



Profiles

of Mennonite Faith

Albert and Anna Enns: Whatever It Takes

What Canadian woman packs a wedding dress and flies to a distant country to marry a man she mainly knew through letters? What man expects her to do that? Anna (1928–2021) and Albert Enns (1926–2020) were that woman and man. What they had in common was their determination to serve God. That, and the trauma of seeing their fathers taken to prison camps to die.

During the Second World War, Albert fled Ukraine in 1943 and ended up in Poland where, at age seventeen, he was forced to join the German army. At the end of the war, in a prisoner-of-war camp in Austria, he sensed an urgent need to surrender his life to God. From that point on, his one goal was to serve God. He applied to immigrate to Canada but was not admitted because his arm still bore the dreaded SS tattoo. He immigrated to Paraguay, then trained at a seminary in Argentina. While in his first pastorate, he realized he needed a wife. Not just any wife, but one who would willingly put up with a husband as single-minded as he was.

The young Anna Eckert also fled Ukraine with her mother. After a harrowing journey, they settled in St. Catharines, Ontario. She enjoyed her life there, working by day and studying

Christian Education courses at night. When an aunt mentioned that a young minister in Paraguay needed a wife, Anna's independent spirit rose up. She spit out the words, "If I want a husband, I'll get my *own* husband!"

Yet, after three years of letter-writing and many a tearful prayer, she packed up a wedding dress, kissed her family goodbye, and flew to Paraguay with just her clothes and a typewriter. She quickly learned that it was true what Albert had told her—God, not she, would always come first.

While Albert planted a new church in Asunción supported by the Board of Missions and Services for the Mennonite Brethren (now called Multiply), Anna plunged into supporting her husband's ventures, determined to do well. Their first small, rented home had no hot running water. Instead of the modern washing machine she'd used in Canada, she scrubbed their clothes by hand. Instead of an electric stove, she made do with a single Primus burner to cook their meals. Albert opposed investing in a stove, but he did consent to a second Primus burner so she could cook two-pot meals.

Albert launched into evangelism,



Anna (Eckert) and Albert Enns

creating a unique style of ministry he called *Evangelismo Extensivo*. Travelling from town to town in Paraguay, he drew huge crowds to outdoor meetings in stadiums or under giant tents. He carefully selected films to attract the audiences who would then stay to hear him preach about Jesus. He held the crowds spellbound with intriguing messages sprinkled with anecdotes from real life.

Often facing harsh opposition, he and his team camped in tents, preaching month after month, year after year, moving from town to town, their trucks loaded with folding chairs, a film projector, the big-top tent, and enough pots and pans to cook simple food for themselves on camp stoves.

A hallmark of Albert's ministry was that it did not end with evangelism. He insisted that all new converts be given ongoing Bible teaching. Following his campaigns, he and his team set up regular Bible studies with the new converts in their towns. As a result, between 1973 and 1985, over 20 churches and fellowship groups sprang up across Paraguay.

And where was Anna? While Albert spent most of his time on the road, the stalwart Anna was left to raise their five children (Marlene, Daniel, Delbert, Anita, and Arnold) and to create a refuge during his once-a-week visits. It was not without a struggle. However, she had said "Yes" to God, and as life unfolded, it was "just" a matter of re-affirming the commitment she had made.

Anna skillfully managed a backyard of chickens, pigeons, and rabbits, as well as canary birds (Albert's hobby). To help pay for housing, she took in female boarders who also provided an opportunity for adult

conversation. She was active in women's ministry in the church and even found time to bake buns to send along for Albert and his team.

Their work was so admired that in 1988 they were called to the country of Colombia. That country was in the throes of the drug wars, and Albert's work shifted to the training of Colombian pastors with the goal of building strong and dedicated leaders. The Ennses were much appreciated by the Colombians who lovingly referred to their two years of ministry there as "The Enns Era."

The Ennses left a vibrant legacy there as well as in Paraguay. Known throughout the country for his integrity, Albert served for several years as one of the personal counselors to the President of Paraguay.

In 1994, Albert and Anna were asked to serve a group going to share the gospel in Russia. Albert's regular habit was to read his Bible in several languages: German, Spanish, sometimes English, and even Russian. The Ennses agreed to go, even though Albert did not fully agree with the door-to-door method of evangelism that was planned. That method worked in western countries, but in Russia he insisted on changing the prescribed wording to better connect with the mindset resulting from years of Communism.

Strongly opposed to anything that smelled of "cheap grace," he was adamant that everyone should be told up-front the cost of following Jesus. This reflected what lay at the heart of his life-long ministry. It also echoes the unwavering choice made by both Albert and Anna. Choose Jesus and then be ready to do whatever it takes to stay faithful to a divine calling.



Profiles of Mennonite Faith: No. 71, Spring 2022.

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