

/// Readers write

✉ Silver Lake, MC Eastern Canada apologize for not speaking up sooner

Re: “Decades-old sexual abuse comes to light.”

On Aug. 24, 2018, *Canadian Mennonite* published a story about the long-term sexual abuse experienced by Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz over 30 years ago by then Silver Lake Mennonite Camp director Lawrence Pentelow. Shantz had bravely come forward to disclose this abuse to the Silver Lake board and then talked to *Canadian Mennonite* about the impact of this abuse and its continued impact in the following years.

The magazine contacted Pentelow for a response to Shantz’s disclosure and included a number of points that he expressed, including his remorse for the hurt he caused Shantz in the course of what he called their “relationship.” The word “relationship” is an offensive and inaccurate term to describe the abuse inflicted.

Silver Lake and MC Eastern Canada believe that the use of this term and the decision to interview Pentelow caused harm. We understand the pitfalls of being silent on an issue like this and regret that we did not respond immediately.

The Silver Lake Board of Directors, jointly with the Executive Council of MC Eastern Canada, write this letter as an apology for our failure to take immediate action in responding to this article and the pain it caused in a clear and public way. For this, we are deeply sorry.

Silver Lake and MC Eastern Canada do not condone abuse of any kind. It is never okay for a person of leadership at camp or in a church who holds power in that context to be intimate with a camper or staff, or to characterize this deplorable behaviour as a “relationship.”

• DAVID LOBE, CHAIR, ON BEHALF OF THE SILVER LAKE MENNONITE CAMP BOARD OF DIRECTORS
• ARLI KLASSEN, MODERATOR, ON BEHALF OF THE MC EASTERN CANADA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

CM responds: Journalistic integrity and professional ethics require that, when a serious accusation is made against someone, a publication should give the accused person a chance to respond. This provides readers with relevant information they can use to form their own opinion. Censoring that response would be a disservice to readers, who are capable of judging whether the response is relevant or appropriate.

(Virginia A. Hostetler, Executive Editor)

✉ North American Mennonites probably more environmentally unfriendly

Re: “Presentation warns of environmental degradation by Bolivian Mennonites” letter, Nov. 11, 2019, page 7.

There are more than 100,000 Low German-speaking Mennonites living in Bolivia, in 106 colonies and settlements. They grow in numbers, as letter writer Peter Kroeger indicates, but also in diversity.

There is lots to be said for the agrarian lifestyle they continue to choose, and I would no more want to stereotype how they live, work and worship than I would those of us other Mennonites spread around the planet. I’m pretty sure they are aware there are practices among them that are not good for the soil but, for the most part, my understanding is that they do want to be compliant with Bolivian government expectations.

I’m also pretty sure that the relentless consumption with which we could easily stereotype ourselves in North America could be challenged as even more environmentally harmful.

Mennonite Central Committee’s work with colony Mennonites in Bolivia is relatively small, but it is important, and I hope that Kroeger and others continue to support that work, including the hemispheric work of the twice-monthly *Menno-nitische Post* distributed out of Steinbach, Man. *Mennonitische Post* is highly valued by many. It keeps members of the Low German Mennonite population connected with each other and, significantly, with the broader world.

ABE JANZEN, CALGARY

✉ Why reject Don Cherry as not ‘worthy of our attention’?

Re: “What shall I wear: Sport coat or cardigan?” editorial, Nov. 25, 2019, page 2.

I am pretty sure that Virginia A. Hostetler’s intent was not to praise as upright all who wear cardigans while condemning as evil all who wear sport coats.

And I am equally certain that it was not Don Cherry’s intent to disparage or condemn anyone, but only to reprimand those, like me, who did not bother to buy a poppy. Why reject Cherry rather than treating him as a person “worthy of our attention”?

JOHN HILDEBRAND, MISSISSAUGA, ONT.