

blocks away from St. Margaret's. While Fiona prepared a pot of tea in the kitchen, we stood and talked casually about her character home, her roommate and her roommate's dog, and how funny it was that I recognized so many of the (Mennonite) people in various pictures on her fridge. Fiona and I share several Winnipeg acquaintances, and we once took a course together in university. Fiona's kitchen felt homey and familiar with the smell of warm cinnamon buns from the local Wolseley bakery, three popular Mennonite cook books stacked on the island, and with a Ten Thousand Villages³⁵ "How to Build Community" poster hanging on the door leading to the basement stairs.

We drank tea and ate our breakfast together in the dining room. Having asked for the interview questions ahead of time, and having thought a great deal about the questions that were most relevant to her story, Fiona directed our conversation with soft-spoken honesty and ease. We sat for a long time in her dimly-lit dining room and I learned a great deal about Fiona's life and her more recent struggles with both her Mennonite and Christian identity.

Fiona was born in Bangladesh, where she lived until the age of six, while her Canadian Mennonite parents completed their two-term MCC assignment. Following these years of service in Bangladesh, her parents decided to return to Abbotsford, BC where they raised their three children, (Fiona has two sisters), in a Mennonite Brethren church and community. Fiona was baptized as an adult at

³⁵ Ten Thousand Villages gift stores are the initiative of Mennonite Central Committee. The stores aim to sell only fair trade items from around the world, and many of the proceeds go the Mennonite Central Committee. See <http://www.tenthousandvillages.ca/> for further information.

her parents' cottage in British Columbia, her mother cooked many traditional Mennonite foods, and her family continued to be involved in MCC through various community assignments. Though during our interview Fiona recalled several stretches of time when her family did not attend church due to her mother's "disillusionment with the church as an institution," she now claims that these times of absence from the church were "harder on me than I had initially thought." After graduating from high school therefore, Fiona moved to Winnipeg, eagerly seeking out a new Mennonite church community, and hoped she would find it while pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at the newly developed Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). Today, Fiona is employed at a Family Centre in Winnipeg, which works predominantly with local Aboriginal and Métis mothers who struggle to meet their children's needs due to poverty, abuse, and/or poor mental or physical health. Though she attends St. Margaret's Anglican Church, Fiona does still identify with her ethnic Mennonite background. She continues to cook Mennonite food, and feels her choice of job relates to the importance of social justice instilled in her by her Mennonite parents and community. However, since her father has Dutch background, she has found this aspect of her ethnic identity to be increasingly more important since she "strayed from the Mennonite church."

Fiona discussed three periods of time in her life that ultimately led to her decision to attend St. Margaret's. The first coincided with her family's decision to stop attending church around the time of her highschool graduation and her

associated decision to attend CMU. The next critical period was associated with the death of her cousin in British Columbia, and third with the death of a friend in Winnipeg.

Though Fiona sought a positive spiritual change in her decision to attend a Christian university in Winnipeg, she found her time at CMU to be a “huge challenge.” Not only did she struggle quite seriously with her mental health during these first years in university (Fiona has been diagnosed more recently with bi-polar disorder), she also found CMU to be a “hostile environment.” “I had trouble fitting in,” she said. “I had trouble making friends too, and I felt excluded from the Mennonite cliques.” Throughout her time at CMU, Fiona also had difficulty finding a church community that was the “right fit” for her spiritual needs. Though Fiona tried both General Conference and Mennonite Brethren churches in Winnipeg, as well as Baptist, Pentecostal, Alliance and Evangelical Mennonite churches, none of these churches felt right for her. Eventually, Fiona decided to try a different Christian university in Alberta. Yet, after a series of negative experiences at this school, she made up her mind to finish her degree at CMU in Winnipeg.

Accompanying her decision to return to CMU, Fiona made more of a conscious effort to develop positive relationships with a few of her professors. It was these professors, who are members of and involved in St. Margaret’s, who encouraged Fiona, “disillusioned with her faith” at the time, to begin attending the parish. “Ironically, it was my experience at a Mennonite university that led me to

the Anglican Church,” said Fiona. And, though Fiona only attended St. Margaret’s casually in the beginning, it was after the deaths of her cousin and friend that she found great and meaningful solace in the Anglican Church. It was at her friend’s funeral, which took place at another Anglican Church in Winnipeg, where Fiona realized the power and beauty of the Anglican liturgy and the depth of the scripture-based sermon. “The funeral absolutely blew me away,” explained Fiona. As well, following the death of her cousin and her subsequent move to the Wolseley area following her graduation from CMU, Fiona began attending St. Margaret’s more regularly and joined a grief group, led by a former Mennonite. This group “engaged [her] more with St. Margaret’s,” and the group’s leader became like Fiona’s “dad away from home.”

Fiona has been attending St. Margaret’s regularly for about five years. “I felt immediately welcome into St. Margaret’s,” she said. Though the change in denomination was difficult for her mother, father and sisters to accept (one of her sisters is a pastor in a Mennonite Church), they have come to appreciate that Fiona’s “spiritual growth,” which came as a result of this change, has been a “positive and healthy influence” in her life. Fiona now refers to herself as an Anglican, and finds that the Eucharist has become central to her identity as a Christian. She also feels that “St. Margaret’s is a wonderful place to ask tough questions about faith, God and herself.” More particularly, it is St. Margaret’s Art and Worship Committee that has made Fiona’s experience of St. Margaret’s a

“life changing” one. She has learned to “appreciate beauty,” and to recognize that her artistic talents and faith can be united through worship.

**ST. MARGARET’S, ART AND WORSHIP:
ART AS A CENTRAL FEATURE OF FIONA’S RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

Many of the parishioners at St. Margaret’s with whom I spoke expressed a sense of happiness with regards to the emphasis on the arts within their church community. These parishioners also frequently suggested that that the character of the Wolseley neighbourhood (known to be an especially artistic community) has a direct influence on the artistic attitude of the church. That is, reflecting the character of the Wolseley neighbourhood, St. Margaret’s is a church “passionately interested in the arts and it is also a church which has a tendency to attract artists.”³⁶ Yet, as St. Margaret’s is a church community filled with parishioners interested in the arts, questions are often discussed such as “How is art to be dealt with in the Church?” and “What does it mean for the Church to encourage and support its artists?” as well as “How can those artists both maintain artistic integrity and reflect in a real way the faith of their baptism?”³⁷

Through the Art and Worship Committee, for example, or by way of inviting St. Margaret’s artists to showcase their talents on the church website, in parish publications and on church event advertisements, St. Margaret’s

³⁶André Forget, “Uncertain Art and Faithful Uncertainty,” in *Via Media: A Journal of St. Margaret’s Anglican Church* 3(2010), <http://viamedia.saintmargarets.ca/editorial-uncertain-art-and-faithful-uncertainty/>.

³⁷Ibid.

encourages the unification of artistic talent and faith among parishioners.³⁸ For Fiona, the Art and Worship Committee has been an important and expressive venue for her interest in pastels, but also healing, spiritual growth, and religious learning. After Fiona and I had finished breakfast during our interview, she pulled out a folder from under her chair, which contained several beautiful, abstract pastel drawings. Handing me one piece after the other she said,

Most Mennonite churches I've been to are bland and simplistic; art and beauty are not considered part of worship at Mennonite churches. At St. Margaret's, beauty and art have become so important to worship for me. I find that they are connected to the liturgy, and that art was important to my healing after my friend and my cousin both died. It was really the Art and Worship Committee that opened up a new space for me to express myself and my faith, and I have learned that making art can be meditative and worship-like. It's been really life-changing.

Fiona, like many parishioners at St. Margaret's continues to cultivate her artistic talent by attending art workshops at St. Margaret's, where she learns new patterns and techniques for creating artwork and combining such techniques with prayer and reflection. She finds that creating art is "calming and meditative," and appreciates that the St. Margaret's community places great value on art as a form of worship, and incorporates beauty into worship practices, both of which were not the case at her former Mennonite Church. According to Fiona, learning to worship in an artful way has become a practice that pulls her out periods of depression and anxiety. She also appreciates that St. Margaret's has hosted an "artist in residence" in the past, that great care is taken to ensure the Eucharist

³⁸ As I found while conducting fieldwork at St. Margaret's over the summer of 2009, it is common for parishioners to have artistic talents. Not only are there are two published poets, several professional photographers, as well as potters and painters, but many others, like Fiona, maintain artistic hobbies in their free or meditative time, or have become "more artistic" since becoming members of St. Margaret's.

table is decorated beautifully, that vases full of flowers often decorate the piano and altar and that parishioners' art is showcased in community events and on the church website.

In a recent issue of *Via Media*, an online journal of St. Margaret's Anglican Church which "seeks to...encourage the church community to wrestle with its understanding of what it means to be a people of faith through critical dialogue," questions about the relationship between faith and art are explored by St. Margaret's members in poems, essays and paintings. This issue allows for further theological reflection on Fiona's discussion of the relationship between art and faith or worship. To preface the issue's overarching discussion, Editor André Forget points out that the work of art seems to be similar to the work of the church, for both depend on surrender; while the artist surrenders their complete creative power over their work, the church must surrender control over its own destiny. Accordingly, Forget further suggests that if the work of both art and the church depend on surrender,

[T]he discipline of art, then, is similar to the discipline of faith. Although the culture in which we live frequently pits art and faith against each other—suggesting that art is new, adventurous and uncertain and faith is dogmatic, proscribed and settled—this is perhaps a result of the Church's failure to be itself. Faith has never been about safety. Our faith, after all, is in a man who was publicly executed at the age of thirty-three for making outrageous claims about himself and the ordering of the world... To create a piece of art is to open oneself up to ridicule, to put forward the most private and personal of feelings and experiences to be viewed and possibly derided by the public. In short, it is to have faith in one's own experience of the truth.³⁹

As can be noted from Fiona's experiences and from the discussion in the above issue of *Via Media*, the efforts of St. Margaret's clergy and congregants to

³⁹ André Forget, "Uncertain Art and Faithful Uncertainty."

nurture the idea that similarities exist in the practices of art and faith, or worship, has contributed to the development of church committees, events, and leadership opportunities connected to the arts. At St. Margaret's, cultivating artistic talent in interested parishioners is, according to the church's website, important for these people's "theological formation."⁴⁰ Influenced by the surrounding community and by the guiding notion that worship should be beautiful and rigorous, St. Margaret's has become a place where the arts have a place of central, theological importance, and where parishioners, like Fiona, can discover new, creative ways to worship. Though Fiona did not leave the broader Mennonite church community due to the lack of attention paid to art and beauty in worship, she realizes now that the artful worship practices encouraged among St. Margaret's community members has contributed to a positive and desired change in her religious identity. Today, while she admits that her transition away from Mennonitism was gradual, and while she still identifies with Mennonitism in a cultural or ethnic way, Fiona identifies herself, religiously, as an Anglican.

As Fiona noted about her former Mennonite church, members of Mennonite churches are often far less open minded about including the arts into their Sunday worship services or as part of their collective, Christian identity, than are members of St. Margaret's. This close-minded attitude to the arts is said to stem from the traditional Anabaptist tendency to view the world in binary categories. More specifically, Anabaptist teachings profess that the arts and

⁴⁰ St. Margaret's, "About Us."

beautiful things are part of the “worldly world,” from which Mennonites have historically strived so hard to remain separate. Today, many Mennonites continue to advocate that worship as well as the worship space should be simple, and maintain that extravagant things like dancing, bright decorations or clothing and controversial poetry take worshippers’ attention away from God and the non-extravagant lifestyle that they believe Jesus advocated. John D. Roth notes that at a deeper level, Mennonites have been suspicious of the “potential deceit inherent in visual images...[for] a painting, after all, is an illusion, and a play only pretends to be reality.”⁴¹ Many Mennonites believe, Roth continues, that “Christians are not called to gaze on the world as an illusion but to participate in it fully as disciples of Jesus. Moreover, skill at creating these artifices often leads to pride.”⁴² According to Roth, however, these suspicions and attitudes towards beauty must change. In his discussion of possible options for the renewal of Mennonite worship, Roth suggests that the Mennonite church open itself more knowingly to God’s presence in the form of beauty. “Beauty is the inevitable consequence of true worship,” he argues. “[T]he Christian witness to the world is true only if it is genuinely beautiful.” Beauty is expressed in the particular, but always exceeds its form.⁴³

Today, though many people in Mennonite communities would tend to avoid likening the disciplines of art and faith, questions about the relationship

⁴¹ Roth, *Practices*, 216

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

between the arts, beauty and Christian worship are increasingly present within Mennonite communities, as some (predominantly young) Mennonites suggest feeling estranged from the church because of their interest in exploring the arts.⁴⁴ Scholar Hildi Froese Tiessen argues that young Mennonite poets, writers and artists are beginning to explore the “grey area” between the Mennonite world and the “worldly world,” in efforts to understand more about from where they have come and who they are, as artists, in their world of binary understandings.⁴⁵ And, as Allison Fairbairn similarly notes about Mennonites in Manitoba, Mennonite artists often feel they must “create a new place for [themselves] in between the binary oppositions [they] face and [have] been raised to understand.” Many Mennonite artists in Manitoba are thus openly seeking a place “where they can explore who they are in the context of Mennonite culture and the broader Mennonite community, free from the perceived constraints placed on them by organized religion and an older generation of Mennonites.”⁴⁶ As a result, questions such as “What is the relationship between art and the church?” and “What is the ideal setting to showcase and encourage the work of Mennonite artists?” are becoming increasingly relevant in Mennonite circles. Accordingly, some Mennonite churches are beginning to incorporate modern and folk music into their worship services, set more decorative Eucharist tables, and integrate the

⁴⁴ Allison Fairbairn, “Mennofolk Manitoba: Cultural, Artistic, and Generational Perspectives in a Music Festival Setting,” in Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver, eds., *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music* (Waterloo: Pandora Press, 2005), 129.

⁴⁵ Hildi Froese Tiessen, “Beyond the Binary: Re-inscribing Cultural Identity in the Literature of Mennonites,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72 (1998): 491-501.

⁴⁶ Fairbairn, “Mennofolk Manitoba,” 125.

creative work, whether it be music, paintings or poetry, of congregants into worship services. On the other hand however, many Mennonite church buildings and sanctuaries remain plainly decorated, but for simple wall hangings, wooden crosses, or seasonal banners, and, very few churches outwardly encourage their congregants to engage in the arts as means of spiritual or theological development, or as a form of worship.

In efforts to create an open and welcoming environment for Manitoba artists who are “rooted in the Mennonite tradition,” yet who also feel that their art does not have a place in the church and believe that “God is revealed [to them] and can be worshipped in a variety of ways,” Menfolk Manitoba, was created in Winnipeg in 1999. In an article based on ethnographic research conducted at Menfolk Manitoba, social scientist Allison Fairbairn describes Menfolk Manitoba as an event mirroring an Ontario-based Mennonite arts festival. More specifically, Menfolk Manitoba is a two-day, organized festival which consists of both an art show and a concert that showcase emerging Mennonite artists of all ages. And, although the event is based on fellowship and not (necessarily) on Christian devotion or worship, Fairburn notes that for most of her informants, faith is a guiding force or a common theme in their artistic work. Moreover, according to the festival website, Menfolk Manitoba seeks to “provide an outlet for artists and musicians associated with the Mennonite community to break from tradition” and explore new ideas about identity, religion and culture.⁴⁷ For

⁴⁷ Menfolk Manitoba, “Mission,” <http://www.menfolk.org/manitoba/mission.html>.

Mennofolk participants, the festival is a place where they feel people are appreciative of their art, which, [as art often does] challenges the older generation of Mennonites’ “acceptable behaviours or familiar taboos.”⁴⁸

It is clear, according to Fairbairn’s study, that many young Mennonites are seeking a Christian community or environment that is welcoming of artistic expression, as well as one that challenges traditional conceptions and styles of Mennonite worship with the incorporation of the arts. However, like Fiona, other Mennonites have felt a sense of creative stagnancy in their respective Mennonite churches, and have thus found ways to unite their love of the arts and worship in a single experience outside of the broader Mennonite religious community, at St. Margaret’s. The efforts of the broader St. Margaret’s church community to emphasize the theological justification for the incorporation of art into worship practices, which did not take place at her former Mennonite church, have allowed Fiona to incorporate art-making into her religious practice and identity, among other liturgically-focused practices, and make the move toward the separation of her religious and ethnic identities.

MATTHEW’S STORY: FINDING A PLACE IN AN INTELLECTUAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

I did not meet with Matthew in person over the summer of 2009, though he answered my list of interview questions in significant detail by email in the winter of 2010 from Toronto where he is currently living with his wife and

⁴⁸ Fairbairn, “Mennofolk Manitoba,” 129.

children, and in the process of completing a PhD in Philosophy. Based on his answers to my questions and my interviews with other parishioners, I learned that Matthew's experience as a Mennonite member of the St. Margaret's Church community has been similar to the experiences of many Mennonites in the parish. That is, like many of St. Margaret's Mennonites, Matthew was raised in Winnipeg, and grew up attending a Mennonite church where he was baptized. However, through his attraction to St. Margaret's worship practices and music, David Widdicombe's preaching and especially to the "theological and intellectual feeling" of the church community at St. Margaret's, Matthew has experienced a "huge shift" away from Mennonitism in his "theological views and Christian practice." Though his parents are still involved in his childhood Mennonite church, and though he occasionally attends a Mennonite church service with his parents, he and his brother (and their wives) have been active members of St. Margaret's for approximately nine years, with the exception of a few years spent away from Winnipeg while in university.

Matthew no longer considers himself to be religiously Mennonite. Even though he has not yet been officially confirmed in an Anglican church, cannot yet bring himself to have his young children baptized, and though he has some feelings of reservation with regards to Anglicanism, (lately, he has been leaning more theologically toward Roman Catholicism), Matthew likes to think of and describe himself, for the time being, as an Anglican. More specifically, in response to my questions about his religious and ethnic identity, Matthew spoke

of his ethnic and religious background as rooted in the Mennonite tradition. The church he previously attended, the food he ate, his friends and relatives, the jokes that were told, his theological education, and lifestyle (emphasizing community-centredness, simplicity and pacifism) were, and to a certain extent continue to be, distinctly and stereotypically Mennonite. Today however, Matthew no longer identifies with his Mennonite, religious background. Though he and his wife do still cook and eat Mennonite foods, enjoy singing Mennonite hymns, and have many Mennonite friends, Matthew is “not a Mennonite religiously.”

Matthew’s decision to begin attending an Anglican church was brought on by a time of spiritual and theological disquietude in his life, during his years at the University of Winnipeg as an undergraduate student. During this time, Matthew became an agnostic due to his realization that the Mennonite church is no different from any other Protestant, evangelical church. As he wrote more specifically,

[T]he Mennonite church is now basically no different from any other evangelical church. (E.g. They no longer sing hymns in harmony). I think the community orientation toward pure living was hugely attractive (e.g. Mennonites originally refused to smoke, or buy TVs), but Mennonites have largely cast it aside and live mostly like everyone else in the city. I think, now, that this is an inevitable result of Mennonite Biblicism—it leaves the individual believers open to interpreting the Bible in light of the spirit of the age, and the leaders of the churches really just follow the people in these matters. I became an agnostic in university because I could not see the warrant for Mennonites’ trust in the Bible, and their methods of Bible interpretation. I still don’t. I came back to the church because of my admiration for Jesus Christ. Now I want to follow the teachings his apostles left to the early (and medieval) church.

Moreover, after a few years of agnosticism, he came to a new realization of the centrality of Jesus in his life. Throughout his academic career in philosophy, Matthew has come to recognize and appreciate the “need” for a “guiding

tradition” in his life. “I have rejected simplistic Mennonite Biblicism (the idea that the Bible’s teachings are obvious to the ordinary prayerful believer),” wrote Matthew, “and emotive Mennonite liturgy (leaving it up to the pastor to try to figure out how to get you excited about Christianity).”

Today, after having attended St. Margaret’s for many years, Matthew places great importance in his religious life on adhering to the Apostle’s Creed.⁴⁹ He has also come to recognize that he needs “theology and church doctrine as a final authority to help [him] in [his] philosophical thinking.” As well, he appreciates that many of his (Mennonite) friends from the University of Winnipeg have formed his supportive, intellectual community at St. Margaret’s. Most importantly, Matthew appreciates the opportunities he has been given to minister to others through teaching a theology course for adults at St. Margaret’s. He was

⁴⁹ See The Anglican Church of Canada, <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/identity/apostles.htm>, for a detailed history of the Apostles Creed which reads:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

never given such opportunities in his former Mennonite church. In this way, Matthew further noted, St. Margaret's has been "a striking example of how to carry out Christian ministry, especially for young people and intellectuals." The intellectual community at St. Margaret's, as well as the opportunities available for interested parishioners to minister to and teach one another that Matthew describes, were frequently cited by many other Mennonite members of the church as hugely influential in their decisions to continue attending.

ST. MARGARET'S: AN INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

On the St. Margaret's website, the parish as a whole is described as "particularly equipped and gifted" in the areas of leadership and education. The largest and perhaps most central area of ministry at the church is, therefore, "Adult Christian Formation," which works in a variety of ways to inspire leadership development among parishioners, as well as to provide community members with opportunities for theological and spiritual education, and intellectual engagement. Specifically, the St. Margaret's website lists the following projects as essential to this area of church ministry: leadership development; continuing external education; scholar in residence; courses taught at parish; visiting scholars; and the increasingly popular Slater Maguire Lecture Series. These projects are especially helpful to Mennonite parishioners in bridging the gap between their emotive, evangelical roots and the Anglican, intellectual tradition. As well, the projects help to emphasize the leadership

abilities and qualifications of both church members, like Matthew, and trained clergy.

St. Margaret's is, however, not unique in its emphasis on theological education, intellectualism, or on a broad understanding of church leadership. That is, an emphasis on adult theological education and the clergy's encouragement of the laity to take on leadership positions, are common initiatives within Anglican churches worldwide. In her essay "The Laity," Fredrica Harris Thompsett explains that these efforts are consistent with a statement in the *Book of Common Prayer* which stresses that the churches carry out their mission through the ministry of all members of the church community. Moreover, she argues that this belief is built on the "biblical, Pauline image of the Church as a body built up through the interdependent activities of its members."⁵⁰ And, though educational work has increased in importance within most North American Anglican parishes over the past several decades, Harris Thompsett notes that within the Anglican Church, "laity have traditionally supported the vision of an educated Church, rather than only a learned clergy." Accordingly, the laity's involvement in Anglican parishes most often takes the form of positions of adult and children's education. The laity might also be hugely influential in organizing theological education classes, diocesan lay training courses, and pastoral care opportunities.

It is also important to note that in his essay "On Being a Mennonite Catholic," Ivan J. Kauffman argues that people who leave the Mennonite church

⁵⁰ Fredrica Harris Thompsett, "The Laity," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes and John Booty (London and Philadelphia: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1988), 245.

and join a sacramental tradition, tend to be highly educated.⁵¹ He also notes that a disproportionate number of those Mennonites who leave Mennonite churches have entered academia, medicine, social work and other helping professions. Though Kauffman attributes their career choices to the “understanding embedded in Mennonite culture that if you wish to live counter-culturally and nonviolently you must find a way to be useful to society, but one that does not require you to participate in violence of any kind,”⁵² he argues at the same time that these highly educated people, like Matthew, are more inclined to leave the Mennonite church in search of religious communities in which “true Christian faith and rigorously logical philosophy can never be in conflict,” as they so often are in Mennonite communities. This complementarity between faith and logic exists in the Catholic tradition, according to Kauffman, because in order to think, Christians must establish an axiomatic base, and it is the sacramental traditions which seem to have this base most clearly determined.⁵³ Because the Anabaptist tradition, as part of the Free Church tradition, has been left, since the Reformation, with the “nearly impossible challenge of creating some new tradition to replace the one

⁵¹ Kauffman’s statement is statistically supported in other studies of denominational change. See for example Sands, Marcus and Danzig, “The Direction of Denominational Switching in Judaism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45:3 (2006): 437-447 and Gay, Lynxwiler and Peek, “The Effects of Switching on Denominational Subcultures,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40:3 (2001): 515-525. Both studies report that people with higher levels of education are more likely to move to more “traditional” or more “conservative” denominations.

⁵² Ivan J. Kauffman, “On Being a Mennonite Catholic,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76:2 (2002): 239.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 242.

they have rejected,” and as a result, their theological focus has shifted away from the ancient church.⁵⁴

It is difficult to suggest, without further inquiry, that Mennonite churches in Manitoba deny their members opportunities for church leadership and discourage theological education and inquiry. While some of my informants explained that opportunities for ministry and theological education did not exist for them in their former Mennonite churches, my own visits to Mennonite churches throughout the last several years have, more often than not, demonstrated otherwise. Nonetheless, according to some Mennonite members of St. Margaret’s, the Anglican tradition, of which they have become a part, is more intellectually stimulating and theologically challenging, as well as more learning and ministry focused. In Matthew’s case, the opportunity to teach and minister, as well as to participate in an academically-minded and theologically rich community have led to a departure from his Mennonite religious upbringing.

CONCLUSION: BECOMING ANGLICAN AND REMAINING MENNONITE?

Over the course the summer of 2009 I learned many things about the ways Mennonite members of St. Margaret’s understand their religious identities in

⁵⁴ Ibid. See also A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethnics* (Kitchner/Scottsdale: Pandora/Herald Press, 2001) and J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in the Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* (Telford/Scottsdale: Pandora/Herald Press, 2000) for two further discussions of Anabaptist theology and its disconnectedness from early church theology. These texts each call for a more thorough approach, among Anabaptists, to theology and theological method. They also call for more inquiry into when and where the Anabaptist tradition strayed from its original, sixteenth century acceptance of the classic creeds of Christendom. As Weaver notes more specifically, there are several Anabaptist intellectuals who feel there needs to be more clear theological links within Anabaptist theology to the early church (95).

connection to their Mennonite upbringing and their attendance and participation in an Anglican church. For most of my respondents, attraction to Anglican church 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, have been important contributing factors leading to their changing religious affiliations and identities. By regularly attending an Anglican church and participating in the Anglican liturgy, many Mennonites at St. Margaret's feel they have become Anglican. Many have also decided to more formally address this change in religious identity by becoming confirmed in the church. I also learned however, that despite their expressed changes in religious identity, many aspects of my respondent's lives, behaviours and attitudes remain distinctly Mennonite. From the open, well-worn Mennonite hymnal on Richard's piano, to Karen's continued love of Mennonite food and holiday traditions, or Fiona's concern for social justice and Matthew's aversion to baptizing his young children, lingering features of Mennonitism are evident in many cases.

Also noteworthy is my observation of the continued influence or involvement of the wider Manitoba Mennonite community in my informants' lives, as well as the spirited attitude held among many with regards to the (new) community of Mennonites at St. Margaret's. Not only were Fiona, Karen, Matthew and Richard each introduced to St. Margaret's by other Winnipeg Mennonites, but Matthew and Richard and others experienced a sense of

immediate inclusion and comfort in the St. Margaret's community because of their Mennonite background and identity. Matthew even noted enthusiastically, that "the Mennonites have wonderfully taken over St. Margaret's." Fiona also expressed her love of the Mennonite influence on the parish, especially with regards to the fact that Paska, a special Mennonite Easter bread, was served after the Easter celebration at St. Margaret's.

In the following chapter I discuss in greater detail these recognizably Mennonite aspects of my informants' lives and identities, and highlight their perspectives on the ways the "Mennonite" parts of their lives have changed. I also introduce some of my respondents' concerns, or lack thereof, with regards to being both Mennonite and Anglican. Lastly, I draw attention to the questions that arise pertaining to the changing relationship between religion and ethnicity among Canadian Mennonites, and how this particular case study relates to broader scholarly discussions of religion and ethnicity, secularization, and patterns of church attendance in Canada.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGION AND ETHNICITY AMONG ST. MARGARET'S MENNONITES

1

I was born into this. I could have been born in Spain. Barcelona
Maybe, or Seville. If the winds had shifted that night. Or Ireland.

...

6

If I met a Mennonite on, say, 4th St. in New York (I would be able
to tell by the walk), I would say, "Hey, I know you; let's go and talk."
Then we would go to the corner bar or restaurant and find out who
our relatives are and how, exactly, each of us is lost.

16

I have been ashamed of my heritage. I have been proud.
I have been confused by this heritage. What is it? What was it?

...

Religiously I'm not Mennonite. In other important ways I am.
Some days I feel Mennonite, other days not. It doesn't really matter.
I was born into this. I could have been born elsewhere to different people.
That's how it goes. I could have been born in Spain.¹

Patrick Friesen

INTRODUCTION

During an interview with Katie Peters, one of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners, I listened as she very eloquently and thoughtfully tried to verbalize her understanding of her Mennonite and Anglican identities. Her comments illustrate the simultaneously complex and simple move towards the separation of Mennonite ethnic and religious identity, and the rejoining of Mennonite identity with Anglicanism, as described by many of my respondents. Like so many of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners, Katie's religious identity has changed, based

¹ Patrick Friesen, "I Could Have Been Born in Spain," in *Why I Am A Mennonite*, ed. Harry Loewen (Kitchner: Herald Press, 1988), 98-105.

on her participation in St. Margaret's. And yet, while she defines herself religiously as an Anglican, her Mennonite identity remains central to the way she understands herself and her life: "I am Mennonite because my parents and grandparents are Mennonite," said Katie. "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 parent's and grandparent's values inform our household." As she further explained,

I am doing my Masters degree in theology at Canadian Mennonite University and I still eat farmer sausage, and at Christmas, papanat. I have many Mennonite friends. I am still in love with and moved by so many Mennonite hymns. [Long pause] On a much deeper level, I think will always identify myself [based on] where I come from and who my parents and grandparents are. Since their faith was a big 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.

However, later on in our conversation, Katie also observed that because she attends St. Margaret's, because she loves the Anglican liturgy, because she has become a more confident in what she believes and is "stimulated and challenged" by the sermons at St. Margaret's and finds "comfort and connection" in the liturgy and in the Eucharist, she "identifies more strongly as an Anglican than [she] ever identified as a Mennonite." She appreciates the academic approach of the parish, as opposed to the pious approach of the church in which she grew up. 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 properly worshipped if I hadn't taken communion during the week, because within 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 Katie, identifying herself as both Mennonite and Anglican is not, and has never been, a problem. She, like so many of St. Margaret’s Mennonites, feels at home in both the Mennonite world and in an Anglican church; Mennonitism and Anglicanism are each important parts of what make Katie who she is. Though her religious identity in particular has been changed, she cannot imagine leaving her Mennonite heritage behind.

This chapter focuses on discussions of religious and ethnic identity among St. Margaret’s Mennonites, like Katie’s above, and attempts to place them within the framework of scholarly debate about religion in Canada. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I return briefly to my fieldwork at St. Margaret’s and highlight more of my respondents’ reflections about their religious and ethnic identities. I focus specifically on my respondents’ conscious cultivation and unconscious maintenance of their Mennonite identities. Though many of my respondents, like Katie, spoke positively and assuredly about their Mennonite identity and heritage, others suggested that their Mennonite identity had been replaced with their newfound Anglican identity, yet at the same time revealed in our conversations, several “Mennonite” things about their daily lives. Namely, my respondents’ discussions about religious and ethnic identity help to point out some of the diverse and complex ideas about these categories of identity, especially in Mennonite contexts. In the second section of this chapter, I

place my fieldwork findings in the context of current scholarly debate about the changing relationship between religion and ethnicity in Canada, and scholarly and community debate about Mennonite religion and ethnicity. I also discuss religion and ethnicity in Canadian Anglican contexts and the changing ethnic makeup of Canadian churches. I consider what my research at St. Margaret's contributes to these discussions. And finally, in the third section of this chapter, I briefly outline how my research might contribute to broader theories about religion in Canada. In this section, I focus mainly on theories about secularization and membership decline in Canadian churches.

WHAT MAKES A "MANGLICAN"?

Many of St. Margaret's Mennonites referred to themselves or each other as "Manglicans" over the course of my fieldwork in the parish. Though this term was most often used jokingly to describe those people who have made the complicated transition from Mennonite churches to an Anglican church, I have come to realize that "Manglican" might be a more useful and accurate description of their ethno-religious identities than I had initially realized. After all, nearly every one of my informants described a feeling of spiritual satisfaction in the Anglican church, but many also expressed a sense of rootedness in the world of Mennonite cultural traditions, ideals and communities.² While at times the

² It should be noted that one married couple with whom I spoke at St. Margaret's described themselves as religiously Mennonite and as theologically Anabaptist, despite their membership in an Anglican church. Interestingly, neither of these two people could easily describe their ethnic backgrounds, when asked to do so. Though they finally came to the conclusion that they were indeed ethnically Mennonite, they lamented the fact that they rarely cook Mennonite food, or

cultivation or maintenance of their Mennonite ideals and traditions was beyond their immediate, conscious recognition, most parishioners seemed to understand that they adhered to certain Mennonite principles and observed specific Mennonite traditions, despite having become Anglican. Below, my informants' discussions of their ethnic and religious identities indicate that in complex ways, Mennonitism has been renegotiated and combined with Anglicanism in the lives of St. Margaret's Mennonites.

Karen identifies herself as an Anglican, though she also noted that she will always adhere to the tenets of non-materialism and non-resistance. She will likely always struggle with the idea of infant baptism and she will always cook Mennonite food on important church holidays like Easter and Christmas. Like Karen, though Andrew considers himself Anglican, he still struggles with the idea of infant baptism, and will always recognize his identity as rooted somewhat in the Mennonite church and in a Mennonite community. He and his wife often cook Mennonite foods. Similarly, though Fiona suggests that she only loosely identifies with her Mennonite heritage since leaving the Mennonite church and to a large extent, the broader Winnipeg Mennonite community, and though she suggests she is very much an Anglican, I noted, during time I spent while interviewing her at her home, several specifically Mennonite things about her daily life and identity. Not only does Fiona cook Mennonite food and enjoy the

participate in any specifically Mennonite cultural traditions. Further research would need to be conducted at St. Margaret's to determine if other Mennonites in the parish describe themselves similarly. In my sample of respondents, this couple was definitely not typical.

fact that paska is served during Easter at St. Margaret's, she cares a great deal about St. Margaret's social justice efforts and wishes the parish would do more for the downtown Winnipeg community in this regard. And finally, though Richard has come to understand himself as an Anglican, or "a non-active Mennonite" because of his participation in St. Margaret's, he does recognize that his Mennonite ethnicity and heritage continue to influence his life in areas of musical and culinary interest, politics, and economics.

CHRISTIANITY, ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY IN CANADA

In their recent and influential work *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, editors Paul Bramadat and David Seljak argue that ethnicity and religion are "two of the most influential forms of both self-identification and ascribed identification," and that religious and ethnic identities "co-mingle" to inform many people's sense of self, and their interactions with others.³ While in the twentieth century and beyond it became increasingly popular for people to make "unequivocal statements" about which parts of their identity are ethnic and which parts are religious, (as do many of St. Margaret's Mennonites), Bramadat and Seljak point out that it is often difficult for such people to describe how exactly these two strands of their identity exist separately. As they further contend,

underlying claims that one is an ethnic but not a religious Mennonite, Quebecer and Roman Catholic but not Christian, Greek but not Greek Orthodox, are some complex and often subconscious presuppositions about religion, ethnicity, and identity that look far more tenuous when they are examined more closely. The primary problem in these

³ Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., "Charting the New Terrain: Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 21.

distinctions is the artificial separation that is made between these modalities of identification. For example, in the Mennonite case the ethnic and cultural features associated with this tradition are intimately bound up with the religious features... The distinctive language of Low German that distinguishes many Mennonites from other Europeans emerged (like Yiddish among Jews) as a result of centuries of explicit religious discrimination against this community by their European neighbours. As well, the long tradition of social activism and pacifism one finds in contemporary Mennonite culture (and also among those Mennonites who say they have no interest in the Mennonite faith) is in fact directly derived from the determinative role that pacifism (even perhaps anti-statism) played throughout the development of the Mennonites as an explicitly religious group.⁴

More specifically, Bramadat and Seljak argue that when people are questioned about the distinction between their religious and ethnic identity, they “will very often become confused, revealing to what extent identity and all of its strands are dynamic personal *projects* rather than *idées fixes* or things-in-themselves.”⁵

Though the self is “indisputably real” they further suggest, it is important to remember that the self is also “constructed, highly mutable, highly creative, and always socially situated.”⁶

In the introductory chapter to their edited text therefore, Bramadat and Seljak reflect not only on the important role ethnicity has played, and continues to play, in shaping Canadian churches and Canadian Christian identity, but also on the many ways that religion works to influence the social construction of ethnic identity among contemporary Canadians. More specifically, Bramadat and Seljak argue that ethnic identity informs religious identity, practice, and community, and that religion continues to be a central force in the shaping of ethnic identity among Canadian Christians (and even in the shaping of a “Canadian” ethnicity).

⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Ibid.

Accordingly, they argue that it is impossible to understand individuals and the communities in which they are rooted “unless we pay close attention to the ways religion and ethnicity, two major components of identity, interact.”⁷

Throughout their text, Bramadat and Seljak make several suggestions for things to consider when conducting research on Canadian church communities. However, particularly pertinent to these studies of church communities across contemporary Canada, I think, are three key areas of consideration. First, Bramadat and Seljak suggest that scholars must be aware of the increased role of immigration (and also globalization and multiculturalism) on the ethnic makeup of, and traditions observed in Canadian churches. Almost all Canadian churches, they contend, will “include practices and rituals, forms of community, and institutions, [unique to specific ethnic groups]...which are often just as important as...the beliefs and experiences of church members.”⁸ Secondly, Bramadat and Seljak suggest that scholars must be aware of any debates about the categories of religion and ethnicity that exist within religious and ethnic communities. How do such debates work to inform the ways individual community members self identify and understand the communities to which they belong? And finally, these scholars highlight that within Canada the categories of religion and ethnicity and the relationship between them, varies between communities, is constantly changing, increasingly fluid, and ever-evolving.⁹

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹ Ibid., 37.

Throughout this thesis, or in my exploration of the changes occurring in Manitoba Mennonite communities and in my exploration of religious and ethnic identity among St. Margaret's Mennonites, I have tried to be attentive to Bramadat and Seljak's suggested areas of consideration. Indeed, I have found that within Canadian Mennonite communities, increased immigration, community debate about religion and ethnicity, and an ever-evolving understanding of Mennonite identity, together work in a multiplicity of complex ways to inform discussions about what it is exactly, that "makes a Mennonite." Central to such discussions are debate about whether a "religious faith can be detached from society, culture, history and tradition."¹⁰ For example, though most scholars suggest that Mennonite history itself has produced all the features of ethnicity—as I outlined in significant detail in Chapter One—the debate among scholars and community members alike about whether Canadian Mennonites are a religious group, an ethnic group, or both a religious and an ethnic group, has become multifaceted over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As scholar Harry Loewen argues, though Mennonites have, like Jews, "developed traditions and institutions which have helped them to survive as a people,"¹¹ there seems to be "a marked tendency, even movement, toward pluralism in religious faith and cultural conduct" among Mennonites today.¹²

¹⁰ Harry Loewen, ed., "Introduction," in *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988), 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

Most North American Mennonites recognize that their Mennonite identities are made up of a distinct mixture of ethnic and religious features. These ethno-religious features inform their daily lives and interactions in a multiplicity of ways. Mennonites commonly describe the ethnic and religious features of Mennonitism as inseparable, existing alongside one another and complementing one another. Mennonites also often discuss the simple fact that because they were born into an ethno-religious group of people and because their lives and theological ideals were shaped by both the religious and ethnic traditions observed by this group of people, Mennonitism is both religious and cultural. Like these individuals, Professor John Friesen describes that for him, being Mennonite is “more due to a historical process than to a logical or rational deliberation.”¹³ As he further notes,

when I faced issues of identity, when I tried to sort out who I was and what I wanted to become, I did not begin from a neutral position. I was already in the stream of history, with my roots in a particular community. Consequently, an important factor for me being Mennonite was that I was born into a Mennonite home, grew up in a Mennonite community, and discovered my first conscious religious ideas within a Mennonite setting. In a real sense my being Mennonite was a gift. It was not earned, nor chosen, but given.¹⁴

There are also Mennonites who suggest that Mennonitism is a form of religious identification only. Gerald Gerbrandt, the president of Canadian Mennonite University argues that “after decades of understanding ourselves as communities in which faith and culture were inseparably fused into one, with

¹³ John Friesen, “Being Mennonite: A Gift and a Choice,” in Harry Loewen, ed. *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988), 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

culture sometimes even given the upper hand, there has been growing awareness that this is not right.”¹⁵ These individuals argue that “at its absolute core, to be Mennonite means to be Christian, to be part of the worldwide Body of Christ.”¹⁶ As these Mennonites further suggest, “Any reflection on what it means to be Mennonite today must begin with, and consistently return to, the commitment to being Christians.”¹⁷ Particularly when reflecting on the “multicultural nature of the Mennonite people, especially as represented by rapidly growing Mennonite churches in other parts of the world, but also by the increasing presence among us of “new” Mennonites with different cultural backgrounds,” these Mennonites argue that the combined religious and ethnic form of Mennonite identification is objectionable.¹⁸

And finally, as my fieldwork at St. Margaret’s has revealed, as poet Patrick Friesen describes of his own identity in the epigraph to this chapter, and as scholars have increasingly noted, there are also a growing number of Mennonites who identify strongly with the cultural components of their Mennonite heritage, but do not consider themselves to be religiously Mennonite. For these individuals, Mennonite identity is now best, (and has perhaps always been) represented by food, community, certain types of music or dress, and familial heritage. While often these individuals do continue to demonstrate a great deal of concern regarding matters of social justice and simple living, these (once

¹⁵ Gerald Gerbrant, “Who is a Mennonite?” *Canadian Mennonite* 9:21 (2005).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

specifically Mennonite religious) ideals are not (or are no longer) thought to be tied to religious identity. It is possible for these Mennonites to be culturally Mennonite, without being religiously Mennonite.¹⁹

These diverse ideas about Mennonitism have developed over time, and are often said to be the result of Mennonite migration 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 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).

¹⁹ The fact that many Mennonites identify strongly with the cultural components of Mennonitism and not at all with the religious components, has become a topic of serious debate among Mennonites in Manitoba. This debate surfaced considerably during the mid 1980’s, 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 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 (Reimer: 1981). 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 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 that “Mennonites were to be defined not by a distinct cultural tradition, but rather by a particular faith or theology” (Gerbrant: 2005). After only a few years, the Mennonite pavilion disappeared from Folklorama.

As conversations with my informants revealed, these changes also often accompany longtime member frustration and a lack of spiritual satisfaction and even interest 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 behind Christianity altogether. In Chapter One, I also briefly noted that increased immigration to North America has changed the congregational makeup of many Mennonite churches, and has contributed to greater debate about the very existence of a "Mennonite ethnicity." Today, for example, as more and more Mennonite churches have many Korean, Japanese, African, or even Indian members, and as there are now more Mennonites in Africa than there are anywhere else in the world, the debate about Mennonite ethnicity become increasingly complex. Many of these Mennonite churches offer church services that cater culturally to these new groups of Mennonites, by way of language, food and music.

It is clear that the changes occurring in Canadian Mennonite churches and communities are quite recent, extremely complex, and are of growing interest to scholars and community members. However, the shifting relationship between religious and ethnic identity among Mennonites is not unlike the shifting relationship between religion and ethnicity that has been occurring in other churches and denominations across Canada, and North America more generally, for quite some time. Just as Wendy Fletcher's chapter in Paul Bramadat and David Seljak's work reminds us, the Canadian Anglican church no longer

resembles the once “historically and politically privileged” denomination with deep roots in the “Church of England.”²⁰ That is, due predominantly to the broader church’s loss of political power, the marked decline in church membership, and the integration of members from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, the Canadian Anglican church is “rapidly evolving.” Fletcher notes further that the relationship between religion and ethnicity among Canadian Anglicans will become even more complex as individual churches become increasingly “reliant on non-European immigrant communities that do not necessarily share with the established community (composed mainly of British descendents) the same relationship with the historical British origins of the church.”²¹ In a broad sense, this means that being a member of an Anglican church no longer dictates one’s British heritage. When such changes are considered within individual Anglican church communities, Moreover, even the St. Margaret’s church community represents well the shifting relationship between religion and ethnicity among Canadian Anglicans. At St. Margaret’s it is clear that immigration, multiculturalism and secularization have reshaped the ethnic makeup of the parish and have, perhaps to a greater extent, transformed the definition of Anglicanism. Not only does St. Margaret’s have a growing community of Christians from Mennonite, Pakistani, Sudanese, and Sierra Leonean backgrounds, many with a long history in the parish, but the church

²⁰ Wendy Fletcher, “Canadian Anglicanism and Ethnicity,” in Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 139.

²¹ Ibid.

incorporates numerous cross-cultural traditions, particularly on special occasions, that have been adopted from the cultural groups that currently dominate the congregation. (For example, St. Margaret's serves Paska, Mennonite Easter bread, at Easter.)

Importantly, my research at St. Margaret's demonstrates that all of the changes occurring within Mennonite and Anglican communities in Manitoba have indeed contributed in varying ways to their discussions about and understandings of the categories of religion and ethnicity in their lives. While at one point it would have been unheard of, or even impossible, for one to be ethnically Mennonite and religiously Anglican, St. Margaret's Mennonites have made the move towards the separation and reconfiguration of their religious and ethnic identities.

CANADIAN CHURCHES AND SECULARIZATION

Along with contributing to scholarly and community discussions about the plurality of relationships between religion and ethnicity among contemporary Canadian Christians, my research at St. Margaret's also contributes to theories about secularization in Canada, as well as to discussions about membership decline in Canadian churches. Though in recent years there has been a growing consensus among scholars that religion will not disappear any time soon from the

daily lives of Canadians,²² most agree that Canadians (and particularly Christians) simply do not identify with religious institutions in the same way their parents or grandparents did. Due to political and economic modernization after the First World War, as well as capitalism and liberalism, and a vocalized desire among Canada's elite for a public sphere free of religion, Canada began to see the beginning of the "disentangling" of religion from the state.²³ Canadian churches have certainly experienced the effects of this "disentangling. As I discussed in greater detail in Chapter One, religion has been privatized in the lives of contemporary Canadians and thus what matters to contemporary Christians is their subjective experience of the Christian faith, as opposed to a sense of belonging to the correct religious institution.²⁴ Accordingly, many churches have experienced rapid decline in membership and attendance. And, increasingly prevalent within church communities is the "discourse of loss," which "reflects the fact that the churches can no longer assume that their values and objectives are in the Weberian sense, co-extensive with the values and objectives of the larger society."²⁵

²² Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002); and *Restless Churches: How Canada can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Kelowna: Wood Lake Books, 2004).

²³ Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," 13. See also Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993); José Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and William Swatos, "The Secularization Debate," *Sociology of Religion, A Quarterly Review* 60:3 (1999).

²⁴ Bramadat and Seljak, "Charting the New Terrain," 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

At a very basic level it seems that my research stands in opposition to these predictive theories of secularization and membership decline in Canada. The fact that so many Mennonites are decidedly joining a growing Anglican church community seems to indicate that St. Margaret's stands apart from membership decline and that this group of Mennonites have avoided the trends of secularization. On the other hand however, deeper analysis does reveal that certain "secularization trends" have perhaps allowed for the loosening of the bonds between public, cultural identity and church participation among St. Margaret's Mennonites. An ethic of individualism, as a result of secularization, has also paved the way for the general understanding that people are free to choose the religious and even ethnic communities to which they wish to belong, just as St. Margaret's Mennonites have done. We also saw that in many cases, Mennonite churches are struggling to attract members by modernizing their church services. The very fact that St. Margaret's Mennonites left their former Mennonite church communities indicates some form of change in terms of congregational populations. As well, the fact that St. Margaret's has so few "cradle Anglicans" indicates that the parish has undergone a significant change in membership over the past several years. Even Rector David Widdicombe has a church background outside of the Canadian Anglican church.

CONCLUSION

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,

into the Catholic church. He admits that 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 recognize that “it is virtually impossible to be an ex-Mennonite.”²⁶ In his article 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 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.”²⁷

As Kauffman further notes, the fact that he 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 however, beginning to understand that “when North American Mennonites leave, we do not leave our past behind.” Though he admits that he is “deeply Catholic,” he also realizes that he can never outgrow his “sense of being Mennonite.”²⁸

²⁶ Ivan J. Kauffman, “On Being a Mennonite Catholic,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* April (2002): 235.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 235-36.

Importantly, Kauffman's discussion here 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 things however, St. Margaret's Mennonites, like Kauffman, can never completely leave behind the Mennonite parts of their identity, which were formed in a Mennonite world, and where many of their familial relationships and friendships still lie. In the following chapter, the Conclusion, I describe a Mennonite wedding I attended at St. Margaret's and recount the combination of Mennonite and Anglican traditions that made this wedding unique. I attempt to tie together my fieldwork with my final reflections about St. Margaret's Mennonites, the relationship between Mennonitism and Anglicanism in their lives, and the distinctive ethno-religious community they have formed within the boundaries of an Anglican church.

CONCLUSION

In ideal spaces, ideal works—religious and philosophical systems, works of art, books, critiques—we try to make all sorts of coherent, consistent systems of ethics, to extract the bad from the good, to remove those elements that are unlike or clash. These are often quite laudable enterprises, ways to seek knowledge of what to do or how to live, paths on which we search for wisdom. We do this because life is not clear, it is jumbled, complex; several value systems coexist, different worlds clash, struggle and recombine. It is often hard to tell what is going on. And so we select certain elements, pick them up and hold them to the light, letting the others fall.¹

Kirsten Norget

My key endeavors throughout this thesis have been (1) to highlight the multiplicity of changes occurring in Mennonite churches and communities in Manitoba; (2) to discuss these changes in connection with emerging theories about the shifting relationship between religion and ethnicity among contemporary Canadians; (3) to provide an ethnographic example of how some of the changes occurring in the broader North American Mennonite world and in religious communities throughout North America more generally have contributed to the development of varied and complex understandings of Mennonite ethnic and religious identity; and finally (4) to demonstrate that the continued centrality of ethnicity as an identity marker among one group of Mennonites, despite their changing religious identities, makes room for a discussion of the separation of such intimately related categories. For scholars of

¹ Kirsten Norget, *Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture of Oaxaca* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 265.

religion in Canada, scholars of Mennonite history and contemporary Mennonite identity, as well as those interested in secularization, denominational switching and ethnic identity, my study of St. Margaret's growing Mennonite population offers an example of a thriving Anglican church community, which stands in contrast to theories of secularization, declining church membership among Canadians, and theories of church growth due predominantly to immigration.

Yet, while my study does draw significant attention to some of the ways denominational switching and changes in ethnic and religious identity among Mennonites are conceived of, lived and discussed, there are many questions, worthy of exploration, which I have left unanswered, due to time constraints and limited space. Accordingly, this thesis might best be used as a point of departure for further studies of religious and ethnic identity among Mennonites, particularly those who have left their respective Mennonite churches, but also for ethnographic studies involving Mennonites who have returned to the Mennonite church. Conceivably, a future ethnographer might also contribute to my research by interviewing some of St. Margaret's Mennonites in ten years time. Would these people have considered returning to the Mennonite church? Would they continue to maintain Mennonite ethnic traditions? In what ways would St. Margaret's and its community have changed? As well, future research might focus on the immediate families of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners. What do they think about and how have they dealt with their sons' and daughters' changes in religious identity? Have these transitions been dealt with differently in

Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite families? Finally, future researchers might also consider conducting a more comprehensive study of Mennonites attending Anglican churches, as well as churches belonging to other denominations in Manitoba. What are some of the similarities and differences between St. Margaret's and these churches and church communities? Why do Mennonites attend these churches, as opposed to Mennonite churches? How do the Mennonites or former Mennonites think about and talk about their religious and ethnic identities?

Although these areas remain to be explored, my study has found that for a variety of reasons, a number of Manitoban Mennonites are regularly attending, and eagerly becoming members of, St. Margaret's Anglican Church in south central Winnipeg. Moreover, while the seemingly paradoxical movement of these people from Mennonitism to Anglicanism has certainly caught the attention of—and even troubled—many members of the broader Winnipeg Mennonite community, it is clear that St. Margaret's offers parishioners, Mennonite or otherwise, distinctive, spiritually moving worship experiences and is home to a unique and thriving Christian community. More specifically, my interviews with parishioners and clergy, as well as participant observation at St. Margaret's, reveal several notable things about the church and church community. During my time at St. Margaret's, it became obvious to me that the one hundred year old parish is rooted in and influenced considerably by both the surrounding diverse, artistic Wolseley neighbourhood and the academically-minded community of

university students and professors living in its vicinity. The neighbourhood surrounding the church is also home to a number of Winnipeg Mennonites, many of whom are politically left-wing. Interestingly, these factors seem to make St. Margaret's attractive to an array of people both young and old, those who live within walking or driving distance of the church, and those from a variety of Christian backgrounds. I also learned that Rector David Widdicombe, his wife and director of music Ruth Widdicombe, as well as other clergy and staff, have structured the church and church programs in a way that sets St. Margaret's apart from other Protestant churches in Winnipeg (whether Anglican, Mennonite, United, or Lutheran). Not only are David Widdicombe's sermons at once poetic, humorous, culturally relevant, intellectually stimulating, theologically challenging and accessible, but Ruth Widdicombe's musical efforts are widely renowned and celebrated in numerous Winnipeg communities. As well, St. Margaret's successful ministry projects, such as City Ministries, Global Partnerships, Youth Ministry, Adult Christian Formation, and Pastoral Care allow parishioners to be involved in the church in numerous ways, as well as to reach out to and foster development in the church's surrounding communities. Discourse about St. Margaret's spreads accordingly.

Indeed, all of these factors have aided in the attraction of Mennonites to St. Margaret's and discussion about the church in the broader Winnipeg Mennonite community. Yet, as my two months of fieldwork at this Anglican parish also revealed, for many Mennonites, the decision to attend St. Margaret's

was based on much more than their attraction to church ministries, the traditional music program or David Widdicombe's sermons. That is, a number of the Mennonite parishioners at St. Margaret's with whom I spoke mentioned emotionally difficult times in their lives as central to their desire to seek out a new church community. These people had also often been introduced to St. Margaret's by their Mennonite acquaintances, who were already members of St. Margaret's. Some Mennonites at St. Margaret's pointed to an awareness of their disagreement with Anabaptist theology, while others simply noted feelings of spiritual disquietude in their Mennonite churches as key factors in their decisions to switch denominations. Many also noted their desire to participate in more liturgical forms of worship, not commonly practiced in Mennonite churches. As well, many of St. Margaret's Mennonites noted that their decision to change denominations was based upon their feelings of dissatisfaction with the changes occurring in their former Mennonite churches. In these cases, church modernization, decreased singing of traditional hymns, and more attention being paid to social justice and environmental concerns than to the central theological tenets of Christianity were often cited as the undesirable changes occurring in Mennonite churches.

Perhaps most importantly, the interviews I conducted with some of St. Margaret's Mennonites reveal that despite their upbringings in Mennonite families, churches and communities, and despite their maintenance of Mennonite cultural or ethnic traditions, most of these parishioners no longer consider

themselves to be religiously Mennonite. More specifically, for each of my respondents, spiritual struggles, feelings of theological discontentment within their respective Mennonite churches, unhappiness with regards to the changes occurring in their former Mennonite churches, and transitions into and participation in the St. Margaret's church community, have together led to significant transformations in their religious identities. Today, though most of my respondents claim to be ethnically Mennonite, they also claim to have replaced their Mennonite religious identities with new Anglican religious identities. Though their familial heritages, the communities in which they grew up, and the cultural traditions they have maintained do influence their ideas about their ethnic identity, in many ways their ethnic identity has been disentangled from their religious identity.

However, as I have also tried to demonstrate in peripheral ways throughout this thesis, it seems that by attending an Anglican church and becoming part of a new Mennonite community, (or at least a community with a large Mennonite contingent), St. Margaret's Mennonites have participated in the reshaping of their collective understanding of Mennonite identity, and have thus renegotiated the boundaries of a new Mennonite ethnic and religious community. St. Margaret's is for these Mennonites a new Mennonite ethno-religious community. St. Margaret's Mennonites make up a community of people with similar familial heritages, religious histories, cultural traditions, and a shared identity.

**FINAL REFLECTIONS: A MENNONITE COMMUNITY
WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF AN ANGLICAN CHURCH**

At the beginning of August 2009, during the middle of my trip to Winnipeg and my time of fieldwork at St. Margaret's, I was invited to attend the wedding of two of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners. Katie Peters and Kevin Reimer both grew up attending Mennonite churches in Manitoba and both were raised in Mennonite homes and communities. They have, however, each been members of St. Margaret's Anglican Church (where they first met) for about nine years. Attending this wedding, or observing Katie and Kevin's Mennonite friends and families participating in an Anglican wedding ceremony, making note of the large community of St. Margaret's Mennonites at the wedding, and also witnessing the distinct way this wedding combined Mennonite ethnic traditions with Anglican church rituals, allowed me to reflect deeply on the complexity of denominational switching, particularly in Mennonite contexts, and the (ever-evolving) intricacies of Mennonite identity in Manitoba. More specifically, Katie and Kevin's wedding, as well as interviews conducted with them prior to their wedding, helped me to see quite clearly that despite St. Margaret's Mennonites' changing religious identity, many of the most distinguishable and historically significant ethnic (and some religious) features of Mennonitism remain unproblematically central in their lives. As well, I was able to observe Katie and Kevin's rootedness in the St. Margaret's Mennonite community, as well as in the broader Manitoba Mennonite community. Both of these communities arguably continue to influence the way they, like many of St. Margaret's Mennonites,

understand themselves and the world around them, regardless of their becoming Anglican. Though most of St. Margaret's Mennonites identify themselves as religiously Anglican and ethnically Mennonite, and though their ethno-religious heritages no longer seem to dictate belonging to Mennonite churches, upon further reflection about Katie and Kevin's wedding, I realized that the St. Margaret's community of Mennonites is very much an ethno-religious community of Mennonites. Below, I discuss my experience at this wedding and highlight how Allison Fairbairn's article on *Mennofolk Manitoba* has shaped my final reflections on St. Margaret's Mennonites.

Katie and Kevin's wedding ceremony took place at St. Margaret's, on a rainy Friday afternoon and was celebrated by Rector David Widdicombe. The church was filled with the familiar faces of St. Margaret's parishioners, many of whom I knew to be Mennonite, as well as their (predominantly Mennonite) groups of friends, families and extended family members. While overall, the wedding ceremony was representative of an extended Anglican church service—liturgical in form and including specific sacraments—there were many aspects of Katie and Kevin's wedding ceremony and reception that seemed to me to be both culturally and religiously Mennonite. Not only did Katie walk radiantly down St. Margaret's centre aisle to her favorite version of "Come, thou fount," from *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (1992) a newer version of the *Mennonite Hymnal*, but also Katie and Kevin's parents both expressed in their speeches how much their children had been shaped by the Mennonite grandparents, friends, and

communities in their lives. As well, the Low German idiosyncrasies used in their parents' speeches, the homemade pies served for dessert, the homemade jam given to guests, the reluctance of some people to dance, and the traditional, loud, joyous four-part harmonious song sung before dinner, to which everyone seemed to know the words, indicated the maintenance, influence and importance of Mennonitism in Katie and Kevin' community and family lives. And finally, though I was not at all surprised by the large number of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners in attendance at Katie and Kevin' wedding, I was particularly intrigued by their seemingly unabashed acceptance of the wedding's combination of Mennonite and Anglican traditions. As the evening progressed, however, I quickly realized the Mennonites at St. Margaret's are part of a nurturing and tight-knit community of like-minded individuals. As well, these people have similar familial histories, uphold similar cultural traditions, maintain similar Anabaptist ideals, and are all searching for something spiritually, theologically and ritualistically beyond what they feel any Mennonite church can offer them. Also, over the course of my time at St. Margaret's, not one person I interviewed ever mentioned feeling excluded in the St. Margaret's community because of their ethnic and religious background. In fact, most of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners suggested that they felt particularly included in this particular Anglican church because of their Mennonite background.

In her discussion of the *Mennofolk Manitoba* festival in Winnipeg, Allison Fairbairn draws similar conclusions about the formation of an ethno-religious

community of Mennonites outside the boundaries of the Mennonite church. More specifically, she notes that though many of Mennofolk’s Mennonite participants and attendees are longer religiously Mennonite, fieldwork conducted at Mennofolk revealed the maintenance of religious and ethnic Mennonite traditions. Throughout her fieldwork, Fairbairn observed that organizers of and participants in Mennofolk often aimed to keep some of the core values or traditional attitudes of the Mennonite church at a distance, because of their changing religious identities and attitudes, and the shared belief that their artistic endeavors were unwelcome in the church and the wider Mennonite community. However, as Fairbairn also discovered at the festival, the overall atmosphere does relay a distinct combination of Mennonite religious beliefs, cultural traditions and behaviours.²

As among St. Margaret’s Mennonites, especially as I observed at Katie and Kevin’ wedding, the Mennofolk Manitoba festival upholds a feeling of “oneness” among participants, attendees and organizers. More specifically, even though many people at Mennofolk and at St. Margaret’s express their place in the margins of the broader Winnipeg, Mennonite community, both Mennofolk and St. Margaret’s seem to be places where feelings of Mennonite identity and “community” are premised, taken for granted, and celebrated. Though Mennofolk participants often challenge typical Mennonite religious beliefs,

² Allison Fairbairn, “Mennofolk Manitoba: Cultural, Artistiv and Generational Perspectives in a Music Festival Setting,” in *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music*, ed. Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver (Kitchner: Pandora Press, 2005), 134.

Mennonite cultural values are well represented at Mennofolk by way of certain foodtypes, pacifist ideals displayed on t-shirts for sale (for example, “Make pie not war,” and “Make borscht not bombs”), an almost uniform style of plain clothing that promotes simple living, and a social commentary in songs, poems, and in conversation that laments the loss of rural life and advocates for social justice in impoverished Winnipeg communities. At St. Margaret’s Mennonitism is also clearly represented through the Paska served at Easter, the development of a new parish Social Justice Committee, a general feeling of inclusion and oneness among Mennonite parishioners, as well as the ambivalence of some Mennonite parishioners with regards to infant baptism, among many other things. To conclude her article, Fairbairn argues that for Mennofolk artists, performers, audience members and organizers, the festival is a place which creates

an “in-between,” a site where [those involved] can celebrate aspects of their culture and heritage with very little pressure to conform to ideas of religion [or Mennonite faith practices] that they may or may not be struggling with; a site where cultural rituals can be observed and the complexity of the meaning of “Mennonite” can be addressed at whatever level participants feel comfortable.³

Fairbairn further suggests that the work of Mennofolk participants is “welcomed by the festival and the audience with open arms.” She argues that Mennofolk may represent “the beginning of a changing of the guard and a new narrative that combines traditional Mennonite values and cultural rituals with a gradually shifting world-view.”⁴ I suggest that similar processes are at work at St. Margaret’s. St. Margaret’s is indeed an environment in which its many

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Mennonite participants feel comfortable asking challenging questions of their former Mennonite religious beliefs and exploring worship practices not commonly, or necessarily, upheld in Mennonite religious environments. It is also, according to many Mennonite parishioners, an open, inviting and inclusive environment.

In an interview conducted with both Katie and Kevin before their wedding, they each described their backgrounds as rooted in the Mennonite ethno-religious tradition and both suggested that their lives are still influenced considerably by this tradition. Like so many of St. Margaret's Mennonite parishioners, Katie and Kevin no longer consider themselves to be religiously Mennonite. That is, even though both Katie and Kevin recently participated in MCC's Serving and Learning Together program, though Kevin grew up in a small Mennonite town in southern Manitoba and was baptized in a Mennonite church, and even though Katie attended a private Mennonite high school and suggests that her Mennonite grandmother from Russia shaped her faith and theological thinking in many important ways, Katie and Kevin are no longer Mennonite, but, as they suggest, Anglican. Yet, like the larger community of Mennonites at St. Margaret's Katie and Kevin express few concerns about this maintenance of some Mennonite traditions, cultural practices and religious inclinations. Together, St. Margaret's Mennonites have reshaped and recreated their collective Mennonite identity. Together, St. Margaret's Mennonites are expanding the definition and religious parameters their Mennonite community.

As I outlined in significant detail in Chapter Three, scholars of religion and identity in Canada argue that due to secularization trends, globalization and multiculturalism, among other things, there has been an observable loosening of the bonds between religious and ethnic identity in the daily lives of many Canadian Christians. Whereas fifty years ago one's religious background and ethnic heritage would have been intricately connected (Irish Catholic, British Anglican), today, the church to which one belongs often reveals very little about one's ethnic background or vice versa. That is, ethnic backgrounds no longer dictate the religious communities to which individuals belong, or whether they belong to a religious community at all. And, the religious community to which one belongs no longer determines this person's ethnic background or cultural heritage.⁵ Scholars have also noted, however, that despite this loosening of the bonds between religious and ethnic identity, the religious and ethnic communities in which one is raised continue to shape the way an individual thinks about and talks about their daily life and identity (sometimes even without their recognition of such influences), despite their adopting new religious and cultural traditions. My research demonstrates that St. Margaret's Mennonites, following this trajectory of changes occurring to the relationship between Christian and ethnic identity in contemporary Canada, have maintained some Mennonite cultural and religious traditions, yet have also adopted Anglican religious identities. These

⁵ See for example Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005); and Manuel A. Vásquez, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

religious and ethnic components of their identities interact and intermingle in complex ways to create something that appears from the outside to be a new, emergent identity—an identity that is neither traditionally Anglican nor Mennonite (Manglican?), but one that reflects well changes occurring between the categories of religion and ethnicity in the lives of many other Canadian Christians.

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