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AMBS honors Speckeen and Wiebe with Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition

By Annette Brill Bergstresser

ELKHART, Indiana (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) — **Frederick J. Speckeen**, PhD, of Prince George, British Columbia, Canada, and **Leonard Wiebe**, MST, of Goshen, Indiana, are the 2021 recipients of [Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's](#) (AMBS) Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition.

The annual award of the Elkhart, Indiana, seminary honors alumni with an outstanding record of faithful ministry and service. Both recipients earned Bachelor of Divinity degrees from the seminaries that later joined to become AMBS — Speckeen from [Goshen Biblical Seminary](#) in 1956 and Wiebe from [Mennonite Biblical Seminary](#) in 1960.

Alumni Director [Janeen Bertsche Johnson](#) (MDiv 1989) noted that for three years, AMBS has selected two alumni for recognition — one for contributions in congregational ministry; and one for contributions in teaching, mission work, peace work, spiritual direction, or another ministry.

“As we looked through this year’s nominations, we were impressed by the rich service that Fred and Leonard have given over their lifetimes — Fred in administrative leadership and Leonard as a pastor and church planter,” she reflected. “We hope their stories inspire others to see seminary education as a vital gift for whatever professional path they may take.”

Speckeen and Wiebe will be honored during separate Zoom receptions on **Tuesday, Dec. 7** — Wiebe from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m. EST, and Speckeen from 7:30 to 8:15 p.m. EST. (*The link can be obtained by emailing jbjohnson@ambs.edu.*)

Frederick Speckeen

Speckeen was born near Hespeler, Ontario; he and his brother were raised Presbyterian by their parents, who were factory workers. As the first one in his family to attend high school, Speckeen graduated first in his class from a four-year vocational program in practical electricity and began working for a company that manufactured electrical appliances. He returned to high school for grade 13 to prepare for post-secondary education.

“I was influenced to attend Goshen (Indiana) College [GC] by a Mennonite fellow — **James Snyder** — whom I met in grade 13,” Speckeen recalled. “He and I later taught at GC at the same time.”

Speckeen said that while studying at GC, he was motivated to study at Goshen Biblical Seminary (GBS) by the quality of the GBS courses and the faculty — some of whom taught at both the college and seminary.

“My lasting impression of GBS was the dedication of the faculty and staff to its students, the Mennonite Church and the community,” he said. “Theirs was a life of service, with heavy teaching loads for the faculty, limited resources for the staff and, as I learned later, not high salaries.”

Speckeen said the faculty members’ research and writing impressed him, and he enjoyed building relationships with GBS faculty and staff.

“Their Christ-centeredness and servant leadership were inspiring and motivated me as I later took on responsibilities in the church and community — locally and internationally,” he said. “Being a servant and servant leader took me into places I never dreamed of or expected, as did having a worldview for understanding and peace.”

After earning his Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences from GC (1952), Speckeen studied theology at Knox College in Toronto and returned to Goshen to complete his GBS degree. He then earned a PhD in Communication Arts from Michigan State University in East Lansing (1961).

Speckeen spent most of his career in higher education. While earning his GBS degree, he taught in the Speech Department at GC (1954–56). He served in various administrative faculty positions at the University of Dubuque (Iowa), a Presbyterian institution (1960–62); Waterloo (Ontario) Lutheran University (1963–67); and for a project of the Lutheran Church to establish an international university in Freeport, Bahama Islands (1967–68).

From 1968 to 1994, he led five community colleges in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia — one as Vice President and four as President. According to Speckeen, these three-year institutions served isolated and remote communities, offering nondegree technical-vocational, applied and apprenticeship programs as well as high-school equivalency, fine arts, and university transfer courses.

Speckeen has offered his leadership skills to the church as well. He was ordained at [First Presbyterian Church](#) in Goshen in 1957 and served as Director of Christian Education/Assistant Minister. He served [The Presbyterian Church in Canada](#) as a representative on the National Inter-Church Action Working Group for Asia and the Pacific and as Chair of a subgroup to establish policies and actions on relief, economic and social justice issues (1999–2001). He was Director of the Board of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2002–05) and served as a board member for St. Andrew’s Hall (a Presbyterian theological college in British Columbia) and Vancouver School of Theology (2003–08). He was an on-call hospital chaplain and a visiting chaplain for a seniors’ residence in Kelowna, British Columbia.

Throughout his life, Speckeen has contributed his experience and insights as a member and chair of various educational boards, advisory committees, social service agencies and service clubs. He was the founding chair of the Calgary Consortium on Tourism and Hospitality Training and Chair of the Kitchener and District Public School Board.

Speckeen also engaged First Nations communities in northern Canada, serving as a board member for the Old Sun Community College, Blackfoot First Nations, Alberta (1986), and assisting First Nations communities with business planning, fundraising, special events and education. He and his wife, **Joan**, a nursing instructor, served on several church projects in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, working in education, health, administration, management, skills training and recreation. They also volunteered with nonchurch organizations on similar projects in various Caribbean countries, Thailand, Pakistan, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Armenia and the United Kingdom. The Speckeens attend [Trinity United Church](#) in Prince George.

Leonard Wiebe

Leonard Wiebe grew up on a farm in Whitewater, Kansas, the youngest of four children of West Prussian immigrants who met in Newton, Kansas. He began studies at the University of Kansas in Lawrence but

stopped to do two years of alternative service at a polio hospital in California. He then transferred to Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas — where he met his wife, **Joan**, and completed a Bachelor of Arts in History (1957).

While at Bethel, Leonard and Joan became close friends with [Erland Waltner](#), a Bible professor at Bethel who later went on to serve as Professor of English Bible and President of Mennonite Biblical Seminary (MBS). Waltner officiated the Wiebes' wedding — the day after their graduation — and encouraged them to attend MBS, which was located in Chicago at that time.

It wasn't the first time someone had identified Wiebe's gifts for ministry. While at the polio hospital, a young woman Wiebe had taken care of told him he ought to become a pastor. His older sister, **Gertrude Roten** (who later taught Greek at AMBS), used to call him "her little preacher boy," he recalled. The Wiebes followed this call and enrolled at MBS that fall.

"I really looked forward to my experience at MBS," Wiebe said. "There were small groups that formed, and we had an excellent group that met throughout our three years at the seminary. It was the right school for us."

The couple's first year at seminary was in Chicago. Wiebe recalled the close companionship that developed as they rode the bus to class with their fellow students, visiting and studying Greek flashcards on the way.

"It was a meaningful experience to spend one year studying in the inner city," he said.

In 1958, MBS and GBS began a cooperative program known as Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, and MBS (and the Wiebes) relocated to Elkhart. Wiebe recalled the excitement of being part of this new collaborative venture, which Waltner played a key role in leading.

During their third year, the Wiebes got a call from [First Mennonite Church of Berne](#) (Indiana) to plant a church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. They accepted the invitation and began commuting to Fort Wayne on weekends, holding worship services and summer Bible school in a parsonage purchased by the Berne congregation.

Following Leonard's graduation in 1960, the Wiebes moved to the parsonage to continue forming [Maplewood Mennonite Church](#). The Berne church helped the new congregation build its first building in 1963, and the Wiebes pastored there until 1974. During this time, Wiebe also completed a Master of Sacred Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York (1970), and they had three children.

In 1974, the couple accepted a call from [Faith Mennonite Church](#) in Newton, Kansas, and Wiebe pastored there for 12 years. Joan worked for the General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC) Women in Mission. They then received a call from [Western District Conference](#) of the GCMC to plant a church in East Denver. After buying a house there in 1986, they began making contacts in the area, renting meeting space at a senior center. With the financial and prayerful support of many congregations (including Berne and Maplewood), they established [Peace Mennonite Community Church](#) in Aurora, serving there until 1998.

"I always felt that the seminary encouraged us and was very close to whatever we were doing in church planting," Wiebe reflected. "In addition to Erland, a number of professors made a deep impression on our lives, such as **JakeENZ** and **Paul Miller**. There was a real caring for each person and a strong sense of prayer in the school that helped us and gave us the support we needed."

After returning to northern Indiana, Wiebe served as a congregational coach for several [Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference](#) churches. He expressed gratitude for Joan's partnership in their shared ministry,

affirming her strengths in hospitality, relationship-building, teaching and leading music. The Wiebes are members of [Eighth Street Mennonite Church](#) in Goshen.

Located in Elkhart, Indiana, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, offering theological education for learners both on campus and at a distance, including a wide array of lifelong learning programs — all with the goal of educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world. ambs.edu

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Image available:

AMBS Alumni Fred Speckeen Leonard Wiebe.jpg

Frederick Speckeen, PhD (at left), and Leonard Wiebe, MST (at right), are the 2021 recipients of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition. (Speckeen: photo provided / Wiebe: credit: Annette Brill Bergstresser)