



Vol.8 Final Edition
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Note:

Contrary to a prior announcement staff pulled through to complete this FINAL EDITION thanks to the gathered & all the comunteers for hosting an *Extrordinary Assembly*.

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Ushers Collect ballots. Photo by Matt Veith

Delegates vote to allow space for differences

Dan Dyck

Nine years of careful study, sensitive listening, deep engagement by many but not all congregations – and innumerable meetings of the Being a Faithful Church Task Force led to a large majority vote in favour of creating space for congregations to differ from one another when it comes to same sex relationships.

With permission to permit abstentions, 277 delegates voted yes, 50 voted no, and 23 abstained in their response to an amended BFC recommendation that took into account some concerns from MCBC about language.

Outgoing moderator Hilda Hildebrand read well the gravity of the Assembly's discernment process. She repeatedly reminded delegates of sensitive etiquette for those on all sides of the debate, requesting that no applause be given for individual comments, or when the vote results were delivered. Announcement of the results ended with silent prayer and singing just before the lunch break.

Delegate Ray Friesen of Swift Current sensed a fulcrum moment when Gerry Binnema, pastor at Black Creek United MC, shared that he had anticipated voting "no" prior to attending assembly. While his attendance at a seminar by Dan Epp-Tiessen on *Reading the Bible in light of same sex relationships* did not change his mind, it did help him hear that differing understandings can also be valid.

Delegate Ray Hamm of Altona appealed for equal attention to the science of same sex relationships. "We owe it to ourselves and those among us to talk about more than Bible verses – genetics, environment, choice," he said.

Gary Fehr of Blumenort MC indicated a "no" vote on behalf of his congregation. "I really hurt for those with same sex attraction, but there has been very little talk about being accountable to the institution of marriage and how God meant it to be prior to sin entering the world."

Several youth commented at the open mic. Katharine Penner of Osler, Sask., said, "I want to be a church that focuses on love." Sue Ann ?? said, "I feel five when I say this, but my question is 'Why?' We accept other religions. As youth we only get two votes to say that in the future this is what we want. It means we have to have this big discussion again in 10 years; Friends have come out to me. I cannot full heartedly say that the church will accept them... you don't need to understand same sex relationships – you just need to love them."

Reuben Tut of South Sudanese MC in Edmonton cautioned whether doctrine needs to spell out whether we love those in same sex relationships or not. "Do we just need to love them?" he asked? "I pray because I know Mennonites are peacemakers, but sometimes Satan comes and diverts your ways when you are moving in a good direction. Let us be careful on this."

Future directions affirmed

“We are all responsible for what happens next”

Deborah Froese

Although a concrete picture of what Mennonite Church might look like in two years isn't yet determined, 318 delegates voted to approve in principle the direction proposed by the Future Directions Task Force (FDTF) to develop a more integrated nation-wide church body. Twenty-one voted against, and 4 ballots were spoiled.

Following General Board moderator Hilda Hildebrand's announcement of the ballot results, Aldred Neufeld answered a question that surfaced frequently leading up to today: what's next?

“With the motion having been adopted, the next steps really will be to get the Interim Council together as soon as possible to do certain things.” The Interim Council, which will consist of moderators from each area church and the national church, must now determine who will be on the transition team, create a job description to begin the search for a project manager who will guide the process, determine budget requirements and a create timeline for transitioning.

The vote followed two years of process by the FDTF and intense debate during seminars and plenary sessions at Assembly 2016.

During the morning plenary session preceding the vote, John Rempel of Waterloo North MC concisely summarized a concern raised by others. He asked for confirmation that no structural changes would take place until a proposal developed by the Interim Council was presented to the delegate body for approval by 2018.

Aldred Neufeld confirmed that there would be no changes to current structures until additional work has been done, but with a caveat: internal or programmatic changes might be required because of budget constraints.

Tim Wenger of Springfield MC in Winnipeg, Man. said it felt like delegates weren't being heard throughout the FDTF process. “When delegates ask questions, we are not getting direct answers, but the addendum shows we are being heard.” The addendum created space for further planning and delegate approval of the final plan before implementation. He voiced his support of the FDTF recommendation and trust for leadership.



Marilyn Houser Hamm spoke eloquently about her concerns for remaining connected. She feared decision-making would be left to a smaller number of area church delegates while the wider church gathered for enrichment and spiritual building—a structure similar to what she said is currently not working in MC USA. Houser Hamm, who has siblings in the US, said, “I always prided myself saying that we are not like that. I'm asking us: is this how want to be?”

Another way of looking at it is that delegates will not be asked to process certain decisions twice – once at the area church level and again at the national level; there is the potential for greater involvement, not less, said Paul Wideman, moderator of MCEC

Over the last several months, debate about the future structure of Mennonite Church Canada and the process undertaken by the FDTF has sparked a wider conversation about what it all means. Particularly striking is the involvement of Emerging Voices Initiative, a group of young adults who are passionate about the church and committed to its future, whatever form it might take.

Jonas Cornelsen, a member of EVI, has experienced many regions of the church in Canada, serving as an intern at Sterling MC in Ontario and at the MCEC offices, attending his home congregation in Winnipeg and worshipping for blocks of time in Abbotsford.

“I love my whole national church! . . . while there has been miscommunication, we have a fantastic opportunity to move forward and do better.” He pleaded delegates to remain critically engaged.

“We are all responsible for what happens next.”

Decision Roundup: Assembly 2016

Dan Dyck

Assembly 2016 may become known as a watershed year by delegates.

By turns intense and emotional, joyful and worshipful, the gathered made significant decisions that will impact the Mennonite Church Canada body of Christ for years to come.

On Thursday evening, delegates voted in favour of repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery – a settler teaching that has marginalized and taken rights away from indigenous people for centuries.

On Saturday morning, a majority vote of 277 favoured the Being a Faithful Church recommendation to create space and test alternative understandings to traditional beliefs on same-sex relationships. With allowance given for abstainers, there were 50 “no” votes, and 23 abstentions.

On Saturday evening moderator Hilda Hildebrand announced the results of the Future Directions Task Force recommendation, which passed with a majority of 318 yes votes. “No” votes counted 21, and 4 ballots were spoiled. A following resolution to thank and dissolve the FDTF also passed.

Delegates processed the resolution on Palestine and Israel on Saturday evening. They voiced concerns about what this would mean for relations with Jewish people and organizations in Canada, noted a less than full understanding of what divestment means, and observed that the church has been historically complicit in both anti-Semitism and Christian Zionism.

Seconder Palmer Becker, who has spent blocks of time on five separate occasions in Palestine, pointed out that property broker REMAX stopped selling homes in settler areas in response to pressures. Meanwhile, Caterpillar continues to manufacture equipment that destroys Palestine homes while also constructing settler homes in occupied territories. He also cited Christian Palestinian Alex Awad, dean of students and professor at Bethlehem Bible College, who says that the conflict could be solved in a day if the motivations to continue it could be removed.

The resolution passed after further discussion, with some speakers noting the weight of making this decision with too little knowledge or discussion. “We’ve spend 8 years on BFC recommendation. FDTF has discussed for 2 years and now it will be more. The Doctrine of Discovery passed really, really fast, and here we will do it again. Let’s not say things and be satisfied that we said them,” noted Herb Sawatsky.

Passing the motion commits churches to become more aware and informed on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The motion was carried, though some abstained since they have not yet consulted their congregations on the matter.

Four nominees were acclaimed to their offices: Calvin Quan of Toronto Chinese MC will be the new moderator; Allan Hiebert (Calgary), treasurer; Harold Peters-Fransen (Winnipeg), recording secretary; Don Rempel Boshman (Winnipeg), chair, Witness.



Photos by Matt Veith



Calvin Quan



Allan Hiebert



Harold Peters Fransen



Don Rempel Boschman

Young adults don't need the church

Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

This seminar title was prompted in response to the young adult “problem.”

“It is not meant to be a defiance statement, but a statement of fact. The church is no longer a central force in the lives of young adults,” presenter, Chris Brnjas said.

Brnjas has the background to know what he is talking about. A co-founder of Pastors in Exile (PiE), he and others seek to be pastors “outside the church walls,” which involves meeting with many young adults. Brnjas also works in student services at Conrad Grebel College, is a member of the Gathering Church, and was a Mennonite Church Canada youth delegate to the 2015 Global Youth Summit of the Mennonite World Conference.

The workshop began with participants sharing reasons for interest in the topic. These included: living among young families who do not attend church, wanting to support the faith life of young adult believers who have chosen not to go to church, being concerned about the drop-off in youth engagement with church, and curiosity regarding alternatives to the way church is done.

Brnjas cautioned against painting all young adults with the same brush. At the same time, he pointed out commonalities shared by people in the same generation. Older generations sometimes characterize millennials as cynical, shallow, narcissistic, and selfish, but they also described them positively as creative, connected, confident, and interested in diversity in thought and practice.

Rapidly changing technologies adds a new twist to generational changes; every five years a unique generation results. A 25-year-old may have grown up very differently than a 20-year-old in the same geographic area. For young adults, awareness of issues such as sexual abuse scandals, exclusion related to race or sexual orientation, and the history of residential schools, tend to prompt negative connotations with the word “church.”

“I think we [the church] should be masters of apology! Yet we often seem more interested in protecting our institutions than to rectify past sins,” Brnjas said.

The highlight of the workshop was cross-generational dialogue. Brnjas paired participants with at least 15-20 years between them. The pairs discussed how they grew up, what was happening in the world when they were young, and what attracts—or doesn't attract them—to church.

While it seemed clear that the church today is no longer the center of community as it was years ago, there were a remarkable number of similarities despite age differences. Discussion was lively. People claimed community, connection to good people, and social justice as draws to the church. One cross-cultural pair, Canadian and Sudanese, laughed to discover that they had both grown up in quiet, rural areas, following cattle on foot, and connecting with a small faith community. Another pair noted that rebelling and rebuilding was part of both of their stories. A pastor from a young adult-oriented church noted that they were having trouble holding on to their boomer and senior generations, who kept leaving in search of a “peer group.”

In conclusion, Brnjas encouraged participants to think of church as people, not as an institution, and he emphasized the mutual beneficial effects of cross-generational conversation.

To learn more about PiE go to <https://pastorsinexile.org/about-pie/>.



Chris Brnjas presented a seminar titled “Young adults do not need ‘the church’” on July 9 at Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Saskatoon. During the well-attended session, Brnjas invited participants to share, in inter-generational groups, about their how they experienced church as young adults.” Photo by Irma Sulistyorini.



Photos by Matt Veith

Intercultural relationships: reflective of God's Kingdom



Photo by Irma Sulistyorini

Deborah Froese

The Bible uses the same word for covenant regardless of whether that agreement is between God and God's people, or between people, Safwat Marzouk told delegates at the Friday, July 8 plenary session of Assembly 2016. It's the same word used in the covenant between God and Noah, between Abraham and his allies, and between Isaac and the Philistines.

God isn't calling us into a monocultural or melting pot relationship, and God isn't calling us into a multicultural relationship where we allow cultures to exist side-by-side. Those relationships aren't reflective of the Kingdom of God, Marzouk said. God is calling us to intercultural relationships, where we truly learn and grow from each other.

"We walk our spiritually journeys in different ways and different paths, and sometimes our spirituality has a specific accent to it or emphasis that we rely on and sometimes we need to be challenged by the other voice or the other side of spirituality that is present in the biblical text," he said. The church is called by the Spirit to cultivate a covenantal community that fosters [a] just diversity, where differences are received as a gift not a threat.

He offered five theological principles to guide covenantal relationships:

The Church is God's Project. Acts 10 reveals dramatic ethnic, religious, political and economic

differences between Peter, Jesus' disciple, and Cornelius, the gentile Roman soldier. While these disparities might render a relationship between them impossible, God makes it clear to Peter that the relationship is permitted – as is the food Cornelius offers. When Peter obeys God, God pours the Holy Spirit over the gentiles.

The need is mutual. When the belief that God is God permeates our worship and relationships, we find value not in the privilege we try to protect, but in joining God in God's mission of peace and justice. "Healthy relationships depend on mutuality of giving and receiving," Marzouk said. "Only this allows us to be agents of change and recipients of grace."

Conversion is mutual. In Acts 10, Peter's theology regarding what was "clean" and "unclean" shifted as a result of his encounter with Cornelius, and his eyes were opened to God's capacity for diversity. At the same time, Cornelius encountered God.

Fellowship is vital. It allows us to walk in each other's lives. "We need to remember and lament conflicts in the past and present otherwise we are merely sweeping reality under the rug in order to feel comfortable in our ignorance," Marzouk says. "In order to move forward, the sharing of stories has to be a part of our journey. We share stories in order for the spirit of God to empower the church to move

from pain, shame, oppression into the realm of the kingdom of God."

Healthy Boundaries are necessary. In an intercultural covenantal church, "members aren't fixated on their own identities, but they are sensitive to the new thing that the Spirit is creating when different identities worship together, fellowship together, and serve together," Marzouk said. Intercultural covenantal churches don't exist in segregated communities, yet they aren't without boundaries; they reach mutual decisions about when and how to cross them.

Marzouk's teaching generated considerable interaction on Twitter. Tim Wenger wrote that "Acts 10 invites us to reconsider the boundaries we construct to protect ourselves." Frequent tweeter throughout the entire assembly, Steph Chandler Burns wrote that "Sharing stories helps us move from pain, shame to healing, justice, love, reconciliation"

Others were struck by the big picture of Marzouk's teaching. Michael Pahl simply shared that "@safwatmarzouk is bringin' it."

Watch the Assembly 2016 Plenary 2 with Safwat Marzouk at <http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/saskatoon2016/video>

Partnering with God's healing and hope

Dan Dyck

The 14 people out of 38 registered for the *Partnering with God's healing and hope* seminar may indicate some wearying of attendees, but those present paid close attention and asked good questions about what a mission partnership with a Witness worker or ministry means.

Presenters Daniel Horne and Jason Martin shared a round-up of all thirty current workers in ministries – and pre-emptively addressed the most common questions: What is a partnership? How does it work?

Forming relationships with global initiatives makes communication key: the pair cited prayer and encouragement, financial support, Skype interactions with the entire congregation, and visits through learning tours as conventional ways congregations enrich their mission partnerships.

“And don't underestimate the church bulletin board,” said Horne, noting examples of beautifully done displays he has seen in some congregations that draw significant attention to mission partners.

New ways of connecting with overseas partners are always being imagined, too. In Sask., some churches are thinking about a choir tour to China. In Botswana, Witness workers Nathan and Taryn Dirks imagine sending two young pastors from Gaborone to churches in Canada to explore congregational leadership in a Canadian context.

Josh Wallace, pastor at Warman MC, cited the benefits of a partnership in helping his congregation to see beyond their doors. “It's brought a lot of life to our congregation,” he said. “It reminds us that the work of God is so much bigger.”

Rudy Franz asked about the impact of Future Directions Task Force work on



Photo by Irma Sulistyorini

congregational partnerships. Perhaps there are 2 or 3 congregations that could join together in partnering globally, he said.

“Could invitations to global ministry that arrive in the office be shared with the entire body across Canada?” he asked.

That is the goal, responded Horne. It can happen under the current structure as well, but the hope is that joint partnership among multiple congregations with an international ministry will become more intentionally communicated. Awareness about who is seeking what is critical.

Assembly: the Next Generation



Photos by Irma Sulistyorini and Matt Veith

Rural congregations find ways to be the church in their communities

Donna Schulz
Canadian Mennonite correspondent

Someone once asked Sharon Schultz if she became pastor of Eyebrow (Sask.) Mennonite Church in order to help the church to die well. Schultz did some soul-searching and came to the conclusion that, "I don't think that's why God brought us here."

Schultz and Lois Siemens, who is pastor of Superb Mennonite Church near Kerrobert, Sask., 184 kilometres west of Saskatoon, led a seminar on July 9 at Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Saskatoon, entitled, *Proclaiming the good news in town and country: stories from the rural church*.

As Schultz pointed out, "There are differences between rural and city churches. These are some of the ways we share good news in our context."

Superb Mennonite is a small congregation. Siemens said that when people ask her how big the church is, she tells them, "495, because that's how big we are in heart." About 15 worshippers attend on Sunday mornings. Though the congregation celebrated their 70th anniversary in 2015, they started meeting in one another's homes in the late 1920s. The church building is situated in the countryside.

Like Superb, Eyebrow Mennonite is small, with between 20 and 30 worshippers on Sunday mornings. Located in the community of Eyebrow, 183 kilometres south of Saskatoon, the church is about 50 years old. Schultz described it as a "friendly, family-oriented church," but, like many rural congregations, its young adults leave for urban centres to study or find work and often don't return. Likewise, seniors frequently retire to the cities rather than remain in a community with few amenities.

Siemens said she and her congregation know they have a reputation in the community. Their church choir was recently asked to perform at the opening of an art gallery. Siemens told the organizers, "We are a church choir. We will sing about God." This didn't seem to be a problem, and so the choir sang *Come, bring your burdens to God* at the gallery opening. Siemens also said she was asked to offer table grace before a community meal. "How do I pray grace when they don't pray grace?" she wondered. She decided to list the many ways people use their hands in the community, and prayed a blessing on those hands.

Because Eyebrow Mennonite is small, any kind of programming takes every member's effort. But through vacation Bible school, Sunday school and youth activities, the church has welcomed children from the community. "It has been a blessing to have children coming from the community and to see lives being changed," Schultz said.



Lois Siemens (left) and Sharon Schultz presented a seminar entitled "Proclaiming the good news in town and country: stories from the rural church" at Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Saskatoon. Looking on is Erwin Warkentin. Photo by Donna Schulz.

Members of her congregation are aware that people in the community are watching them. "They don't just see our Sunday morning behaviour. We run into each other regularly throughout the week," she said. And so it's important to be consistent witnesses and be upright in business dealings with neighbours outside the church.

Both Schultz and Siemens describe their congregations' ministry in terms of joy and blessing. Superb and Eyebrow Mennonite Churches, and others like them, are uniquely situated to share the light of Christ in their rural communities. Schultz said she reminds her congregation they are "one expression of the body of Christ, but they are also part of something much bigger."

Making a case for community

Anabaptist emphasis on living together may have lessons for today's church

Donna Schulz
Canadian Mennonite correspondent

"Too often Mennonites have focused on disunity," said Gareth Brandt.

In fact, Mennonite/Anabaptist history is pockmarked with splits and schisms. But Brandt, who presented a seminar titled *Running towards community* at this year's Mennonite Church Canada Assembly, July 8 in Saskatoon, sees these splits as inevitable. "It is, in fact, the nature of our grassroots denomination. "If everybody has a voice then you're going to have these splits," he said.

Brandt invited participants to examine copies of the *Schleitheim Confession* to see if they could discover what the seven articles of the 16th century document have in common. Working in groups, they noted that each of the articles pertain to community. Brandt said some people might conclude that, because the confession doesn't mention anything about God or the Bible, the early Anabaptists must have identified these articles as those which made their denomination distinctive. But Brandt postulates that the early Anabaptists may have seen these seven articles as being at the heart of their faith. "Perhaps these items are what's important," he suggested. "If these tenets are followed, the others will sort themselves out."

Brandt went on to outline several stories of Anabaptists and Mennonites running towards rather than away from community. The first occurred in 1526, when Anabaptists were forced to leave the city of Nikolsberg in what is now the Czech Republic. On the run, the people pooled their possessions in order that all would survive. This group would eventually come to be known as the Hutterian Brethren, or Hutterites. Their movement was characterized by a lifestyle that followed the example of Jesus with pacifism, communal living, and hospitality to strangers.

As a second example, Brandt cited the origins of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada at Hochstadt, Man. and Eigenheim, Sask. in the early 1900s.

The formation of the conference, said Brandt, was a movement toward unity. There was no formal constitution, but their longstanding motto was "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all



things charity." The founders believed that "each congregation was to be the primary locus of God's kingdom work," said Brandt. "The reason for gathering together was so that each congregation would be encouraged in their work." They intended the conference to be a consultative rather than a legislative body, and understood that "disagreement did not imply disunity," said Brandt.

In his own life, Brandt said he has always been attracted by the idea of various Mennonite groups coming together. At one point in his life, both Mennonite Church Alberta and the Northwest Conference Mennonite Church of Alberta employed Brandt as a youth minister. Discussions were underway for the two denominations to unite into one area church. Though this plan did not come to fruition, at the time Brandt saw it as an exciting possibility.

Currently Brandt is professor of practical theology at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C., where Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren denominations collaborate with each other. "I have always been drawn to these experiences," he said.

Brandt also identified a number of movements that have influenced Mennonites over the years. The mystical or charismatic movement, progressive movement, conservative movement, and evangelical

movement have all left their imprint on the church. "All four groups of Mennonites make the case that they are the true Anabaptists," said Brandt. "I say 'yes' to all four of them. We need all of those voices to help us to be true to who we are. Each of these streams influences how we read scripture."

Gareth Brandt presented a seminar titled "Running towards community" at this year's Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Saskatoon. Here, participants study the Schleithem Confession to discover what the seven articles have in common. Photo by Donna Schulz.

From the Archives

Indigenous Relations

Henry Neufeld has spent a life time building relationships between Mennonite and Aboriginal peoples. In the Conference of Mennonites in Canada meeting in Vancouver in 1981, Neufeld (right) was called upon to translate for Mennonite pastor Jeremiah Ross of Cross Lake, Manitoba (middle). Jeremiah was ordained as a Mennonite pastor on 4 February 1968, with Henry Funk (right), chairman of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission Board, officiating. Ross retired from ministry in 1998. Neufeld continues his work bridging the two communities.

1992: On the Doctrine of Discovery - On the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus arriving in North America in 1992, the General Conference Mennonite Church stated that we should "Refrain from a triumphalist spirit in celebrating this event in favor of humble gratitude for the benefits experienced in these new lands."

<https://archives.mhsc.ca/native-ministries-report-at-cmc-annual-sessions-3>



Photo courtesy Mennonite Heritage Center Archives

Volunteer focus

Phyllis Goertz



Prior to volunteering at Assembly 2016, Phyllis had a career in health region management. "I just retired and have the time," she says. "I should be at home picking my Saskatoons, but my friends picked them for me so I could be here!"

Photo by Dan Dyck.

Document Quick links:

Discernment Guide:
commonword.ca/go/654

Full Schedule:
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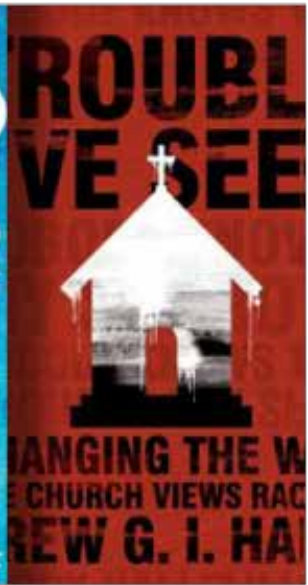
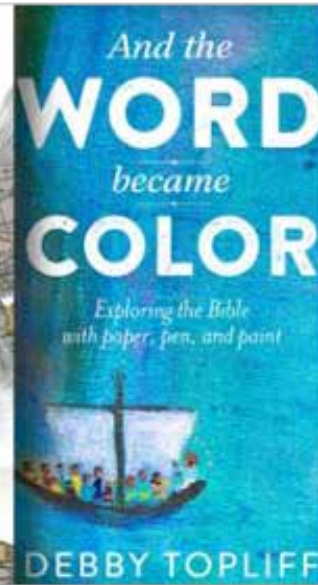
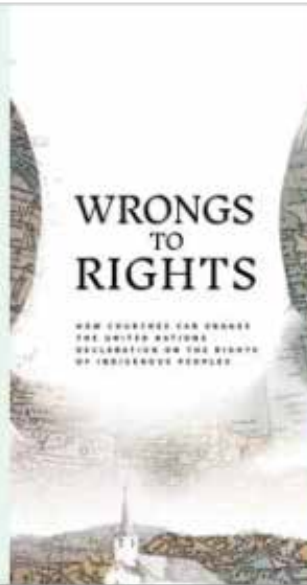
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2016 SUMMER READING LIST

Our annual tradition – recommended books for our lawn chairs, hammocks and beach blankets these next months!

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