

# The Mennonite clergy card

## Finding humor in the ordinary

Jim Loepp Thiessen

### Why I laugh . . . a lot

I'm guessing I don't need to make an argument for laughter or to convince you of its efficacy in producing a state of well being.

I laugh a great deal. My spouse teases me that I have a "low humor threshold"—meaning I easily descend (or is it ascend?) into laughter.

Ingrid and I laugh a lot.

We laugh with our children, and I often chuckle about the oddest things.

I laugh to cope, to transcend the moment, to gain perspective.

Under stress, I'll tell humorous stories to myself as a way of reliving times of hilarity.

Seriously.

I relive some of the lighter moments in ministry by telling myself the story again.

And again.

I laugh because I'm overcome by the joy and goodness of God.

I laugh because it helps me cope with the pain around me: never as a denial of what is but always in hope of what will be.

Laughter helps me release my grip and hold gently what has been entrusted to me. In that way it's supremely an act of faith. It's oh so cathartic.

Sometimes I laugh about the odd things in life that happen but never fully make sense. Good humor takes the most ordinary moment and looks at it anew. Consider the clergy card below. If we give this little card purpose and meaning when it has never had an actual life mission, what might happen? The possibilities are endless!

### The Mennonite clergy card

I was paring down stuff in my wallet recently, and I found the little card that proves I'm a pastor in the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, my

denomination. There is such a card, in case you didn't know. In fact, I get a brand spanking new one every year.

In the early days, it had an Old-World, typed Mennonite simplicity about it—homegrown and unadorned. Recently, however, it was brought

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into the 1980s with a laminate upgrade. Even with that extravagance, however, no one has asked to see it.

Not once.

In almost thirty years.

Two years ago, our daughter, a Canadian on a Mennonite Voluntary Service assignment in Texas, was asked at the US border to . . . wait for it . . . prove that she was a Mennonite. The card would have worked perfectly, but alas, I wasn't at the border with her, and she didn't have the card.

What can you actually do with this little nugget? Even from a stewardship angle, it just makes sense that for some-

one to go through all the trouble of printing and signing these tiniest of pastoral legitimizers, there ought to be at least one time in ministry it could be pulled out and used!

Let's cut to the heart of it: No one wants proof you're a pastor. Even a Mennonite pastor. Never once has someone said to me: "You're a Mennonite pastor? Prove it!" They look at your socks and Birkenstocks and don't need further evidence. And when you mention your pastoral calling to folks outside of church, they don't want proof; they often just want to change the topic!

So here are a few possibilities with this card in terms of usage:

1. *Get out of contributing to potlucks.* You're at church and are invited to stay for lunch, but you didn't bring anything to share. Mennos know they're saved by grace when they can show up at a potluck gladly and freely empty handed. Now, however, out comes the little card. Bingo! Get out of contributing for free! No more awkward stares in the lineup. And if you've earned enough points (see below), you can even cover for the friend

- who invited you! Works especially well when you're at another church where they don't know you.
2. *Skip announcements at your annual spring conference.* The announcements just before lunch seem to go on and on. Flash your little pass to the ushers, they give you a polite acknowledgment, and out you go. No funny stares as you "run the gauntlet" to the exit. "They must be responding to an urgent matter," they think, because answering your phone whilst in session is out of the question, and texting is no excuse to leave. But you really don't need an excuse to leave because you have the card.
  3. *Get a pastor's special on conference swag.* While we're at conference, how about using the card to get the conference rate on swag (whatever that is). Almost every other card in my wallet earns me points! Even my driver's license potentially! So why not this one? Details would need to be worked out, but after buying, say, seven (a good biblical number) of whatever, you get a free compostable lanyard, or a \$2.00 coupon for the thrift shop, or even a T-shirt that says, "Ask me what's in my wallet." And with a looming shortage of pastors, we could use it in our branding: "Become a Mennonite Church Canada pastor, and thrift shop like never before!"
  4. *Attach a scannable barcode.* This would let your conference minister know you've purchased your eighth book on justice. As an added bonus, the barcode would help make the card look a bit more official, should anyone ever see it. It also creates a little accountability in the system. And wouldn't it make the conference minister's annual report a tad more interesting? "And finally, what kind of books did our pastors buy in MCEC in the past year?" People would be on the edge of their seats! Or, possibly, looking towards the exit, thinking, "I just wish I had one of those little cards!"

## About the author

Jim Loepp Thiessen is a pastor at Floradale Mennonite Church in Floradale, Ontario. He has been a pastor in Ontario for almost thirty years, where he has pastored established congregations and planted a church in Kitchener.