

TheMennonite



Merger leaders Dorothy Nickel Friesen and John Murray

10 years later...

July 2011

www.TheMennonite.org

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- To obey or not to obey
- Stewards of grace
- Freedom Riders remind us of racism
- The power of the nonshootout
- Christian mission is not exotic
- Editorial: The Pittsburgh experiment



Everence



Photo: Claybottom Farms, Goshen, Ind. by John Tirota

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ON THE COVER: Photo by Vada Snider

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LETTERS

This publication welcomes your letters, either about our content or about issues facing the Mennonite Church USA. Please keep your letter brief—one or two paragraphs—and about one subject only. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Publication is also subject to space limitations. E-mail to letters@themennonite.org or mail to Letters, *The Mennonite*, 1700 S. Main St., Goshen, IN 46526-4794. Please include your name and address. We will not print letters sent anonymously, though we may withhold names at our discretion.
—Editors

Pink Mennos and conventions

How wonderful of *The Mennonite* to carry two powerful essays on the role that subversive women have played in shaping our faith story (“Wise Men and Subversive Women” and “Subversive Mothers in the Genealogy of Jesus,” May). These authors rightly praise the way the biblical tradition upholds the marginalized as central bearers of God’s good news—news that continues to haunt our hearts. How puzzling, then, that the closing editorial chose to single out a group of marginalized young people (Pink Mennos) as subverting the work of the church. In generations to come, might they be the very ones we praise and uphold as central bearers of God’s good news—news that continues to haunt our hearts?
—Joel Miller, Cincinnati

I look forward to attending the Mennonite Church USA convention in Pittsburgh. I was disappointed to read the editorial in the May issue that suggests Pink Mennos caused serious problems at the convention in Columbus. They have been grossly misrepresented by those who are afraid Mennonite Church USA may become inclusive of sexual minorities.

At Columbus 2009, I heard many positive comments about the respectful, nonconfrontational behavior of this group. I did witness several encounters by youth pastors confronting these people in a disrespectful manner at the

MennoNeighbors booth. I also witnessed two young Pink Mennos being accosted and verbally abused in the empty concourse one night.

As an 80-year-old grandmother, I will take my stand with the marginalized, hoping to see a Mennonite church that welcomes all to the table in my lifetime.—Ruby Lehman, Harrisonburg, Va.

Regarding the May editorial: It is hypocritical to criticize youth for employing “techniques of social advocacy and confrontation” that we would be most happy to see them use in another context, such as an antiwar protest. At many mainline Protestant church conventions, the protests are much less respectful. At Columbus 2009, there were hymn sings and colored clothing rather than incendiary banners or angry rallies. It was uniquely Mennonite. We should teach our youth how to respectfully express disagreement and how to be in dialogue with differing viewpoints. What is it we teach our youth by splitting the convention in an attempt to shut down dialogue? Maybe we should spend less time trying to silence them and more time truly listening to what they’re trying to teach us. Let he who has ears hear.—Reuben Alexander, Washington, D.C.

Spaulding dismissal

Editor’s note: See page 43 for a Mennonite Church USA Communiqué on Randall Spaulding’s dismissal from the Binational Worship Council.

I have appreciated Ervin Stutzman’s columns, in which he often argues eloquently for “diversity” within the church, claiming that diversity is a gift, not a curse, in the church. In the May issue he goes further than just affirming “the gift of diversity.” He argues that sometimes we are called upon to “put up with” those who are not like us, buttressing his argument with the words of Jesus and Paul. He writes, “Perhaps we too readily hang our
(Continued on page 62)

Stutzman responds to concerns about language

The editor invited me to respond to a number of readers who were upset by my words about Pink Mennos, quoted in the June editorial. First, I will quote the two paragraphs from my April report to the Executive Board from which the quotation was taken:

“As I travel across the church, I discover there are radically different feelings about the upcoming convention. Some voice a strong enthusiasm for the event, while others voice a strong sense of dread. The experience with Pink Mennos at Columbus in 2009 introduced a new level of engagement in controversial matters, spreading the level of dissatisfaction from the usual complaints about the content of particular seminars or worship services to include painful encounters in the hallways and display booths. The techniques for social advocacy and confrontation that we have taught young adults in our schools have come to haunt our

church’s most visible gathering, to the end that convention-goers feel immense pressure to take up sides against one another on the most divisive issue in the modern church in America. The youth convention particularly feels the pressure with the withdrawal of some of the largest youth groups who regularly attend the biennial convention.

“I pray that the prayerful atmosphere in the Conversation Room can help alleviate the pressure and sense of dread that some people feel about the meeting in Pittsburgh. We need the presence of the Spirit to help us love one another, even when we disagree. And we need to spend most of our time discussing the matters on which we have the deepest agreement.”

When I spoke of that which “haunts” our convention, I was referring to the complaints and unhappy memories of Columbus 2009 that some have communicated to me.

There are others in our church who were delighted by the creative activities of Pink Mennos, grateful that young adults take such interest in the church. We must not blame Pink Mennos for using techniques of social advocacy and confrontation taught them by the church. Since the days of Martin Luther King Jr., our church has embraced the call to social advocacy and defense of civil rights. I have chronicled this development in my new book, *From Nonresistance to Justice: Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric 1908-2008*.

What haunts our convention now is the way the issue of gay rights is deeply dividing our church. We must draw on other traditions taught in our schools—that of biblical interpretation, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The Conversation Room has been designed to do the latter two. May God help us in that quest.—*Ervin Stutzman, Mennonite Church USA executive director*

IN THIS ISSUE

Ten years ago this month, a formal action created Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada out of three predecessor denominations. We mark this anniversary with commentary from the two people at the center of the merger process. Pastors Dorothy Nickel Friesen and John C. Murray are introduced on page 12. Then they respond to questions about the merger process with some candid answers (page 14).

Two other pieces in this issue are related to Mennonite Church USA’s last decade: “Fewer Churches Leave MC USA” (page 40) is reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Weekly Review*. The editorial (page 64) takes

a look at what leaders expected 2011 to look like back in 2001 and reasons why none of those aspirations came to fruition (page 64).

Martha Yoder Maust takes another look at Romans 13 with her article “To Obey or Not to Obey” the government (page 17). In “A Witness to War,” Doug Shirsch says, “The patriotic argument always begins with love (for country) but inevitably demands our acquiescence for doing things to outsiders that is criminal behavior in our own country” (page 21).

Several institutions in Goshen, Ind., had experiences in the last month that relate directly to patriotism. The Goshen College board of directors reversed its March 2010

decision to play the national anthem before athletics events and was punished by many in the secular media (page 38). Meanwhile, Bethany Christian Schools decided to put U.S. flags in each classroom and create a daily opportunity for its students to say the Pledge of Allegiance. These changes are required for any private school wishing to receive Indiana’s tuition vouchers, new for the 2011-2012 school year (page 39).

The news section also carries our second Communiqué from Mennonite Church USA Executive Board staff (page 43). This one provides the official explanation of Randall Spaulding’s dismissal from the binational worship council.—*Editor*

Miller named secretary of Global Christian Forum

WINNIPEG, Manitoba—The Global Christian Forum (GCF) has appointed Larry Miller to become its first full-time secretary when he completes



nearly 22 years as the general secretary of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

Miller will begin officially with the GCF on Jan. 1, 2012, at the same time that César García, MWC's next general secretary, assumes the position after a time of transition.

"My rootedness will remain in the Anabaptist-Mennonite communion and in relationships with you," Miller wrote to his MWC colleagues in the wake of the GCF's invitation. He noted that for several years he had felt an interest and call toward involvement in the GCF. "My hope is that the Anabaptist communion, including you, can view me as one sent also on your behalf."

The GCF, formed in 1998, is a growing global initiative that seeks to bring leaders of all Christian churches in the world together to foster mutual respect and to address common challenges.

—MWC

Mennonites speak at peace convocation

KINGSTON, Jamaica—Two Mennonites, Thomas Finger and Lisa Schirch, made presentations on May 23 at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston.

Finger's workshop, titled "Peace: the Lens for Re-visioning Christian Theology and Mission," explored his views about peace, justice, salvation, sin and Jesus' mission.

In a section titled "Not Only," he explored classic theological assumptions. In another part called "But Also" he said, "Sin is not only the personal breaking of divine laws, but also the corporate turning away from and losing sight of God, peace and justice."

He is a professor of church history and world religions.

In a panel discussion, Lisa Schirch, professor of peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., pointed out that governments tend to attempt to justify large-scale military action—at its worst, nuclear warfare—in the name of "security." She called into question what security should mean to Christians.

"Jesus doesn't use the word 'security.' The language of the church is much more about justice and peace than about security," she said.—*World Council of Churches*

Youth sentenced in death of Mennonite volunteer

ALAMOSA, Colo.—A teen who pleaded guilty to criminally negligent homicide in the traffic death of a Mennonite Voluntary Service worker was sentenced June 14 to two years proba-

tion and 45 days in detention.

District Judge Martin Gonzales went against the wishes of the victim's family with the detention term for Kyle Stotsky, 16, and argued that his sentence needed to serve as a deterrent to others in the community.

Last Oct. 24, Stotsky hit cyclist Chloe Weaver from behind while driving. The boy then fled the accident but was tracked to his home by authorities later that evening. Weaver, 20, died at the scene.

The judge praised Weaver's family, noting that he all too often sees victims' families so consumed by hate and vengeance that they are blind to anything else. "They have been your guardian angels in this process," he told Stotsky.

Herm Weaver said his daughter would have called on Stotsky to live his life honestly and to take responsibility for his actions.—*Pueblo Chieftain*

Settlers injure 9-year-old Palestinian with stones

HEBRON/AL-KHALIL, West Bank—On June 2, two boys, residents of the Beit Hadassah settlement in Hebron's Old City, ages 14 and 15, threw stones at Palestinians walking in the market below. Some of the rocks were as large as five inches. A 9-year-old Palestinian boy was struck with two stones, causing a head injury that splattered the sidewalk with blood. An ambulance rushed the boy to the hospital.

An Israeli soldier stationed beside the settlement had neither tried to stop the boys nor take any action against them after they hurled the stones. An Israeli policeman later called on a Palestinian resident who saw much of the incident, and took information to investigate further.—*Christian Peacemaker Teams*

Anabaptist Network of North America launched

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif.—Co-founder Tom Airey announced in May the launching of the Anabaptist Net-



50 miles to fight poverty

Eric Massanari, pastor of Shalom Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan., runs along a 50-mile trail May 14 near Lawrence, Kan., to raise money for Circles of Hope, a program that works to help people out of poverty. He raised more than \$2,225.—*Gordon Houser*

MCC photo by Silas Crews



MCC reaches out to Haitian immigrants

Mennonite Central Committee East Coast immigration counselor Sara Mateo-Deo (right) confers with client Emmanuel Limonta. Mateo-Deo meets with immigrants each Thursday at this small storefront beside the First Haitian Church of the Brethren in Brooklyn, N.Y.—MCC

work of North America. ANNA seeks to provide “a point of entry for jaded and lamenting Christians who seek to identify, belong and commit to a wider movement alternative to ‘accommodated Christianity’ largely ordered around personal piety and future salvation.”

ANNA also facilitates partnerships among local worshipping communities “by sharing resources and collaborating in the heavy lifting of God’s reign: the hard and holy work of releasing peace on earth. [And] ANNA provides a brainstorming session for North American Anabaptists (like our global counterparts) who, over time, solidify core convictions that we commit to embodying on this accommodated continent.”

For more information, go to anabaptistnetwork.ning.com/?xg_source=msg_mes_network.—ANNA

MDS responds to many tornados this spring

LITITZ, Pa.—Tornados struck with unusual frequency and ferocity this spring. Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) executive director Kevin King has tracked the “dizzying array of storm reports that came in almost daily

in April and May.”

By June 7, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrative reported 525 fatalities nationwide, the highest death toll from tornados since the NOAA began gathering statistics in 1950 and well above the annual average of 80 tornado-related deaths.

MDS units and regions have reported on responses in the following locations: Pulaski, Va.; Tushka, Okla.; Bertie County, N.C.; Birmingham, Hackleburg and Phil Campbell, Ala.; Reading, Kan.; Joplin, Mo.; and Oklahoma City.—MDS

Hesston College dorm furniture helps others

HESSTON, Kan.—As Hesston College students graduated May 8 and headed home for the summer, they embodied the college’s motto of “Start Here, Go Everywhere.” On May 10, students loaded dorm furniture into a semi for donation in Waco, Texas.

For 42 years students used the beds, dressers, mirrors, desks and chairs, but as the college prepared to renovate the dorm rooms this summer, the old furniture needed a new home.

Hesston College facilities employee

and project organizer Tim Goering had a connection with an organization in Waco that had a need, “and things fell into place better than we hoped.”

Goering’s cousin, Kathy Reid, is the executive director for the Family Abuse Center (FAC) in Waco, one of the organizations to receive the furniture. The center assists victims of domestic violence by sheltering those seeking an escape and providing education and intervention to prevent abuse. On any given night, the shelter houses 40 to 75 residents, predominately women and children.

FAC operates a targeted housing program for shelter residents to eventually move into their own homes. The organization provides basic furniture for furnishing the new residences, so Hesston College’s donation of 152 dressers, more than 100 beds and mirrors, 20 desks and 15 love seats was welcomed.—Hesston College

MHS Alliance, Everence to share offices

GOSHEN, Ind.—Mennonite Health Services (MHS) Alliance has signed a lease agreement to move its Goshen office to the Everence corporate office building in Goshen, beginning July 1.

Seven MHS Alliance staff members and two consulting associates will relocate to North Main Street. Rick Stiffney, MHS Alliance president and CEO, says “this is a wonderful opportunity to pursue new possibilities between two organizations that serve as ministries of Mennonite Church USA and other Anabaptist denominations.”—Mennonite Church USA

Registration numbers for Pittsburgh 2011

Adults: 2,082

Youth and sponsors: 3,584

Junior youth and sponsors: 194

K-5: 171

Preschool: 53

Infants: 55

Total: 6,139

There is a time for departure



Ron Adams will become pastor at Madison (Wis.) Mennonite Church next month.

There is a time for departure, even when there's no certain place to go.—Tennessee Williams

These words have been my screen saver for the last year. Whenever I stop typing for a few minutes, they scroll across the screen. They remind me that I am in an in-between place. They orient me. The time for departure is coming.

In August, I will have been at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pa., for 13 years. For the last three years, I have been aware of a growing restlessness. When is it time to leave a congregation? How will I know it is time? And, if I leave, where will I go?

After many months of prayer, conversation and meetings with my spiritual director, I became convinced that the restlessness and the questions had their source in God. The Spirit was inviting me to something new. Only recently did I discover what and where that new thing is.

None of this is easy. Our family has roots in the congregation. Roots that have developed and deepened over 13 years of life together. Our sons grew up at East Chestnut Street. It's the only congregation they know.

Marilou and I did some growing up, too. All of it under the tender care of an extraordinary community—the kind of community that pastors

find a home at Madison Mennonite.

In the meantime, we inhabit an in-between place. Still connected to East Chestnut Street. Still enjoying both the work and the congregation. But beginning the process of becoming connected to Madison Mennonite. Learning what's happening there and what makes them tick and slowly shifting our feet from one place to the next. It's a strange and sometimes awkward place to stand.

What makes this awkward stance tolerable is an abiding awareness of God's companionship. The transition ahead will be hard, we know. Saying goodbye to people we've fallen in love with is not easy. It's an ending, and endings require grieving.

Finding our way in a new community is also hard. It's a beginning, and beginnings require patience. Grieving and patience walking together. Not the most comfortable partnership.

But God keeps reminding our family that we are not alone in this in-between place. Our sisters and brothers in Lancaster and Madison are right there with us. And so is God. Faithful and true companions on the journey through this in-between landscape. Without such companions, I'm not sure we'd make it. With them, I know we'll not only make it but will also be cared for every step of the way.

Here's the thing: All that language we use about God's faithfulness and God's presence and God's companionship? It's all true. We may not always believe it. We may not always be aware of it. We may not always welcome it. But God is faithful. And God is present. And God is our companion all the way.

Through all the discernment and all the changes and all the worries about taking this step, God's abiding presence has been so clear. When all I knew was that it was time to go, even though I didn't know where, God was with me. And now, when I know exactly when I am leaving and when I am starting and where we are going, God is with me. God is with us.

The goodbye is awfully hard. The hello comes with a big learning curve. But I know we can make this transition. Because God is with us. Thanks be to God. **TM**

Here's the thing: All that language we use about God's faithfulness and God's presence and God's companionship? It's all true.

dream of serving. It's a strong, wise, capable and compassionate community whose love and support have never wavered, despite my all-too-frequent blunders. Even now, as our relationship is ending, the folks at East Chestnut Street keep extending their love and good wishes to us, graceful to the end. No, leaving here is not easy.

But there is a time for departure. And so the Spirit is calling us to Madison, Wis. I will serve as pastor at Madison Mennonite Church. We are eager to begin this new leg of the journey and to find community in a new place. We are ready to

Rain

by Regina Murray Brault

In seven days
we'll call this last July,
and still the prairie grass
stands higher than the faded corn.

My daughter's once-a-farmhouse
occupies high ground
overlooking Granger, Iowa
where twin water towers
labeled—HOT
and COLD
in block print red and blue
attest to Midwest humor
that has a way of sneaking up on you
like the daddy-long-legs
who crosses a patch of parched garden
to wear my empty sandal.

Three lightning rods
straddle the peak of the pointed roof
appearing to challenge God.
We watch the sky—
searching the horizon for thunderheads
to spark the metal.

This time last year
we spread out blueprints
from her husband's flooded office
in Des Moines
across the split-rail fence
to dry.
Today we draw a carefully constructed plan
scaled in inches—
a prayer for rain

but not too much.

*Regina Murray Brault lives in
Burlington, Vt.*

Selective secrecy about drone warfare

War reporting has changed over the decades, with the military usually trying to hide what they're doing from the press—or else making sure the reporting is spun positively—all in the name of what's good for the nation.

During the Iraq War, the military introduced “embedding,” in which reporters became part of certain groups of troops. This increased reporters' sympathy toward the soldiers but also limited their access to stories that might not be positive toward the military's actions. The growing use of drones (remote-controlled planes), particularly in Afghanistan, is one attempt to control war reporting by making military actions as secret as possible.

Tara McKelvey discusses this in her article “Coving Obama's Secret War” in *Columbia Journalism Review* (May/June). She writes that journalists “have not succeeded in digging down to basic questions about drone attacks: How are targets chosen? Under what legal authority? How successful are drones in killing enemies and sparing civilians? Are the drones helping win the war against would-be terrorists?”

According to the New America Foundation, writes McKelvey, President Barack Obama has authorized 193 drone strikes in Pakistan since he took office in 2009.

Jane Mayer, a writer for the *New Yorker*, published a story in October 2009 that said the Predators (drones) were “much more than just a breakthrough in technology—they were also a new frontier legally, politically and morally.” When the CIA is asked directly about its role in gathering the information the drones use for targeting, it denies having one, said Mayer.

Gene Stoltzfus, founding director of Christian Peacemaker Teams who died on March 10, 2010, wrote about the moral question in a Feb. 25, 2010, blog collected in the book *Create Space for Peace: Forty Years of Peacemaking* (TriMark Press, 2011).

The blog discusses “robotic technology now being developed to make modern warfare ‘safer’ for soldiers but, inevitably, more lethal for civilians.” The lethality is not just inevitable but actual. Stoltz-

fus notes that “people on the ground in Pakistan told me that just 10 percent of Predator drone bombings are insurgent combatants; 90 percent are civilians.”

“When the Western media do cover drone strikes that miss any high-value targets—and which, consequently, no U.S. official is willing to discuss—” McKelvey writes, “their stories are thin.” The Pakistani media, on the other hand, provides plenty of details.

Three days after Obama was sworn in as president, his administration launched its first drone strike, according to numerous news reports. News reports about the attack, which reportedly hit a house that was a Taliban hideout, had conflicting details.

The news articles from U.S. sources mentioned only briefly that the drone struck the wrong target. The homeowner had been a tribal elder who had attempted to organize a peace movement to fight extremism. “The deaths of the father and others, along with the property destruction, left the family, including an 18-year-old son, destitute,” McKelvey writes. “The teenager called for revenge.”

These details were not gathered by reporters but by a human-rights investigator, Chris Rogers.

A larger question than reporting on drone strikes, according to Stoltzfus, is the growth of robotic warfare. He writes: “The absence of meaningful work for many in this generation may become the void where new waves of imagination in the service of violence are unleashed.”
—Gordon Houser

Pontius' Puddle

Joel Kauffmann



“If current education criteria were applied to medicine, hospitals would be closed if any patients died in 2014; doctors would be fired or their salaries cut if patient outcomes did not climb each year, and there would be one narrow medical measurement to determine this.—John Richard Schrock in *the Wichita Eagle*”

How to revive the economy

“The best way to revive the economy is not to cut the federal deficit right now,” argues Robert Reich in his blog in February. “It’s to put more money into the pockets of average working families. Not until they start spending again big time will companies begin to hire again big time.” Big American companies are sitting on almost \$2 trillion of cash because there aren’t enough customers to buy additional goods and services. “The only people with money are the richest 10 percent whose stock portfolios have been roaring back to life,

Bank of America?

- Bank of America’s 2009 pretax income: **\$4.4 billion**
 - Amount Bank of America paid in taxes in 2009: **\$0**
 - Number of foreign tax havens Bank of America used in 2009: **115**
 - Percentage of Americans who want to end tax cuts for the richest Americans: **59**
- Yes! Magazine*

but their spending isn’t enough to spur much additional hiring.” How to get money into the pockets of average working families? asks Reich. Progressive taxation. The lion’s share of America’s income and wealth is at the top. “Taxing the very rich won’t hurt the economy. They spend a much smaller portion of their incomes than everyone else,” he writes. Average families need to have enough to spend to get the economy moving again.

Beware of prognosticators

Students at Hamilton College analyzed prognostications by 26 political and economic pundits during a 16-month period in 2007-2008 to see how accurate they were. They concluded that only nine of the pundits were more accurate than the flip of a coin, two were much less accurate, and the remaining 15 were statistically as reliable as a coin toss. Princeton economist Paul Krugman, columnist for the *New York Times*, came out on top. The worst prognosticator was conservative columnist Cal Thomas.—*Christian Century*

The Jews and Pope Paul II

When the Vatican beatifies someone and places the person just one step away from sainthood, it usually attracts scant attention among Jews because it is correctly perceived as an internal church process. But the recent beatification—and likely canonization—of the late Pope John Paul II is different; the Jewish community remembers the Polish-born Karol Wojtyla as the best pope the Jews ever had.—*Religion News Service*

A quiz on the Bible and sex

- The Bible’s position on abortion is:
 - Never mentioned.
 - To forbid it along with all forms of artificial birth control.
 - Condemnatory, except to save the life of the mother.
- The Bible suggests “marriage” is:
 - The lifelong union of one man and one woman.
 - The union of one man and up to 700 wives.
 - Often undesirable, because it distracts from service to the Lord.
- The Bible says of homosexuality:
 - Leviticus describes male sexual pairing as an abomination.
 - A lesbian should be stoned at her father’s doorstep.
 - There’s plenty of ambiguity and no indication of physical intimacy, but some readers point to Ruth and Naomi’s love as suspiciously close, or to King David declaring to Jonathan: “Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” (2 Samuel 1:23-26)
- In the Bible, erotic writing is:
 - Forbidden by Deuteronomy as “adultery of the heart.”
 - Exemplified by “Song of Songs,” which celebrates sex for its own sake.
 - Unmentioned.
- Jesus says that divorce is permitted:
 - Only after counseling and trial separation.
 - Never.
 - Only to men whose wives have been unfaithful.
- Among sexual behavior that is forbidden is:
 - Adultery.
 - Incest.
 - Sex with angels.
- The people of Sodom were condemned principally for:
 - Homosexuality.
 - Blasphemy.
 - Lack of compassion for the poor and needy.

Answers:

1. A. 2. A, B and C. 3. A and C. 4. B. 5. B and C. 6. A, B and C. 7. C. —*New York Times*

As co-chairs of the integration committee, Dorothy Nickel Friesen and John C. Murray played key roles in the process.

Ten years ago, delegates to General Conference Mennonite Church (GC), Mennonite Church (MC) and Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) gatherings voted to create Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. The process leading up to this vote—first called “merger,” then “integration” and finally “transformation”—

10 years later

by Everett J. Thomas

was coordinated by the Integration Committee. Pastors Dorothy Nickel Friesen and John C. Murray co-chaired the committee, which did its work from 1995 to 1999. A

decade later, we asked these

leaders about that process and where Mennonite Church USA, in particular, finds itself now (see page 14).

John C. Murray and Dorothy Nickel Friesen.
Photo by Vada Snider



During most dimensions of the merger process, church politics required dual leadership on such committees. Nickel Friesen was GC, at the time senior pastor at First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio. Murray was MC, at the time pastor of Emma Mennonite Church in Topeka, Ind. But each had a long history of conference and denominational leadership before being tapped for the Integration Committee.

Nickel Friesen, originally from Mountain Lake, Minn., served as a pastor in several congregations and an administrator at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., beginning in 1982. From 1983 to 1989, she was a member of the GC Commission on Home Ministries and served as its chair the last three years. She preached at churchwide conventions in 1993, 1999 and 2003 and taught seminars at the 1983, 1986, 1989, 2007 and 2009 conventions. Prior to her work on the Integration Committee, she published eight articles in *The Mennonite's* predecessor publications, *Gospel Herald* and *The Mennonite* (GC).

Nickel Friesen is now retired. But after her stint with the Integration Committee, she moved to Newton, Kan., where she served as conference minister for Western District Conference from 2003 to 2010. She is married to Richard Friesen; they have two adult children and two grandchildren. She says her hobbies include reading, seeing movies, eating chocolate and “taking afternoon naps—especially on Sunday.”

Nickel Friesen is quick to point out that the decision to form Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada came to fruition after decades of work.

“One of the historical notes [for] newcomers,” she says, “is the ongoing, intentional dialogue regarding integration that the Integration Committee inherited: Integration Exploration Committee (after Bethlehem '83), the two-country structure committees that worked during 1997-1999. ... There were many consultations. ... In short, [the] Integration Committee had many groups working and reporting and planning and proposing. My stack of Integration Committee papers is over a foot tall.”

Nickel Friesen uses a metaphor to describe the

nature of the Integration Committee: “I compared the Integration Committee to the antennae of a caterpillar, the head of the caterpillar as the general boards and then all the segments of the caterpillar as various parts of the church moving at their own pace. The Integration Committee surveyed the landscape and kept moving to a new reality, and other parts of the church sometimes followed but at slightly different angles and speed.”

I compared the Integration Committee to the antennae of a caterpillar, the head of the caterpillar as the general boards and then all the segments of the caterpillar as various parts of the church moving at their own pace.

—Dorothy Nickel Friesen



John Murray, originally from Kouts, Ind., has

been in pastoral leadership

since 1982. He served as president of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference from 1991 to 1994 and preached at the churchwide convention in 1999. He also had published four articles in *Gospel Herald* before beginning as Integration Committee co-chair and was an occasional chapel speaker at Mennonite colleges.

In 1999, at the end of the Integration Committee assignment, John moved to Hesston, Kan., where he continues to serve as lead pastor at Hesston Mennonite Church. He has also taught several classes and been a guest lecturer at Hesston College. One of his passions is Menno Clinic in Andhra Pradesh, India, where John is a charter member of the board of directors. John is married to Krista A. Miller Murray, and they have three children.

John is quick to point out that he and Nickel Friesen may have been the co-chairs of the Integration Committee, but they were not afforded much leadership authority. He describes their role as facilitators to let changes happen while others made decisions.

Q & A: Dorothy and John

'New' Mennonites are attracted to Mennonite Church USA because of its Anabaptist core beliefs—not because of former structures.—Dorothy Nickel Friesen



1. What was it like to facilitate the merger/integration process from 1995-1999?

Dorothy: It was enormously complex and complicated. The Integration Committee (IC) was to “guide and monitor” the process, which meant immense data collection, endless conversations that both respected the past but prodded toward a new future. The expectations were high; the learning curve equally high; the opportunity to interact with people across the denomination—priceless.

John: I am grateful for the experiences and relationships that were forged on the journey of leadership of the IC. Staff changes in executive leadership of both the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church in the midst of our work shifted our focus and way of working in the middle of the process. A further challenge was operating without a clear budget for the process.

2. An oft-stated goal during the late 1990s was for us to move to a Mennonite Church USA identity from identities as members of General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) and Mennonite Church (MC). Has that happened?

John: While a new identity has not fully developed, the former GC and MC identities are fading due to the passage of time, the presence of new leaders and new shared experiences. Giving more attention to a healthy grieving process may have been helpful in letting go of the former identities. The former identities remain stronger in conferences that did not integrate.

Organizational structure is important, but it cannot create a compelling identity. *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, applied as an identity, becomes a creed rather than a confession. Vision: Healing and Hope, applied as an identity rather than a calling, sounds like an untrue statement rather than an invitation to growth.

I advocate an identity of grace-filled communities of love as outlined in Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love. Vision: Healing and Hope is our purpose. *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* is a guide in ongoing discernment. Organizational structures facilitate our relationships in order to fulfill our purpose.

Dorothy: For those areas of Mennonite Church USA where “both” identities are present, there are continuing historical realities and memories that shape the present understanding of being part of the new denomination. “New” Mennonites are attracted to Mennonite Church USA because of its Anabaptist core beliefs—not because of former structures. Unfortunately, stereotypes instead of values of “GC” and “MC” still inform our conversations and deter us from proclaiming our Christian identities in an increasingly post-Christendom environment.

3. There was an assumption before 2001 that area conferences would merge or be transformed in some way. That has not happened for most conferences east of the Rocky Mountains. What were your responsibilities as facilitators to work with area conferences?

Dorothy: Actually, it was the impulse of congregations “merging” since the late 1960s that spurred area conferences to begin intentional conversations about integration. Meanwhile, both MC and GC program agencies had multiple programmatic integrated efforts. However, the mandate to the IC was to deal with denominational agenda (name, publication, General Board integration); we were not to deal with area conferences at all—and we didn’t.

(A note: Central Plains Mennonite Conference is east of the Rockies and is an integrated area conference.)

John: The IC was charged with the task of bringing together the MC and GC general boards and agencies. It was never its mandate to reshape the structures of conferences with new geographic boundaries. Conferences were expected to engage in their own journeys of discernment regarding integration. Prior to integration, the Mennonite Church included conferences with overlapping geography.

4. Before merger/integration, the assumption was that Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA would remain one denomination in North America. There now is little connection between the two other than by national staffs. Was this separation inevitable?

John: The Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church were binational organizations with a dominant U.S. agenda. The establishment of two national structures was intended to create equitable national structures in order to facilitate the unique agenda of the church in each national context and create equal conversation partners for a binational agenda.

The degree of separation that has developed between Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada is one of my greatest laments of the integration process. At the time of the formation of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada there was a commitment that the 2007 Convention would be a joint convention of the United States and Canada and be held in Canada. This is one of the practical commitments to ongoing meaningful relationship that was abandoned.

Dorothy: No. We simply failed miserably in this area. The IC discussed and seriously considered a “regional paradigm” with four regions—one being Canada. That got no traction. Finally, the 100-year history of the Conference of Men-

nonites in Canada gave it a head start for missional agenda, whereas the U.S. country agenda is still struggling for comprehensive unity (not uniformity). If we do not have joint delegate assemblies, there will be little connection with, appreciation for or learning from each other. This is one of my deepest regrets about IC work—and subsequent lack of Mennonite Church USA’s commitment for binational linkages.

5. What are the current weaknesses of Mennonite Church USA?

Dorothy: Failure to articulate Anabaptist core beliefs, legalism and the practicing of punitive discipline (even excommunication), few gifted women in major leadership positions, consumerism, lack of nonviolent pacifism, general lack of inertia concerning peace and justice, loss of population in the Midwest, lack of stewardship of finances and the environment.

John: I lament the focus on organizational structure, as if restructuring will transform hearts and minds. I lament that “missional” is often a



Vision: Healing and Hope, applied as an identity rather than a calling, sounds like an untrue statement rather than an invitation to growth.
—John Murray

A timeline of Mennonite Church/General Conference Mennonite Church integration

1983	1989	1995	1999	2001	2002
MC and GC hold joint assembly in Bethlehem, Pa.	MC and GC hold joint assembly in Normal, Ill.	After joint assembly in Wichita, Kan., Integration Committee forms	Integration Committee completes its work.	Delegates at Nashville, Tenn., agree to form Mennonite Church USA.	Mennonite Church USA begins on Feb. 1.



buzz word rather than a passionate commitment. I lament that the document Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love is largely unknown and too often not practiced in our relationships. I lament the ongoing tendency to be a closed, ethnically defined community rather than an open community defined by shared spiritual values of love, joy, peace and patience.

I hope we can embrace conversations that make us uncomfortable, allowing questions and doubts within the context of loving communities.—John Murray

6. —the strengths?

John: I celebrate our commitment to and efforts regarding antiracism. I celebrate our historic and ongoing commitment to a lived faith in humility and service. And I celebrate our willingness to wrestle with the difficult and complex issues of our day without needing to formulate resolutions of agreement. (This is an affirmation of “The Pittsburgh Experiment.”)

Dorothy: The growth of urban congregations both in progressive theology and new ethnicities; the plethora of Anabaptist resources, including outstanding Mennonite colleges and seminaries; “new” Mennonites; increased numbers of women pastors; excellent spiritual foundational commitments expressed in such documents as *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (not doctrinal), Vision statement, Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love; Anabaptist history of speaking truth to power; ecumenical linkages; creative and diverse worship and music; pastoral salary guidelines.

7. —the opportunities?

Dorothy: Endless. Cooperating with each other and other faith communities in matters of peace, justice, mental health, human rights, globalization, economic resourcing; establishing teaching centers in congregations with our colleges and seminaries to educate new leaders and pastors, resource lay leaders, encourage youth and inspire artists; sharing scholarship concerning Anabaptism and biblical literacy in local, regional, national and global arenas; creating funding sources for new ventures in land stewardship, church planting and congregational visioning.

John: I hope we will discover the places where the Anabaptist vision is alive and well beyond our denominational boundaries and offer our support. I hope we can embrace conversations that make us uncomfortable, allowing questions and doubts within the context of loving communities. I hope we will engage the missional calling, seeking to discover and reveal the image of God within everyone around us.

8. —the threats?

John: The greatest threats come from within, when we equate institutional preservation with the advancement of the reign of God, when we confuse unity with uniformity, when the word “Mennonite” describes an exclusive ethnicity rather than a living faith, when we engage in missional encounters without being open to being changed by those encounters.

Dorothy: Seduction by consumerism, violence and prejudice in our culture; societal fear; forgetting our Anabaptist history; lack of energy or inertia for involvement with congregational discernment and the inadequate spiritual practices of church members; post-Christendom realities; growth of poverty in our communities.

To obey or not to obey

A meditation on Romans 12:14-13:10

by Martha Yoder Maust

Romans 13 starts with this phrase: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities." What does that mean? Are we always supposed to obey everything the government tells us to do? ▶



Is Paul just exaggerating to make a point? Before we look at the text, let's consider some examples of how Christians have chosen to obey or not to obey the government authorities.

I begin with a story from my family history. My mother was a teenager in eastern France when World War II began. She lived on a farm and attended the Diesen Mennonite congregation. When Germany occupied eastern France, members noticed a man they did not know in the back of the church building during worship services, observing what was being said and done. Congregation members assumed he was a plainclothes member of the Gestapo. Several years ago, I asked my mother what she remembered of what had been preached at Diesen during the war. "Submit yourselves to the governing authorities," she said. What would you expect? What else could a preacher say when he preached under the eyes of the Gestapo?

No matter who you are, you know that living in harmony can be a lot of work.

A second example comes from Indiana history. Levi Coffin was a Quaker merchant who kept a general store near Richmond, Ind., in the 1830s and 1840s. Against the advice of some of his friends, he became involved in the Underground Railroad movement. He and his wife sheltered escaping slaves in their home and transported them to the next stop on their road to safety and freedom in Canada. His work was illegal. Neighbors boycotted his store, and some leaders in his church disapproved of his activities. He is credited with helping more than 3,000 slaves escape.

Another example comes from the southern United States. Twenty years after the Civil War, states in the south enacted laws mandating strict separation of black and white people. People with any degree of African ancestry could not use facilities reserved for whites. In the 1950s and 1960s, some courageous African-Americans challenged these laws. Accompanied by white friends, they sat together at lunch counters, rode buses together (see *Mediaculture*, page 59) and demonstrated together. Some were killed; many were jailed or beaten or both. The movement eventually led to the dismantling of the racist laws that had persisted for many decades.

Having considered those examples, let's shift

gears and move to the book of Romans, which began as a lengthy letter written to the house churches in Rome. The letter was probably read aloud and discussed in one congregation after another, as the listeners tried to understand what Paul was saying and how it applied to them. As in many large cities, there would have been people from many nations living in Rome, including Jews and Greeks. Some of the

James H. Meredith (left) was the first African-American to enroll at the University of Mississippi. He was escorted to class by U.S. marshals on Jan. 1, 1962.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



Christians may have been merchants, some owned property and some were poor. Maybe they were suffering persecution. They brought all these perspectives to their hearing of Paul's letter.

Instead of starting at the beginning of Romans 13, let's back up to the last few verses of chapter 12 so we can get a sense of the flow of Paul's thought. Imagine yourself as a Roman Christian hearing these words read to you: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." (All quotations from Romans are from the New International Version.)

You might be thinking about a recent event of persecution that happened to you or to someone in your congregation.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

If you are a well-to-do Roman, you might be wondering whether Paul realizes how hard it is to reach across class barriers or how hard it is for you to wash the feet of a poor brother or sister in imitation of Jesus. If you are a Jewish Christian, you might be thinking about how hard it is to share a meal with those who don't observe the food laws that you have observed since childhood. No matter who you are, you know that living in harmony can be a lot of work.

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Now you might be thinking about the last time someone sinned against you and wishing Paul would be more understanding about how hard it is to get along with some folks, especially those in power. Perhaps you would find yourself thinking about rebellion. But the Roman Empire was ruthless with insurgents. Jesus was crucified under a banner calling him the King of the Jews, and many others who looked like rebels to Rome were also crucified. So Paul did not want his readers, wishing they could return evil for evil, to plot rebellion. Imagine yourself, again, as a Roman Christian hearing these words of Paul:

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is re-

bellious against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. ... It is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. That is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing."

Maybe we can figure out when to obey and when not to obey the government by looking at the needs of our neighbors.

That sort of takes the wind out of your rebellious sails. Jesus submitted to crucifixion, and you, too, are to submit when persecution and punishment come your way. And it does seem that God has allowed the Romans to be in charge of the known world, at least for now. Maybe Paul teaches against insurrection in order to avoid greater persecution and bloodshed.

But does Paul really mean it when he says that rulers hold no terror for those who do right? Certainly we who read this letter in 2010 know of cases where governments, from Nazi Germany to Central American dictatorships to the killing fields of Cambodia, have been sources of terror to those who did right. But Paul did not live in any of those times or places. Remember that Paul was a Roman citizen, with all the privileges of that position. In Acts 23, we read about how Paul was protected from a lynch mob by Roman soldiers. He appealed to the protection of Rome when it seemed that he could not get a fair trial in Caesarea. So it seems that, for him at least, the Roman government held no terror.

Let's go back once more to imagining ourselves as Roman Christians hearing this letter:

"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another. For he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet' and whatever other commandment there may be are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is

the fulfillment of the law.”

Here is where it all comes together for the listener. We have to pay the taxes we owe to the government officials who come to collect them. We owe respect to those in authority. Above all, we owe honor to God, and we owe love to each other and to all of our fellow human beings. Submitting to the government authorities is not the greatest law. It’s one of those “other commandments” Paul mentions. Love of God and of neighbors is the greatest law, and submission to the government is only one thing that we are asked to do to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and harm to our neighbors.

Let us read Paul’s writings and other Scripture texts together, and let us talk with each other about the greater laws and the lesser laws.

If love of our neighbors is a greater commandment than submitting to the authorities, then maybe we can figure out when to obey and when not to obey the government by looking at the needs of our neighbors. Let’s go back to our examples and see how the greater law applies to the question of obedience to the authorities. When a plainclothes Gestapo man stood at the back of the Diesen congregation, love of neighbors led the preacher to preach about submission to the authorities, since he knew that preaching about rulers being toppled from their thrones would probably result in harm to his congregation.

Levi Coffin and other Christians broke the law when they sheltered people who were fleeing from slavery through the Underground Railroad. When asked to defend his actions in court, Levi said: “I had read in the Bible when I was a boy that it was right to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and to minister to those who had fallen among thieves and were wounded but that no distinction in regard to color was mentioned in the good Book, so in accordance with its teachings I had received these fugitives and cared for them” (*Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*, Ayer, 1992).

Coffin acted in love toward his neighbors, and this led him to disobey some of the laws that supported slavery.

During the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s, some Christians—especially white

Christians who already enjoyed their civil rights—disapproved of the demonstrations, saying that legal methods should be used instead. Other Christians argued that the greater law of love for the neighbor justified breaking the Jim Crow laws that denied basic civil rights to people of African descent.

We have looked at the text from Romans and at a few examples from more recent Christian experience. What does Paul’s teaching mean for us today? Sometimes we can call upon our government to right some wrongs, and the government can be a source of protection from angry mobs, as it was in the case of Paul. (Think of Ruby Bridges and the federal marshals who protected her as she walked to school every day.) Laws mandating free public education and providing health care for low-income pregnant women are good laws, and we support them. Most of us obey most of the laws of our land most of the time.

But there are times when we are called to obey the greater law of loving our neighbor and to disobey some of the lesser laws that keep us from doing that. Some of us have felt called to withhold a part of our taxes in order not to participate in killing those whom our government considers enemies. Some churches have provided sanctuary to people fleeing persecution in their own lands but unable to convince our government of their need for protection as refugees. Food and relief supplies have sometimes been provided to people our government did not consider worthy of our aid.

So let us read Paul’s writings and other Scripture texts together, and let us talk with each other about the greater laws and the lesser laws. Together let us seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. When the law of our land conflicts with the greater laws, let us work together to discern the right path, and let us support each other if our attempts to be faithful lead to suffering. When in doubt about the right path, let’s reread these words from Paul: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another. For he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.”



Martha Yoder Maust is a family physician and a member of Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis.

I teach chemistry (not everyone's favorite subject), so I'm used to people not wanting me to give a presentation. When someone called in a bomb threat, however, after reading that I would speak at Markham (Ill.) Mennonite Church on a Sunday morning in 1988, it involved a topic more important to me than chemistry. The congregation decided to go ahead with the service, although some

Experiences from someone who saw a war from two ends

A witness to war

families kept their children home, and I spoke about my experiences in Nicaragua documenting human rights violations by the U.S.-backed Contra guerrillas. ►

by Doug Schirch

The bloodstained pickup truck after Contras had attacked those in it in Nicaragua.

Photo provided by author



Talking about the war in Nicaragua is like describing the culture shock students experience returning to their First World bedrooms after living with a host family in the two-thirds world in an adobe hut under a tin roof. The explanations don't do justice to the disparity experienced.

One of those experiences was coming across a tan civilian pickup truck that had been ambushed an hour earlier. We had been on this road the previous week. The intense sun on the sprawling, flat cornfields at some places had reminded me of peaceful summer days growing up in Ohio on Augsburger Road, where Doug and Jim Caskey and I often played as kids.

There sat an empty vehicle, its tires flattened, the windows shattered by bullets; blood was in the cabin and two pools in the pickup bed. The victims in the back must have bled profusely, as the blood had flowed out and onto the ground before the sun's heat had started drying it into a sticky glue. We didn't know if the ambulance had

removed the victims alive or dead, but we knew that blood in the back came from two children.

Earlier in the day an army roadblock had prevented us from driving through here. A group of Contra guerrillas had been seen ahead, and they frequently ambushed civilian vehicles on this road. The two other Witness for Peace (WFP) co-workers and I were eager for them to lift the roadblock so we could continue searching for Richard, a coworker who had been kidnapped by the Contras the week before.

Eventually, giving up, we turned around and drove away. That's when we saw this tan pickup, with two boys in the back, pass us going the opposite direction. They took our place at the roadblock. When it was lifted an hour later, they were the first to pass.

The next day we attended a wake for the victim in the cab, a 28-year-old man. We listened to his friends and his wife, who nursed a 6-month-old baby, grieve. "Why would anyone want to do this? How can they shoot innocent civilians and children? What do those people hope to achieve by doing these things?"

We didn't know if the ambulance had removed the victims alive or dead, but we knew that blood in the back came from two children.

A boy who survived the attack by Contras in Nicaragua. Photo provided by author



A 15-year-old boy in the back survived a bullet through the neck that nearly hit his spine. He had been travelling to a weekly Bible study with his 8-year-old brother, who lost his arm and was brain-damaged. He wouldn't talk. The older brother didn't know if it was because of the emotional trauma or the brain injury. Kids where I grew up on Augsburg Road don't have to worry about the U.S. government doing this.

Would those have been our consequences had we waited with patience at the roadblock and been the first vehicle through? I'd like to think that the markings on our pickup identifying us as journalists meant we would have been spared. Nevertheless, having been spared, what responsibility did that place on me?

Certainly to tell the stories of what I had seen and heard from Contra victims: the cooperative farm burned to the ground and three fathers killed, the Chilean agronomist captured and decapitated, the 6-month-old baby we buried after the Contras attacked her house, the poor farmer kidnapped from his home in the middle of the night and found dead the next morning.

Although I came from the country that trained, bankrolled and directed the Contra guerrillas, Nicaraguan victims always made me feel loved. "We know people in the U.S. can't control what their government does," they often told me. As the other WFP volunteers and I knew, however, that was patently untrue. But surely, if we told people in the United States what we witnessed, wouldn't they stop the government? After all, we don't treat each other in the United States like this. That's why I dedicated five years to talking and listening to those on two ends of this war—the receiving and the sending.

However, sharing what I'd witnessed did not change the minds of many Contra supporters I spoke to in the United States. Even if the conversation started in a church, the justifications ended up under the flag, based on patriotism, differentiating "us" from "them." Stories about Contras killing children clashed with national pride; the more pride, the less they wanted to hear. Because religious ritual is used to teach patriotism, I shouldn't have been surprised.

I also spoke to many supportive audiences who did write their congresspeople. But that's because most audiences were Mennonite groups that invited me.

That support wasn't the case for a WFP volunteer who returned to speak at his home Menno-

nite congregation. They got angry, not with their government but with their member who had gone to Nicaragua. That Mennonite church had a U.S. flag in it. When I picture the blood in the pickup, I don't see it coming from our bullets or politics; it came from our patriotism and comfort with dual allegiances.

When ardent Contra supporters said the deaths of innocent Nicaraguans were necessary collateral to protect the United States, I considered asking if that rationale extended to the death of the person standing in front of them. I didn't ask; I knew the answer, from the bomb threat at Markham and U.S. government warnings against working in Nicaragua. If you behave as if your country isn't elevated above others, people see you as one of "them."

The war taught me that peace begins with the way Jesus' treated Samaritans, tax collectors and soldiers.

The patriotic argument always begins with love (for country) but inevitably demands our acquiescence for doing things to outsiders that is criminal behavior in our own country. The war taught me that peace begins with the way Jesus treated Samaritans, tax collectors and soldiers. He went out of his way to teach us that no borders stood between him and them. It didn't matter that such actions violated intense social expectations or angered some.

As a kid I often attended sporting events at a Mennonite college with the tradition of standing and singing the National Anthem. I wondered if it was inconsistent, but then why would the college do it? When I discovered as a student at Goshen (Ind.) College that it didn't play the anthem, that practice spoke louder to me than any classroom lecture on the topic. That practice was later validated in the war by what I saw patriotism do to people on both ends, the believing and the receiving. That is why I felt terrible sadness when the college that set me on the path to Nicaragua was teaching students to stand in solemn religious obedience for a ceremony cultivating patriotic allegiances.



Doug Schirch is professor of chemistry at Goshen (Ind.) College.

A photograph of a horse-drawn buggy on a paved road. The buggy is dark-colored with a horse in front. In the background, there is a large red barn and green trees. The scene is set in a rural, Amish community.

The power of the nonshootout

Many Mennonites, at least those watching movies in the 1980s, likely remember the stir caused

by L. Lamar Nisly

by *Witness*, the 1985 film set among the Lancaster, Pa., Amish community. Rather than joining the debate about whether the movie transcends the standard pattern of action flicks, my mind after all these years remains fixated on a small encounter between an obnoxious tourist and Harrison Ford, who is posing as an Amish man. ►

Resisting the myth of redemptive violence in Tim Gautreaux's *The Missing*

Assuming that no Amish person will retaliate, the young tough dabs an ice cream cone on the face of Ford's friend. Notwithstanding my lifelong pacifist commitments, I find it difficult not to feel gleeful when our hero slugs the surprised tourist.

The sequence demonstrated in this small scene occurs repeatedly in comic books, cartoons, and movies: Our hero is tracking down the villains; he takes some hits along the way; but, in the climactic scene, he destroys the evil one with compelling and exciting violence that eliminates the villainy and sets everything aright. Theologian Walter Wink, in *Engaging the Powers* (1992), identifies this cultural pattern as the myth of redemptive violence, a shared assumption that when a wrong occurs, violence is required to eliminate evil. Wink writes: "Violence is so successful as a myth precisely because it does not seem to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It is what works. It is inevitable, the last and often first resort in conflicts."

The usual inevitability of violence, and often vengeance, in books and movies is what makes Tim Gautreaux's novel *The Missing* (Knopf, 2009) such a welcome, alternative voice. Gautreaux, a Catholic writer from Louisiana, has published two other novels and two collections of short stories that often wrestle with moral issues. *The Missing* places questions about revenge at the center of a compelling storyline.

Sam Simoneaux, the protagonist of the novel, arrives in France just after the armistice has been signed, ending World War I. Though he witnessed the devastation the war had caused, Sam was not involved in any of the fighting. Gautreaux, who had uncles involved in the major engagements of World War I, notes in an interview that Sam's life has been shaped by avoiding the fighting, for "it just happens that everybody that gets involved in the business of shooting people with rifles ends up damaged and changed." Sam returns to New Orleans, eager to settle into civilian life with his wife as he works as a floorwalker, or security guard, at a department store. Yet two violent events, one long ago and the other recent, conspire to upset Sam's anticipated serene existence. First, we learn that Sam's entire parental family, except for him, was murdered in a revenge killing, so he was raised by his uncle's family. Second,

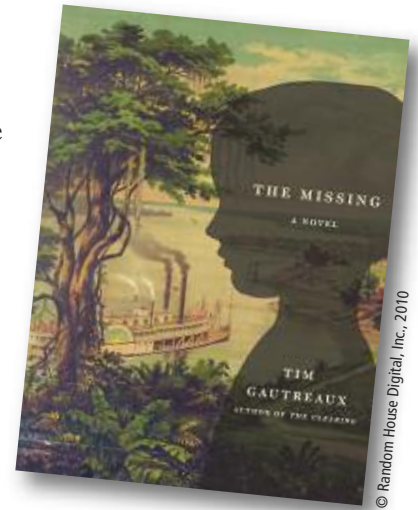
Sam fails to thwart a kidnapping of Lily, a beautiful blond girl, from the department store, so he is fired from his job. Both because he hopes to have his job restored and because of his sense of guilt, Sam embarks on a journey to find the missing child.

Much of the novel takes place on a jazz excursion boat, as Sam travels with Lily's parents up and down the Mississippi River, hoping to find clues about the kidnapping. At the same time, Sam struggles to come to terms with his own childhood loss. Much of the novel is filled with Sam's detective work as he tries to piece together clues about both crimes. Eventually he is able to glean names of possible villains. In response to both situations, the kidnapping and the family massacre, Sam hears a constant drumbeat of criticism from his companions because he hesitates to carry out decisive vengeance against the perpetrators. One of the most persistent is Charlie Duggs, Sam's bunkmate on the boat, who says: "Well, you're a little pudding if I ever saw one. You don't try to find out about these outlaws, I hate to say this, but I'll be ashamed of you."

The myth of redemptive violence is a shared assumption that when a wrong occurs, violence is required to eliminate evil.

The quiet voice that helps Sam resist this alluring response comes from his Uncle Claude, the unsophisticated yet devout man who raised him. When Sam informs his uncle that he has discovered his family's killers, his uncle astonishes him by saying, "It's been 26 years they been suffering. ... It's what the priest says, Sam. Sin is its own punishment. They got to live with what they did. ... Baby, what they did is who they are. It makes them cripples. Half-people."

Claude's assertions are probably as astounding to the reader's ears as to Sam's, for he is espousing



the countercultural view that one who has been wronged has no need to seek revenge; the perpetrator himself is already suffering because of the sinful action. In a line that reflects Sam's loss as well as a caution over any vengeful action, Claude says, "Ah, Sammy, when a man kills somebody, the most important thing he takes away is all the things that person can do in a lifetime." Claude's thoughtful comments force Sam and the reader to embrace the whole range of implications of a killing, not just the short-term jolt of righteousness redemptive violence provides.

'Bullets didn't seek out guilt or innocence; they were flying accidents of fate.'—from *The Missing*

Two scenes particularly highlight Gautreaux's challenge to our standard cultural myths. After Sam learns the identity of Lily's kidnappers, her teenage brother August decides he must kill them, both to punish her theft as well as to avenge his father, who has been killed in an earlier attack on the kidnappers. Anticipating the harm the outlaws will inflict on August, Sam hurries after the boy, catching up to him in the woods outside their house. Gautreaux provides a forceful, engaging conversation between the two, as Sam enunciates the reasons against seeking revenge. Though August remains committed to revenge, Sam gets August to pause just long enough that he does not shoot when the kidnapper walks out the door—holding Lily. August is stunned, realizing that he almost shot his sister, and he emotionally thanks Sam for stopping him. Reflecting on this scene, Sam muses one of the most memorable lines of the novel: "Bullets didn't seek out guilt or innocence; they were flying accidents of fate."

Though these kidnappers are scoundrels, the encounter with them serves as a mere dress rehearsal for Sam's meeting with the debased killers of his family, the Cloats clan. As he journeys to accost these murderers, Sam hears horrific tales of what the Cloats do to anyone who crosses them. Despite his hesitation about seeking vengeance, Sam takes a gun with him and is unsure what he will do when he confronts the killers. What he finds when he arrives at the Cloats compound seems appropriate for such a debased fam-

ily: only three of the Cloats men remain alive, each of them old and diseased. With Sam clearly in control of the situation, the reader is poised for a glorious scene of redemptive violence, a response that Sam contemplates: "Sam raised the pistol thinking of how he could kill him and people would care more for the corpse of a mole rotting in its burrow. His eyes narrowed for a moment, along with his conscience. Living in the present is so easy. You just do a thing and not think about what could happen the next day, or how you might view your own actions in 10 years." In this reflection, Sam gives the lie to much of what makes the myth of redemptive violence seem so attractive. Violent action appears to have no consequences except to remove the evil character. But as Sam, encouraged by his uncle, realizes, actions always have consequences.

Instead of shooting him, Sam forces old Cloats to recount details about Sam's family, helping Sam visualize his missing relatives. These images of his family allow Sam to find some peace and begin the process of healing from this loss. Gautreaux notes that some readers were disappointed with this unusual climax, for "Americans have been programmed to a template of offense followed by justified violence. This is a cliché and a simple-minded notion. I hope *The Missing* sets some writers free from the idea that if offense is given then offense must be taken."

Providing a different conclusion than *Witness*, this nonshootout—indeed all of *The Missing*—can inspire not only writers but all readers of the novel to resist the siren song of redemptive violence. May we all affirm with Sam's uncle that sin is its own punishment, thus putting aside vengeance and engaging in the much harder but much more rewarding work of healing.



L. Lamar Nisly is professor of English at Bluffton (Ohio) University.

The call of the church to be missional

In his 2007 sociological study of Mennonite Church USA (*Road Signs for the Journey*, Herald Press, 2007), Conrad Kanagy points out that young adults "are less engaged in the church than are older members." While that grim statement may characterize many, some young adults are working at renewal and mission within the congregations of MC USA. The Anabaptist Missional Project (AMP) consists of a variety of young adults from across the United States who are engaged in conversations that grow out of a love for Jesus, a deep love for church and a desire to participate in the mission of God.

Love the church

by Jeremy Shue and Sherah-Leigh Gerber

Understanding the missional church

Over the last decade Mennonite Church USA has used the word “missional” to describe who we are and what we are to be about. Caring for the church is an important part of the vision and goals of AMP, and this passion is interwoven with the call to be missional.

Church as community

Missional may be an obtuse word, but the Trinity provides us with two ways of illustrating what it means to be missional. Understanding God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all as one and the same God provides an understanding of community. The church participates in communion with one another in that same relational style.

The apostle Paul used the language of the body of Christ. Just as the Trinity can be viewed as three distinct persons and the body has many different parts, the church is also made up of many different people. As a part of the body of Christ, we all bring our personal experiences and understandings of God to the community.

When we disagree is precisely when we need each other the most.

Since we live in a broken world, we are a broken communion. None of us sees wholly, yet we all see partially. This is why we so desperately need each other. We cannot completely understand who God is by ourselves. Part of being the body is committing to give and receive counsel, to work at displaying God’s love and reconciliation to the world. Just as the hand cannot live separated from the body, we cannot live when separated from other Christians. When we disagree with one another, living together may seem impossible, but when we disagree is precisely when we need each other the most.

Living out our commitment to this community by the grace and reconciliation available in Christ Jesus stands out from the surrounding culture. It is what makes us a city on a hill. This commitment to the community is our care for the church, but it is not limited to an insular community of believers.

Church as sent community

The broken body of believers that I love—the church—is a community sent by God into the world. In John 20, Jesus appears to the disciples following his resurrection and tells them: “ ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to

them ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ ” (John 20:21-22).

As the body of Christ, the church is sent to represent God to the world in the same way Jesus dwelt on earth: We are to be the church in every aspect of our lives, representing God no matter where we are. We cannot sit back and wonder why people are not beating down the doors of our congregation. Instead we must realize that the Spirit of God is at work outside our congregations, even among people who do not proclaim Jesus as their Lord. There is not a place we can go where the Spirit is not already present and at work. The missional church embraces its mission as a sent community, joining the Spirit in its work where ever it may be.

Putting it into practice

There are many churches, pastors, leaders and believers that care for the church and are working to put this missional call into practice. One example is Kidron (Ohio) Mennonite Church, where team pastors Lydell Steiner and Thomas Dunn (both young adults) brought the congregation along in their shared vision of reaching the community in a new way.

Two and a half years ago, these young pastors received a request to assist someone with their heating bill. Rather than just agreeing to pay the bill, they wanted to see why the bill was so high in the first place. Upon arriving at the man’s home in the local trailer park, Thomas and Lydell were introduced to an unknown pocket of poverty just down the road from their congregation. As they continued to follow-up with the heating bill situation, they wondered how the church could be present in this neighborhood.

At first they took church youth to play games and throw a Frisbee with the children at the trailer park. Those relationships led to more organized programs, such as a fall fest and movie night. Soon the congregation had the idea to start a summer program in the trailer park. They hired a young adult intern for eight weeks to develop programming that involved Christian teaching and basic physical health programming.

The church has continued developing relationships with the trailer park residents. “Mentor families” have agreed to bring children to the Wednesday evening meals and to Sunday morning services and Sunday school. A couple from the congregation is preparing to move into the park as part of getting to know the local community.

This missional outreach has raised many questions in the congregation. Is the goal simply to get



these people to start coming to church? How can the congregation address issues of economic development? What can the church learn from these people with different life experiences? How can mutual relationships be built and sustained?

The challenges

When the church embraces its identity as a sent community, it cannot remain unchanged. Is it possible that young adults have been listening to the denomination as it challenges us to be missional? Might embracing our missional identity shift our focus from the politics of the denomination to experimenting with engaging the poor community just around the corner? As we learn to live our entire lives as missional workers in the kingdom of God, we will no doubt experience God at work throughout the week and not just on a Sunday morning.

Might embracing our missional identity shift our focus from the politics of the denomination to experimenting with engaging the poor community just around the corner?

When we see our entire lives as participating in the kingdom, Sunday morning with fellow believers may not maintain the same priority level it once did. Even if we are not gathered on a Sunday morning, we must remember the importance of worship for the life of the church.

Worship must be a continuous part of the missional church. It may happen in a warehouse, around a dining-room table, in an office before work or in a sanctuary on a Sunday morning. No matter where it happens, when we worship the God who created the earth and everything in it, when we worship Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection model the way to live and offer us grace, we are demonstrating to the world that the story we are participating in is larger than us. We are proclaiming that God is worthy of our praise and worthy of our lives.

How do we learn to take our worship into the world as a sent community? Answering this question will no doubt change the way we think about church. Are we willing to see where the mission of God might take us?

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Life in a Mennonite Voluntary Service unit

My work opened the door for me into a new world—a world of police brutality, cold nights, complicated bureaucracies and weary faces.

by Ben Kreider



Blessings

Ben Kreider works in the chicken coop at East Central Ministries, an organization in Albuquerque, N.M., where he volunteers. Photo by Andrew Clouse

I came to the Land of Enchantment at roughly three miles over the speed limit. My uncle drove me, my trusty bicycle, an assortment of footwear, clothing, knickknacks and a guitar across the horizontal world of sky and land of Kansas into a land interrupted by rock formations. I now reside at my farthest ever latitude position west relative to the United States.

In at least a superficial way I follow those before me who have gone to a western land, for better or worse. Although I felt at home immediately, welcomed by our unit leaders, Gabe and Bethany, with good food and a waiting bed, I knew that, like Dorothy, I wasn't in Kansas anymore. Stucco and cactus abounded, green chiles awaited my impending addiction, and the solemn Sandia Mountains looked on.

Vacation-like wonderment in all aspects of my life soon transitioned to a clear picture of the realities awaiting this new adventure. The early honeymoon of unit life was replaced by a more realistic and wholesome lifestyle that included doing dishes, sleeping, responsibilities to others, and adapting to the eccentricities of my housemates.

Working at St. Martin's Hospitality Center, an organization that provides services for Albuquerque's many homeless people, opened the door for me into a new world—a world of police brutality, cold nights, complicated bureaucracies and weary faces. I have had a small glimpse into the world of the homeless in Albuquerque. My official job title is shelter assistant. From 7:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. I do a variety of tasks, not limited to helping people find the help they need, running the clothing room, handing out food, cleaning the shelter and using my

six-foot-four-inch height to reach high objects. I answer the phone at the front desk many times a day. Often the person on the other end of the line lays out a desperate story, and usually the only help I can offer is to listen. The majority of serious requests I can't personally help with, either because I'm an ignorant 18-year-old who isn't acutely in tune with the complexities of how to access services in Albuquerque or because there simply isn't any help available. I also help run the mail room. Another employee and I sort hundreds of pieces of mail a day. Checks, IDs, letters, bills and packages all pass through our hands. I now have a fondness and respect for names and can alphabetize in my sleep.

One day, as I was unlocking my bike to go home, a man I'll call Martin spoke to me. The conversation steered to the book he was reading, *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He shared how much he had learned from this book and how his journey to live as a Christian—to let his light shine as a homeless man—was both difficult and rewarding. I was inspired.

I saw a mother and her baby come into St. Martin's, and I choked up. It's not that seeing moms and kids is an unexpected occurrence; it happens all the time.



But I was struck by the realization—and could see—that this baby was indeed God’s beloved child, as was the baby’s mom. When I am able to see God’s touch in others, the true identity of others and in myself, I am astounded, floored, bewildered, moved. I am in awe to comprehend that God in his/her entirety took the form of a refugee baby who grew up to be a homeless man. The All Powerful became what our society would call the epitome of weakness and failure. That gives me hope.

It is limiting to believe that my vocation, and more importantly God’s work, is confined to the organization I clock in and out of every day. My house is also a place of work in a different sense. Here I must clean and cook but also prod and affirm my brothers and sisters in their own journeys and request they do the same for me. As I am young and seeking wisdom, my vocation is also to be a humble learner. I volunteer at a Christian community development organization called East Central Ministries many afternoons. While I help with their urban farm, I have learned fascinating things about chickens, the nature of New Mexico-style roofing, how difficult it is to be ethical and turn a profit, urban gardening and a work ethic.

God’s work also happens when we expand our communities. I was messing around with a soccer ball one Sunday afternoon after playing a pickup game with some folks in a park. Some Hispanic guys had shown up and were kicking the ball

around. I went over and introduced myself, hoping to gain some information on the local soccer scene. One of the guys, Jorge, invited me to scrimmage with a team. What followed turned into a friendship with Jorge, invitations to his church and home, and me being able to play on a few different teams, all in Hispanic leagues. I am a tall white guy that barely speaks Spanish and usually plays center defense. The serendipity of these opportunities, and Jorge’s hospitality to me—a stranger—point to God.

How do I serve the broken out of my own brokenness?

My living thus far has not given me a nice, clean-cut philosophy, a lovely little theology but rather inconsistencies that I struggle to force together and often leave separated. Sometimes these tensions are best expressed as questions. How do I go on long weekend trips, driving hundreds of miles, marveling at the beauty of God’s creation, then come back on Monday to people who are desperate for a one-way bus ticket home or a \$2 bus pass to the doctor? How do I live with the economic privilege that allows me to choose to do service, a choice that one of my recently immigrated soccer teammates would probably never have the luxury of making? How do I serve the broken out of my own brokenness? What does it look like for me as a young person in a society that values mobility to embody the type of commitment to a place and a people that enables real change to take place (and does my short-term, 10-month service placement undermine that)? How

Continued on page 33... ▶



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We are called to receive grace from God and give grace to others.

I am a huge fan of novels and movies. Many light-bulb moments have come at the feet of unexpected mentors, such as Tolkien, Rowling, McCarthy, Anderson and O'Connor.

For instance, one meaning-filled image of stewardship I have comes from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In these books, he introduces a family of stewards of the kingdom of Gondor. Functioning in place of a king, their primary function is to hold the throne for the time when a king would return. With all the responsibility and most of the rights of royalty, they clearly were not kings. They were stewards and caretakers. They stewarded something that belonged to another. They did not possess the throne but held it only to give it away.

1 Peter 4:10-11 says we are stewards of God's grace. We are given God's grace not for our own sake, not to possess it or because it belongs to us. No, we steward God's grace by holding it in order to give it away. Peter's letter drips with talk of grace, which for him was the only real, tangible way we encounter God. It is the very Spirit and character of God. I'm reminded of the father's radical welcome of the prodigal sons, Jesus' counter-cultural defense of women and those on the fringe, the prophetic insistence on inclusion of the lost, the least, the last. Though nurturing, God's grace is no sentimental trait. It is strong, capable of rewriting DNA, relationships and social groups. Indeed, it is the only power with the capacity to

bring change to the human heart. George Brunk III says, "Grace is the place God meets us and converts us to godliness and holiness." So when Peter says in 1:2, "May grace and peace be yours in abundance," I say, Yes, give me some more please. Who wouldn't want in on that?

But clearly for Peter the "abundance of grace" is meant to spill out into the world for others. As stewards of grace, we are to serve one another rather than rest in our personal blessings. Like any body of water, unless water can flow in and out, the water will stagnate and spoil. This text, along with 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4, speaks of spiritual gifts that God gives to God's people for the sake of loving others. But a better translation of the Greek "charisma" is "grace gifts," or perhaps "gracing." It's our individual ability to grace others, to be and give grace to them.

This is a captivating, strong and beautiful definition of both ministry and evangelism, the lines between which are suddenly blurred beyond repair. We're called to be and to give grace to others. The shape our "gracing" others takes depends on our individual grace-gifts (speaking, serving), but we're all called to grace others. Imagine how different Christianity would be viewed if we were known as "gracers" instead of evangelizers and judges? Imagine how different your workplace, neighborhood, family and church would be if you lived to grace others? Imagine the feeling of volunteering not out of oughts and shoulds but out of the overflow of your own internal sense of grace and peace.

I've seen no better example of ministry or evangelism as "gracing others" than from Doris and Berdella Stutzman, two elderly sisters in Oregon, who graced 30-plus teenagers in our youth group and community with their constant care, attention and loyalty. They certainly didn't fit the typical "cool mold" of youth sponsors, but they are to this day the most effective sponsors I've ever worked with. I've witnessed countless teenagers gracing others (was it ministry or evangelism or both?) by eating lunch in the cafeteria with outcasts and lonely classmates.

Once I witnessed an episode of gracing in Panera Bread, where one obviously distraught patron was gently cared for by an employee who took the opportunity to pray for her. Each of these acts of grace defines a church I am excited to be a part of and energizes me for the old categories we traditionally called "ministry" and "evangelism."

by Marty Troyer

Stewards of grace



It should surprise no one that these words come from Peter, whose journey was one of constant transformation by the grace of Christ in his life. From headstrong fishermen to lifelong responder to Jesus' call, "Follow me." From calling down fire on the heads of outsiders to radical inclusion of Cornelius and all Gentiles. From demanding Jesus' security to celebrating being "tested by fire." From three painful denials to embracing Jesus' call to "feed my sheep."

Grace in Peter's life unsettled nations and, like Jesus, ultimately cost him his life.

Apparently, grace is both contagious and confusing. It is contagious because at its core, humanity longs for nothing more or less than wholeness, to find itself in the family of things. Peter found himself through the constant grace of Christ in his life. Under his leadership, the early church attracted hundreds who longed for what Peter seemed to possess: wholeness, grace, God.

It is confusing because God's steadfast love and unmerited favor poke holes in the one life lesson no one has ever had to teach a single human

being, that we have fallen short. Kings and religious leaders alike opposed Peter's proclamation of grace, demanding obedience and conformity. Grace proves that instinct dead wrong by creating wholeness in previously scattered and pathological hearts. Peter no longer slinks into the shadows of conformity, but publicly sings of his transformed faith being "imperishable, undefiled and unfading."

Imagine the feeling of volunteering not out of oughts and shoulds but out of the overflow of your own internal sense of grace and peace.

So if grace is where God meets us and shapes us to give as Jesus gave, may it be yours in abundance. And may you both be and give grace to others. Anything less wouldn't be worth sharing anyway.

Marty Troyer is pastor of Houston Mennonite Church.



Blessings ... continued from page 31

does one serve in a way so both "us" and the "them" come to know that each person's salvation is bound up with the other?

I came to Albuquerque because I wanted to be shaped. Part of me knew, to quote Richard Rohr, that "we do not think ourselves into new ways of living; we live ourselves into new ways of thinking." I came to Albuquerque because I wanted to be thrown by the Potter as a lump of clay. I came here because I wanted to grow as a disciple of Jesus. Just because I showed up didn't mean that my old habits and unhealthy ways simply disappeared. I still can be lazy, apathetic, selfish and easily distracted. I am in a place (not to say I wasn't in one back home) where I work through such things, where I am repeatedly called to an identity and a purpose higher than my own small, selfish ambitions. When I can feel my housemates and church praying for me, I am comforted and empowered. When I look out from a mountain peak and see grandeur and beauty but also know that down below there is an Air Force base filled with nuclear weapons, homeless people napping on concrete and lonely people trapped in their lives, I am blessed with a fuller vision of reality. When I share food and songs with others, I can hear and taste a glimpse of heaven to come.

I am blessed to serve. I am blessed to catch

glimpses of God. Service Adventure has blessed me in the ways of the prayer below, which Albuquerque Mennonite Church used to anoint our unit when we began our service assignments.

When I share food and songs with others, I can hear and taste a glimpse of heaven to come.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships so that you will live deep in your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people and the earth so that you will work for justice, equity and peace. May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer so you will reach out your hands to comfort them and change their pain into joy. And may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world so you will do the things others say cannot be done.

Ben Kreider, a member of Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton, Kan., participated in Service Adventure, a Mennonite Mission Network service opportunity for young adults.



Determination and perseverance



Juanita Nuñez is a member of the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA and co-pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer in Apopka, Fla.

When I first came from the Dominican Republic to live in the city of Miami, I was newly wed and in my early 20s. Adapting to a new country, culture and language was a major challenge. I eventually learned that determination and perseverance are key elements in achieving the plans God has for our lives. For those who are having challenges while serving the Lord, I offer the story of Nehemiah, which has given me inspiration.

Nehemiah, whose name means “the Lord comforts,” was a great intercessor, a valiant, determined individual and a great reformer of his time. The story, in the book of Nehemiah, took place when some Jews were returning to Jerusalem after 70 years in exile and captivity. Many were probably excited at the chance of a new beginning. However, many unforeseen obstacles and circumstances made this return seem impossible. Nehemiah came to learn of the afflictions of the people, the threat of the enemies surrounding them and the destruction of the city’s gates and walls.

What was Nehemiah’s reaction to this sad news? He mourned, fasted and prayed to God, ruler of heaven and earth (Nehemiah 1:4-11). Even though Nehemiah lived a privileged life in the palace of the king, he never separated himself from the plight and struggles of the people of Israel. Like a lawyer, he presented their case to God. He recognized God as sovereign ruler of the universe and protector of his people, faithful to his covenant with them.

According to the Word of God, Nehemiah did not pray for only one day and expect to see changes right away. The news came around November or December (called Quisleu). He prayed and waited patiently until the perfect time presented itself to speak to the king—about four months later, in March or April (called Nisan). Through Nehemiah’s patience and prayer, God prepared his mind and heart to speak to the

king with honesty and humility.

In our instant-satisfaction society, many of us want God’s hand to move immediately. However, we must manifest the fruit of the Spirit in waiting, since God always knows the perfect time to act and accomplish his will.

Nehemiah was troubled to the extent that the king noticed his sad look, which could have cost Nehemiah his life. But God was with him, and his words convinced the king to give him his request to be sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

Once his request was approved, Nehemiah set out with a plan of action. He did not let the current condition of what he heard or saw stop him

from accomplishing what God had purposed for his people. He made plans with the Jews to repopulate the city, and he gave orders to the leaders and others involved for the reconstruction of the city. He later inspected the work during the long hours of the night to ensure that it was done with precision and excellence. His oversight even helped protect the Israelites from the enemies who were trying to sabotage the work. Through their diligent work, the Jews were able to reconstruct the walls of the city in only 52

days, bringing glory to God as word of their accomplishment spread throughout the region.

How do we apply some of these truths from the life of Nehemiah to today’s society? Mennonite Church USA faces many new challenges, but its true goal and mission have not changed. We are to continue to build and establish God’s kingdom of truth, justice and peace until it rules every aspect of his creation. Do we have the patience and determination to persevere in sharing the gospel? God is waiting for his children to impact the world and to shine brightly in it. Where are the Nehemiahs of today—reformers loyal to God, his Word and his will? What is your part?

I believe God has given each of us the ability to be a reformer, and it depends on us how much our lives will impact society. **TM**

Many of us want God’s hand to move immediately, but we must manifest the fruit of the Spirit in waiting, since God always knows the perfect time to act and accomplish his will.

Death makes me angry

Death makes me angry. Not scared, so much as thoroughly ripped off. The way it cuts down young people in their prime, like Bob Wenger on a cycle, or Matt Garber just after graduation. And Jim Williams and Marj Heinrichs in car wrecks. Chet Wenger with a rare leukemia, and Davor Peterlin with an unsuspected heart attack; 200,000 in the Balkan wars of two decades ago. More recently, thousands in the overwhelming Japanese tsunami, and now hundreds in horrific tornadoes. After many disasters and tragedies and scourges and plagues throughout the decades of my brief life, I'm still caught off-guard by how abrupt the ending can be.

Every life is brief; we are all terminal. The little, would-be terror in my daughter's classroom is right: "We're all gonna die." (He'll be on a talk show some day.) Every life is precious, and every life is fragile. Each could potentially be the next Einstein or Beethoven or Mother Theresa.

What do we do with all this talent, this potential, this capacity for life? Far too much of it is wasted. We squander our time and energies on things that pad our security. We distract ourselves with diversions that are mostly self-centered. We obsess about stuff that keeps us from acknowledging the precariousness of our existence on this tiny planet and the sheer gift it is.

Visiting many congregations these days, I'm struck with how the Baby Boomers are telling stories of dealing with aging parents. That's the generational story in our churches. Prayer requests, disrupted schedules, need for support and assistance; the bulletin notes document the far-flung dramas of our lives.

Strangely enough, I find more comfort in funerals as time winds on. How to deal with death? Real families keep coming together for the rituals and rites of final passage, the shared comforts of mourning, the fellowship of memories and stories that retrieve the essence of what Grandma was about. And the best stories locate these people, these families in their communities, extending the sense of belonging across the generations. They show how families survive through the terrors and plagues, the depressions and the failures. The stories cut through the husks and eggshells of our fumbling attempts to create meaning. They get to the heart of what it means to be human—relationships that endure, against the odds.

So it's my resolve to beat back the dull monotony of a boring existence. I am drawn to seek out significant life even at the margins of safe and predictable stories. If life is too short anyway, why take so many precautions? Why pad our existence with countless protections? I certainly hope to be prudent where we have to, in ways that sustain the goodness of life. But I don't intend to hide timidly behind warnings or run quickly for cover. I am energized by taking the risk and drawn toward a life lived boldly.

Life with meaning is not found hiding in a corner, waiting for the world to happen. We don't deal best with death by building a cult around it. Rather, we turn death into a punctuation mark at the close of a life that made it worthwhile, worthy of our status as creatures who bear the imprint of a Creator with high hopes for us.

I've been more angry than scared about death for a long time now. I don't expect to die gradually. Perhaps I will go out in a flash, protesting against some agony or injustice in the way this weary

We don't deal best with death by building a cult around it.

world is unfolding, probably raging against the violations of God's intentions for our well-being. I once thought I was coming close, during a peace-seeking mission in the Balkans. On a tiny country road in Hungary, up a hill and trying to pass a slow truck in a compact rental car, with another huge truck barreling straight toward me, I had visions of the end that did not require much imagination at all. With centimeters to spare, I shook so badly I had to stop in the next small town.

We are all in the process of being delivered from death into life, from lonely isolation into the community of God's coming kingdom. Our family stories are the prelude to the wedding feast that inaugurates the reign of the Lamb of God. The death we are trained to fear is little more than a marker for the transition that releases us into what the Bible and the old hymns call glory. It is a commentary on our lives that we spend so much time in paths small and sordid that we have little or no comprehension left to wrap around the concept of glory. But glory is a life well lived now, and glory is forever. **TM**



Gerald Shenk recently resumed bicycling in the wide open spaces of Indiana.

Christian mission is not exotic



Jim Bertsche is a member of Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

The following reflections come as a response to the article “Mission as Form of Exoticism” by Leo Hartshorn in the November 2010 issue.

My responses are shaped by 25 years of experience in the Republic of Congo with Congo Inland Mission/Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) and another 12 in the home office in Elkhart, Ind.

Hartshorn lodges a series of critiques with which I heartily agree:

- Within the North American Mennonite community, Christian Mission was for decades equated with ministry in distant places.
- Meanwhile “home missions” were seen as less compelling and less glamorous.
- Over time there developed a consequent imbalance in funding, publicity and preparation of personnel.
- There also emerged a tendency to highlight and circulate “foreign missionaries” on home leaves while leaving others quietly at work in inner-city settings or isolated rural areas much less publicized, and this happened amid a society steadily drifting into secularism.
- And, yes, there was a certain fascination with captivating stories and colorful artifacts from distant strange places.

I cannot agree more with Hartshorn when he insists that a truly missional church is equally aware of and concerned about human need situated both south of the equator and around the corner from where we live.

However, the article reflects four inadequate perceptions:

- His article leaves the broad impression that the “foreign mission” enterprise of the past 150 or so years has essentially been driven by a fascination with the exotic. There is no recognition of the enormous sense of urgency that prevailed from the mid-1800s through much of the 1900s, which spawned a host of mission organizations across the western world, including the Mennonite communities of North America. This urgency was born of the conviction that the mandate left by Jesus to his followers to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth” had not expired. It was an era when Christian mission was not viewed as an intriguing topic for debate or as a noble humanitarian enterprise or a working vacation. Christian mission was instead born of the conviction that the millions who had never heard about Jesus had

to be given that opportunity at whatever cost. And cost there was.

- His article reflects no understanding of the enormous price paid by overseas missionary communities—particularly during the pioneering decades. Stories are told of missionaries assigned to Africa in the late 1800s who packed their supplies in personal caskets since they had no realistic expectation of ever returning to their homelands. Congo Inland Mission sent its first exploratory trio of missionaries to Congo in January 1912. Before year’s end, one of the three already lay in an African grave. All this suggests there was something much more profound at work than fascination with the exotic.

- The apparent belief that the missionary enterprise across the years has essentially cast white-skinned people from the west as the unchanging practitioners of mission among people of



A drummer at a celebration in the Republic of Congo. Photo provided

darker skins is untrue. AIMM will celebrate its centennial year of unbroken ministry in the Congo in 2012. A major focus of celebration will be the publication of stories highlighting how, in the broad sweep of a cen-

tury, Congolese Christians were the evangelists of their own people and the planters of their own churches.

- Finally, the repeated statement that missionaries have typically clung to roles of authority and power among the churches that emerged from their work is untrue. Once again our experience differed from this assessment. Upon our arrival in the late-1940s, we already found African church councils in place on our major mission posts. These met on a regular basis to seek resolution of conflicts between members, exercise discipline, recommend candidates for baptism and probe opportunities for placement of teacher-evangelists in outlying villages. In 1971, the mission voluntarily annulled its legal status in Congo and merged with the African church. Thereafter, missionaries went to Congo only as invited and served where they were assigned. **TM**

The views expressed do not necessarily represent the official positions of Mennonite Church USA, *The Mennonite* or the board for The Mennonite, Inc.

MCC Binational to disband in 2012

Joint Ministry Council will link MCC U.S. and MCC Canada.



Herman Bontrager, MCC Binational board chair, speaks with Arli Klassen, MCC executive director.

In an elementary school in Ethiopia, students received pencils as a gift from a missionary. One of the students, Zenebe Abebe, is now the executive director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Great Lakes, based in Goshen, Ind. He said he had no idea who had purchased, packed and mailed the pencils. Jesus words: “You are the light of the world,” took on new meaning; the pencil became the “light” for him.

That was in 1945. Years later he learned that the pencils came from MCC. “The pencil affirmed my hope, I was encouraged, impressed and empowered to work hard,” he says.

Participants at the Mennonite Central Committee Binational annual meeting June 10-11 in Abbotsford, British Columbia, listened to this testimony.

During the meetings, Binational chair Herman Bontrager said, “MCC is an arm of the church; it is not a parachurch organization.” He acknowledged that MCC has a weakness in how it relates to congregations. He also made a plea to retain a high regard for diversity, to focus on compassion rather than professionalism and to concentrate more on deeds than on words.

Arli Klassen, executive director of MCC, said MCC continues to have strong denominational involvement, with the United States comprising 60 percent and Canada 40 percent of the MCC constituency.

The meeting addressed some of the issues related to the implementation of the New Wineskins strategy (NWS), a three-year process nearing its end. The restructuring will see MCC Binational replaced by MCC U.S. and MCC Canada. Linking the two bodies will be a Joint Ministry Council comprised of representatives from MCC Canada, MCC U.S. and Mennonite World Conference.

To complete this process, bylaws for MCC Canada and MCC U.S. will need approval at the binational meeting this fall. If approval is given, MCC Binational will cease to exist at its final meeting in March 2012, making way for the two new country-based MCCs.

Responding to questions about how MCC U.S. and Canada will operate international programs, Klassen compared it to two parties owning one house.

“Each one can furnish their room as they wish,” she said.

Ron Byler, executive director of MCC U.S., sees the NWS process as an opportunity to strengthen relationships with churches and to streamline decision-making.

“MCC Akron will not be able to do everything it has done in the past,” Byler said.

The need for interdependence and collaboration increases as there’s an increasing gap between the constituency and what MCC promotes, said Klassen. This led to a discussion about two covenants.

A “Covenant for the MCCs in the U.S.” sets out the relationship between the area MCCs and MCC U.S. A second covenant draft sets out the relationship between MCC Canada and MCC U.S. Both covenants were approved in principle, with staff asked to work on the details.

Participants approved a change in the relationship between MCC U.S. and Ten Thousand Villages. The approval of the three MCC U.S. appointees to the Villages board is required for CEO appointments and changes to bylaws. Board members provided apprehensive affirmation for the changes.

Other business: Ron Flaming, international program director, said significant attention and resources were directed at disasters in the past year. MCC received more than \$19 million for Haiti following its earthquake. He reported that 50 percent of MCC’s international workers are from outside North America.

Ken Langeman, director of financial services, reported a slight surplus in the past year and noted that proceeds from thrift shop sales have increased. U.S./Canada joint income exceeded \$75 million. Donations from Canada continued to be strong, while donations from the United States showed a small increase, he said.

Jan Martens Janzen reported on issues of MCC worker safety. “MCC takes a lot of precautions to ensure safety of its workers,” she said, noting that local partners are important in decisions about MCC workers leaving.

“If workers feel uneasy and ask to leave (a country), we want them to leave,” she said. The January upheaval in Egypt resulted in all MCC workers being evacuated and then returning a month later.—*Henry Neufeld for Meeting-house*

Goshen College reverses anthem decision

Board of directors asks President to find an alternative song by fall

On June 4, the Goshen (Ind.) College board of directors reversed its 2010 decision to play an instrumental version of The Star Spangled Banner before athletic events. In a statement released on June 6, the board said it has asked President Jim Brenneman to “find an alternative ... that fits with sports tradition, that honors country and that resonate with Goshen College’s core values and respects the views of diverse constituencies.”

A news release from the college on June 6 did not give a timeline for finding the alternative. But board president Rick Stiffney said he expects the alternative to be ready by the beginning of the fall athletic schedule.

Students, faculty and alumni also received a “decision statement” from the board of directors on June 6. In it, the board acknowledged some shortcomings in the earlier process that led to its Feb. 13, 2010, decision to have the national anthem played.

While students, faculty and staff had opportunities to provide feedback before the 2010 decision, the statement said, “It would have been helpful had there been opportunities for greater alumni participation.”

According to the statement, the board asked the school’s President’s Council to create a formal “listen and learn” process as preparation for its June meeting.

“Since making [the 2010 decisions],” says the statement, “the board has carefully considered this issue and the feedback of thousands of alumni, students, faculty, staff and friends who offered opinions, advice and prayers over the past 16 months ... the board believes the listen and learn process demonstrated the Goshen College community could discuss difficult issues with civility and mutual respect.”

The process also revealed a fault line between Mennonites and non-Mennonites connected to the college, with Mennonites generally more negative about playing the anthem, while non-Mennonites were more positive.

“Still, the issue could not be reduced to a clash between those two groups,” said the statement, “and there was overlap on many of their viewpoints.”

Finding an alternative to the national anthem was left in the hands of Brenneman, and the board does not expect to review the decision again.

“Discussion on the issues surrounding and raised by the playing of the National Anthem ... will and should continue,” said the statement. “The official discussion, though, at Goshen College about this issue is concluded with the board’s decision.”

In the week following the announcement, the college was inundated with media requests. Richard Aguirre, director of public relations, said on June 13 that they declined invita-

tions from six regional talk shows scattered across the country. Afterward, he researched the talk shows.

“I checked on them,” Aguirre said, “and found out they were strongly conservative and posted insulting things about the college. They just wanted someone [on the air] to attack us.”

Fox Radio and Fox News were the most persistent national media.

“Fox News used language saying Goshen College had ‘banned’ the anthem,” Aguirre said. “Fox misrepresented our rationale and would not correct it even after we asked them to do so. ... Most of the criticism we received was from people who heard the spin that we ‘banned’ it.”

The college did not ban the anthem. The June 6 news release explained there were differences of opinion among board members, and discontinuing the anthem was necessary to maintain the school’s unity.—*Everett J. Thomas*

What local papers said

Both Elkhart County, Ind., daily newspapers published editorials opining about the Goshen College decision to no longer play the national anthem. Here are excerpts:

The First Amendment to the Constitution gives us freedom of religion and freedom of speech. ... Let’s get one thing straight: Mennonites don’t have a tenet in their faith to hate America, so let’s stop the vitriolic attacks to the contrary. But through their faith, they place God before country and strongly believe in pacifism. Their decision to reject the “Star Spangled Banner” reflects those beliefs. ... What’s un-American is the idea that all Americans must be forced to adhere to some sort of patriotic orthodoxy.—*The Elkhart Truth*, June 7

We know the leaders at Goshen College are well within their constitutional rights to either play the anthem or not play the anthem. It’s their ship, and they can sail it in whatever direction they choose. Still, we are disappointed that a system that seemed to be well thought-out and working will sink into a sea of discord. ... It seems the question at the root of this issue is what kind of college does the board of directors want Goshen College to be. Is it a college so firmly rooted in the beliefs of the Mennonite church that it actually discourages the diversity its leaders try so hard to embrace? Or is it an institution that practices what it preaches and does its best to make its non-Mennonite students, faculty and guests more comfortable?—*The Goshen News*, June 8

Bethany will accept tuition vouchers

New law requires U.S. flags in classrooms, daily opportunity to say Pledge.

Beginning with the next school year, Indiana will have one of the most comprehensive voucher programs in the United States. The vouchers may be used for private school tuition. Bethany Christian Schools, an Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference school in Goshen, Ind., plans to accept the vouchers.

“The whole [vouchers] initiative is rooted in the idea of giving parents more choice for the schools they want for their children,” said Allan Dueck, Bethany’s principal, on June 14. “This is something that people of means have had for a long time.”

The new program, however, stipulates that any private school accepting voucher money must have a U.S. flag in each classroom and must provide students with a daily opportunity to voluntarily say the Pledge of Allegiance. On June 13, the Bethany school board agreed to a plan that Dueck said is intended to be respectful of the law while maintaining integrity with the school’s mission.

Each classroom will have a poster with the U.S. flag first and then the flags of all the countries of origin for the current student body. This follows a practice of many years: Bethany has displayed the flags of the countries from which students originated over the last decade, with the U.S. flag displayed according to the Flag Code. At the bottom of the poster will be the words, “Bethany’s Global Community.”

Students will have an opportunity to say the Pledge during a period of silence at the start of each day. Dueck said that in a beginning-of-the-year chapel, his administration will explain that during the period of silence, students can recite the Pledge of Allegiance, the Lord’s Prayer, the Christian Pledge of Allegiance written by June Alliman Yoder and J. Nelson Kraybill, or just remain silent.

“We are comfortable complying with the law as long as it does not conflict with our values,” Dueck said. “We also want to be a welcoming community for students from other traditions, as long as we hold true to our values.”

Federal income guidelines for free and reduced-price lunches will establish the monetary amount in the vouchers supplied to parents. A family of four with income under the guidelines’ ceiling will receive \$5,400 for high school students and \$4,500 for middle school students. Families with incomes above the federal guidelines but less than 150 percent of the guidelines will receive lesser amounts.

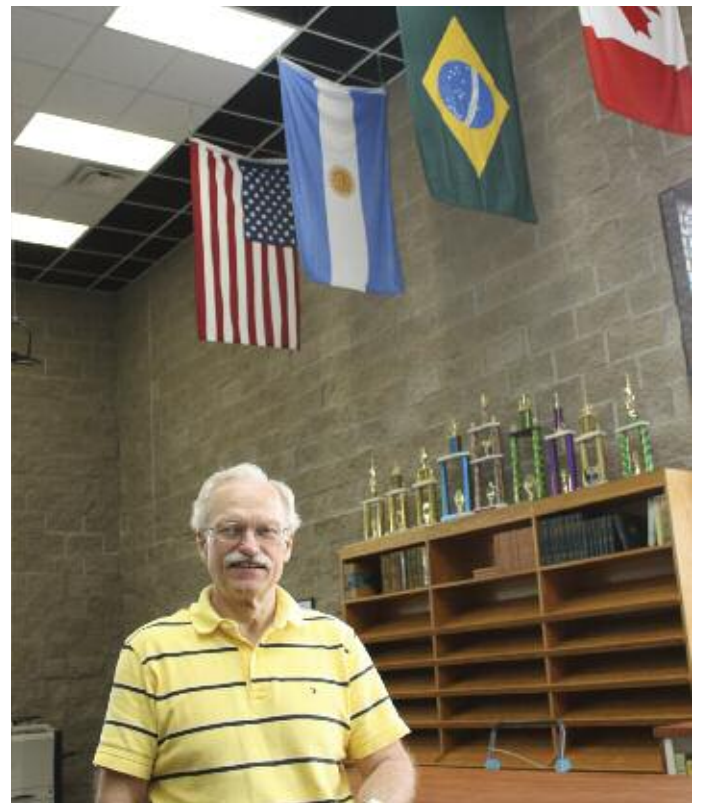
Funding for private school vouchers will reduce funds available for public schools, which created some tension between Bethany and at least one other Mennonite educator. Bruce Stahly, superintendent of the Goshen Community School system and a member of College Mennonite Church, publicly criticized Bethany’s decision to accept vouchers.

“I do find it interesting how Bethany is maneuvering that issue within the Mennonite church,” Stahly was reported as saying in a June 5 article in *The Goshen News*. “I don’t know what they are saying by putting a flag in every classroom and saying the Pledge every day, which is one of the requirements of the bill.”

But for Dueck, the decision to accept vouchers and comply with the requirements is about equal access.

“We believe this program will allow us to better achieve our commitment to serve all students, no matter what their finances,” Dueck wrote in a June 14 letter to local Mennonite pastors and Bethany parents.

Bethany has grades four through 12 with a projected enrollment of 260 for the 2011-2012 school year. According to Dueck, approximately 10 percent of the current student body would qualify for the new vouchers. Bethany provides \$450,000 each year in tuition assistance from its budget. Dueck said that between the voucher money and tuition assistance, it would cost some poverty families nothing to enroll their children at Bethany.—*Everett J. Thomas*



Everett J. Thomas

Bethany Christian School principal Allan Dueck stands in the school’s library under the flags from the countries of origin represented by the school’s student body.

Fewer churches leaving Mennonite Church USA

Churches from Western District, Lancaster Conference among those withdrawn.

Withdrawals from Mennonite Church USA continue, but at a slower pace. Fourteen churches left the denomination in the past two years, according to a *Mennonite Weekly Review* survey of conference ministers.

That's a much lower rate of loss than occurred between 2000 and 2007, when about 120 congregations exited.

The departures account for the bulk of a trend in which MC USA had a net loss of 191 congregations and 15,694 members over 10 years. That goes back to just before MC USA's founding in a 2002 merger of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Among those that left in 2009 and 2010, two congregations broke ties of more than a century—in one case, nearly three centuries. First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, Kan., a charter member of Western District Conference

(WDC) in 1892, withdrew in November 2010. Indiantown Mennonite Church of Ephrata, Pa., part of Lancaster Mennonite Conference since 1725, left in December 2009.

Both congregations are now independent.

Among MC USA's 21 area conferences, Lancaster has lost the most churches over the past decade. Thirty-nine congregations withdrew between 2000 and 2006. Seven of the 14 departures from MC USA in 2009-10 were from Lancaster.

Those that leave generally resist changes to conservative theology and practice. The creation of MC USA added another point of contention. John L. Ruth of Harleysville, Pa., who wrote a 2001 history of Lancaster Conference, believes some former Lancaster members considered MC USA an identity imposed from the outside or the top down.

"When Mennonite Church USA was accepted by the leadership of Lancaster Conference, it felt to some like something that was not generated by the peoplehood that was asked to accept it," he said.

At Indiantown Mennonite Church, some members believed Lancaster Conference had abandoned sound doctrine.

Jay S. Weaver, former associate pastor and current lead pastor, didn't feel good about ending a historic affiliation but supported the departure.

"Our sentimental feelings, our traditions, shouldn't determine the future of the church if it's headed in the wrong direction," he says.

Indiantown, with about 165 members, was one of Lancaster's oldest congregations. Members worshiped in homes for nearly a century before building a meetinghouse in 1819.

More than 75 percent of voting members approved the withdrawal, Weaver says.

"Our main concern was the next generation," he says. "We have a lot of young parents who are concerned about the direction the church is going."

Steve Martin, Indiantown's former lead pastor, thought leaving was a mistake. He resigned as pastor last June.

"I was disappointed in the decision," Martin says. "I felt people were misled by what they were hearing."

He says this included accusations that Lancaster Conference bishops were teaching heresy.

Martin and Weaver say Indiantown withdrew because members disagreed with the conference's acceptance of women's ordination and divorce and remarriage, because they disliked joining MC USA and because they felt the denomination did not take a firm stand against homosexuality.

Lester L. Zook, pastor of First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, says older members generally were the ones who most regretted ending the congregation's 118-year
(Continued on page 43)

Congregations that left Mennonite Church USA in 2009 and 2010

Central District Conference: Comins (Mich.) Mennonite Church

Central Plains Conference: Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Doland, S.D.

Lancaster Conference: Hinkletown Mennonite Church, Ephrata, Pa.; Lichty Mennonite Church, Terre Hill, Pa.; Diamond Street Mennonite Church, Philadelphia; South Seventh Street Mennonite Church, Reading, Pa.; Emmanuel Worship Center, Bronx, N.Y.; Indiantown Mennonite Church of Ephrata, Pa.; International Christian Community Church, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Indiana-Michigan Conference: Coldsprings Christian Fellowship, Mancelona, Mich.

Pacific Northwest Conference: Prince of Peace Community Church, Corvallis, Ore.,

South Central Conference: Protection (Kan.) Mennonite Church

Southeast Conference: New Jerusalem Mennonite Church, Sarasota, Fla.

Western District Conference: First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, Kan.

DNA connects Swiss, Puerto Rican Mennonites

Darvin L. Martin shares findings that he and Santiago come from same 'tribe.'

Puerto Rico is among the last places one would expect to find ancient relatives of the Swiss-German Martin family of Lancaster, Pa. Yet a recent analysis of Lancaster Historical Society director Rolando Santiago's DNA unlocked a secret. As I compared my DNA to that of every staff member of the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, it was Rolando who matched me the most closely. My Swiss Martin ancestry and Rolando's Puerto Rican Santiago ancestry ultimately originate within the same "tribe."

While DNA testing often reveals unforeseen family connections that may be difficult to comprehend, research into the political and geographic history of ancient Europe gives us significant clues as to how and why my connection with Rolando is possible.

According to family tradition, Rolando's ancestry derives from Galicia, the Spanish province in the northwestern portion of Spain. His family name is a tribute to the Way of St. James, the ninth century Catholic pilgrimage route to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in central Galicia

and the supposed site of St. James' burial. His ancestors probably settled in Puerto Rico between 1508 and 1528, during a period of Spanish colonization initiated by gold seekers—mainly single men who married native (Taíno) women.

The Mennonite Martin family points to the Emmental village of Eriswil, located in the eastern part of Canton Bern in an area known for a strong Anabaptist presence in the late 1500s and through the 1600s. The surname Martin derives from St. Martin of Tours (316-397), an early Catholic bishop who was revered by many in modern-day France and western Switzerland. Within the Emmental, the surname Martin probably came into common use through the church at Kirchberg, west of Eriswil, which was dedicated to St. Martin as early as 1208.

Why are the Santiago families of Spanish Galicia related to the Martin families of the Swiss Emmental? As a first clue, the Spanish dialect spoken today in Galicia has both Celtic and Germanic influences. Roman history reveals that a portion of the Germanic tribe known as the Suebi migrated from the regions north of Lake Constance in Germany to the Roman province of Galicia between 406 and 409 A.D.

Rolando's paternal ancestor was likely among the people who took part in this mass migration. During the Roman era, my Martin ancestors also lived in the region north of Lake

Constance and made up a portion of the population of the Kingdom of Swabia—a name derived from the Suebi.

The ancestors of these Santiago and Martin families were part of the Suebi tribe prior to the mass migration to Galicia in 406. The ancestors of the Martins remained behind and probably lived for several centuries north of Lake Constance as part of the Kingdom of Swabia before moving south and west into modern Canton Zurich, and then eventually into the Emmental, around 760 years ago.

These movements can be traced nearly perfectly within the political history of the time. Through marriage, the feudal Kyburg lands near Winterthur were passed on to the Swabian counts of Dillingen in 1078. This allowed migration from Swabia into modern Switzerland. The Kyburgs continued as vassals of the Duke of Swabia and expanded their holdings to the south and west. By 1250, they founded the town of Huttwil, only five kilometers north of Eriswil, where the paper trail of the Martins begin.

By the time my Martin ancestors were converting to Anabaptism, Rolando's paternal ancestry had already moved to Puerto Rico.

The Swiss Yoder and Zimmerman families also relate very closely to the Martins and share this same ancestral profile with Rolando Santiago's ancestry. One can think of these families each as branches on the same tree. The Martin, Yoder and Zimmerman families form a tight cluster, sharing a common ancestor as recently as 700 years ago and probably all diverge from one man who helped expand the Kyburgs into the Emmental.

It is only after tracing back further than this that Hispanic lines begin to converge with the same cluster. And Rolando's family is not the first. The Galarza family from Mexico and the Cavalcanti family from Brazil who both have Galician ancestry begin to connect to this same subset of the Swabian families immediately prior to 406 A.D. While part of the same tribe, Rolando's parental ancestry converges to these others at a much earlier date—perhaps as early as 4,000 years ago, when the proto-Suebi were living further to the north in modern eastern Germany.

This is but one of countless examples how DNA connects families across time zones, cultures, religions and ethnic barriers in surprising and complex ways. We are far closer to those who are very different from us than anyone would have guessed prior to the knowledge of one's deep ancestry—made possible through studying DNA.—*Darvin L. Martin. This article originally ran in Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society's June 2011 issue of The Mirror. Reprinted with permission.*



Rolando Santiago (left) and Darvin Martin

'Peace Pastor' blog reaches thousands

Houston pastor Marty Troyer encourages others to 'speak faith publicly.'

When Martin Troyer, a Houston pastor, began blogging for his church nearly two years ago, about 30 people read his posts.

Now his blog, "The Peace Pastor," reaches an online audience of tens of thousands of people. On one occasion, his blog post received 15,000 hits within six hours of publishing a post.

This success story starts in fall 2008, when Troyer began serving as pastor of Houston Mennonite Church. Six months into his time there, the leadership team posed the question, "What does it mean for us, as a Mennonite congregation, to offer a distinctly Christian peace presence in Houston?"

Those on the team agreed that a pastoral blog provided one way to address this question. Troyer, who likes to write, began blogging. He tied the blog to the church's web page, and it received few hits—mostly from church members. In March 2009, Troyer contacted the *Houston Chronicle* web editors but didn't hear back from them.

In December 2010, the leadership team revisited their question and looked at how to be missional with a "larger public platform," says Troyer. Several months later, the online Belief editor for the *Houston Chronicle*, Kate Shellnutt, came across Houston Mennonite's website. The peace stance and information on peace and justice intrigued her.

In February, she contacted Troyer. "What she said next made me almost fall out of my chair," he says.

"I want you to blog as a Houstonian about peace and from a Christian perspective," Troyer remembers Shellnutt saying.

Troyer says, "This is just what the leadership team at Houston Mennonite had been discussing for the past two years."

Within three days, Shellnutt had Troyer's blog up and running. His first public blog, on Feb. 27, entitled, "In Praise of Nonviolent Resistance," received a lot of traffic.

"Since then we've been going 60 miles an hour," says Troyer. Now, just a few months later, Troyer ranks as the third or fourth most-read of Chron.com's Faith Leader bloggers, which include some 25 leaders and 40 lay people.

"It's absolutely electrifying," he says. "We've been talking about being missional. This is my missional experiment."

Troyer says many of his friends focus their energies internally and within Mennonite Church USA. For example, their ultimate aspirations include preaching at a Mennonite convention, having an article printed in *The Mennonite* (see Troyer's article "Stewards of Grace" in this issue on page

32) or a book published by Herald Press.

However, Troyer says, he now lacks an interest in those venues and finds excitement in writing for a wider, non-Mennonite community.

"We're great at living our faith publicly but not at speaking our faith publicly," he says. "Go out there and try it. Preach the gospel of peace."

Troyer's blog focuses on peace and justice issues but moves beyond "saying no to war," he says. "I could write about 1,000 different things that relate to peace." Examples of Troyer's blog headlines include: "Jesus, Israel-Palestine and the Bible," "Executing the Innocent," "Road Peace on Rage Road" and "A Primer on Hating Your (Cyber!) Neighbor." He hopes readers see his blog as not only a political message but also very Christian.

Shellnutt says that while Mennonites are a minority in the Houston area, Troyer's approach in his blogs is "relevant, relatable and meaningful."

"[He] stands firm in his faith and responds gracefully, even to those who disagree with him," she says.

Initially, Troyer declined to respond to readers who commented on his blog. But more recently he has interacted with those commenting—many of whom post negative statements. He hesitated because he did not want it to consume his time, and he was unsure whether his interactions would build healthier online dialogue.

Still, Troyer sees small improvements. For example, one commenter posted extremely negative comments, such as, "You just wait and see, no one will read this stuff from this liberal, socialist pastor." Over time the commenter has backed down and now posts gentler statements.

These dynamics of online interactions have changed Troyer's spiritual life. While he sees the many benefits of the blogosphere, it has also "reinforced the true power of the congregation," he says.

In fact, Troyer includes an invitation to the church's website and to the church in his online posts. A few of Troyer's readers have visited Houston Mennonite's worship services. More significantly, the blog opened conversation opportunities for Troyer with individuals in the community and church, including a lawyer who lives beside the church.

"He read a post on the death penalty and connected it to his Christian faith in a way he hasn't in 20 years," Troyer says.

Go to <http://blog.chron.com/thepeacepastor/> to read Troyer's blog.—*Anna Groff*



Official account of Spaulding dismissal

There are rumors and varying accounts of Randall Spaulding's dismissal from the Binational Worship Council. This is a brief but official Mennonite Church USA account of our understanding of what happened. When the Binational council was formed, it seemed natural for Mennonite Publishing Network (MPN) to appoint Randall to the committee, since he had participated in a number of other such tasks, including the editing of two hymnal supplements. So, at the time the Binational Worship Council was formed in April 2008, they took counsel with denominational leaders, at which time Randall was appointed as one of the representatives of Mennonite Church USA.

MPN knew that Randall had divorced his wife of 19 years before coming out as gay, so MPN made the appointment with an understanding from denominational leaders that Randall could serve as long as he was not in an active gay relationship. (Not everyone involved remembers the agreement in the same way; Randall and council members thought the only limit was that he not serve as chair of the committee).

Later, when Randall told the Southeast Mennonite Conference he was pursuing a same-sex relationship, they revoked his ministerial credentials. After joining in a marriage

covenant with another man in June 2010, Randall raised the question of his ongoing participation on the Council in October 2010. In January, MPN sought counsel from denominational staff, who conferred with Southeast Mennonite Conference and with the denominational moderators. All agreed that although Randall was serving well from the viewpoint of the committee, it seemed best for him not to continue in such a visible role after his pastoral credentials had been suspended; substantial groups in the church could not support his ministry. It was also deemed to be consistent with the membership guidelines adopted at Nashville. This was communicated to Randall in a phone conversation with good mutual exchange. In the end, Randall indicated that he would not step down voluntarily; he would need to be asked to quit. After further counsel, it was deemed best to honor the conference's decision and discontinue his appointment through Mennonite Church USA.—*Ervin Stutzman, Mennonite Church USA executive director*



Fewer churches leaving (Continued from page 40)

history with WDC.

"I would say that is the biggest drawback in the minds of members," Zook says of breaking the longtime relationship.

At a congregational meeting on Nov. 14, 2010, 67 percent voted to withdraw, barely the two-thirds majority needed for approval. The church has an average attendance of about 155. Zook had mixed feelings about the decision.

"I feel that as congregations pull out of conferences, that weakens the evangelical voice that is allowed to speak to conference issues," he says. But he says some members felt they shouldn't align with churches that they believe take theological stances contrary to the Bible.

"There are congregations in the conference that are at polar opposites from First Mennonite of Pretty Prairie," he says. "By being part of the conference, are we guilty by association? That was part of the thinking."

Zook and Lynn Stucky, chair of the deacon board, declined to cite specific issues that led to the rift with the conference.

"It was biblical and theological issues we didn't agree with," Stucky says. "We're not abandoning our Mennonite heritage. We want to remain active with MCC, MDS and other programs we've been involved with."

Stucky and Zook agree that the withdrawal left the congregation in need of healing. "I would not say everyone is at peace with it," Zook says of the decision. "We are trying to promote healing as we can."

During 2009-10, conference ministers reported the addition of 20 congregations, some of which are church plants. That number would be larger if all church plants were counted. The closing of several congregations accounts for part of the change in denominational membership. MC USA had a net loss of 15 congregations in 2009-10.—*Paul Schrag of Mennonite Weekly Review. This first appeared in MWR's Feb. 14 issue. Reprinted with permission*

Endowment to expand pastoral development

Full-time internships available for those who say 'yes' to the call

An endowment dedicated to funding long-term pastoral internships for graduate students—initiated by Duane Beck, pastor at Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church, and Terry Shue, Mennonite Church USA leadership development director—will be named in honor of Peter and Rheta May Wiebe of Glendale, Ariz. (pictured), to commemorate their sustained missional and pastoral leadership throughout the denomination. Mennonite Foundation will oversee the administration and investment of the endowment.

“Naming the endowment after Peter and Rheta May Wiebe recognizes the couple’s complementary roles in the pastorate,” says Beck. “They have a passion for pastoral leadership and an enduring love for the Mennonite church.”

Funds will be distributed to seminary students and recent graduates confident about their call to be pastoral leaders within the denomination and who seek to develop their pastoral identity and skills through full-time congregational internships. The endowment will give special attention to suitably matching interns with mentoring pastors and their congregations.

Over the course of 46 years, Peter Wiebe mentored 20 pastoral interns in four different congregations, helping these pastors develop their identities and preparing them to work in congregations and their communities around the country. “As I guided interns, it became abundantly clear to me that experience alone without reflective awareness would not allow for the development of pastoral identity,” Wiebe says.

“Peter has been very instrumental—inspiring a ripple effect, as those he has mentored go on to mentor others,” says Shue.

Beck interned under the supervision of Wiebe and Shue under the supervision of Beck. Both Beck and Shue credit their internships with having provided a strong foundation for their pastoral formation and development, and both have shared their passion with other interns.

Beck and Shue believe that full-time internships of nine months to a year will allow developing pastors to understand their place within the communities they serve in a way that classroom learning and part-time internships cannot. “To increase the number of places with full-time internships is important, because it will open up opportunities for people who are beginning to create a pastoral identity,” says Shue.

The endowment to be named after the Wiebes is intended

to supplement existing internship programs, such as the Ministry Inquiry Program (MIP) of the Mennonite colleges, which for more than 20 years has given undergraduate students opportunities to explore their call to ministry.

“We don’t want people to use this fund for inquiry; we want it to be for people who have said, Yes, and this is where the call has taken me,” says Shue. “We are looking to complement the schools, not compete with the schools.”

Beck and Shue want the endowment to fund internships for students who are interested in pastoral positions in

unique Mennonite settings. Raleigh Mennonite Church, where Beck is a pastor, is located in an urban area and is closely connected with Mennonite churches in the nearby cities of Durham and Chapel Hill. The community established by these connections has drawn in students from Duke Divinity School in Durham who are interested in interning in Mennonite, urban and missional congregations.

For Beck, the tools necessary to become a missional pastor develop as individuals build relationships in the community surrounding their church.

“Part of pastoral skill is knowing how to network at all levels in your city—with other churches, nonprofits and neighborhood associations,” Beck says.

The program will allow students at non-Anabaptist seminaries who have been called to Anabaptist ministry during their study or who have attended graduate school with the purpose of becoming Mennonite pastors to receive funds from the endowment.

“Right now in the Mennonite church we have quite a few non-Mennonite-trained pastors taking on the task of leading an Anabaptist congregation without an understanding of our theology and faith and an appreciation for our heritage,” says Peter Wiebe. “An internship for such students would be even more important, it seems to me.”

Shue adds: “There are people all around the world who are looking at Anabaptism as something that is extremely positive. There are non-Mennonite schools—like Duke Divinity School, for example—where Anabaptists and Anabaptism hold a lot of interest. This program is an opportunity to bring that beyond the academic realm and pair up interested students with ministry leaders who have struggled through the missional context themselves. It opens up broader possibilities for the future of the Mennonite church.”—*Johnny Kauffman for Mennonite Church USA*



Peter and Rheta May Wiebe

South African elder celebrates learning

Wise elders usually expected to be listened to and served—not taught

Although about 90 years of age, Amos Sobambela still celebrates learning. He enters into study of God's Word at Bethany Bible School in Mthatha, South Africa, with enthusiasm that belies his age. Such focus and energy at a time of life when many are considering retirement are remarkable anywhere in the world, but they are especially countercultural among the Xhosa, Sobambela's ethnic group.

As a church secretary of the Church of God in Zion, Sobambela has arrived at a position in life where, as a wise elder, he can expect to be listened to and served—not taught.

"In Xhosa culture, there is a time for service and a time for being served, a life-stage for receiving instruction and a life-stage for giving it," says Joe Sawatzky, a Mennonite Mission Network teacher at Bethany.

Sobambela is not the only elder that Bethany Bible School serves. Visitors are often startled by so many "old people who still want to learn" when they walk into an animated session of scriptural study at Bethany, Sawatzky says.

"Perhaps their surprise is due to the fact that in most countries, learners are people between the ages of 5 and 22, between primary school and university," Sawatzky says.

Another mature Bethany Bible School student leader, Mavis Tshandu, is a nurse who has experience in HIV-AIDS education. Tshandu conducted a workshop in her area of expertise for Bethany students in March. This workshop, part of a series that addresses social issues affecting South African society, empowered students with tools to tackle what often seems like an overwhelming burden in their communities.

At the end of the HIV-AIDS workshop, Sobambela says, "Before Jesus Christ left this earth, he asked his father not to take his disciples out of the world but to keep them."

As long as he has not been taken out of the world, Sobambela continues, he knows that God intends to "keep him" by renewing him through knowledge.

Sobambela sees the privilege of learning as proof of God's love for him, Sawatzky says. "Amos Sobambela is, like his biblical namesake, also a prophet."

At a Bethany workshop on community mobilization last October, Thandi Gumbi, a Zulu guest instructor in her 30s,

received a remarkable statement of hospitality and humility from Tata K. Zangqa, a Xhosa bishop four decades her senior.

"We are your children, and you are our teacher," Zangqa said.

Sawatzky explains that according to culture, Gumbi was Zangqa's "intombazana," or "little girl, one who could be ordered to fetch his tea."

With these few words, the bishop, like Jesus, laid aside his privileges of gender, age and insider status. Such recognition by an old man is a work of the Holy Spirit, a confession of faith, Sawatzky says.

Though Bethany Bible School was founded in 1982 to train leaders in African-Initiated Churches, some leaders of mainline churches are taking note of the far-reaching education Bethany offers. African-Initiated Churches, churches that were founded by Africans with worship and practice meaningful to local Christians, differ from mainline denominations, which were planted by expatriate missionaries.

When Anna and Joe Sawatzky met with Fikile Mbabama, the Anglican canon of the Mthatha Diocese of St. John's, to discuss the raise of rental fees for the office space they share, the canon said, "I have seen the fruits of your labors." Mbabama told the Sawatzkys that prior to coming to

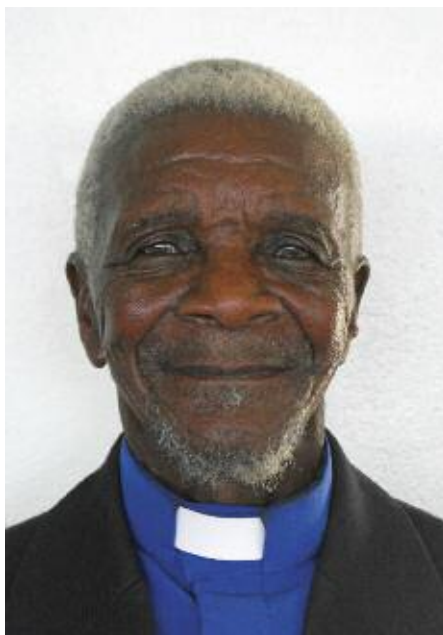
Mthatha he ministered in a rural area where there were many African-Initiated Churches.

He was impressed with the quality of preaching in some of the African-initiated congregations. When he affirmed the leaders, Mbabama reported that the leaders replied, "Yes, we are going to Bethany."

Students from 45 African-initiated denominations travel up to 60 miles, many in the cramped conditions of minibus taxis, to study at Bethany Bible School six times each year.

Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network collaborate through the Southern Africa Partnership Council to walk alongside this ministry.

Anna and Joe Sawatzky and their four young sons have lived in Mthatha and have worked through Mennonite Mission Network since 2006.—*Lynda Hollinger-Janzen of Mennonite Mission Network*



Amos Sobambela

Noticed and welcomed or invisible and lonely?

What does someone who has been a visitor in 40 different congregations in 10 months have to say about congregational hospitality? Quite a lot.

Following my retirement as associate pastor of First Mennonite Church in Urbana, Ill., my husband and I took the opportunity to worship with a variety of congregations. Recalling Diana Butler Bass' lecture at Pastors' Week (Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., in January 2009) about the non-negotiable importance of congregational hospitality, especially to visitors, I decided to do an informal research project to rate the hospitality we received at the churches we visited. Of the 40 congregations we attended, five were nondenominational, and the remainder represented 19 denominations.

We attended large, medium and small congregations; urban and rural churches; congregations representing a wide range of theological perspectives; ethnically diverse and nondiverse congregations; churches with a contemporary worship style and those that were more traditional.

In each congregation I gathered anecdotal data about hospitality in seven areas: website information and design, parking, signage outside and inside, the quality and quantity of welcome prior to the worship service, the worship service, the quality and quantity of welcome following the service, and follow-up. Although I believe all seven areas create a total package of congregational hospitality, there are three I would list as most important: website information and design, the quality and quantity of greeting before a service, and the hospitality of the actual worship service.

At the outset of this project I had no idea of the importance I would soon give to a congregation's website, especially since I am not technologically savvy. However, after carefully perusing over 40 of them, I have come to regard a well-designed and easy-to-manuever website as an act of hospitality. Many potential visitors are checking out congregations online and forming an initial impression without ever setting foot in a building. Although not all congregations will choose to develop a website, I offer these suggestions to those who do:

1. A church's home page should clearly post the two things a visitor needs to know—the address of the church and the time of worship. It was surprising how many websites neglected to have these readily available for a newcomer. On one congregation's website, I had to open six different links before I could find the time of the worship service. Correct or incorrect, the impression I got was that this congregation did not care if visitors came or not.

2. In addition to the address and time of worship, websites provide visitors with other helpful information: maps, parking instructions if space is limited, mission statements, tips on what to expect in a typical worship service, denominational information and an introduction to local church leadership. Online sermons give the visitor a glimpse into the theology of a congregation. Calendars indicate both the activity level of a congregation and whether those activities are ones a visitor would be interested in. From online bulletins a visitor can see what kind of music the congregation prefers and how much importance is given to Christian education. From posted pictures, a po-

tential visitor could observe the age, gender and racial diversity in the congregation.

3. Although it takes a lot of time and effort to keep websites current, up-to-date information announces, "Here is what we are doing right now. Come and join us." Out-of-date information advertises a congregation's lack of attention to details. Worse yet, it can actually mislead visitors. One Sunday I arrived for a worship service at the time announced on the congregation's website, only to find the pastor delivering the benediction. Obviously no one had adjusted the information on the website, so how was a visitor to know the congregation went to an earlier starting time in the summer? My conclusion? This congregation did not care much about attracting new people.

After 10 months of visiting churches, I believe the single most important aspect of hospitality to newcomers is the quality and quantity of the greeting before the worship service begins. For most visitors, walking into a new church takes courage, and many, including myself, are out of our comfort zone in a new worship environment. We found, from the beginning to the end of this project, that the initial greetings we experienced in a congregation colored the lasting impression we had of that church. We often received warm and sincere greetings. We experienced smiles and friendly words that made us relax and feel comfortable—made us feel like someone cared that we were there and gave us a little taste of community. We also received greetings that were cold and flat, greetings where there was no spirit of joy, and unfriendly greetings that actually reduced me to tears on two occasions.

It should be the responsibility and privilege for all of us to greet visitors on a Sunday morning. But it is especially important to implement good welcoming practices for those assigned as greeters or ushers. Once again a few reflections from our visits:

1. Not everyone is well-suited to be an usher or greeter any more than everyone is suited to be a Sunday school teacher or song leader. It is important to tap those who are especially gifted in the area of extending warm hospitality or who are willing to be trained.

2. There is much more to a hospitable greeting than handing out bulletins, and the training of greeters is helpful. It was always obvious to us which congregations had trained their greeters

about visitor hospitality and which had not.

3. Greeters and ushers should be familiar enough with the congregation to be able to recognize new faces and welcome accordingly. The exception to this might be if the congregation is so large that newcomers cannot easily be identified. Even then, however, the careful training of greeters can result in a sincere and friendly welcome for both newcomers and regulars.

4. We enjoyed being welcomed multiple times before worship by strategically placed greeters and especially appreciated when they pointed out restrooms, coat racks, offices, fellowship space and Sunday school rooms.

5. We found it hospitable to be given the name of the person or people greeting us and likewise appreciated being asked our names.

6. Most visitors feel awkward or uncomfortable finding a seat on their own in a crowded sanctuary. I would have avoided embarrassment one Sunday if a greeter or usher had assisted me in finding a seat. I arrived during the preservice singing, and the sanctuary was crowded. Because worshipers were standing to sing, it was difficult to see empty seats. I slipped into a row toward the back, but just as we were about to sit down, the person next to me said, “You’ll have to go sit somewhere else. This is where I always sit.”

7. The attention given to the hospitable greeting of visitors also increases the quality of welcome to regular attendees. Once visitors are in the sanctuary, the opportunities for hospitality continue. Do other worshipers acknowledge visitors, especially those sitting nearby? Is there a written welcome to visitors in the bulletin? Are visitors publicly welcomed by the worship leader or pastor? Do visitors have the opportunity to introduce themselves or to register their attendance in some way? Are there easy-to-understand directives from worship leaders and song leaders about different aspects of the service? Will visitors know whether they are invited to participate in congregational rituals, and if so, are there clear instructions on how to proceed? Does the language used in worship exclude visitors by using only first names during announcements and sharing time? Is there an overuse of acronyms and “insider” humor during the service that excludes newcomers? Are visitors invited to a time of fellowship following the service? Are visitors left awkwardly alone during the fellowship hour?

Each congregation we visited had a palpable atmosphere of hospitality or nonhospitality. We could tell if people were happy and excited to see each other. We could sense when there was an aura of anticipation about what the morning would bring. We could gauge the level of joy in being together. From our observations, we could discern not only whether community was important to a congregation but whether it might be open to adding new people to their community.

Many of the congregations we visited seemed almost fearful of overextending their welcome—perhaps apprehensive about chasing away a newcomer with too much attention. However, the fear of overextending hospitality is not an excuse for lukewarm hospitality. Take a chance; err on the side of friendliness. Churches rarely get a second chance with visitors. Most visitors will find sincere and effusive hospitality a gift, maybe a gift worth opening again and again.

The low point in our hospitality project came when, on two consecutive Sundays, we were entirely ignored. On the first Sunday, we had to search for our own bulletins in the foyer. On the next, the usher liter-

ally thrust the bulletin into my face without a word. Not one person spoke to us before, during or after either worship service, and the worship leaders and pastors did not acknowledge visitors in any way. On the way home from the second church, my husband wanted to stop at Home Depot and check out their new selection of perennials. Within a few minutes of walking in the front door, no less than six clerks greeted us with “Good morning. So glad you are here.” Or, “Welcome to Home Depot; let us know if there is anything we can do for you.” My husband mumbled, “I think if you want to be warmly greeted on a Sunday morning, Home Depot might be the place to go.”

Thankfully, total visitor anonymity was not what we experienced in most churches we visited, but those two Sundays helped me realize that congregations tend to fall into one of the following categories:

1. Visitor hospitality is important, and we have done and will continue to do everything we can to welcome and attract visitors to this congregation.

2. Hospitality to visitors is important, and even though we are unsure of how to improve in this area, we are willing to take steps to become a truly hospitable congregation.

3. We are happy when visitors come, but we are not interested in exploring ways to improve our hospitality.

4. We are not particularly interested in growing our church; we’re happy with the way things are.

If congregations want to share the good news of Jesus Christ and the joy of belonging to a community of faith, they must strive to be churches in categories one or two. Diana Butler Bass, in her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, writes: “True Christian hospitality is a central practice of the Christian faith. Christians welcome strangers as we ourselves have been welcomed into God through the love of Jesus Christ. Through hospitality, Christians imitate God’s welcome.”

It was an honor to visit such a variety of churches. I have a new and deep appreciation for what it means to be a visitor. I know firsthand what it means to be noticed and welcomed in a congregation. I also know what it means to be invisible and lonely on a Sunday morning in church. I believe, now more than ever, that we are called to welcome lavishly those who enter our sanctuary doors in the name of Jesus—the One who practiced such lavish hospitality himself.—*Cindy Massanari Breeze*

Online users can participate in Pittsburgh 2011

Social media will benefit individuals unable to attend convention in July.

This summer, for the first time, people who are not physically present at a Mennonite Church USA convention will be able to participate in churchwide delegate conversations along with conventiongoers.

Through live video and audio streaming, Twitter, Facebook and more, people will be able to follow delegate sessions at the 2011 Mennonite Church USA convention in Pittsburgh from anywhere. Through real-time chat rooms hosted by volunteer moderators in the delegate sessions, online users will be able to discern alongside delegates.

Rachel Swartzendruber Miller, Mennonite Church USA convention planning director, calls the efforts a trial run for alternate-site participation during future conventions.

“This will help us understand the pros and cons for having a ‘virtual delegate’ option,” Swartzendruber Miller says.

Online users will not have voting privileges in Pittsburgh. Chris Rahe, Mennonite Church USA web services director, says that while virtual services will augment conventiongoers’ experiences, the largest benefits will be for people unable to attend convention.

Harry Jarrett, lead pastor of Neffsville (Pa.) Mennonite Church, is working with Rahe on the delegate session social media efforts. He says that social media can expand the church’s ability to share transformative stories experienced at convention and can lower multiple, long-standing barriers.

Though delegates represent their congregations and conferences, Jarrett says many individuals and communities are marginalized by being unable to attend conventions due to distance, cost, immigration status, physical limitations and other factors. These nonattenders, he says, are marginalized despite being integral parts of the church.

Jarrett says the chat rooms used at Pittsburgh will help break down other barriers as well. Translation software will allow people both to read and type in multiple languages. He calls the typed chat format, also found on Twitter and Facebook, a “faith gateway” that can allow participation for people who have felt hurt or bullied by the church or who are uncomfortable speaking before groups.

“Generally we hear the majority of investment from the extroverts,” Jarrett says. “[Social media] actually balances the power.” Jarrett organized similar video streaming and chat sessions for the spring assembly of Atlantic Coast Conference in New York City in April.

Convention planners have expressed hope that congregations, retirement communities and other groups might gather during delegate sessions and hold their own conversations as delegates discern. Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, says there is a possibility that feedback from online delegate table discussions may be

shared with delegates present in Pittsburgh.

Delegates will have various online resources to use as they report back to their congregations after Pittsburgh 2011. Convention organizers plan to host a diverse group of bloggers reporting and reflecting on their experience.

The official convention publication, *mPress*, will report news and offer staff member tweets and blogs. Duane Stoltzfus, *mPress* editor and professor of communication at Goshen (Ind.) College, says staffers—which include students—will produce podcasts and videos, including projects that will allow conventiongoers to tell their own stories in their own words.

Twitter and text messaging also will be used to report on-site time and location changes at the convention. Swartzendruber Miller notes that while convention planners initially hoped to make videos of worship sessions available online, they decided to forgo this option because of logistics and limited resources, focusing instead on trying out the technology in connection with the delegate sessions.

Jarrett says the additional social media offered in Pittsburgh will be built using free and inexpensive online technologies and volunteer moderators. He says that outside sources will help pay for the new efforts and that the convention will incur minimal extra cost.—*Ryan Miller for Mennonite Church USA*

How to connect to Pittsburgh 2011

- View general convention-related updates, blogs, links and photos at www.MennoniteUSA.org/convention.
- View delegate-related updates and blogs, watch live video streams and participate in chat sessions through <http://pittsburgh2011.digitaldelegate.net/>.
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/Pittsburgh2011.
- Twitter: Members write updates in 140 characters or less. Subscribe via computer or cell phone to read text updates from specific users or by following keyword-based hashtags, like #Menno11 for this summer’s convention.
- *mPress*: View *mPress* coverage at blog.goshen.edu/mPress.
- Subscribe to *TMail* at www.themennonite.org and receive daily reports; read convention coverage in *The Mennonite*.

Everence volunteers dig in

Some 25 volunteers donate time to Help-a-House program.

Justin Cripe

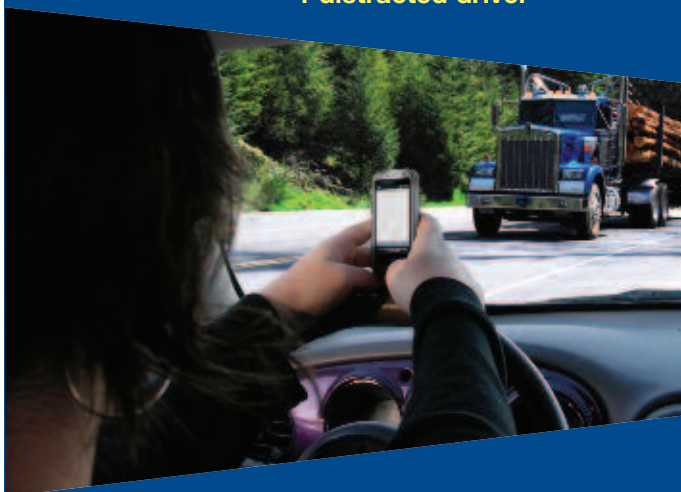


Everence volunteers Susie Kauffman, Lisa Gautsche and Brenda Hess work on a project during the May 14 Help-a-House program.

The forecast was wet and chilly, but that didn't slow down the Everence volunteers. The weather held for most of the day and allowed the workers to tear off

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shingles, replace a roof, shovel dirt, pull weeds, plant flowers and paint some trim.

They donated time to the Help-a-House program coordinated by LaCasa Inc., a community agency in Goshen, Ind., that strengthens neighborhoods through housing and development programs. LaCasa invited local residents and groups to lend a hand to improve low-income homes during the May 14 event.

Everence employees, family members and friends—more than 25 in all—came to help.

“It was an opportunity for my family to spend some time supporting the community,” says Kevin Strite, a project manager for Everence. He, his wife and two sons helped install a rain garden, which helps control water runoff. “To see the progress and what was accomplished in the time we were there, with all the other volunteers, was fun and satisfying for all of us,” he says.

“Team Everence” sported bright orange T-shirts and joined around 300 other community volunteers who worked on 15 different job sites to fix homes for local families.

Bonnie Long is a laid-off worker who welcomed the repairs that volunteers made at her home. “I’m so incredibly grateful. They don’t know what it means to me, and I’m not sure they ever could,” she said in an article for *The Goshen News*.

LaCasa organizers were also happy to see the outcomes. “The volunteers are important for successful projects and they truly become neighbors with the people they are helping. This reminds everyone that globally, we are all neighbors,” says Kate Irelan, the volunteer coordinator for LaCasa.

This reminds everyone that globally, we are all neighbors.—Kate Irelan

This belief fits well with how Everence and its employees see their work. Many Everence volunteers participate in community development, fund-raising events and many other civic activities.

At the root of the organization is a belief in caring for one another—and making a contribution to the communities across the country in which Everence serves.

This involvement is in addition to the grants, charitable giving programs and stewardship education that Everence provides to members and communities as part of the faith-based financial and insurance services it offers.—*Everence*

MC Canada to consider sexual inclusivity

Leaders will allow Harmony group to introduce motion at July assembly.

While topics regarding sexuality have dominated the mainstream headlines in the past several weeks, Mennonite Church Canada and area church leaders have made a move that points to a shift in values regarding sexuality within the conference.

On May 14, Willard Metzger, MC Canada general secretary, Vic Tiessen, chief operating officer, and Ken Warkentin, executive director of MC Manitoba, met with members of Harmony: Mennonites for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered) Inclusion. The grassroots initiative within MC Canada desires to create open and loving spaces for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in congregations and conference bodies. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a motion Harmony plans to present at the MC Canada assembly in Waterloo, Ontario, in early July.

The motion will ask MC Canada to acknowledge that:

- there are nonheterosexual individuals who are struggling within its congregations, whether or not those individuals have publicly acknowledged their orientation and whether or not they are in a relationship with another person; and

- all Christians have a legitimate place in God's kingdom generally and in the church specifically.


The motion also calls on MC Canada to:

- urge its area churches and congregations to take seriously the call to continue in loving dialogue and to fully embrace—by inviting and welcoming into their midst—all people, including their nonheterosexual members, adherents and neighbors; and
- be encouraged to expedite the present “Being a Faithful Church” process, especially in regard to education and discernment on matters of sexuality.


The timing of this motion is especially important to Harmony, since it was 25 years ago that a motion on sexuality—known as the Saskatoon Resolution—was presented and adopted at a national assembly.

That resolution reads in part: “We understand the Bible to teach that sexual intercourse is reserved for a man and a woman united in marriage and that violation of this teaching is a sin. It is our understanding that this teaching also precludes premarital, extramarital and homosexual sexual activity.”

Life Together in the Spirit
—A new book by John Driver, Greencroft Goshen resident



John Driver
Greencroft Goshen Resident



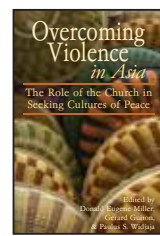
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Free copies available at the Mennonite Church USA Convention 2011 in Pittsburgh for both English and Hispanic Church leaders. Visit the Goshen College exhibit/booth for your free copy.

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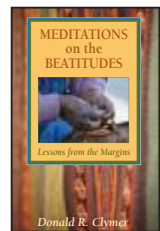
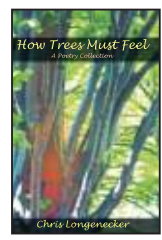
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“In the past, the Saskatoon Resolution has been used as a tool to make nonheterosexual people feel excluded,” says Ben Borne, a coordinator of Harmony and the incoming student council president at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg. “It is certainly outdated, because of the language and the wording used.”

He says the Harmony motion is meant to do what the Saskatoon Resolution could not: include nonheterosexuals in the church.

“This is a resolution to call on congregations to embrace their [nonheterosexual] brothers and sisters,” says Erwin Warkentin, a member of both Harmony and Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

Harmony believes that the Saskatoon Resolution, through its outdated language, has led to a deep struggle with unspoken pain, resulting in silence for individuals, their families and communities and has led to schisms, withdrawals and expulsions of individuals, their families and supporting congregations within MC Canada.

For Borne, being able to meet with senior Mennonite church representatives symbolizes the relationship Harmony hopes to build with the national church.

“It shows that Mennonite Church Canada is interested in what their own members are doing,” he says.

According to Metzger, putting forward this motion that

would hold the church accountable for “loving dialogue is a message we always need to hear.”

Looking ahead, Metzger is prepared for difficult discussions at the conference regarding sexuality.

“The General Board is committed to walk toward difficult conversations, confident that when God’s people gather, the Spirit of God is in the midst,” he says.

The Harmony motion is scheduled to go through the Res-

The [1996] Saskatoon Resolution has been used as a tool to make nonheterosexual people feel excluded. It is certainly outdated, because of the language and the wording used.—Ben Borne

olutions Committee on July 6 at the assembly. It will be given a 20-minute time slot.

“That’s more time than any other resolution,” Tiessen note.—*Rachel Bergen national correspondent for The Canadian Mennonite. This article ran in the May 30 issue of The Canadian Mennonite. Reprinted with permission.*

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BEHIND the VEIL- EXPERIENCING EGYPT with MEDA (November 14-26)
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CALENDAR

Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, Minn., will celebrate our **50th Anniversary** on Sept. 23-25, 2011, with a theme of On the Banks of the River: 50 years of invitation to the Water of Life (Jeremiah 17:7-8). Join us for a weekend of stories, music, food, renewing old friendships and celebration of God's faithfulness. Contact us at anniversary@faithmennonite.org or check out details at www.faimennonite.org.

WORKERS

Baker, Michael T., was licensed as pastor of youth and young adults at Community Mennonite Fellowship, Milton, Pa., on March 9.

OBITUARIES

Arn, Sarah Eleanor Kratz, 71, Lansdale, Pa., died May 10 of cancer. Spouse: John W. Arn. Parents: Horace Spare Kratz and Sarah Eleanor Wampole Kratz. Children: Christel Boysel, Kendra Hosgood, Nathan; six grandchildren. Funeral: May 14 at Grace Mennonite Church, Lansdale.

Bechtel, Irene Souder, 99, Spring City, Pa., died March 6. Spouse: Norman Huber Bechtel (deceased). Parents: Edwin and Ella Souder Hackman. Children: Geraldine Stiedle, Eleanor Fuhrman, Lois Shank Gerber, Lorraine Sayre, Doris Schmehl, Harold, Wilmer, Dorothea Ray; 24 grandchildren; 54 great-grandchildren; six great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: March 12 at Vincent Mennonite Church, Spring City.

Disbrow, Caleb D., 96, Archbold, Ohio, died May 19. Spouse: Estella Grieser Disbrow (deceased). Parents: Ernest and Floy Johnson Disbrow. Children: Elizabeth Uphoff, Kenneth, Shirley Stuckey, Ernest; 19 grandchildren; 41 great-grandchildren. May 21 at Fairlawn Haven Chapel, Archbold.

Dutcher, Gertrude Lydia Maust, 86, Hartville, Ohio, died May 19. Spouse: Frank Dutcher (deceased). Parents: Earl and Idella Maust. Children: Jonathan, Ruth Massey, Dan, Naomi Leaman, Titus; 17 grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 23 at Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Hartville.

Godshalk, Earl H., 84, Blooming Glen, Pa., died May 21. Spouse: Ruth D. Mitman Godshalk. Parents: Horace and Elsie Hockman Godshalk. Children: Beth Ponzio, E. Brent; three grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Funeral: May 25 at Doylestown Mennonite Church, Doylestown, Pa.

Griffin, John W., Sr., 86, Denver, Colo., died April 26. Spouse: Jan Griffin. Spouse: Elsie Griffin (deceased). Children: Rochelle Griffin, John Jr.; three grandchildren. Funeral: May 21 at First Mennonite Church, Denver.

Hershberger, Grace L. Gongwer, 84, Goshen, Ind., died May 2. Spouse: LeRoy Hershberger. Parents: Maurice and Olive Stauffer Gongwer. Children: Cheryl Hershberger, Donna Skiles, Dawn Moneyheffer, Jerry; five grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 6 at Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa, Ind.

Hertzler, Russel Henry, 90, Dillsburg, Pa., died April 19. Spouse: Agnes P. Bupp Hertzler. Parents: Henry Christian and Annie Elizabeth Harbold Hertzler. Children: Lois Diller, Russel Jr., Evelyn Miller; nine grandchildren; 18 great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 25 at Slate Hill Mennonite Church, Camp Hill, Pa.

Hieser, Vernon J., 100, Foolsland, Ill., died May 28. Spouse: Margaret Ulrich Hieser (deceased). Parents: John E. and Mary E. Cender Hieser. Children: Kenneth, Judith A. Hershberger, Sharon J. Hieser, Sally S. Gaff; seven grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Funeral: June 2 at East Bend Mennonite Church, Fisher, Ill.

Janzen, Pearl Mierau, 87, Reedley, Calif., died May 16. Spouse: Victor Janzen (deceased). Parents: John and Lydia Friesen Mierau. Children: Michael, Christina Moyer, Mark, Carolyn Janzen; six grandchildren; three great-grandchildren. Memorial service: May 21 at First Mennonite Church, Reedley.

Kenagy, Clifford "Ralph," 89, Albany, Ore., died March 29. Spouse: Lois Yake Kenagy. Parents: Urie Emmet and Bertha Neuschwander Kenagy. Children: Susan Kenagy Schaefer, Peter, Marguerite Kenagy, Eric Yake Kenagy; six grandchildren. Funeral: April 19 at Albany Mennonite Church.

Klaassen, Donna L. Regier, 86, North Newton, Kan., died May 8. Spouse: Melvin Klaassen. Parents: A.J. and Suzanne Barga Regier. Children: Linda Harms, Chuck, K. John, Ellen Byergo; 12 grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 21 at Grace Hill Mennonite Church, Whitewater, Kan.

For the Record is available to members of Mennonite Church USA. Births and marriages appear online at www.themennonite.org. Obituaries are also published in *The Mennonite*. Contact Rebecca Helmuth at 800-790-2498 for expanded memorial and photo insertion options. To submit information, log on to www.themennonite.org and use the "For the Record" button to access online forms. You may also submit information by e-mail, fax or mail: Editor@TheMennonite.org; fax 574-535-6050; 1700 S. Main St., Goshen, IN 46526-4794.

Kraus, Mildred Inez Brunk, 84, Harrisonburg, Va., died May 8. Spouse: Dr. Harry Lee Kraus Sr. Parents: Joseph A. and Hannah L. Brunk. Children: Harry Jr., Donna Parrish, Debra Snyder; nine grandchildren. Funeral: May 13 at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

Leatherman, Willard "Bill" D., 92, Hatfield, Pa., died May 19. Spouse: Alma Moyer Leatherman (deceased). Parents: David G. and Martha D. Leatherman. Children: Janet Yoder, Ray, Darlene Brandis; five grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 24 at Plains Mennonite Church, Hatfield, Pa.

Lehman, Oleta Miller, 93, Kidron, Ohio, died May 12. Spouse: Marvin Lehman (deceased). Parents: Samuel and Barbara Miller. Children: Joann Erb, John; two grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 15 at Kidron Mennonite Church.

Miley, Guy, 89, Harrisonburg, Va., died May 8. Spouse: Christine Heatwole Miley. Parents: Walter and Effie Vance Miley. Step-children: Wayne Eugene Heatwole, Gary Wilson Heatwole; five step-grandchildren; three step-great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 12 at McMullen Funeral Home Chapel, Harrisonburg.

Miller, Durward "Butch" Henry, 76, Pigeon, Mich., died May 1. Spouse: Nova Jean Wertz Miller. Parents: Orval and Marjorie Pletcher Miller. Children: Margie Clement, Sheldon, Darlene Hoffman; seven grandchildren. Funeral: May 7 at Pigeon River Mennonite Church, Pigeon.

Miller, Rachel M. Keim, 90, Goshen, Ind., died April 25 following a two-month illness. Spouse: Dwight Miller (deceased). Parents: Menno and Libbie Rhinesmith Keim. Children: David, Karen Higginbotham, Kathy White, Curtis; eight grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 28 at Walnut Hill Mennonite Church, Goshen.

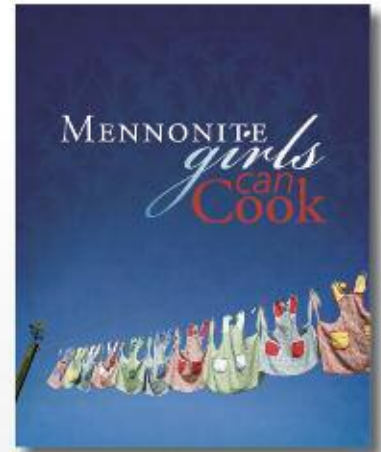
Miller, Ruth Kathryn Mishler, 93, Shipshewana, Ind., died April 4. Spouse: Ernest Miller. Parents: Homer and Lydia Miller Mishler. Children: Dewayne J., Gerald Keith, Jennifer Kay Miller, Franklin J., Ralph Edward, Dennis Kalb; eight grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 28 at Shore Mennonite Church, Shipshewana.

Moyer, Joseph N., 89, Souderton, Pa., died May 27. Spouse: Eva Souder Moyer. Parents: William and Valeria Mood Moyer. Children: Glenda Bergey, Neal J.; six grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 31 at Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Blooming Glen, Pa.

Noll, Lois Arlene Hershey, 82, Lancaster, Pa., died March 31 from complications of Parkinson's disease. Spouse: Kenneth B. Noll. Parents: D. Paul and Sue B. Snyder Hershey. Children: Jeanette Bontrager, Herb; four grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 5 at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster.

Nussbaum, Willis, 88, Dalton, Ohio, died March 21. Spouse: Edna Nussbaum (deceased). Spouse: Erena Lehman Nussbaum (deceased). Parents: Eli and Hulda Nussbaum. Children: Elton, Arvilla Kaufman, Arden; five grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Step-children: Virgene Lehman, Karen Garnett, Curt Lehman, Darel Lehman, Craig Lehman, Lori Napolitan, Joyce Weaver; 10 step-grandchildren. Funeral: March 26 at Kidron Mennonite Church, Kidron, Ohio.

Peachey, Sue E. Yoder, 97, Goshen, Ind., died May 14. Spouse: Jacob J. Peachey (deceased). Parents: Christian B. and Fannie Kauffman Yoder. Child: Chester R.; two grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Funeral: May 16 at Greencroft Meetinghouse, Goshen, Ind., and May 18 at Henderson Funeral Home in Belleville, Pa.



Mennonite Girls Can Cook

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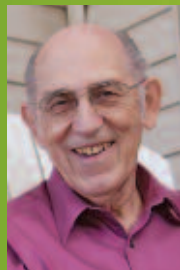
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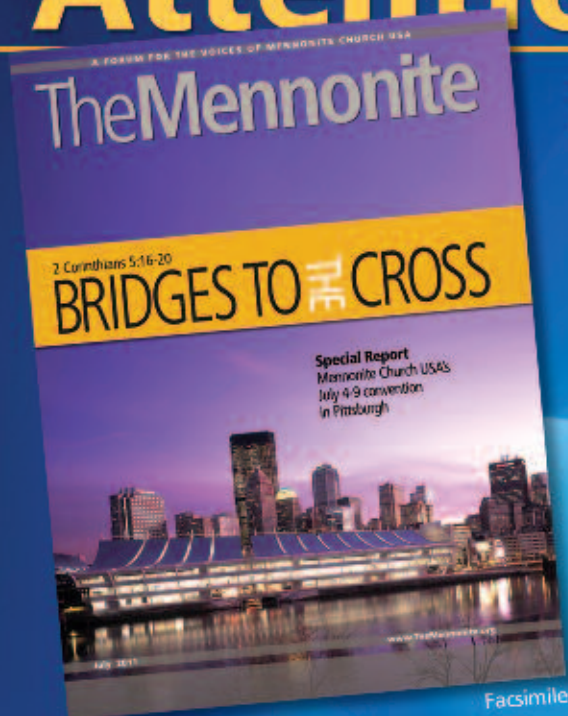
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Preheim, Curtis E., 86, Freeman, S.D., died May 13. Spouse: Ruth Regier Preheim. Parents: Emil and Frances P. Waltner Preheim. Children: Charlene Friesen, Tyrone, Arlan, Donna Beier, Jane Mahoney; 17 grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 17 at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman.

Rodgers, Hugh M., 97, Perkaspie, Pa., died May 1. Spouse: Hildegard Holb Rodgers. Spouse: Margaret Yoder Crowthers Rodgers (deceased). Children: Ronald Rodgers, Ralph Rodgers, Karl Kimball, Marianne Seastrand, Robert Rodgers; seven grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 5 at Anders Detweiler Funeral Home, Souderton, Pa.

Schell, James R., 67, Alliance, Ohio, died May 29 of cancer. Spouse: Marilyn Conrad Schell. Parents: Howard and Arlene Bourquin Schell. Children: Laura Wilson, Christine Schell, Shannon Aguero, James, Brian; eight grandchildren. Funeral: June 12 at Beech Mennonite Church, Louisville, Ohio.

Schlabaugh, Gordon Dean, 76, Wellman, Iowa, died May 17. Spouse: Lois Horisberger Schlabaugh. Parents: Sam and Nettie Yoder Schlabaugh. Children: Daryl, Lee, Jim, Neil; five grandchildren. Funeral: May 20 at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa.

Schlegel, Benjamin T., 92, Coplay, Pa., died May 18. Spouse: Evelyn M. Heffelfinger Schlegel. Parents: Harvey C. and Stella M. Heintzelman Schlegel. Children: Carol Buss, Althea Muffley-Bond, Christine Schlegel-Metz, Benjamin T. Jr., Roy, David; 20 grandchildren; 36 great-grandchildren; five great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 18 at Schisler Funeral Home, Inc., Northampton, Pa.

Schmucker, Mildred Mary Sommers, 91, Louisville, Ohio, died April 29. Spouse: Elden J. Schmucker (deceased). Parents: John and Bertha Taylor Sommers. Children: Ruth Anne Bontreger, Marcia Miller, Eunice Miller, Elva Block; eight grandchildren; 20 great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 4 at Beech Mennonite Church, Louisville.

Schrock, Dorothy Gerber, 90, Dalton, Ohio, died May 10. Spouse: David Schrock (deceased). Parents: Grover and Fairy Gerber. Children: Robert, Leah Bishop, Rita Sutter, Judy Miller, Hannah Gehman; 16 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; one great-great-grandchild. Funeral: May 13 at Smithville Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio.

Showalter, Gerald W., 74, Newport News, Va., died March 29. Spouse: Evonne Shank Showalter. Parents: Oliver and Frances Miller Showalter. Children: June Hartzler, Joann Morgan, Joyce Brunk, Jonathan; eight grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Memorial service: April 2 at Huntington Mennonite Church, Newport News.

Smith, Nancy M. Roth, 74, Wauseon, Ohio, died May 24. Spouse: John Smith. Parents: Reuben and Norma Switzer Roth. Children: Steve, Kirby, Penny Shultz, Jim, Kamal, Kathy Smith, Carl; 16 grandchildren; three great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 29 at Central Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio.

Steiner, Lucille Zuercher, 94, Kidron, Ohio, died April 1. Spouse: Phares Steiner (deceased). Parents: Christian and Anna Lehman Zuercher. Step-children: Margaret Gerber, Wilford, LaVerne, Mahlon; 15 grandchildren; 39 great-grandchildren; 16 great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 4 at Kidron Mennonite.

Weaver, Jean Wenger, 83, Waynesboro, Va., died May 4. Spouse: Marion Weaver. Parents: Henry S. and Amy Heatwole Wenger. Children: Maynard, Sidney; nine grandchildren; four great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 6 at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro.

Yoder, Wilma Cordelle Brenneman, 91, Wellman, Iowa, died April 20. Spouse: Pete M. Yoder. Parents: Eris and Martha Marner Brenneman. Children: Mary Wenman, Marvin, Dona Kasper; six grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 23 at Wellman Mennonite Church.



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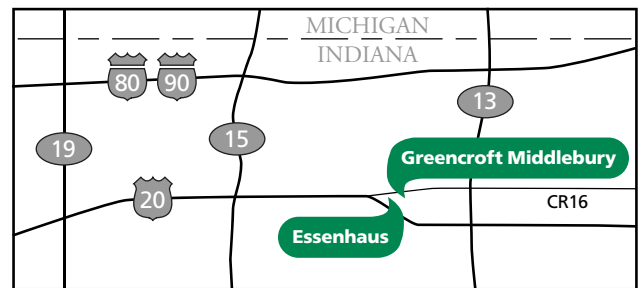


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Community Mennonite Fellowship in Corning, N.Y., is seeking a long-term **pastor**. We are part of New York Mennonite Conference. If you are interested, please send your Ministerial Leadership Information form to Dan Gallagher or contact him at DG.CorningNY@gmail.com.



Our good idols



Thomas Dunn is associate pastor of youth and young adults at Kidron (Ohio) Mennonite Church.

In January 2010, I read my first book by Timothy Keller. Since that time, I have become a huge fan, reading his books and blogs and listening to his sermons online. Keller is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, which is having a significant impact there and around the world through its many church planting initiatives. In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Keller discusses the pervasive sin of idolatry. Even though it's been close to a year since I read this book, the ideas are still percolating in me.

The most significant takeaway from this book is the idea that idols are good things. That's right; the vast majority of the idols in our lives are good things. For me to understand this, I first needed to understand what an idol is. I had always dismissed the passages in the Bible about idolatry because I don't have any shiny things I bow down to in my home. I am a monotheist and never struggled with polytheism. With this understanding, I never thought much about idolatry and certainly didn't see myself as being idolatrous. This is because my definition of idolatry was lacking. An idol is anything we elevate above God in our lives, and most things that we elevate above God in our lives are good things.

We quickly want to jump to the "evil" things that "bad" people do to replace God in their lives. We talk about lost individuals, people groups or generations that look to drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling or false religions in the absence of God in their lives. As true and as sad as this reality may be, this is not the type of idolatry most Mennonite readers struggle with. There are many good things that can play the same idolatrous role in our lives.


The list of good idols in our lives is endless: family, friends, success, education, financial stability, spouse, children, grandchildren, acceptance, good grades, athletic achievement, entertainment, food, hobbies. As you can see, all these things are good, and I am certainly not proposing

that we attempt to eradicate them from our lives. What I am saying is that all these things (and more) have the potential to become the ultimate reality of our lives, thus making them idols in place of God himself.

To take it a step further, we can look at Mennonite Church USA and ask: What have become idols for us? What are the things we are tempted to elevate above Jesus Christ? Have we elevated our peace and justice stance above Jesus himself? Have we made denominational unity a false god? Have we emphasized our Mennonite distinctives to the point of idolatry? Have we held up our history and tradition to a point where it is more im-

portant than the Good News of Jesus Christ? Have we declared creation care more important than the Creator? Have we bowed to the gods of politics and power? Have we succumbed to the almighty dollar? Have we become idolatrous?

The easy answer is yes; we are all in our hearts idolaters. To keep our hearts turned toward God above all other things is a daily struggle for all of us. It is important to realize this because idolatry is such an insidious

sin. It can creep into and become deeply seeded in our hearts while we remain oblivious to it. We comfort ourselves by saying, "I'm not bowing down to any little golden idols." We are all prone to wander, but thanks be to God we are not left to wander on our own. We have such a high priest in Jesus Christ, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). 

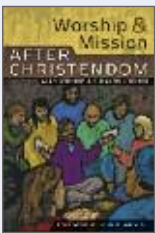
An idol is anything we elevate above God in our lives, and most things that we elevate above God in our lives are good things.

FILM REVIEW

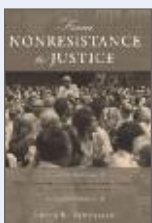
Super 8 (PG-13) combines the elements of a coming-of-age story with the suspense of a monster movie but is really about making movies. Set in 1979, it follows four 12-year-old boys (and a 14-year-old girl) as they make a zombie movie using a Super 8 camera. While they're filming, a train wreck brings the U.S. Air Force to their small town to search for an escaped alien. The story is affecting, and the young actors are excellent. The story of their relationships is more engaging than the monster plot, which ultimately is predictable.—*Gordon Houser*

BOOK REVIEWS

Worship and Mission After Christendom by Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider (Herald Press, 2011, \$19.99) argues that while Christendom, which combines church and state, separated worship and mission, the two must be combined. Drawing on studies of mission, liturgy, Christian history, the Bible and the experience of the global church, the Kreiders call on us to integrate worship and mission with all of life, to encounter God and let "God's character and purposes shape us."—*gh*



Nonresistance to Justice; the Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric 1908-2008 by Ervin Stutzman (Herald Press, 2011, \$39.99) is neither a history lesson nor a theological treatise. Trained as a rhetorician, Stutzman examines the rhetoric in official church statements and what writers in *Gospel Herald* and *The Mennonite* have said about pacifism over 100 years. After charting the shift from "quiet-in-the-land" nonresistance to nonviolent peace activism for justice, Stutzman concludes with a call for Mennonites to extend grace to our enemies, just as God has extended grace to us.—*Everett J. Thomas*



Freedom Riders remind us of racism

How quickly we forget our nation's experience around racism! A good reminder of where we've been and the price many have paid along the way appeared on TV in May.

"Freedom Riders," shown on PBS stations and available at pbs.org, is a powerful film that recounts the experiences of courageous men and women who risked their lives for simply traveling together on buses and trains as they journeyed through the Deep South in 1961.

From May until November that year, more than 400 black and white Americans rode on buses and trains, deliberately violating Jim Crow laws. These Freedom Riders—a name they gave themselves—met with bitter racism and mob violence along the way, yet remained committed to their belief in nonviolent activism.

The two-hour documentary is based on Raymond Arsenault's book *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. The film includes interviews with many of the riders, plus others involved in the events, including John Patterson, governor of Alabama at the time, and John Seigenthaler, an assistant to Robert F. Kennedy, attorney general at the time.

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized the rides, which occurred after the U.S. Supreme Court had mandated the desegregation of interstate travel facilities.

The newly inaugurated Kennedy administration was focused on the Cold War at the time and tried to ignore civil rights issues. Headlines about the mob violence against the riders appeared in Europe, where Kennedy was traveling on his way to meet with Krushchev, the Soviet premier. These events forced Kennedy to address the problem.

Klansmen in Alabama set fire to the original Freedom Ride bus, which only inspired others to get on another bus. In Montgomery, Ala., a mob attacked

the riders when they—black and white—got off to use segregated restrooms or eat together. Meanwhile, the police looked on and waited to intervene until some riders were beaten so bad they had to be rushed to the hospital. Then the police arrested the riders, not those committing the violence.


Kennedy chided the governor, urging him to act in protecting the riders. On camera, Patterson told the interviewer that he told his secretary to tell Kennedy he wasn't available.

Eventually, Alabama authorities escorted the riders' buses to the Mississippi state line. Mississippi officials used the tactic of locking up the riders and sending them to the notorious Parchman State Penitentiary.

Instead of discouraging the movement, more riders traveled to Jackson, Miss., to be arrested. Their tactic was to fill the prison with their numbers. More than 300 were arrested. The movement made front-page news across the country, and eventually they were set free.

Watching this powerful documentary left me with several impressions. An obvious one is the courage of the freedom riders and their commitment to nonviolent resistance to injustice. I asked myself, Am I willing to stand up as courageously against injustice?

Another impression, also obvious, was how blatantly racist many practices, if not laws, were then. How could those people react so violently to people simply riding a bus together or wanting to eat together at the same table? The answer is fear. They feared the loss of their privilege.

This raised a further question to me: What racist practices am I upholding, afraid to lose my privileges as a white person? 



Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.

These readers submitted answers

Mark Amstutz, Eastham, Mass.	Edna Goossen, North Newton, Kan.	Frances Moser, Wooster, Ohio	Florence Stauffer-Denlinger, Lancaster, Pa.
Mary L. Beck, Archbold, Ohio	Jerry Graber, Parker, S.D.	Anne Moyer, Lansdale, Pa.	Gabriel Stuckey, Westover, Md.
Marlene Birky, Valparaiso, Ind.	Esther F. Hartzler, Harrisonville, Mo.	Ruth Mumaw, Wooster, Ohio	Paul & Bertha Swarr, Harrisonburg, Va.
Beth Bontrager, Goshen, Ind.	Richard Heisey, Winchester, Va.	Pauline Musselman, Souderton, Pa.	Greg & Amy Troyer, Lancaster, Pa.
Phil Bontrager, Berrien Springs, Mich.	Harley & Margaret Himes, Kidron, Ohio	Peter & Shirley Nofziger, Archbold, Ohio	Meredith Vendrely, Leo, Ind.
Ruby Bontrager, Bristol, Ind.	Marian Hollinger, New Holland, Pa.	Edna Otto, Leonard, Mo.	Sheryl Weaver, Hartsville, Ohio
Alice Buller, Henderson, Neb.	Vileen Hostetler, Colorado Springs, Colo.	Carl & Ella Peters, Henderson, Neb.	Martha L. Wedel, Elbing, Kan.
Maretta Buller, North Newton, Kan.	Rod Huebert, Moundridge, Kan.	Howard Piggee, Fredericksburg, Va.	Elizabeth Wenger, Ephrata, Pa.
Lyle Burkholder, Waynesboro, Va.	Donald King, Goshen, Ind.	Odette Rolon, Archbold, Ohio	Lois Whisler, Hanover, Pa.
Ruth L. Burkholder, Harrisonburg, Va.	Ethel Kolb, Myerstown Rd, Pa.	Bonnie Rufenacht, La Junta, Colo.	Marilyn M. Whitman, Vancouver, Wash.
Miriam Cochran, Hollsopple, Pa.	Stephen Kurtz, New Holland, Pa.	Marlin Rupp, Pettisville, Ohio	Elaine Widrick, Croghan, N.Y.
Hettie Conrad, Hesston, Kan.	Faye I. Landis, Lancaster, Pa.	Esther Sauder, Wauseon, Ohio	Duane Yoder, Mechanicsville, Va.
Margaret Derstine, Lancaster, Pa.	Alice Lapp, Akron, Pa.	Harlo Schmidt, Buhler, Kan.	Esther Yoder, Goshen, Ind.
Larry & Janet Dixon, Topeka, Kan.	Ethel Lehman, Columbiana, Ohio	Wilbert Schmidt, Goessel, Kan.	Marilyn Yoder, Archbold, Ohio
Katherine Garber, Elizabethtown, Pa.	Phyllis Lehman, Mt Eaton, Ohio	LaVera Schrag, North Newton, Kan.	Mary Kathryn Yoder, Harrisonville, Mo.
Anna D. Gehman, Souderton, Pa.	Anna V. Liechty, Berne, Ind.	Allen Schrock, Lexington, Ind.	Homer & Elizabeth Yutzky, Wauseon, Ohio
Elizabeth & Lavina Gehman, Seville, Ohio	Frances Mast, Walnut Creek, Ohio	Edith Schrock, Lancaster, Pa.	Florence Zehr, Manson, Iowa
John & Anna Gehman, Apple Creek, Ohio	Erma Maust, Sarasota, Fla.	Ruth Shaum, Goshen, Ind.	Joyce E. Zehr, Castorland, N.Y.
Sarah Glick, Belleville, Pa.	Crist Miller, Goshen, Ind.	Dorothy F. Shirk, Denver, Pa.	Pearl E. Zehr, New Wilmington, Pa.
Evelyn Good, Urbana, Ill.	Lois Miller, Wauseon, Ohio	Eleanor Shoup, South Bend, Ind.	
Lorene Good, Minier, Ill.	Susan Miller, Streetsboro, Ohio	Ruth N. Showalter, Chambersburg, Pa.	
	Vernon & Margaret Miller, Walnut Creek, Ohio	Alice B. Souder, Grottoes, Va.	
		Ruth Stauffer, New Holland, Pa.	

RESOURCES

Becoming Whole and Holy: An Integrative Conversation about Christian Formation by Jeannine K. Brown, Carla M. Dahl and Wyndy Corbin Reuschling (BakerAcademic, 2011, \$24.99) uses social science, ethics, biblical studies and hermeneutics to present a cohesive vision of human wholeness and spiritual holiness.

The Limits of Perfection: Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Goshen Conference on Religion and Science by Noreen Herzeld, edited by Carl S. Helrich (Pandora Press, 2011, \$18), addresses the questions, What is perfection? and, Can we attain it?

Sunday, Sabbath and the Weekend, edited by Edward O'Flaherty and Rodney L. Petersen (Eerdmans, 2010, \$16), includes essays by 14 contributors from diverse traditions across the spectrum of American Christianity that examine how Christians and others can find needful rest through Sunday and Sabbath in managing the pressures of our 24/7 global culture.

A Lever and Place to Stand: The Contemplative Stance, the Active Prayer by Richard Rohr (Paulist Press, 2011, \$15) offers a critique of religion that often creates an alternative pious world without really challenging oppression, materialism and sectarianism in our modern world.

Year of Plenty: One Suburban Family, Four Rules and 365 Days of Homegrown Adventure in Pursuit of Christian Living by Craig L. Goodwin (Augsburg Fortress, 2011, \$12.95) describes a family's year-long experiment to consume only what was local, used, homegrown or homemade.

Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor by Ben Witherington III (Eerdmans, 2011, \$18) considers work as neither a curse nor the cure of human life but rather as something good that God has given us to do.

All references are to the New International Version unless stated otherwise.

ACROSS

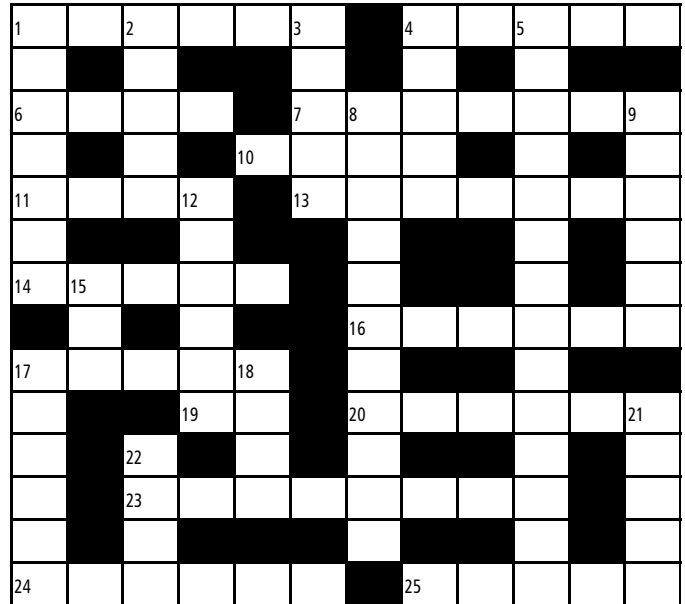
1. Solomon had 12 thousand of these animals.
4. "The Israelites ate manna ___ years, until they came to a land that was settled ..." (Ex. 16:35)
6. The number of virtues listed as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23
7. Ten of these went with their lamps to meet the bridegroom.
10. "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ___ of thousands." (I Sam. 18)
11. "On the third day he will ___ again." (Lk. 18).
13. The Lord told Rebekah, "Two ___ are in your womb ..."
14. Two of these birds or two pigeons were to be sacrificed when Jesus was presented to the Lord. (Lk. 2)
16. Before this young woman became queen, she had to go through 12 months of beauty treatments.
17. Number of demons Jesus drove out of Mary Magdalene (Lk. 8:2)
19. Did Adam only have three children? Yes or No.
20. "And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for ___ seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'" (Rom. 11:4)
23. The Hebrew one began in spring and contained the months of Abib, Ziv, Ethanim, and Bul; later a 12-month Babylonian one was adopted.
24. Jesus spent 40 days of temptation here.
25. This priestly vest had two onyx stones with the 12 tribes engraved upon them. (Ex. 28)

DOWN

1. "Abraham was a ___ years old when his son Isaac was born to him."
2. The Ark of the Covenant had four gold ___ fastened to its feet, two on each side.
3. In Revelation, John refers to the ___ churches of Asia.
4. "I am the ___ and the Last."
5. "... I will send ___ ___ ___ for 40 days and 40 nights ..." (4 words)(Gen. 7:4)
8. "For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are ___ ___."(two words) (1 Jn. 5:7-8)
9. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah and all the brothers had only one of these, named Dinah. (singular)
12. The number of goat-hair curtains made for the tabernacle (Ex. 26)
15. "Now the whole world had ___ language and a common speech."
17. "God called the expanse 'sky.' And there was evening and there was morning – the ___ day."
18. "The First ___, the angels did say ..."
21. This happened when Noah was 600 years old, on the 17th day of the second month.
22. This book of the Bible spans approximately 32 years, from the ascension of Christ to Paul's imprisonment.

What's that number?

By Jeanette Baer Showalter



RECOGNITION

To be recognized in our September 2011 issue, send the completed puzzle and form below to: The Mennonite, 1700 South Main Street, Goshen, IN 46526.

DEADLINE:

August 1, 2011

NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS

CITY

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EMAIL ADDRESS

Answers to the puzzle can be found on page 57.

(Continued from page 4)

hopes for the church on false premises, such as the unrealistic beliefs that others will change to be like us.”

Imagine my consternation, then, upon reading in the same issue that Brother Stutzman fired Randall Spaulding, a proven, gifted and dedicated servant of the church, from whose hymnal supplements we sing practically every Sunday morning. The only reason given for throwing Randall under the bus is that he will not change to become like Ervin in his sexual orientation. Apparently Brother Randall was more than Brother Ervin could “put up with.”
—Melvin D. Schmidt, Hyattsville, Md.

I read the May issue, as I always do, with interest and expectation. I was struck by the comments of the executive director on page 63, where he wrote that he would “not give a nickel for church unity based solely on common bloodlines. . . .” I agree. However, on page 48 of the same issue, he rejects the gifts of a talented, committed man simply because he loves another man. I guess if the executive director won’t “give a nickel” for a partially inclusive church, I’ll offer a dollar for one that is fully inclusive of all Anabaptist believers.—Lonnie Buerge, Kansas City, Mo.

Supports Spaulding dismissal

In response to Rebecca Sommers’ letter in the June issue, I suggest that her rationale for supporting “those of a different sexual orientation” is actually dangerous. Given her assumption that the Mennonite Church USA position must change because we are on the “wrong side of history,” then we must also assume that our position on biblical pacifism must change. It’s obvious from the rest of Christianity that we are probably on the wrong side of history when it comes to our peace position.

My belief is that as long as we hold to that basic Anabaptist tenet of being “people of the Book,” then we will frequently be countercultural—even when

the culture we are speaking of is another Christian group. I hope we never let the surrounding culture determine what we believe but always follow the words and actions of Jesus. He called sin for what it was but gave us a wonderful example of how to react to it when he spoke to the woman caught in adultery: “Go and sin no more.”

As a church, we are called to confront sin and then offer God’s amazing grace so that everyone can experience freedom from sin. It is for that reason that I support the decision of the Mennonite Church USA executive leadership to dismiss Randall Spaulding from the Binational Worship Council.—Nelson Shenk, Bally, Pa.

Mennonites pay for war

Today’s estimates of our military budget vary between 48 to 59 percent of total federal expenditures. The latter figure includes Department of Defense, War, Veterans Affairs and Nuclear Weapons Programs. The Pentagon seems committed to destroying other people’s countries in order to allow our rich multinational corporations to steal their natural resources.

So how much money do we give our government to support our wars? To find out, go to www.rethink-afghanistan.com and click on “How much did you pay for war this year?”

If one’s taxable income is \$10,000, (married, filing jointly), you pay \$274 a year for war; if it’s \$25,000, it’s \$798 per year; at \$50,000, it’s \$1,826 per year and at \$100,000, you pay \$4,757 per year for war. For the categories single, married filing separately and head of household, the war tax bite is larger.

If your congregation has 50 people with taxable incomes of \$50,000 that means your congregation sends our government \$91,300 per year to use for wars of aggression.

If one adds up the taxable income of every Mennonite in the land, how much is the Mennonite church contributing to destroying other countries for the benefit of our corporations? Is this really

what we want to do with our wealth, the wealth of “Die Stille im Lande,” the capital of Anabaptists, the sweat of the brow of the meek and the nonviolent peacemakers?—Daniel Riehl, Lititz, Pa.

Gets choked up, too

I spent a week with my mother. It was only a little over a week after we lost Daddy (see page 52). I was reading the article “Song Weepers” by Lisa Schmucker Showalter (May). I agree that when you hear a song you relate it to something in your life. At Daddy’s funeral, we sang his favorite song, the beautiful “Wonderful Grace of Jesus.” I got choked up and could not sing. However I listened to the congregation singing it, and it was beautiful.

Daddy was Russel Henry Hertzler, 90 years old, of Dillsburg, Pa. He was a life member of Slate Hill Mennonite Church, Camp Hill, Pa. I often enjoyed your magazine when visiting with my parents.—Evelyn Hertzler Miller, Anderson, S.C.

Subscript, not superscript

It’s just a style thing, but it bugs the chemistry teacher in me. When the chemical formula for carbon dioxide is abbreviated, and appropriately so, as cee-oh-two, the two must be a subscript and not a superscript, as in the May issue (“Why Are Gas Prices So Low?”). Please, and thanks.—E. Elaine Kauffman, Mountain Lake, Minn.

Thanks for MPH story

Thank you for your contribution to all of us through your honest but sensitive article and editorial about Mennonite Publishing House (June). You obviously put a lot of work and thought into them.

Many people are going to say, “I finally get it.” That even happened for me—someone who worked in the old MPH and now is with the new incarnation. People ask me questions about what happened. Now I can respond more intelligently.—Steve Shenk, director of marketing and sales, Mennonite Publishing Network, Harrisonburg, Va.

Investing in hope Desolation and consolation

On [God] we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers...

—2 Corinthians 1:10b-11a (TNIV)

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians following a time of considerable frustration, disappointment and deep peril. He testified to being under such severe stress, far beyond his ability to endure, so that he despaired of life itself (2 Corinthians 1:8). I'm quite sure the Corinthian church's ambivalence about Paul's apostleship was one of the factors that drove him to despair.

But at the time of this writing, Paul had experienced a time of great comfort. Apparently a report from Titus about the Corinthian church brought Paul a deep sense of God's comfort (2 Corinthians 7:6-7). On another occasion, after desperately pleading for God to remove a "thorn" in his flesh, Paul received the consolation that God's grace was sufficient for him (12:9).

It seems that Paul, like many of us, experienced times of desolation as well as consolation, sometimes in response to social situations. "Desolation" and "consolation" are words used by St. Ignatius of Loyola to describe such experiences. This seems abundantly clear as I read the stories of the Israelite people. The Psalms express such times in the life of the Hebrew people. For several examples, see Psalms 10:1; 13:1-2; 22:1-2; 88:1-18; 130:1-4. These are prayers of people whose hope has waned, yet they cry out to God for help. They ring true of groups as well as individuals.

I notice that many of the laments in the Psalms are followed by a declaration of expectant hope or confident trust. See, for example Psalms 10:14; 13:5-6, 22:23-24 and 130:5-6, the same Psalms that begin with a sense of despair. Again, the writer of Lamentations 3:1-21 blames God for deep difficulty yet comes back to praise God for mercies that are new every morning (v. 22).

Although the Psalms were written by and for the Hebrew people, the Christian church has adopted them. Jesus was intimately familiar with the Psalms. He often referred to them. I believe he understands what it means to feel distanced and forsaken by God, particularly as he experienced it during his crucifixion, quoting Psalm 22.

I find it helpful to meditate on the Psalms. They help me notice the movements in my own soul from desolation to consolation. As I travel across Mennonite Church USA, I find that just like the Apostle Paul and the ancient Hebrew people, individuals and congregations experience times of desolation and consolation.

In times of desolation, our life may lose its sense of cohesion. Congregational attendance may languish. The worship may turn dull and insipid. Members may find themselves in intractable conflict. The church may lose its sense of purpose and direction, with people just "going through the motions."

Yet there are times of great consolation, times of renewal when the same group has a palpable sense of God's presence. People work together in unity of heart and mind.

At times when I turn my eye toward the internal divisions and troubles in our church, I identify with Paul in his interaction with the Corinthians. I feel a sense of desolation, and hope seems to slip

At times when I turn my eye toward the internal divisions and troubles in our church, I identify with Paul in his interaction with the Corinthians.

away. Yet when I fix my eyes on all that God is doing in the world and in our church, my hope is renewed. At times I am moved to tears, a sign for me of God's presence and power. I am confident that God is at work in Mennonite Church USA, far beyond my awareness or imagination.

As Paul told the Corinthians, turning to God in the midst of stress and trouble is an investment in hope. Praying for others who feel despair is also an investment in hope. By God's grace, I will practice both of these disciplines and invite others in our beloved church to do the same. **TM**



Ervin Stutzman
is executive
director of
Mennonite Church
USA.





The Pittsburgh experiment



Everett J. Thomas

Ten years ago to the month, delegates at Nashville 2001 voted to create Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. The 2001 delegate workbook offered an audacious look at the future of our new national church body. According to the document, “Imagining the Future: 2001 to 2011,” this is some of what 2011 was *supposed* to look like:

- 75 percent of congregations are active in urban mission partnerships, and more than 2,000 people are participating in a year of service;
- the 2011 assembly celebrates partnerships with 10 other national Mennonite church bodies;
- enrollment of Mennonite students in Mennonite seminaries has doubled since 2001;
- the Ecumenical Stewardship Center reports that Mennonites top its giving chart for the first time;
- a newly created Mennonite Peace Center plays a key role in the passage of peace tax fund legislation that pays for peace instead of war;
- Mennonite artists and musicians complete a new, illustrated electronic hymnal;
- a new merger process begins with the goal of Mennonite Church USA joining some related Anabaptist groups.

If delegates approve the ‘Pittsburgh Experiment,’ they will establish goals and priorities for the next biennium through a different process.

What happened?

I don’t recognize any of these characteristics in the Mennonite Church USA of 2011. Why did we so completely miss the mark set for ourselves? If we believe God’s Spirit moves in the midst of the gathered church—even when doing business in a delegate session—how could this happen?

I see many reasons; some may consider them excuses:

1. Much of the language in 2001 was about what we were going to do for God in the next 10 years. But since that time, we have come to understand that being a missional church is not about what we can do. It is about what God is already doing and then discerning how we can join in God’s work.

2. Two months after the vote to form Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, the U.S. church was traumatized by 9/11. We found it more important to think about Islam and unforeseen U.S. wars in Muslim countries.

3. The Great Recession required retrenching and reordering priorities for many church institutions that just wanted to survive.

4. A 2008 attempt by the Executive Board to create a “one board” model diverted institutional and leadership time and money that could have been directed toward some of those 2001 goals.

5. The primary way we’ve done business in delegate sessions has required delegates to respond to what leaders have brought to them rather than discerning direction together as a spiritual community.

This last reason may be something Mennonite Church USA can address. If delegates approve a proposal called the “Pittsburgh Experiment” during this summer’s convention, they will establish goals and priorities for the next biennium through a different process. Instead of delegates debating resolutions, leaders want a new process that can generate a purposeful plan. In the Pittsburgh Experiment, such a process would focus on listening for the Holy Spirit, praying, listening to each other and discerning how the church should respond to God’s love and care for us and the world.

If the process generates new goals for the next 10 years, realization of those goals will confirm that such discernment put us in touch with what God is doing already.—*ejt*