

# The Mennonite



## Growing in God

Hyacinth and Benjamin Stevens are helping guide new generations in New York City.

July 2014

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  - Too focused on doing the Lord's work
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  - Many choose influential Mennonites
  - Expecting new love

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ON THE COVER: Photo provided by Hyacinth and Benjamin Stevens

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### Indebted to Marcus Smucker

“I’ve never seen a congregation so excited to get the latest edition of *The Mennonite*,” pastor Keith Zehr said as he held the May issue high. About five years ago, Lowville (N.Y.) Mennonite Church faced some difficult times, he continued. Marcus Smucker (cover story) was able to come and walk with us and provide some insight and guidance during this time.

We at Lowville Mennonite publicly thank Marcus for the work he has done for our congregation and the greater church. We also commend *The Mennonite* for featuring him. Our congregation is better for Marcus’ gentle but often firm admonishments about how to relate to one another. Some who worked closely with Marcus knew bits of his personal history. By reading his whole story, we were able to better understand what brought Marcus to the place where he can ably recognize unhealthy systems and so effectively coach congregations back to life-giving communication.

Our congregation is deeply indebted to Marcus for the work he did. But more than that, we developed a deep affection for Marcus and Dottie. We were blessed to have them come back to our rural New York community to visit and vacation even after his work with our congregation had been formally completed.—*Lowville (N.Y.) Mennonite Church*

### Are we ignoring materialism?

Harvey Yoder, in writing about the wealth disparity (Opinion, May), highlights the problem in spending so much time focused individually and in Mennonite Church USA on issues like homosexuality. It is so much more comfortable debating the perceived sins of others than to take on the challenge of our collective sin in regard to our materialistic and consumer lifestyles.

The enormity of this problem within Mennonite Church USA churches will require all our attention and a call for God’s Spirit to move our hearts to compassion toward the needs in our world. I wonder when this issue will get its turn to take front and center in our church dialogue?—*Deborah Good, Harleysville, Pa.*

### Craving stories of creation care

I rushed through Andrew Clouse’s article about the Albuquerque Mennonite Church seeking “to live in light of environmental crises” in the May issue. I crave these stories of creation care by my fellow Mennonites. The article notes “the unparalleled environmental crises facing the world today” and notes that participants at a conference on Watershed Discipleship in Albuquerque shared in an experience called “Losing Turtle Island.”

I agree completely that the epicenter of a community must be the community’s own watershed and that our churches must engage in restorative justice for all those who have been wounded by human development—plant, animal and human alike. In this regard, representatives of my own church—the First Mennonite Church of San Francisco—participated in a rally against climate change on Earth Day, April 19, in San Francisco.

Please continue to inform us of the efforts of Mennonites everywhere to stem the tide of environmental degradation that is upon us. As the article notes, “The need for change in the church and in the world is urgent.”—*Jim Musselman, San Francisco*

### Loving or leaving?

Mennonite Church USA appears to be in danger of further fracturing over differing responses to the issue of homosexuality. Laity, pastors, churches and conferences disagree. We hear of threats to break fellowship—like “we are right, they are wrong, so we may leave.” What produces such thoughts and expressions—fear, insecurity, individualism, self-righteousness, selfishness, a desire to be faithful?

Our Lord calls and teaches us to love one another. Jesus makes love for one another the signature of genuine discipleship. He teaches us to accept, respect and love each other unconditionally. There is no conditional “out” (like if we are in agreement) to get us off the hook.

So how are these threats to break fellowship or actually leaving the conference or denomination expressions of love? My wife and I have lived and served the church in five different Mennonite communities in the last seven decades. In each community we have observed the “church shoppers” demonstrating “consumer Christianity,” moving from congregation to congregation multiple times in a lifetime. Will congregations and conferences that leave the larger body encourage

and promote the superficial commitments of the “church shoppers”? Having served as a conference minister for a decade, I know the tremendous pressure laid on leadership to resolve conflicts. Delegates, congregational leaders and pastors want denominational and conference staff to do what they often are not willing to do themselves—the difficult and sweaty work of engaging with and listening to those with whom they disagree.

At the same time, I have seen how people with declared differences have mellowed and modified their views if and when they dared to visit, converse and worship with those on the other side of an issue. Let us love one another.—*Robert Hartzler, Wayland, Iowa*

### Grateful for tax article

After reading the “Mennonites Say No to War Taxes” cover story (June), the Lancaster, Pa., chapter of 1040forpeace.org strongly affirms both the message and the messenger. We are grateful not only for the thoughtful, life-affirming witness that the portrayed war-tax resisters provide but also for their courageous actions of not paying for war that go beyond their fervent prayers for peace. We also thank *The Mennonite* for highlighting these

pivotal concerns of the church and the world in a timely and careful manner.

Marian Franz, the former Mennonite director of the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund, stressed that “no witness for conscience is ever lost.”

She also said: “War taxes kill twice. First, they directly enable war—particularly by paying for weapons. Second, taxes allocated for war represent a distortion of priorities. Money is taken away from the important work of healing and is spent to destroy and kill.”

Many of us pay more in federal income taxes that underwrite the government’s militarism and war making than we donate to our churches and their institutions. At a time when we are destroying and killing at a faster rate than we are healing people and fixing things, the “Mennonites Say No to War Taxes” article was a welcomed respite. Our hope is that many will come to see tax witness as a way to declare the good news of Jesus in our time.—*Harold A. (“H.A.”) Penner, Akron, Pa.*

### Thanks to Mark and Martin

In response to the June issue: to the editors, thanks so much for publishing two articles on same-gender relation-  
(Continued on page 54)

## IN THIS ISSUE

**M**any readers will receive this issue in preparation for July 4. Fittingly, in an article that relates to Independence Day, pastor Ryan Ahlgrim reminds us that “democracy is great, but the church is called to practice something better” (page 17).

We are honored to have leaders Hyacinth and Benjamin Stevens grace our cover this month. Both former counselors at Camp Deerpark, Westbrookville, N.Y., they now cultivate leadership development in their co-pastorate at King of Glory Tabernacle in Bronx, N.Y.

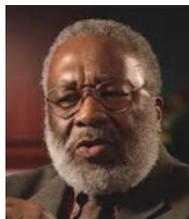
Next year at this time, Mennonites

from all over the United States and the world will gather in July for the Mennonite Church USA convention Kansas City, Mo., and the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Harrisburg, Pa. Although MC USA and MWC planners are hosting two separate gatherings, they have been working together to find ways to collaborate in order to assure that both events are meaningful and well attended. John D. Roth (page 9) reminds us that the MWC assembly will “offer a remarkable opportunity to gather with 7,000-8,000 brothers and sisters from around the world to sing, pray and share together.”

We received a lot of encouragement and critique (via email and Facebook) regarding Gordon Houser’s article about influential Mennonites in the June issue. Read letters to the editor responding to our project on page 54. Houser also reflects on this in the *Mediaculture* column in this issue (page 53): “In a conversation, a friend said that ‘Mennonites have a lot of trouble talking about power or influence.’ We like to pretend it doesn’t exist.” To see the full list of submissions, go to [http://www.themennonite.org/issues/17-6/articles/Influential\\_Mennonite\\_submissions](http://www.themennonite.org/issues/17-6/articles/Influential_Mennonite_submissions).—*Editor*

## Vincent Harding, pastor and civil rights activist, dies at 82

NEWTON, Kan.—Vincent Harding, a former Mennonite pastor, African-



American historian and long-time civil rights activist, died May 19 in Philadelphia. He was 82.

Harding was co-pastor at Woodlawn Mennonite Church in

Chicago from 1958 to 1961.

In 1960, Harding and his wife, Rosemarie Freeney Harding, moved to Atlanta to participate in the Southern Freedom Movement as representatives of the Mennonite Church. They co-founded Mennonite House, an interracial voluntary service center and movement gathering place in Atlanta.

Harding drafted speeches for Martin Luther King Jr., including King's famous anti-Vietnam speech, "A Time to Break Silence."

Harding taught religion and social transformation from 1981 to 2004 at Iliff School of Theology in Denver. He authored numerous books, including *There Is A River* and *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*.

Survivors include his second wife, Aljosie Aldrich Harding, daughter Rachel and son Jonathan.—*Gordon Houser*

## Brenneman reappointed as Goshen president, names Snyder provost

GOSHEN, Ind.—The Goshen College board of directors and Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) board of directors has reappointed James E.

Brenneman as president of Goshen College for a third four-year term.

Brenneman's reappointment begins July 1 and continues through June 30, 2018 and was made at the May 30-31 GC board of directors and the June 2 MEA board of directors' meeting. MEA, located in Elkhart, Ind., is the education agency of Mennonite Church USA.

photo provided



## Mennonite middle-schoolers do service

Two of 40 students from the Lititz (Pa.) Area Mennonite School spread mulch during a service day on May 1. The students visited the Mennonite Disaster Service headquarters and learned about MDS, then worked on the mulch.—*Dave Siegrist*

Brenneman is the college's 16th president and began serving in this role in 2006. GC board member Ken Hochstetler affirmed Brenneman's leadership in helping the college become more culturally diverse and relating with external groups.

Brenneman announced that he is creating a provost/executive vice president position to help run the day-to-day operations of the college while he primarily focuses on external relations. He named Lee Snyder to that position.

She was the eighth president of Bluffton (Ohio) University, where she served from 1996 until retiring on July 31, 2006.—*MEA*

## Kansas church to close after 108 years

NORTH NEWTON, Kan.—On June 8, Burrton (Kan.) Mennonite Church decided to close the church at the end of 2014, after 108 years of ministry in the Burrton community and beyond.

Their small membership was affected by many funerals in the past several years. Given the advanced ages of their active membership, filling leadership roles had become increasingly difficult. The remaining members

sensed too much of their reduced giving resources was needed to maintain the building, thus limiting the amount available for mission.

They also realized it would be difficult to support another pastor after current pastor Jim Dunn retires on Dec. 31.—*Western District Conference*

## Nancy Roynon new coordinator of Sister-Link Wall Hanging Ministry

ELKHART, Ind.—In May, Nancy Roynon of Archbold, Ohio, assumed the volunteer position of coordinator of the Mennonite Women Sister-Link Wall-Hanging Ministry. She will work from her home in Archbold.

Mennonite Women USA has been participating in a partnership with Mennonite Disaster Service since 2003, providing pieced and quilted wall hangings for homeowners whose homes have been destroyed by natural disasters. The original works of art are presented to homeowners during a house blessing following the completion of their home rebuild.

She takes over for Rebecca Sommers of Goshen, Ind., who began in 2011.—*Mennonite Women USA*

## Bluffton senior getting closer look at ministry

BLUFFTON, Ohio—A Bluffton University senior from St. Marys, Ohio, is serving this summer in a Goshen, Ind., church as part of Mennonite Church USA's Ministry Inquiry Program (MIP).

Participating in the program at Yellow Creek Mennonite Church is Shannon Thiebeau, a youth ministry major at Bluffton. Her home church is Zion Lutheran in St. Marys.

The MIP enables students from Mennonite institutions to test their calling and gifts for ministry. Supervised by host pastors, they take on various worship, pastoral care and administrative roles during the summer term, including preaching, leading worship, youth ministry and hospital and home visits. Wes Bontreger is Thiebeau's supervising pastor at Yellow Creek Mennonite.

Each student receives a \$2,000 scholarship to be applied toward college tuition, along with a \$500 stipend. In addition to the Mennonite institutions and Mennonite Church USA De-

Paul Hunt



## MDS in Mississippi

A Mennonite Disaster Service volunteer uses a chain saw to clear downed trees and debris in Winston County, Miss., after it was hit by an EF-4 tornado on April 28. MDS volunteers have contributed over 4,000 volunteer hours since the response began on May 8, completing 80 jobs.—MDS

nominal Ministry, funding sources include host churches and the students' area Mennonite conferences and home churches.—*Bluffton University*

## Long-lost etching plate for Martyr volume now at Kauffman Museum

GOSHEN, Ind./NORTH NEWTON, Kan.—The Martyrs Mirror Trust, a collaboration between the Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, and Kauffman Museum, North Newton, has announced the discovery and purchase of a 17th-century copper plate, etched by Dutch artist Jan Luyken for the 1685 edition of *Martyrs Mirror*.

The recently acquired plate illustrates the martyr story of Jacques d'Auchy, a merchant arrested in 1558 in Harlingen, in what is now the Netherlands, and charged with being an Anabaptist. The plate depicts d'Auchy in jail, bidding farewell to his grieving, pregnant wife with the prison guard and others in the background.

"Luyken's detailed etchings vividly capture the drama of the stories contained in the *Martyrs Mirror*," says John D. Roth, director of the Mennonite Historical Library. "Seeing the actual plates that he created to print those illustrations gives a new appreciation both for his skill and for the stories themselves."

D'Auchy's account, published in the *Martyrs Mirror*, includes his confession of faith and a lengthy transcription of his interrogations. He was killed in his prison cell before the official execution could be carried out.

The d'Auchy plate can be viewed at Kauffman Museum through the end of the year when it will return to the Mennonite Historical Library.—*Bethel College*

## Nelson Kilmer Science Scholarship established

HESSTON, Kan.—Longtime Hesston College science faculty and staff member Nelson Kilmer's 46 years of dedicated service to the college is being honored with the establishment of the

Nelson Kilmer Science Scholarship by his children Ron Kilmer, Glendale, Ariz., and Krista (Kilmer) Nelson, Shawnee, Kan., and their families. Kilmer retired from his service at Hesston College in May.

Kilmer began his teaching career at Hesston Academy, the college's high school, in 1963, and remained in that role until 1965, when he left to pursue graduate studies.

He returned to teach science and math courses at Hesston College in 1970. Kilmer also served as associate academic dean for seven years and director of finance and chief financial officer for 19 years. He also served as a leader in academic assessment and analysis in recent years and as chair of the science department and chair of the natural science division at various times.—*Hesston College*

## First Anabaptist Deaf Ministries leaders retreat

MT. PLEASANT, Pa.—Over the weekend of May 16-18, 36 people from the Eastern and Midwestern United States gathered at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center to worship, fellowship and share faith stories, all in American Sign Language.

Husband and wife team (deaf) Jeff and Jan Hoffer led the group through thoughtful discussion and sharing on the theme of "Faith, Fellowship and Fun."

Participants shared stories of faith and renewed acquaintances. There was much hope and determination to make this an annual event for Deaf people across the Mennonite Church.

A three-member planning committee representing Signs of Life Deaf Fellowship, Staunton, Va.; First Deaf Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa.; and Deaf Christian Fellowship, College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., coordinated the event. This "first" event built on the foundation of an earlier annual retreat coordinated in the 1970s and 1980s by the former Mennonite Board of Missions Deaf Ministries office.—*Sheila S. Yoder*

## Learning about veterans and myself



**Ron Adams**  
is pastor of  
Madison (Wis.)  
Mennonite Church.

For a little over a year, I have co-facilitated a spirituality group for veterans. My partner is a chaplain from the VA hospital. The group meets monthly at the First Unitarian Society of Madison, Wis.

Typically, there are four to six of us who gather each month. The space is comfortable. Snacks enough to feed a multitude fill a table along one wall. An oil lamp rests on another table in the center of our circle. I light it and sit back to see what happens.

Our intention is to provide a safe space for veterans to explore their spirituality. We define spirituality broadly, to include any connection to the world that provides solace security, and a sense of being at home.

**For many veterans**, military experience damages their most important relationships, including their relationship with God. That damage can leave some veterans feeling disoriented and alone. Our primary agenda is to think together about what it might look like to repair whatever connection is broken.

I often wonder what I am doing in that circle. I worry that I have nothing to contribute. My chaplain partner assures me that I belong there with her. I still wonder, but I go. I eat snacks and listen. And I learn, and not only about veterans. I learn about myself.

As a good Mennonite, I am comfortable remaining behind the walls that separate me from those participating in the military. And frankly, it's easier that way, neatly dividing the world into us and them. On my side of the wall are pacifists and the innocent victims of military violence. On the other side are those who contribute to that violence, soldiers included.

Now here I am, sitting in a circle of veterans. They say things that affirm every negative feeling I have about the military. They say things that challenge those feelings. And I am surprised as one stereotype after another is broken open, allowing me to see past my carefully tended walls to the humanity we share. I hear a longing for love, for safety, for communion, for salvation.

It's safe to say that the Pharisees considered Jesus to be a royal pain. They worked hard to maintain the law and the tradition. They believed the future of their people depended upon it.

Then along came this upstart rabbi who blithely crossed every traditional and legal boundary. Jesus ate with anybody. He touched everybody. He turned no one away.

And when his disciples tried to draw some boundaries of their own, Jesus took a child on his lap and revealed something about the kingdom of God. It is, as Jesus described it, a very untidy place. The disciples were constantly surprised by who they met there.

**It's amazing what you discover** when you follow Jesus over the borderline. It turns out that people are people. We share the same needs and desires and hopes. Trite but true. It turns out that God loves all people. We knew that, right? It turns

out that Jesus calls us to love all people. Now the argument starts.

What do we mean by "love"? By "all people"? Don't people have to change their ways before entering into God's reign? Look at how they live and what they've done. And off we go. Brick by brick, building another wall. Protecting ourselves or the tradition or the community by naming someone as beyond the call to love.

I am still a convinced Mennonite pacifist. I remain opposed to violence, whether committed by individuals or blessed by the state. I still believe that war is sin. My convictions are intact.

But none of that excuses me from loving others, including military veterans. Neither the strength of my convictions nor the rightness of my theology can overcome the call to love everyone Jesus loves. Weird as it may be, I now hear Jesus calling me to step over the line and love veterans.

When you look over the borderline, who do you see? Only you can say. But I can tell you this. Jesus is right there with them. And he's calling you to come on across. **TM**

**Weird as it may be, I now hear Jesus calling me to step over the line and love veterans.**

## Prepare to be hosts for MWC in 2015

Eight years ago, when Jonathan Stucky and a small group of women from the Teusaquillo Mennonite congregation in Bogotá, Colombia, began bringing food every Sunday afternoon to the small neighborhood of San Nicolás at the edge of the city, their efforts seemed hopelessly insignificant. Nearly half of Colombia's 46 million inhabitants live on approximately \$8 per day, and 15 percent survive on less than \$2 per day. Years of violence in the countryside have uprooted millions of families from their homes, with hundreds of displaced people showing up in Bogotá every day. The rapidly-growing San Nicolás neighborhood has one school for its 5,000 inhabitants but no clinic, no police station and few basic services. Yet Sunday after Sunday, Jonathan made the trip across town with a van laden with sandwiches.

**Slowly the Sunday afternoon meal project** evolved into the Comedor Pan y Vida (Bread and Life Cafeteria), a small community center that now provides regular meals, a bilingual after-school program, workshops for adults and a safe refuge for abused women. Five years ago, a small congregation—La Iglesia Menonita de la Resurrección—emerged, and it has become a spiritual oasis in the San Nicolás community. The secret to the program's success, says Adaía Bernal, an energetic leader in the congregation, is patience and love.

"In a setting where there is so much darkness," she explained recently to a delegation of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) visitors, "we are lighting candles by letting the world see that we love each other."

Our group of international visitors quickly experienced that love. As we crowded into a small room, our hosts—including many children and young people—opened our time together by raising their hands and offering us a blessing. In the hours that followed we were moved as together we worshiped and sang, heard testimonies of transformed lives and joined in prayer. At the end of our visit, members of the congregation prepared a simple meal for us, sharing generously from their meager resources.

Next year at this time, thousands of Mennonite brothers and sisters from around the world—among them, several members of the Iglesia Menonita de la Resurrección in San Nicolás, Colombia—will travel to Harrisburg, Pa., to participate in the 16th Assembly of MWC. At that

gathering we will have a unique opportunity to host members of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church. Even though the date seems far away, it's not too early to think about your role as a host.

Here are a few suggestions that came to mind as I was visiting the Comedor Pan y Vida in San Nicolás:

### 1. Register to attend Pennsylvania 2015:

Our understanding of church places a high value on face-to-face relationships. If you wonder what it means to be part of a global family, the upcoming MWC assembly (July 21-26, 2015) will offer a remarkable opportunity to gather with 7,000-8,000 brothers and sisters from around the world to sing, pray and share together. You may not develop a personal relationship with each participant, but you will return home with a host of new friends and a deeper appreciation for God's work in the world.

**2. Reach out to sister churches in other countries:** Most Mennonite congregations in the United States have developed special relationships with individuals or congregations in other parts of the world. Building on these relationships, extend a personal invitation for your partners to attend Assembly 16 and offer financial assistance to help make that visit possible. Write a letter of invitation that may prove helpful in the visa application process. Look on our global gathering as an opportunity to deepen these existing friendships.

**3. Contribute your 'fair share':** In comparison with the global organizations of other denominations, the administrative costs of MWC are miniscule. But there are still costs. And hosting a global assembly will bring more costs. Currently, the "fair share" portion that MWC requests from its supporting churches amounts to the cost of one meal per member per year. That's right—one meal per year. We know our congregations are already supporting many good causes. But if you believe that Mennonite World Conference serves a worthy purpose, please encourage your congregation to include this ministry in your annual budget for at least the amount of one meal per member.

Last month, the tiny congregation of Iglesia Menonita de la Resurrección served MWC representatives a meal. They have paid their "fair share."

Let's respond by doing the same. 



**John D. Roth** is professor of history at Goshen (Ind.) College, director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and editor of *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

The upcoming MWC assembly (July 21-26, 2015) will offer a remarkable opportunity to gather with brothers and sisters from around the world.

## An Evangelical case against alcohol

**M**agazines like to publish articles that present something in a different light. So when *Christianity Today*, the flagship evangelical periodical, published its June issue with these words on the cover: “The Case for an Alcohol-Free Life,” the underlying assumption was that most evangelicals use alcohol. Or at least a significant enough number of them do to make being alcohol-free new and different. Times have changed.

The writer of the article, called “Why I Gave Up Alcohol,” is D.L. Mayfield, a 30-year-old Evangelical woman who with her family serves with InnerCHANGE, a Christian order among the poor.

She grew up in a pastor’s home where alcohol was a nonissue. As a young adult, she became “an occasional drinker, a social imbiber, free to live my life in a way that glorifies God.”

Then she and her husband joined a Christian order among the poor. “Our first shock when we moved into our low-income apartment in a Midwestern inner city,” she writes, “was the amount of substance abuse that surrounded us.” She describes the abuse in detail.

**Spiritual discipline:** After a year of living there, she writes, “I gradually just ... stopped. I dreaded going to the liquor store, imagining the faces I would see there.” Eventually she realized she could abstain from alcohol entirely, and this became a spiritual discipline for her.

Mayfield goes on to reflect on Christians of previous centuries who stood against alcohol’s effects. “Temperance movements,” she writes, “often founded and organized by women, were a direct reaction to the perceived social evils of alcohol in the 1800s and 1900s.”

In the 19th century, alcohol was tied to spouse and child abuse, and women had little to no rights in regard to property and possession. Thus women, especially Christian women, writes Mayfield, “started to organize and lobby against alcohol, starting from within their homes and gradually moving into the political sphere.” The temperance movement, while focusing on alcohol, became associated with women’s rights, including suffrage.

Mayfield sees that movement as a model for us today. She writes: “Just as we currently have no problem denouncing slavery, prostitu-

tion and, to a lesser extent, gambling—all for the ways they harm persons and communities—we’d be wise to reconsider the valid and pressing reasons why so many Christians before us chose to give up alcohol completely.”

Clearly, she is providing a different reason for giving up alcohol than was used in previous decades for Evangelicals, to be unstained by the sin of the world. She notes that many Christians view drinking as a rite of passage out of “the perceived fundamentalism of our past.”

She sees young people and women in particular embracing alcohol as a sign of liberation. And many of her peers celebrate drinking. She wonders, “Isn’t anyone friends with alcoholics?”

Given that about 1 in 6 Americans has a drinking problem (defined as excessive drinking or alcoholism), they probably do know someone who has a drinking problem.

**Evils of the world:** Mayfield’s argument is less about purity than about justice. “I didn’t give up alcohol because I wanted to flee the evils of the world,” she writes. “I gave up alcohol as a way of engaging the evils of the world.”

Who we relate to affects our perspective on this issue, Mayfield writes. She has been changed by her neighborhood.

“I am not calling on everyone to become teetotalers,” she writes. “But I am asking us to consider temperance as a valid and thoughtful option.”

Echoing the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8, she says we are free not to drink because of our relationships with those who struggle, when “love tempers our actions.”—*Gordon Houser*

## Pontius’ Puddle

Joel Kauffmann



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“I don't understand the state of mind that makes people at ease with the idea that gun laws are being relaxed to the point that makes it overwhelmingly likely that homicidal people will have possession of these military weapons.”—Marilynne Robinson

### The goodness of law

If you want to feed the hungry, reduce poverty, make peace and save the environment, an important wrench in the do-good toolbox is a robust legal system, justly enforced, says Lowell Ewert, director of peace and conflict studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario, in Canadian Mennonite.

He cites economist Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate, who contends that there has never been a famine in a country where basic civil and political rights are respected. The reason? Because the ability of citizens to partici-

participate in the political process and hold their leaders accountable provides a policy foundation that makes famine less likely.

So also with protecting the environment, which becomes easier when a free and independent press informs the public about environmental risks, and these informed people have the right to work for change without risking their lives.—*The Marketplace*

### Creative or unruly?

University of California, Riverside, psychologist Tuppert Yates led a study in which 171 preschoolers were observed during “pretend play” sessions in which they interacted with stuffed animals and other toys. Three months later, the kids were evaluated by their teachers. “Black children with imaginative and expressive pretend-play skills were evaluated negatively, whereas nonblack children with similar play skills were evaluated positively,” she reports in the journal *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. The 93 teachers doing the evaluating were overwhelmingly either white or Hispanic, and it appears they unwittingly interpreted benign behaviors by black kids as problematic.—*Pacific Standard*

### Leading cause of death

The leading cause of death for African-American women ages 15 to 45 is murder at the hands of a partner.—*Christianity Today*

### Violence in God's name a corruption

The International Theological Commission has published a new document clarifying that Christian belief is not only inherently incompatible with the incitement to violence but that calls for violence are the religion's greatest corruption. The new document, published so far only in Italian on Jan. 16, will be made available in other languages. The title is “God, the Trinity and the Unity of Humanity: Christian Monotheism and its Opposition to Violence.” It is the fruit of a five-year study by the commission.—*Bridgefolk*

### Numbers to ponder

- Percentage of all U.S. criminal defendants who forgo a trial by pleading guilty: **97**
- Percentage of U.S. convicts exonerated last year who had previously pleaded guilty without a trial: **17**
- Portion of U.S. jobs held by humans today that are at high risk of being automated by 2024: **½**
- Factor by which black applicants for New Jersey hurricane-relief funds are more likely to be rejected than white applicants: **2.5**
- Number of deaths in traffic accidents for every 100,000 vehicles on the road in developed nations: **11**
- In Ethiopia: **3,865**
- Percentage of divorced low-income men who say they wish they had stayed married: **53**
- Of divorced low-income women who do: **19**
- Percentage of single people who say they cannot define a “date”: **69**
- Percentage of all litter on U.S. roadways accounted for by cigarette butts: **36**
- Estimated additional hours Americans would spend stoned annually if marijuana were legal in most states: **30 billion**
- Percentage change since 2000 in the average cost of food worldwide: **+123**
- Percentage of U.S. married men who say their spouses vote the same way they do: **73**
- Of U.S. married women who say so: **49**
- Percentage of e-cigarette nicotine-poisoning cases in Oklahoma this year that have involved children under 6: **87**—*Harper's*

# Growing in God

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

Several decades ago in the Bronx, a borough of New York City, says Hyacinth (Banks) Stevens, God was shaping her heart. She was becoming a youngster who shared Jesus in the inner-city streets near her congregation, the former Burnside Mennonite Church. At the same time in the neighboring borough of Manhattan, says Benjamin Stevens, God was shaping his heart as well. He was developing into a youngster who grew in his walk with God and was baptized at the former Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church.



**Hyacinth and Benjamin Stevens are helping guide new generations in New York City.**

Benjamin and Hyacinth Stevens. Photo provided

Their hearts for God intersected when they became adolescent campers at Camp Deerpark, a ministry of the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches in upstate New York. After meeting as campers when they were 12, they later served together as teenagers and young adults for a decade. In 1998, their friendship blossomed into courtship, and they married in 1999. Today Benjamin and Hyacinth Stevens are co-pastors of King of Glory Tabernacle (formerly Burnside) and parents of four children, ages 4 through 13.

The 40-year-olds have transitioned from being children of the city's leaders to leaders of the city's children. Today they are helping lead the next generations of urban Mennonites as they apply in adulthood what formed them earlier, they said during an April telephone interview.

Hyacinth was influenced by an intentional Christian community led by her parents, Michael and Addie Banks, longtime Mennonite leaders in the city. "There was lots of crime and negativity in our neighborhood, and I was perplexed with questions about this," she said. "But my Christian community taught me to not look through eyes of desperation and hopelessness but through eyes of hope for peace, reconciliation and change."

She grew up in a Christ-centered, process-oriented community. "If something was going on socially, politically and spiritually, we sat around the dinner table to talk and pray about it," she said. "We had Bible studies, community building sessions and worship that focused on the empowerment of God for positive renewal. My father was instrumental in helping us take our peace witness to the streets."

As a result of those prayer walks, the sections of heavy drug activity in the nearby city blocks began to shrink some. "It did not change overnight, but it did change," she said. "These blocks had heavy gang violence and drug activity. We bathed this area in an invisible circle of prayer and created outreaches for youth, such as a baseball team."

At this same time, Benjamin was growing up at Seventh Avenue, now Infinity Mennonite Church. It's where as a young child he attended Head Start, a program sponsored for small children in the church. His strong values today regarding the importance of family, church family and positive nurturance were shaped by the close proximity of the church family with his family, he said. For example, a couple of his teachers were friends with his mother and grandmother, who lived across the

street from the church.

"Everyone who knew my grandmother knew my brothers and sisters and me," he said. "I was surrounded on all sides by my church family and my biological family, and there was always someone watching out for me and giving me some type of guidance. There was a huge circle of connection of love that helped ground me and shaped my development. That plays a big part in my having something to pass on to others today."

**But my Christian community taught me to not look through eyes of desperation and hopelessness but through eyes of hope for peace, reconciliation and change.—Hyacinth Stevens**

#### **Growing together at Camp Deerpark**

This circle of security gave Benjamin the confidence to branch out to Camp Deerpark, an important stepping stone into pastoral leadership, he said. Camp is where he and Hyacinth were mentored by Ken Bontrager, the camp's longtime executive director. For a couple of decades, he's shaped the camp into a conduit for developing new leaders in the city. That required taking risks, he said during a February interview.

"I was questioned about the amount of responsibility I gave these young people," Bontrager



Youth from King of Glory Tabernacle play at Camp Deerpark. Photo provided



Benjamin Stevens, co-pastor of King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx, serves at Camp Deerpark in upstate New York.

Photo provided

said. “But I felt strongly that unless we allowed them to sink or swim, they would never discover what they could really do. If we wanted to have strong leaders, we needed to let them practice here. It was amazing how when we gave more than they could handle, they stepped up to the plate.”

Benjamin and Hyacinth stepped up to the plate. They began as assistant cabin counselors and later became head counselors. Benjamin later led Bible studies and activities and painted a mural on a 12-foot wall for the challenge trail. At 17, Hyacinth was summer drama instructor—a job normally given to young adults in their mid-20s. She

it right the first time, it became a teachable moment. Ken created a guided space where he and others could speak into our journeys and influence us in learning to respond to God’s grace and to desire and practice deeper discipleship.”

Benjamin said he was constantly pushed at camp to do things he felt beyond him. “The first time I was asked to do Bible classes, I hesitated,” he said. “But I was told there was not a perfect formula for doing things. God simply asked that I be who he created me to be and that he would do the rest.”

#### **Camp’s formation helps couple form others**

Today they continue to value and practice leadership development in their co-pastorate—began in 2008—at King of Glory, a congregation with 80 members, many of them African-American. The co-pastors encourage camp participation and sponsor mentoring programs for children, young people and young adults that include life-skills development, spiritual formation and service opportunities.

“It’s important to us to give back all we’ve been given,” Hyacinth said. “Having so many opportunities to develop new leaders keeps us committed to serving as pastors in the city despite the challenges. Part of that is encouraging camp attendance with our families—even with families who are not regular attenders at church.”

When kids come home from camp, they flounder in connecting their positive spiritual experience in the mountainous pastoral setting with the day-to-day urban grind. “We emphasize the importance of being missionaries right in their own

## God simply asked that I be who he created me to be and that he would do the rest.—Benjamin Stevens

also served as a discipleship leader, summer program director and year-round program director. Today she is on the camp’s board, and she and Benjamin serve as camp pastors and do staff training.

“Camp is where God called me into leadership long before I knew what the word really meant,” Hyacinth said. “The many opportunities molded me, gave me experience in and exposure to ministry and freedom for trial and error. If I didn’t get

back yard—either going back to camp to work or serving in the city,” she said. “We help them see that serving at camp and church is just as much a part of doing missions as is going overseas.”

Benjamin and Hyacinth also strive to help campers move on to become camp counselors. That helps supply camp with qualified staff members who are members of the urban churches. “These counselors come back to continue the relationship with the campers through social media and in one-on-one relationships,” Hyacinth said. “They become ongoing ambassadors, bridges and role models.”

Benjamin believes young people are more likely to remain in the church when they engage in ministry, such as helping out with Sunday school or the worship team and have one-on-one mentors. “None of this is instant,” he said. “It depends on building the relationship over time.”

The couple is challenged in juggling the mentoring of young people with parenting their growing family, they said. “Our commitment to leadership development begins at home,” Benjamin said. “It’s a balancing act, giving as much attention to our own children as we give the church. We try not just to bring them to church because we are here but to help them find their own joy in coming, serving and building relationships.”

Hyacinth said, “I am really grateful for the modeling of my own parents. They taught me about the Bible and about Jesus and their own convictions, but then they let me do my own faith journey. They introduced me to Christianity but emphasized that it was my personal relationship

to Christ. It was not about rules but about relationship. I want to convey this to our children. “

### **Mentors seek mentoring**

To replenish their energies after mentoring their congregation and their family, Benjamin and Hyacinth seek ongoing support from fellow leaders in the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches. It consists of 18 congregations (African-American, Latino, Anglo, Garifuna or a

**Benjamin believes young people are more likely to remain in the church when they engage in ministry and have one-on-one mentors.**

mixture) that belong to Lancaster Mennonite Conference (LMC) or Atlantic Coast Conference. Two of those leaders are Sylvia Shirk, who has served as pastor of Manhattan (N.Y.) Mennonite Fellowship for eight years, and Monroe Yoder, who is bishop emeritus for LMC and in 2015 will have provided 50 years of leadership in the city.

“Benjamin and Hyacinth are no longer the youngsters they once were,” said Shirk in an April telephone interview. “Longstanding leaders in the city remember them when they were kids at camp. But now they are fully functioning adults who are raising four children while serving in an important ministry. They are grownups doing some really good work.”



Benjamin and Hyacinth Stevens, co-pastors of King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx, baptize one of the young people they mentored. Photo provided

As one of Hyacinth's mentors, Shirk has a front-row seat to the flowering of her leadership. For example, Shirk served as a reference for Hyacinth in the interviewing process with Mennonite Central Committee. MCC recently hired her as the part-time NYC program coordinator.

"Hyacinth has built up a lot of credibility with her work with Camp Deerpark and with mentoring young people at King of Glory," Shirk said. "Some of those young people have gone to do some amazing things. She is also serving on the boards of Camp Deerpark and Mennonite Women

baton of spiritual leadership to the next generation. "I am so confident we are handing leadership into capable hands that will carry and protect it well," he said. "Because I see the dedication and capability of these younger leaders, and their desire to allow the grace of God to work within them and to mold and shape them, I can sleep peacefully at night."

### **The dance of God**

It is this "dance" of cooperating with God's grace that continually renews the couple's love for God, for each other and for their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, they said. Hand in hand, they are facing the urban challenges along with others in their generation, including Moises Angustia, youth pastor at United Revival Mennonite Church, a Spanish congregation in neighboring Brooklyn. He and the couple have mentored some young adults who are becoming the latest crop of new leaders.

"In the last four years, leadership in some pockets of New York City has been undoing a shift, as new leaders emerge," Hyacinth said. "All that focus on leadership training by Ken and my father has cycled back around. The seedlings that were planted are now maturing."

When God planted the tender seedlings of faith in Benjamin and Hyacinth, they did not yet know that they would eventually partner together with God in the tough call of urban mission. This partnership of grace is the glue that holds them together and keeps them moving together.

"It's like a dance," Hyacinth said. "At times we step differently, but we try to step together. It has taken time to learn the different approaches we've brought to ministry. But we're finding our balance, as we respect and value each other and our different gifts and strengths. We are allowing ourselves to submit to each other."

Benjamin said, "I have learned it is a dance in which sometimes I take the lead and Hyacinth follows, and then other times, she takes the lead and I follow. What keeps me serving in the city is being able to do all this with Hyacinth. It can be very tiring, and there are times I just want to lay down. But I get up and keep going, because I have a wonderful wife to do all this with."

At times we step differently, but we try to step together. It has taken time to learn the different approaches we've brought to ministry.

—Hyacinth Stevens

USA. She is branching out from the city into a wider sphere of ministry."

Yoder has served as a longtime mentor for Benjamin. The retired bishop knew him as a little boy and became part of his faith development as a teenager and young adult. Yoder serves with Benjamin on the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches, for which Benjamin became moderator in June.

"He was very active with the youth group and sang with the youth choir and was very faithful and dedicated," says Yoder, who at one time was Seventh Avenue's pastor. "I remember how when Benjamin said he'd be there at a certain time, he was there. He was always zealous to learn, and he developed his own opinions and convictions rather readily and easily and was always ready to defend them."

Those same qualities are operating today. "Benjamin does his own thinking and calls us to task sometimes when we need it," Yoder says. "When he wants to make a point, he does it graciously. I see him as a real budding church statesman. I once knew him as a little kid, and now he is a mature, brother gentleman. He is also a good, sensitive father who knows his children."

When Yoder preached at Benjamin and Hyacinth's installation service a couple of years ago at King of Glory, he felt like he was passing the



*Laurie Oswald Robinson is a free-lance writer in Newton, Kan., and the author of Forever Family.*



Democracy is great, but the church is called to practice something better.

# Democracy and the way of Jesus

by Ryan Ahlgrim

In many American churches, the Sunday closest to July 4 is a patriotic service. The national anthem or another patriotic hymn is sung while the American flag is marched down the center aisle. Many churches do this, or something similar, because they believe democracy is the form of government God specially favors. Democracy is a kind of kingdom of God on earth, and the United States has been chosen by God for spreading democracy everywhere. ►

**Those in the Anabaptist-Mennonite** tradition tend to be skeptical of this view. We do not identify any national government with the kingdom of God, so our allegiance to national governments has careful parameters. Most of our congregations do not sing patriotic hymns during worship services or display the American flag in the sanctuary.

But Mennonites are sometimes too dismissive of our government, so let me take a moment to defend democracy.

What form of government does God want people to live under? This question is embedded in Israel's sacred story, and part of that story goes like this:

God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery and bring them to Mount Sinai, where God gave them a set of laws. These laws formed the basis for a new government. That government was a theocracy. In other words, religion ran the government, and the laws were based on loyalty to the God of Israel.

## The Israelites did not give their allegiance to a king but—ideally—to God alone.

Most nations at that time were theocracies; but one aspect of Israel's theocracy made it unique: It did not have a king. The Israelites did not give their allegiance to a king but—ideally—to God alone. There was no central government, only a loose confederation of tribes. Leadership was in the hands of local elders, priests, prophets and—in the case of war—judges.

**How well did this form of government work out?** According to the Book of Judges, not very well. Because there was no centralized authority or standing army, Israel was constantly vulnerable to attack and domination by other nations. Various judges had success in battle, trusting in God's intervention, but the victories were local and temporary. Envy, competition and violence among the tribes and between towns were frequent. Women and the vulnerable suffered horribly. Leadership was often corrupt or deeply flawed. The Book of Judges paints a picture of existence that was nasty, brutish and short.

After a couple of hundred years of decentral-

ized, local leadership, the tribes of Israel said, "Enough" and demanded a king. The prophet Samuel tried to warn them of the consequences:

"These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day" (1 Samuel 8:11-18).

In other words, having a king with centralized power will result in a military-industrial complex, a draft, loss of freedoms, heavy taxation and confiscation. Nevertheless, this looked a lot better than their current circumstances, so the Israelites proceeded to create a monarchy: a king with centralized power that would be passed on to the eldest legitimate son.

**How well did this form of government work out?** According to Israel's sacred story, not very well. Saul, the first king, turned out to be mentally ill. David, the next king, was highly effective, but he abused his power to commit adultery and murder, and his eldest son led a civil war against him. Solomon, the next king, attained the throne by murdering the competition. He brought wealth into Israel but at the cost of the importation of foreign gods and the implementation of oppressive labor. His reign was so controversial that, after his son Solomon's death, the nation split into two—the north and the south—each with its own monarchy. The two lines of kings were generally worse than the ones who came before them. Eventually both kingdoms were destroyed by invading empires, their kings assassinated or imprisoned and their sons murdered.

But around the time Israel collapsed and became a dream, far away in Greece, in the city of Athens, people were creating a new form of government called democracy. Citizens voted for their leaders, and leaders served limited terms. The system was not ideal: women, slaves and

lower classes could not vote. Nevertheless, democracy was a revolutionary idea.

Which form of national government would you prefer to live under today: a decentralized theocracy, a monarchy or a democracy? Despite its never making an appearance in the Bible, I would choose democracy. Nowhere in the Bible do people vote or leaders serve for designated terms. Even Jesus never promoted democracy. Jesus never asked his disciples, “Raise your hands if you think we should go to Capernaum” or, “Who is in favor of Judas being our treasurer?” Despite the lack of democracy in the Bible, it is a better form of national government than any that we see in the Bible.

**This does not mean democracy is ideal;** in fact, it also has serious drawbacks. Let’s look at some of the defects of American-style democracy. Money has tremendous influence over elections and legislation. Those with the most money can hire the most lobbyists, afford the most lawyers, file the most lawsuits, pull the most strings, fund the most candidates and block or support the most legislation. The super-rich can fund their own campaigns or set up their children in politics, creating a political aristocracy. American democracy is dominated by a wealthy elite.

Another problem with democracy is that the majority rules. This certainly sounds like a fair principle, but it means the minority gets shut out. In American democracy we have a winner-takes-all approach. If a candidate wins an election by the slimmest percentile, he or she wins everything, and the other candidate—who received almost the same number of votes—gets nothing. So the majority has the power to impose its will on even a sizable minority.

Democracy is also often unstable. This is not so much true in the United States as it is in many other countries. Democracy sometimes leads to more crime and more social instability. Consider Russia, which in the 1990s became a democracy. High unemployment, organized crime and other social problems have caused the country to move toward a dictatorship. Consider Egypt, which recently became a democracy, where mass protests and a financial crisis led the military to depose the

elected president. Consider Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan—all democracies and all highly dysfunctional.

Winston Churchill said the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter. He also said democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the other forms that have been tried. I tend to agree with him.

**Despite the lack of democracy in the Bible, it is a better form of national government than any that we see in the Bible.**

The Bible never came up with the idea of democracy, but it did come up with two concepts that are essential for good government. The first concept is this: Good government must protect the vulnerable. Leviticus 19 provides a sampling of laws reflecting this concern:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not



strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

...

“You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

“You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor.

...

“You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10, 13-15, 32-34).

## This is not how Jesus wants his disciples to operate. Instead of leading from the top, they are to lead from the bottom. Leaders are servants.

The United States has, in some ways, incorporated this concept of protecting the vulnerable in the Bill of Rights. The Constitution, as originally written, did not have the Bill of Rights, but James Madison pushed for its inclusion because without something like a Bill of Rights democracy can be just as oppressive as any other form of government.

The second concept essential for good government comes from Jesus:

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:25b-27).

**Jesus is saying that in pagan** national governments, power is centralized; the ruler imposes his or her rule through coercion and the threat of

force. The resources of the nation are also centralized, and the ruler can divvy out those resources to whomever he or she wishes and is praised for doing so.

But this is not how Jesus wants his disciples to operate. Instead of leading from the top, they are to lead from the bottom. Leaders are servants. They do not have coercive power, privileges or perks. They do not hand out benefits from a position of superiority. Instead, leaders simply serve and do what is best for others.

I do not know whether it is possible for a national government to operate like that, but it is how the government of Jesus’ disciples—the church—is supposed to be run.

Most American churches have borrowed the concepts of democracy. We often vote for our leaders and chairpersons and make decisions with a show of hands. But many churches have gone beyond democracy to something closer to the way of Jesus. Instead of holding elections in which two candidates vie for a church position, fostering a system of winners and losers, many churches have a system of congregational discernment resulting in a slate of recommended leaders, all of whom are affirmed together by the congregation. Instead of majority-rule votes, which inevitably cause consternation for the minority, many congregations do not move ahead with a decision until they have reached a consensus. In churches that are seeking to follow Jesus’ way, leaders are not given special privileges or prestige; instead, all are treated as equals, and leaders serve for the purpose of benefiting the congregation, not themselves. Jesus tells us this is our form of government.

I am glad the United States is a democracy, and I am glad I live in the United States. But it is not the kingdom of God. As a Christian I call on the government to live up to its Bill of Rights and to do an ever-better job of protecting the vulnerable. As a Christian I call on the government to use as little violence and coercion as possible, and I suggest that the best way to lead is to serve others. But as a Christian I call on the church—not the United States—to truly be God’s government in this world.



*Ryan Ahlgrim is pastor of First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis.*

# MCC school kit bags, birthdays and Leona Dirks Loepp

**A visit with a church matriarch of service and Christian love.**

by Raylene Hinz-Penner

Our granddaughters Esther and Emmeline are 5 and 3 years old, respectively. For the past two years we have celebrated their July birthdays at their neighborhood park along with their little friends and parents.



Children and adults at a birthday party in Topeka, Kan., where they fill Mennonite Central Committee school kit bags sewn by Leona Dirks Loepp. Photo provided



Children and adults at a birthday party in Topeka, Kan., where they fill Mennonite Central Committee school kit bags sewn by Leona Dirks Loepp. Photo provided

**The children dress for water play** in a little water feature that runs through the park in Topeka, Kan., try out the park's playground equipment, laugh loudly at their parents' version of the birthday piñata—throwing water balloons at established targets, including their father, eat off the grill their father fires up, and finish with a great birthday cake designed and decorated by their mother. We usually provide the watermelon.

After we have eaten, the girls' mother brings out the bright, colorful, Mennonite Central Committee fabric bags—so much better than the wrapping paper that stuffs our landfills. The children line up beside the boxes where they've placed their pencils, tablets, erasers and other

**I turn 65 this year, and my favorite Sunday school and Bible school teacher is 100.**

MCC-prescribed school supplies purchased for the birthday party. Each with a colorful fabric bag open to claim its contents, and helped by adults to fill a bag with the right numbers of pencils and other items, the children stuff the bags, which then become school kits for other children.

I help Emmeline, who seems proud to accomplish the task herself this year alongside her older sister. It is becoming a wonderful birthday tradition, this little parade. As I watch the girls'

mother loading the 34 school kits the children had made, I wonder, Who makes all those fabric bags?

Almost providentially, a friend who also grew up in the Oklahoma Panhandle at Turpin Mennonite Church, soon contacted me to see if I might want to interview Leona (Dirks) Loepp about the hundreds of fabric bags she has made for MCC school kits in her lifetime, reminding me that Leona turns 100 in 2014.

Leona memories flooded over me. I turn 65 this year, and my favorite Sunday school and Bible school teacher is 100. I remember when I was an exchange professor in Chengdu, Sichuan Province in China, with MCC-related China Educational Exchange in 1984-85. Leona's instruction on China's people and Mennonite missions in China came back to me.

I still see our little class of 10-year-olds in Bible school gathered around the globe, with Leona poring over the continents, tracing a finger from China round to the United States, then examining a larger map of China's huge land mass and, finally, Leona's careful instruction about Chinese ways and Mennonite missions. It was better geography instruction than I ever remember receiving in school.

**Many years later, Leona told me** that after she first taught school with a provisional certificate immediately after graduating from high school during the terrible Dust Bowl years in the Oklahoma Panhandle, she had so wanted to finish college and be properly certified for teaching, but she married, they bought a farm, she raised her sons and time moved on.

I believe she poured that need to teach into us, the children she nurtured at Turpin Mennonite Church. She is still teaching all of us as the church matriarch and model of service and Christian love. And so, I went home to see Leona last year at her home, Emeritus at Liberal Springs in Liberal, Kan. Tiny and spry as ever, still filled with energy, thoughtfulness and caring for others, Leona was downstairs in the foyer to greet me lest I get lost climbing all those stairs to find her apartment.

Leona began sewing the fabric bags for MCC school kits as part of her role with the Women's Missionary group at Turpin Mennonite Church more than 50 years ago. The women's group purchased the cotton fabric that Leona and her friend Luella Schmidt used to sew the school kit bags in those early years. She thinks the cotton seemed

## In her 90s, she pieced six quilts from school bag scraps after doing four more for her grandchildren in 2011 and 2012.

heavier when she began than it is today. Now, because Leona no longer drives, other women buy the fabric for her.

**“Do you want to see them?”** Of course. She pulls from beneath her bed a box and counts out 21 completed bags, stacked neatly into the box of bags still in process. Then she gestures toward the boxes stacked under her desk in the corner of her bedroom. She figures there are two or three times as many completed bags in the stacked boxes waiting to go to MCC. When I ask her to estimate the number of bags she makes in a year, she shrugs. “Oh, maybe one or two hundred.” I’m sure that estimate is low. Even so, if she has sewn 200 bags each year for 50 years, that is a sizable number.

“How are your eyes, Leona?” She acknowledges that at age 99, they are growing weaker. She can’t thread the needle on her machine any longer, and her neighbor down the hall helps as Leona needs her. Then she chuckles. In 2010 she decided to piece a quilt, “just a simple nine-block quilt” with the scrap material left from all those school bags. A friend machine-quilted it for her, and she liked the way it turned out.

When her oldest son, Franzie, and his wife, Dorothy, came for a visit, she proudly displayed the quilt on her bed. Franzie shook his head. “Oh, Mom,” he said, “you should never have done that. Now, Dennis [Leona’s younger son] and I will fight over that quilt when you’re gone.”

Leona could not have squabbling sons, so that Christmas she gave them each a quilt. The grandchildren announced that they were next in line. So, in her 90s, she pieced six quilts from school bag scraps after doing four more for her grandchildren in 2011 and 2012.

**The doctor advises her to save her eyes** by resting them for 10 or 15 minutes during occasional breaks from her work. She does some reading and would love to read her Bible more. She has a large-print Bible, but she notices her eyes’ weakness most when she reads.

Driving back to Topeka from Oklahoma, I re-

member that I should send Leona pictures of Esther and Emmeline and their friends filling the MCC school kits at their party. Leona needs to know how she is passing on the MCC school kit tradition, continuing to educate children from the Oklahoma Panhandle, where she began with children like me, to our granddaughters and friends in the Kansas City area, to the many school kits she has helped MCC send to children being educated around the world.



*Raylene Hinz-Penner is a member of Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka, Kan.*

Children and adults at a birthday party in Topeka, Kan., where they fill Mennonite Central Committee school kit bags sewn by Leona Dirks Loepp. Photo provided



# Too focused on doing the Lord's work

**Sometimes we get so focused on doing 'the Lord's work' that we may actually miss the prompting of the Spirit.**

by Derrick Ramer

One summer the junior high at the church I was serving traveled to St. Louis for our summer service project. The first day, we worked in a community garden in a city neighborhood. We were pulling weeds and doing basic cleanup in the garden. Right beside the garden was a playground, and many of the neighborhood kids were making their way over to us to see what was going on.



After a while, several of our youth were in the playground playing with the neighborhood kids. They helped them build some ramps for their skateboards and bikes and were having a lot of fun. A few of the sponsors reminded them that we were here to work in the garden and shooed them back to work.

These are junior highers we are talking about, so before long they were back in the playground playing with the neighborhood kids. Sponsors got on them again about the reason we were here and ushered them back to the garden. Not too long after that, the unfocused junior highers were again in the playground. I reminded them the third time that they needed to get back to work. Since we are talking about junior highers here, it likely happened another time or two.

That evening, we adults gathered all the youth together to have a Bible study and talk about the events of the day. As we shared stories from the day, a theme quickly emerged. The youth didn't talk about pulling weeds and making the garden look nice, but they shared stories of playing with the neighborhood kids. I heard story after story of how they built ramps, played games and had conversations with the children

**The sponsors missed it. I missed it.** But the youth did not miss it—the better option. I was so focused on the work we were supposed to be doing that I missed it. I apologized to the youth that evening. Anybody could have pulled those weeds, but there was only one opportunity on that day for our youth to interact with those neighborhood kids. Weeds will grow back, but lives may have been forever changed; the lives of the neighborhood kids and the lives of our youth.

This reminded me of the story of Mary and Martha found in Luke 10:38-42. It is so easy to be hard on Martha. I mean *Jesus* was at her house, and she was busy doing everything but spending time with him. Martha was running around the house. I imagine her thinking, Oh, my house is such a mess. I haven't vacuumed or dusted for weeks. And I have to make this meal not only for Jesus but for his disciples. I hope I have plenty of beef and noodles; oh, and I should bake some fresh zwiabach, and do I have everything I need to make a shoofly pie?

Martha was doing what she should be doing. She was attending to the needs of the house and preparing a meal. It was her job as a Jewish woman at that time to be doing these things, and she wanted to know where her help was.

Her help should have been her sister Mary, but

she was sitting at Jesus' feet. Now to sit at the foot of a rabbi—a teacher—was not something a woman should have been doing. Someone who sits at the foot of a rabbi or teacher is doing so in order to be a disciple, to learn. That was not Mary's place. At that time, in that culture, in that setting, it was not Mary's—or any other woman's place—to be at the feet of Jesus.

**For a better picture of who Mary is** and what she is doing in this text, I turn to a different story, found in John 12:1-8. This story in many ways parallels our story from Luke. We find Jesus and the disciples at Mary and Martha's house for dinner. Martha is serving, and Mary is at Jesus' feet.

I mentioned that at the feet of a rabbi was not the place to find women. In this story there are several other things going on as well. William Barclay in his Bible commentary says that in Palestine, no respectable woman would be seen with her hair down, it would be put up. It was a sign of an immoral woman for her hair to be down. The Bible says that Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair. She couldn't do that if her hair was bound up as it should have been. On top of that, she just wasted what is commonly believed to have been one year's wages on perfume that she poured on Jesus' feet.

So Mary, a woman, was at Jesus' feet, wasted a year's wages and had her hair down like an immoral woman. Mary was out of line, and her actions were inappropriate and absurd. I can just imagine everybody in the room feeling awkward, offended and embarrassed for Mary.

Anybody could have pulled those weeds, but there was only one opportunity on that day for our youth to interact with those neighborhood kids.

Martha, on the other hand, was doing what she was supposed to be doing. She was focused on doing the Lord's work. Doing the Lord's work for her was preparing the meal and caring for other's needs. It was her job and her calling. It was how she was serving the Lord. There were expectations for Mary, and she was breaking all of them. Her focus should have been on other things. Her way to "do the work of the Lord" should have been helping Martha. But Mary heard a different voice, and by listening to that voice she was al-



lowing herself to follow the Holy Spirit. She allowed herself to be moved from the norm and to be daring enough to do something extraordinary.

**I'm not saying that what Martha did** was wrong, and I'm not saying that working in the garden that day in St. Louis was wrong. That was work, too, and it needed to be done. Jesus does not ever actually tell Martha that the work she was doing is bad or wrong. There would have been no food to eat if Martha had not prepared it.

the details of things, so focused on doing the work of the Lord, that we may miss opportunities the Spirit presents us with. Mary had one opportunity to anoint her Lord's feet, and if she had not done something absurd she would have missed it. The youth had one opportunity to spend time with those neighborhood kids in St. Louis. If they had listened to us adults, they would have missed it.

**Let's open our eyes.** Let's open our ears. Let's open our hearts. What is God saying to you

Some things we can do almost any time, but some things we will never do, unless we grasp the chance when it comes.  
—William Barclay



Christ In the House of Martha and Mary - Henryk Siemiatkowski/wikart.org

It is just that Mary had chosen to do something else, and it would not be taken from her. Mary listened to the Holy Spirit.

William Barclay said it best when he wrote, "There is here one great truth about life. Some things we can do almost any time, but some things we will never do, unless we grasp the chance when it comes. We are seized with the desire to do something fine and generous and big-hearted. But we put it off—we will do it tomorrow, and the fine impulse goes, and the thing is never done. Life is an uncertain thing. We think to utter some word of thanks or praise or love but we put it off, and often the word is never spoken" (*The Gospel of John*, Westminster Press, 1975).

I wonder if sometimes we get so focused on

through the Holy Spirit? Where is God at work in Mennonite Church USA, in your community and in your lives?

Mary didn't let herself get boxed in by what was expected but boldly followed the Holy Spirit. Let's not be so focused on doing the Lord's work the way we expect it to be done that we miss an opportunity to follow the Holy Spirit and do something a little crazy, a little wild or perhaps even a bit inappropriate and absurd—something extraordinary.



*Derrick Ramer is pastor of Emma Mennonite Church in Topeka, Ind.*

# Reading the Bible

**How we miss the  
point of Scripture**

by Bob Brown

We filter Scripture, every piece. We even hand pick what we read. That is why many churches use lectionaries. These filters are necessary: The Bible has 35,000 verses in it; we can't equally value every verse if we want to understand the enormity that is this book. Without filters we end up spending all our time pondering the begats and never get to the Beatitudes.



**Jesus even gives us the filter:** “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two com-

## Things we are passionate about or worried about or afraid of shape which verses are important and which aren’t.

mandments” (Matthew 22:37-40, NIV). Filters help us understand the story of God that we find in the Bible. Churches teach filters all the time. We say things like: “This section is very important,” which implies that we don’t need to worry too much about that other section.

While filters are helpful and even necessary, they can create problems. One such problem is

that our ways are not God’s ways. Our filters can miss the point. We can read Galatians looking for the rules Paul tries to lay out for community, but in truth Galatians is a letter Paul wrote to a church that was spending too much time worrying about the rules.

Filters are even more dangerous when we don’t acknowledge or admit that we are using them. Many people you talk to will claim they don’t use a filter when they read the Bible, but if we are honest, we all use filters every time we pick up the Scriptures. Things we are passionate about or worried about or afraid of shape which verses are important and which aren’t. These concerns shape which books and verses we read all the time and which ones we pass over. If we are honest, most people have managed to never even open their Bibles to at least a few of its 66 books. These filters cause problems because many of them do more to protect us from God and insulated us from the parts of Scripture that make us uncomfortable than they help us learn about God’s desires for us.

There are several common filters used in churches across the country in many different churches (Mennonite and otherwise) that should be abandoned immediately. These filters actually get in the way of hearing about the character of God. They are based more on our fears and our desire for comfort than on an honest desire to be disciples of Jesus.

We must recognize the following filters and abandon them immediately so that God may speak more deeply into our lives and we can hear the challenging and life-changing message in the Bible. These are the three filters that are the most common and/or most distracting from the gospel of Jesus shared in our Scripture:

### **1. Jesus gets mad when I get dirty. Aka: God’s making a list and checking it twice.**

When we look at the 10 commandments, we make *all* of them about us instead of understanding that the first four are about our relationship to God, and the last six are about our relationship to people. We neglect justice for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the person in jail, even though these are mentioned in the Bible again and again. Since Jesus gets mad when I get dirty, it is really all about us. When we use this filter, Jesus is mad not because we abused the poor or the widow but because we broke a rule. But this way of thinking ignores the fact that God is not petty. God doesn’t make up rules so that we have to jump through



hoops. God guides and directs us so that we will treat others better. Because everyone on Earth is a child of God.

## **2. “Believing” means saying the sinner’s prayer. Aka: I said, “Jesus was my Lord and Savior.” What else do you want?**

With this filter we skip over the Sermon on the Mount, the sheep and goats, basically everything Jesus says besides John 3:16. We don’t hear Jesus say, “Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me.” Instead we focus on Romans 10:9: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This focus often neglects what it means to believe and assumes what it means to be saved. We are not saved by our works, but a belief that doesn’t change how we live our lives isn’t really a belief at all.

## **3. God isn’t doing anything now but is waiting until later. Aka: Just wait till Jesus gets home.**

This is the filter that produced the *Left Behind* series. Using this filter, we search for obscure prophecies that will tell us the day and the hour or the how and why of Jesus’ coming. We decide we don’t need to change the world or even take care of it because Jesus will come and make all things new—at some later date. But what if God’s time is now? What if we are supposed to be doing God’s work, instead of just waiting for it? If we are waiting for the kingdom of God to be brought by Jesus, then we have forgotten that we (the church) are the body of Christ on Earth.

Why am I tearing down all these filters? They shape how we read the Bible, telling us which verses are important and which ones we don’t really need to pay much attention to. When we are studying a huge and diverse book like the Bible, filters do help. However, these filters worry about comfort and power and security and don’t focus on the things of God.

We will always read with filters, but we need to recognize we are using them and then choose better ones—ones that encourage transformed lives now, not passive faith. We need filters that allow God’s mercy, love and call to action to speak through the text instead of missing the forest for the trees.

Here are a few filters we should try on:

### **1. God is patient and faithful to us even though we aren’t faithful.**

What if this is the story of God and of God’s people? What if God has been calling us to him since the beginning of eternity, and we (we, not just those other people) are still turning away? Does this filter shed some light on the story of Abraham lying about Sarah being his wife? Does it open up the story of Judas or Jonah?

### **2. Love wins over power.**

What if God’s narrative is about justice—about justice and loving mercy that is poured over the whole world? What if we are called to turn away from our desires for comfort, security and power so that we can share God’s love with the world? Are the 10 commandments and even all those laws in Deuteronomy a little more understandable

## What if we are called to turn away from our desires for comfort, security and power so that we can share God’s love with the world?

when we hear them as God’s call to justice instead of rules made up by some far off deity?

### **3. God’s time is now, and he calls us to make his kingdom present.**

Does this filter help you understand why Jesus had to come and kickstart the work of God? Does this tell you why he trusted the church to flawed humans? Can you see that God loves you and cares for you right now? Can you see that God wants you to tell everyone about God’s love for them with words, acts of kindness and charity and your thirst for justice?

All these filters are human creations—the ones I’m rejecting and the ones I’m recommending. We always read using a filter, whether we realize it or not.

What if God is a mystery unfolding before us that becomes more beautiful every day?



*Bob Brown is pastor of Stahl Mennonite Church in Johnstown, Pa.*

## Plan for your stewardship journey



**Larry Miller** is president and CEO of Everence. He retires at the end of August.

Becoming an effective steward of our financial resources is a multifaceted journey that can be complicated to walk through alone.

*Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.—2 Corinthians 13:11*

Stewardship is one of our church's priorities. As stated in the Purposeful Plan of Mennonite Church USA, we seek "to reflect God's abundance through our generosity as God's stewards, in order to achieve missional goals across all parts of the church."

To faithfully achieve this goal, we need to bring some level of intentional financial planning to our lives. "Financial planning" often connotes wealth accumulation and financial self-sufficiency. What does it mean to do financial planning from an Anabaptist faith perspective?

### Discovering God's purpose

Becoming faithful stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us is rooted in our relationship with Christ. Beryl Jantzi, stewardship education director at Everence, says, "Stewardship is everything you do after you say you believe." Financial planning begins with discovering God's purpose and plan for our lives. No matter what level of resources we have or our stage of life, God calls us to a path of Christian stewardship—and integrating our faith and values into our financial decisions is a good guide for that journey.

### Living generously

Financial planning grows out of our relationships in the faith community. Discerning the use of our money, time and talent for the benefit of God's children helps us develop habits of generosity and care for others. Good financial planning helps us see and understand God's abundance in our lives, which gives us a sense of financial security and peace. That releases us to manage our resources with open hands of generosity rather than clenched fists of fear and anxiety. Living generously is about putting our faith into action.

### Planning for your journey

Becoming an effective steward of our financial resources is a multifaceted journey that can be complicated to walk through alone. Sometimes we need someone else to alert us to potential opportunities, detours and missteps and to hold us accountable along the way.

That is where Everence can help. Our professional advisors can work alongside you to deter-

mine a financial path that fits your goals and values. Together, we help you achieve what many never experience in their financial lives: the chance to find financial peace.

A financial plan can give you an overarching understanding and guide for your stewardship journey, including:

- **Cash flow planning:** By learning how to manage your money in ways that are efficient for you and that honor God, you can remove stress, increase peace, live freely and give generously.
  - **Protection planning:** You can't always know what will happen in the future, but you can take steps to have resources in place for your loved ones in case the unexpected happens.
  - **Investment planning:** From retirement income to college funding, there are many reasons we invest our money. In order to have that money for our future needs, we must think strategically about the way we are investing.
  - **Retirement planning:** Many people are afraid of running out of money in retirement. Whether you're 25 or 65, it's important to determine how much you will likely need in retirement and how you might get there.
  - **Tax planning:** Nearly every financial decision you make has tax consequences, and it's important to understand how it might impact your financial situation.
  - **Estate planning:** Creating an estate plan is one of the most important acts of Christian stewardship. It's a way for you to make your wishes known and take some heavy burdens off the shoulders of your loved ones.
  - **Charitable planning:** Most financial planners don't focus on this seventh area of your financial life. But Everence believes that being generous is a significant way to live out your faith. Developing a financial plan helps give you the freedom to be more generous, so you can make an impact on the ministries closest to your heart.
- Everence advisors specialize in helping you identify your values and incorporating them into your financial decisions. Our systematic process helps you develop an overarching financial plan for your life, and our financial planning fees are based, in part, on your personal situation.
- A stewardship plan is a way for you to achieve financial peace and live with open hands of generosity, regardless of where you are at in life. **TIM**

## Is it time for Anabaptist University?

**W**e need to consider how higher education can serve and be served by the Anabaptist/Mennonite community while dealing with the complex reality of institutional histories, economics, student dynamics and technology.

Here are some possible models:

### The cut-em loose model

In this model, the Mennonite Education Agency in concert with Mennonite Church USA officials would take action to sever official denominational links to some (or all) colleges and universities. The administrators in these agencies may decide that the cost of higher education and the dwindling percentage of Mennonites attending denominational colleges make denominational higher education too expensive and unnecessary.

This decision would mean that the individual campuses would have to determine an alternative mission and find new sources of money and students. Absent solutions to these issues, some (or all) Anabaptist/Mennonite institutions may close.

### The right-sizing model

This model would require that all parties have faith in a denominational body, either Mennonite Education Agency or, preferably, a specifically appointed task force. This task force would be empowered to make recommendations to bring denominational higher education campuses and programs in line with available resources and perceived needs. Campuses might be consolidated, programs reduced (or enlarged) and personnel reduced (or expanded).

There are many possibilities. Perhaps all Mennonite education would be consolidated on one campus. Perhaps one campus would focus on the humanities and one on the sciences. Perhaps some programs would be terminated and others, which fit mission and need, begun or expanded.

### The university or consortium model

A university model would be similar to many public institutions that have scattered locations with a central administration assisted by personnel of appropriate title and rank at each campus. Thus the “Anabaptist University” would have one governing board and one president. A common budget and centralized purchasing operation would be implemented. There would be one central admissions office and strategy. The fund-raising network would be consolidated and made more efficient. Registrar functions could be con-

solidated. Student mobility, even faculty mobility, would be facilitated as necessary. While there would be many details to be worked out, it has advantages of common purpose, efficient use of resources and a reduction in administrators.

### The virtual model

Those who develop online courses have sparked an intense debate about the meaning of education and the meaning of a degree. Proponents argue that online discussion groups and the unlimited resources on the Internet provide what is needed for information to be both acquired and processed. Critics have argued that true education requires the intimacy of personal communication in the context of a community of learners. And there is substantial disagreement about the need for extracurricular programs such as music ensembles and athletic teams.

A virtual model would require careful attention to education quality and assessment/verification. It may require rethinking the characteristics of an effective teacher. It would certainly require evaluation of what physical base is necessary, what technology and technology assistance would be needed, and the implementation of an effective registrar process.

### The virtual/residential hybrid model

Some observers have suggested a creative hybrid that makes use of the resources and economic efficiencies of virtual education, while retaining a limited residential requirement. Students would be expected to make several short stays on campus, where the best features of person-to-person learning would occur.

At this point there does not seem to be an overwhelming reason to select any of the above. However, given the frenetic pace of contemporary social and economic change, strategic planning demands that all options be explored. Given the length of time it took Mennonites to “merge” and the many vested interests involved, it is time to begin an intensive, wide-ranging discussion (i.e., one that goes beyond the small population of college administrators and church officials) about the future of Mennonite higher education.

Choosing a model of higher education for the 21st century and infusing that model with Anabaptist/Mennonite foundational principles will require the best critical thinking that can be mustered. It is imperative that the task begin. 



**Duane Kauffmann** is a member of College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

It is time to begin an intensive, wide-ranging discussion about the future of Mennonite higher education.

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

# Kenneth Hochstetler named new Everence CEO

**He brings broad financial services expertise with deep faith and service roots.**

**O**n June 13, the Everence board of directors announced that Kenneth D. Hochstetler will become the organization's next President and CEO.

Hochstetler will assume the role upon the retirement of President and CEO Larry D. Miller at the end of August.

Hochstetler currently serves as senior executive vice president at Uninvest Corporation, which provides a wide range of banking, trust, financial planning, investment, foundation and insurance services through a network of approximately 40 offices in southeastern Pennsylvania.

"Ken will bring deep and broad experience in the many services of a financial organization," said D. Duane

**He is strongly committed to the church and is actively involved in the Anabaptist faith community.**

—Pat Swartzendruber

Oswald, Everence board chair. "He has over two decades of management and executive leadership experience in banking, insurance and investments."

"He is strongly committed to the church and is actively involved in the Anabaptist faith community," said Pat Swartzendruber, chair of the presidential succession committee and Everence board member. "He

has contributed volunteer service to many local and national nonprofits, demonstrating his strong sense of call to serve the church and community."

"I am grateful for the opportunity to use my experience gained in private industry for the good of the stewardship organization serving the Mennonite and Anabaptist faith community," said Hochstetler. "I look forward to joining the Everence team in helping members integrate their faith and values into financial decisions."

## Hochstetler's background

Joining Uninvest in 1992, Hochstetler currently serves as chief executive of the following Uninvest subsidiaries: investments, advisory services, foundation, municipal pension

services and wealth management services. He previously worked at Meridian Bank in eastern Pennsylvania.

Hochstetler holds a bachelor's degree in business and computer science from Goshen (Ind.) College and a master's degree in business administration from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa.

He attends Blooming Glen (Pa.) Mennonite Church, where he serves as chair of its congregational leadership board. He is on the board of directors of Goshen (Ind.) College, co-chair of the campaign leadership council of the North Penn Commons, chair of the Souderton Industrial Development Authority and a long-term planning committee member of the Bucks-Mont Coalition for Evangelism.

## CEO succession process

Hochstetler's appointment was approved by the Everence board as well as by the Executive Committee of Mennonite Church USA's Executive Board.

The CEO succession process started last fall, when Miller announced his retirement. In addition to Swartzendruber, other succession committee members



New Everence CEO Kenneth Hochstetler

included the following individuals:

- D. Duane Oswald, Everence board chair (ex-officio);
- R. Clair Sauder, Praxis Mutual Fund board trustee;
- Richard Thomas, Mennonite Church USA executive leadership rep;
- Donna Voth, Everence board member;
- LaVern Yutzzy, former Everence board member;
- Ervin Stutzman, Mennonite Church USA executive director (ex-officio).

Founded in 1945, Everence will celebrate its 70th anniversary in 2015. The organization serves approximately 80,000 members and manages \$2.4 billion in assets (as of Dec. 31, 2013). Everence is the stewardship agency of Mennonite Church USA.—*Everence*

# Clinton Frame to leave Indiana-Michigan Conference

## Congregation exploring relationship with South Central Mennonite Conference

Clinton Frame Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., affirmed a recommendation to leave Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference in a congregational meeting on June 4.

There were 204 votes presented, and the recommendation passed by 95 percent.

According to a June 7 email from Terry Diener, lead pastor of Clinton Frame, “Over the years, it has seemed to us that the conversations within Indiana-Michigan have been more about exploring the edges of our theological diversity rather than a common vision of God’s transforming power in our lives.”

Also, Clinton Frame is located in a community where other Mennonite leaders have taken public stances that “affirm same-sex marriage and support the LGBTQ agenda,” which “runs counter to our witness and outreach,” Diener wrote.

The recommendation to leave Indiana-Michigan was brought to Clinton Frame by the congregational oversight board.

It came after discussion and prayer at a leadership level and a two-year congregational process, wrote Diener. Clinton Frame plans to end its relationship with Indiana-Michigan on June 30 and is beginning to explore a relationship with South Central Mennonite Conference.

Diener and Dan Miller, conference pastor of Indiana-Michigan, have had numerous conversations throughout this process.



Terry Diener

Miller attended a congregational meeting in January, when it was decided that Clinton Frame leadership would begin to explore options with other conferences and continue to process the relationship with Mennonite Church USA.

In an interview on June 5, Miller said the conference is sad to say goodbye to Clinton Frame. The church will still be in the conference’s geographical area but will be realigning itself within Mennonite Church USA.

“We understand the church’s call to focus on its calling and mission ... and we affirm that,” Miller said.

Diener wrote: “We seek to hold to the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. We have a heart to welcome all people and long for all people to experience the transforming, redeeming love of Jesus Christ. ... We are seeking a conference connection that has a more focused conversation around our shared mission, vision and values and is more willing to publicly attest to those commitments. We value relationships and desire to continue good relationships with Indiana-Michigan churches and relate as good neighbors. This decision is about identity, clarifying our mission, vision and values. We strongly feel the grief that comes with ending our membership in a conference in which we are charter members and which has been a central part of our congregational life and identity over the past 100 years.”

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is a community of 76 congregations with just over 10,000 members in Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee.

South Central Mennonite Conference is a regional conference of Mennonite Church USA. Its churches are located in Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and Mexico.—*Anna Groff*



Clinton Frame Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., celebrated its 150 anniversary last October. Clinton Frame has about 430 active members and 625 active attenders.

# Volunteer helps plant common ground

## Food Bank of Elkhart County bridges divides, works for common good

Isaac Fast



Katie Jantzen helps fill a van with fresh vegetables from a produce auction in Elkhart, Ind., for her service placement at Church Community Services.

**W**hen working with a diverse group of volunteers, it can seem impossible to get them to agree on anything. But at Seed to Feed, volunteers agree to set aside their differences to feed 7,200 families.

“I haven’t been able to find anyone who can argue against providing healthy, local food to people who need it,” says Katie Jantzen. She is a Mennonite Voluntary Service participant in Elkhart, Ind. Jantzen co-coordinates Church Community Services Seed to Feed program.

### Providing fresh food

The initiative began in 2012 and grew out of a need for local, fresh produce in Elkhart County. This matched the local farmers’ passion to provide.

In 2013, Jantzen helped Seed to Feed disperse a total of 150,000 pounds of food to families in Elkhart County. The harvest includes fruits and vegetables from 10 area gardens and 64,000 pounds of potatoes, and donations from other local farms and gardens. They also received \$50,000 in donations from the proceeds of other farmland. This helps to provide the logistical support needed for the initiative.

### Building community

Creating community is just as important as supplying fresh food, says Kurt Bullard. He has been raising vegetables for 23 years and is a member of the Seed to Feed board.

Men Alive is one of many communities that contribute to Seed to Feed. Launched in January, Men Alive is a program of Church Community Services that seeks to empower men. Each afternoon for 20 weeks, eight men gather to garden, work in the food warehouse and learn about nutrition, cooking, community and responsibility to their neighbors.

“We aim to help these men become healthy in all areas of

their lives: mentally, socially, spiritually and physically,” says Sean Murphy, program coordinator.

### Bridging different perspectives

Jantzen has seen Elkhart strengthened as volunteers work together. Democrats, Republicans, church members, businesspeople, farmers, neighbors, students and food pantry clients have all volunteered. They have served a total of 8,000 hours since the initiative began two years ago.

Volunteers bring their different farming and gardening experiences, and so does Jantzen. She grew up among large-scale farms and granaries in Nebraska. At Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., Jantzen worked on the campus garden. It was there that her passion for creation care flourished.

Even the Seed to Feed leaders have a variety of experiences. Dave Hochstetler, the co-coordinator with Jantzen, brings his business background from his career in the RV business. A pastor, a duck farmer, a livestock auctioneer and crop farmers give other perspectives on the Seed to Feed leadership board.

Support for Seed to Feed comes from a variety of people and perspectives. But they work together to provide food to hungry people. On March 10, a local farmer nominated Seed to Feed for a grant from Monsanto, a Fortune 500 seed company. As a result, Seed to Feed received \$2,500.

Seed to Feed has also received a variety of heirloom seed donations, which have been passed down for generations. Although they are known for smaller yields, the seeds are held in high regard because they have fruits with more flavor and are better adapted to local growing conditions.

Jantzen’s assignment with Seed to Feed has not only impacted the community but also affected her own life. “[By caring for both people and creation] this placement has been a good way for me to live out my own faith,” she says.

Her MVS experience taught her how to live in community and disagree respectfully. While families often share a set of assumptions or a similar culture, MVS participants bring a wide variety of backgrounds to their unit. For example, some may expect the MVS unit to eat together once a week; others assume they will eat together each day. But despite differing expectations, MVS workers are committed to living together as a community.

“My two years with MVS have expanded my view on a lot of things,” says Jantzen. “I’ve learned that perspective is incredibly important—knowing my own and understanding that of others. People with different perspectives can wind up with the same end goal ... and work together to make Seed to Feed a success.”—*Kelsey Hochstetler of Mennonite Mission Network*

# Mennonites in Burkina Faso grow by 12 percent

## Growth of the church occurs in a heavily Muslim context.

Recent baptisms have swelled the membership of Eglise Evangélique Mennonite du Burkina Faso (Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso) by more than 12 percent.

Siaka Traoré, national president of the Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso, was surprised and pleased when he learned about the large number of baptismal candidates this year.

“I cannot explain [this wave of interest, other than to say] that I believe God wants to grow the church,” Traoré said.

In the three Sundays surrounding Easter, 63 new Mennonites joined five different congregations in Burkina Faso. The national church had a membership of about 500 at the beginning of 2014, with 44 of these members baptized in the weeks around Christmas.

Because of a shortage of pastors in these rapidly blossoming congregations, baptisms are often scheduled to coincide with special events—holidays or ordinations—that bring church leaders from more densely populated areas to village churches that don’t have their own pastors.

**Baptism by immersion** has special significance during the Easter season, as believers act out their desire to follow Jesus’ example to die to the world’s standards. Emerging from the water, they rise into newness of life.

“I wanted to identify with Jesus in his death and resurrection as I abandoned my old life and begin to live a new life,” Lydie Yougbaré said after her Easter Day baptism in the city of Bobo Dioulasso. “When I came out of the water, I felt

light, like all my burdens had slipped off.”

According to Burkina Faso’s most recent government census (2006), more than 60 percent of the population practices Islam, and 4 percent belong to a Protestant denomination.

**In a context where Muslims** make up the majority of the population, the decision to be baptized is not to be taken lightly, as it may result in derision and even persecution. Traoré said he rejoices when people count the cost and still want to be baptized into the Mennonite church.

“[Those who choose baptism] are people fully conscious of what they want,” Traoré said. “Praise the Lord for faithful work and witness over years in each of the locations that have laid the groundwork for these decisions for Christ.”

Preparation for baptism usually takes place over a three-month period and includes basic Bible knowledge, an understanding of church life and instruction in evangelism, ethics, practical aspects of Christian living and Mennonite history.

The church is in the process of standardizing a curriculum for baptismal candidates. Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Church Canada Witness, and Comité de Mission Mennonite Français (French Mennonite Mission Committee) work with the Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso through a partnership council.—*Lynda Hollinger-Janzen for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission/Mennonite Mission Network*



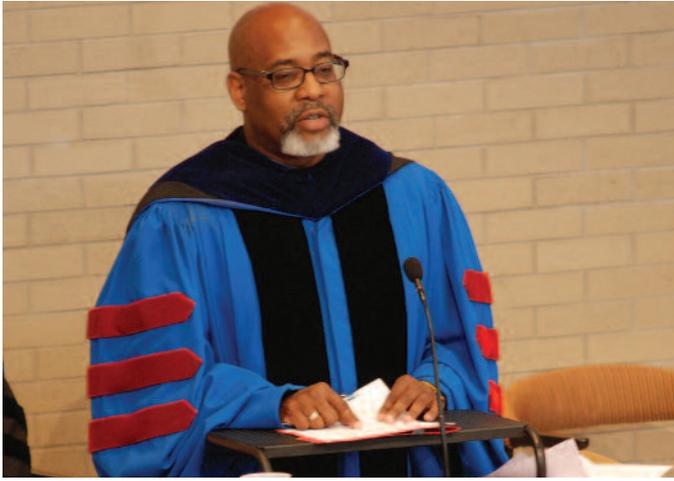
Frank Nakanabo

Lydie Yougbaré emerges from her baptism and into the fellowship of the Bobo Dioulasso congregation of Eglise Evangélique Mennonite du Burkina Faso (Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso).

# AMBS graduates 35, representing seven nations

**Graduates encouraged to take love and lessons into the world.**

Mary Klassen



James Logan, associate professor at Earlham College, Richmond, Ind., spoke at the AMBS graduation.

**T**hirty-five graduates of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) were reminded of “the simple yet not so simple four-letter word: love” by speaker James Logan at the commencement service on May 24 at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

Logan, associate professor at Earlham College, Richmond, Ind., affirmed the ways graduates are already involved in ministries of meeting needs. He reminded them that even in the midst of all the challenges in their lives and work, “the power of Christian love will seek to find a way to break through to a new and better place, where peace, justice, grace and mercy will dance out loud—or so we hope.”

Naming ways the world needs the love and contributions of the graduates, Logan pointed to violence and conflict; children dying because of malnutrition, lack of water and substandard medical care; black and Hispanic men incarcerated because of racial injustice and how consumerism and “me-ism” seem to be the highest measure of what it means to be human.

**As you go into the world** looking for your kind of Christian love—a “refusing-to-give-up-on-one-another-and-the-world kind of love, take the complicated lessons you learned at AMBS with you,” Logan said.

Make sure you go forward wrapped in Christian love “with a wise mixture of toughness, gentleness, joy, courage, prudence, temperance, humility, mercy and a very, very difficult peaceableness,” he added.

The supreme example, Logan said, is Jesus: “aching and suffering love for the very humanity that nailed him to and then hung him from a cross.” Real Christian love must not be an escape, he added; “real Christian love is an entry into

the needs of the present, sharing in its suffering, its needs and activities, and its hope.”

Logan is associate professor of religion and associate professor and director of African and African-American studies. He holds an M.A. in theology and ethics from AMBS and a Ph.D. in religion and society from Princeton Seminary.

**First Corinthians 13** was read in four languages represented among the graduates. Martin Navarro read in Spanish, Chaiya Hadtasunsern in Thai, Theo Odhiambo in Swahili and Lydia Nofziger in English.

Sixteen graduates received the Master of Divinity degree, representing three years of study, and three earned the Master of Arts: Peace Studies; two the Master of Arts: Theological Studies and two the Master of Arts in Christian Formation. Certificates representing one year of study were presented to 11 students, and one student completed the AMBS–Great Plains Foundation Program of Study.

Six graduates are from Canada, one of them originally from Korea, another living in Germany. One graduate is living in Korea, another in Paraguay; one each is from Tanzania and Thailand.—*Mary Klassen of AMBS*



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# Bethel College graduates 105

## Schrag reminds graduates of 'valuable grain' gleaned from a Bethel education

Bethel College's Class of 2014 may be among the rare few who actually remember the commencement address. That's for at least two reasons: It may have been the shortest ever and it was all in rhyme.

Commencement speaker Dale Schrag, who retires at the end of June after 30 years at Bethel, most recently as campus pastor and director of church relations, is known to the campus community for many things.

One that the Concert Choir looks forward to almost every year is a recap of the spring break choir tour done completely in rhyme. Schrag decided to do the same with his commencement address, "Always be a Thresher."

Schrag began his address on May 18 thus:

"Commencement, we would all agree, / Is a very special time. / But commencement addresses can sometimes be deadly, / So I'll try to make this one rhyme.

"I'll admit it's a different way to proceed— / Perhaps a rhetorical trick. / But I'm simply trying to do my best / To make these brief comments stick."

Schrag went on to consider the Bethel College mascot, the Thresher, noting that "the special thing about threshers is they separate wheat from chaff" and then expanding on the wheat metaphor.

**Valuable wheat**, Schrag said, can be found within Bethel's four core values of discipleship, scholarship, service and integrity. The latter, he said, is not only a matter of "character and conscience" but also of integration. "Life is not fragmented, ... so integrate your faith and learning into a consistent whole.

"There's a ton of cultural chaff out there," Schrag said. "Constantly search for life-giving grain: Always be a Thresher."

"I know this speech was very short, / But I've said what I intended," Schrag concluded (the address clocked in at about 7½ minutes). "We're kind of sad to see you go. / As a class you've been just splendid.

"Know that in your time with us/You were a special gift. / And now as you are graduates/Our relationship will shift.

"But connected we will all remain— / A community somehow,/Because, you see, through thick and thin, / We're all true Threshers now!"

Brad Born, vice president for academic affairs, noted that 83 of the 105 graduates are from Kansas—along with one from Mexico, one from Peru by way of Colorado, and one from Brazil by way of Kansas. At least seven are following a long-standing Bethel tradition of taking voluntary service assignments starting within the next several months.

Born presented the 2014 Ralph P. Schrag Distinguished Teaching Award to Allen Jantz, professor of education.

Jantz has an undergraduate degree in mathematical sciences from Bethel College. He earned a master's degree in educational administration and supervision and a Ph.D. in educational leadership from Wichita (Kan.) State University. Jantz joined the Bethel faculty in 1996 and has led the Bethel teacher education program for 18 years.

**At the baccalaureate service** earlier in the day, three graduating seniors and one parent reflected on the impact Bethel College had had on them.

Martin Olson, Denver, said, "The faith my time here has given me is love," he concluded. "Always love."

Katie Regier, Whitewater, Kan., said, "Bethel has impacted my faith [through] this community and this kind of love [which] is not ordinary. I pray that we [the Class of 2014] can set examples of faith like those we've been given and pay it forward into the future."

Rosa Barrera, administrative assistant to the Bethel president, has worked at the college all four years her son Danny was a student. They each gave their perspectives on being at Bethel with the other.

"I am excited to see what God has in store for me and all of us for the years to come," Danny said.

"Parents," Rosa said, "it is time for us to turn the wheel over to our fine, educated young daughters and sons, because the world awaits them.

"Graduates, when in doubt and confusion about your purpose, may God light your way and give you peace in his plan for you. May ... the gifts you have received in your studies ... become a source of inspiration and blessing for the world."—*Melanie Zuercher of Bethel College*



Veda Sieder

Stephanie Shogren, Hesston, Kan., shakes hands with President Perry D. White. Behind her are Samantha Sheridan of Newton, Kan., and San Diego, Calif., and Casey Schunn, Whitewater, Kan.

# Goshen students' quick response helps save a life

**On a class trip, an unexpected layover became a life-saving opportunity.**

Photo provided



Goshen College students Julianna Tennefoss (left) and Molly Malone (right) put their CPR skills to use in the Munich Airport during a May term trip.

Somewhere in the world, there is a man who owes his life in part to Goshen (Ind.) College students. Call it a coincidence, call it fate or call it divine intervention. Whatever you call it, the students were fortunately in the right place at the right time.

On May 1, not long into the second leg of their flight to Thessaloniki, Greece, for a May term class to study the Apostle Paul and the ancient church, a flight carrying 30 Goshen students and faculty made an emergency landing due to a technical issue.

The students and other passengers disembarked in Munich, Germany, and learned that a cracked windshield was responsible for their unplanned stopover.

Frustrated and jet-lagged, the group gathered in the terminal, gearing up for a long layover until the next available flight to Greece.

As the group settled in and looked for food and free Wi-Fi, a Goshen student noticed that a man nearby had collapsed.

He was sprawled in the middle of the terminal, his body lying across his shoulder bag. It appeared he had not been breathing for a while.

“As he was motionless on the floor of the airport I could tell he was in bad shape,” says Seth Conley, assistant professor of communication and a co-leader of the class. “I saw that his face was beyond blue, it was deathly gray and still. One or two people stood and stared down at him but really didn’t appear to know how to help.”

“Another man who spoke only a little English tried to find a pulse in his neck and said to me, ‘It’s done,’ then he walked on,” Conley says.

### **But it wasn’t done.**

Panicked, Conley ran around the corner to a group of Goshen students who had just sat down to eat lunch, asking if they knew CPR.

Molly Malone and Julianna Tennefoss, both education majors who had completed CPR training, jumped up to help.

“They appeared fearless,” Conley says.

Malone, a 2014 graduate from South Bend, Ind., and Tennefoss, a senior from Greenwood, Del., ran around the corner to the spot where the man lay, lifeless.

“It was like my body automatically kicked into gear,” Tennefoss says. “I felt a sense of urgency but in the moment also a sense of calm. When we reached the man, I remember looking into his face and feeling my heart sink.”

Malone began compressions, and Tennefoss called for an AED machine. A third student, Brett Conrad, had noticed one in the airport earlier and sprinted to grab it.

“While I was getting food, I saw the AED machine and thought, Those seem handy; we should have more of them. It was a really lucky thought,” says Conrad, a senior from Lakewood, Colo.

The three, accompanied by an airline worker at this point, continued compressions and attached the AED shock pads to the man’s body. The machine required 30 seconds to get an accurate read on his heart.

“It was the longest 30 seconds I’ve ever experienced,” Tennefoss says. “As we waited, I looked into his face for any response and was drawn in by the blank look in his eyes. Suddenly, life seemed so fragile that all I wanted to do was get on the plane, go home and hug everyone I loved.”

The AED machine did not receive any response from his heart, so they delivered a shock. The man coughed and took three quivering breaths, then fell silent again. The students continued performing CPR.

“The next thing I remember was Brett pulling me back as the paramedics ran in to work, then sitting back at the table where we were eating, listening to the paramedics work on the man,” Malone says.

**The paramedics took over chest compressions.** They worked feverishly to get the man’s heart restarted.

Eventually, they carted him down the terminal and to a hospital. The students were told that the man was alive and talking to paramedics when he was taken away.

“Nobody knew how long he had been down; I don’t know how long we had been doing compressions before the paramedics came,” Malone says. “Nobody knew a whole lot other than that man had been blue, lying on a floor, dead. It still feels completely unreal.”

As the group went back to waiting for a flight, Conley couldn’t help but wonder if there was a reason the group ended up in Munich.

“Did God allow us to be diverted to give this man a chance at life? Did God allow our Goshen College education majors trained in CPR to be there at that place and that exact moment for that purpose?”—*Brian Yoder Schlabach of Goshen College*

## Church purchases *Shine On: A Story Bible* for every child

***Story Bible* is a basic tool in the new *Shine* children’s curriculum.**

**H**arrisonburg (Va.) Mennonite Church has purchased 80 copies of *Shine On: A Story Bible*—the largest order to date of the new multiculturally illustrated children’s Bible story book—to give to each child in their congregation in kindergarten through grade 5.

Harrisonburg Mennonite has been the third largest user in North America of children’s Sunday school materials jointly produced by MennoMedia and Brethren Press. It is also one of the biggest supporters for the new *Shine* curriculum development campaign, having contributed \$5,000 toward the costs that accrue before any sales begin.

Lenora Bell, head of children’s ministries at Harrisonburg Mennonite, says the congregation traditionally uses MennoMedia/Brethren Press curriculum, even though she’s tested materials from other publishers and denominations: “We find that our denominational material best follows the statement of purpose put together by our own Sunday school superintendents, teachers and staff.” She says that using a curriculum that teaches children “about our understanding of faith week after week matters to us.”

Bell notes that they like how over a three-year period, “this curriculum will cover important characters and stories from Genesis to Revelation, not just the familiar stories that we see in other curricula on the market.” She says they feel that the educational principles used in past curricula have successfully helped children reflect on society from a Christian perspective in different ways at each age level.

“We are looking forward to using the new story Bible over a three-year period so that children can see how stories from the Old and New Testament fall into place,” says Bell.

“The Sunday school superintendents and I are still trying to decide how we will present the story Bibles to the children,” Bell says. “But for now, they are stacked on a lobby display and building lots of excitement among the children.”

Teachers will use *Shine On: A Story Bible* to tell the weekly story in the classroom, and children will be able to reread and page through their story Bibles at home with their families and on their own.

“This is an outstanding take-home connection unlike we’ve seen in the past. We are tech savvy, but I believe our

families need access to a book of this nature,” Bell says.

Bell also stresses the role that teachers play in nurturing faith formation. “Teachers frequently have limited amounts of time to prepare, and our denominational curriculum provides teacher training, prayers, encouragement and activities for children’s different learning styles,” she says. But teachers can also come up with their own ideas to use in the flexible curricula.

*Shine On: A Story Bible* retails for \$24.99. Free shipping is available on orders of three cartons or more, equal to 42 or more books. See [www.MennoMedia.org](http://www.MennoMedia.org) or call 800-245-7894.—*MennoMedia*

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## Taking Sister Care 'home' to Puerto Rico

**Carolyn Heggen and Elizabeth Soto-Albrecht lead seminar where they grew up.**

Carolyn Heggen



Maureen Mehne, left, and Angie Ortiz Diaz, right, practice a ritual of compassion for our wounds.

Coming full circle leaves powerful impressions. This was certainly the case when Carolyn Heggen and Elizabeth Soto-Albrecht co-led the Mennonite Women USA Sister Care seminar March 21-22 in Puerto Rico.

Heggen spent her formative years as a girl in Puerto Rico, the island where her American parents met while they were serving with different Anabaptist mission organizations. Soto-Albrecht was born in Puerto Rico, came to live in the United States when she was a baby and returned to the island as a 12-year-old. After receiving a degree at the University of Puerto Rico, she started at Seminario Evangelico de Puerto Rico, then transferred and finished her degree at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

**Heggen lived and worked in Puerto Rico** post-college. A friend and classmate from her middle school years, Eileen Rolon, was the local organizer of the event, and her assistant, Mim Godshall, was another friend of Heggen's.

Soto-Albrecht, too, felt the love and welcome from the friends and leaders who helped form her leadership. She was reminded during the seminar of the significance around her home church's trust in her as a young woman, sponsoring her attendance at seminary when that was not a typical avenue for young women to take at the time. "My overwhelming impression after revisiting these women is that we cannot afford to leave young leaders behind. We need to give them space for their leadership to develop. There is both a lack of women and young people as leaders in the churches of Puerto Rico, and I'd like to see that change," she said.

In Puerto Rico the recurring theme the women shared both with the large group and privately with Soto-Albrecht and Heggen centered on loss: the loss of family members leaving the island to find economic footing in the United States, the loss of loved ones dying too young and the loss of

trust in leaders of the church because of sexual exploitation, abuse and patriarchy.

**Another unexpected bridge** was strengthened between the Mennonite churches of Puerto Rico and Mennonite Church USA during this Sister Care. When Mennonite Church USA was born in 2001, the Puerto Rico Mennonite church chose not to affiliate with the larger denomination for a variety of reasons, one being the feeling that their needs and interests would be overlooked in the context of a larger organization. After this decision, the Puerto Rico Mennonite church drifted from Anabaptism and aligned more with Pentecostal traditions. After 10 years, the Puerto Rico Mennonite church decided to become an associate member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Women leaders from the Puerto Rico Mennonite churches expressed gratitude for the Sister Care manual. They reported they have never had Mennonite resources specifically for women in their congregations.

Participants' educational spread spanned from low literacy to sophisticated government employees. Heggen said: "What continues to amaze me as we share Sister Care around the world is how well these materials are received. ... whether in a rural community like Kokomo or a bustling megacity like Kolkata, [all of us] want to feel we are precious to God, and our life matters, and someone will be there for us when life is hard and we don't know how to keep going."

Of the 10 Mennonite churches in Puerto Rico, eight sent participants for a total of 76 women. A women's group in two of the Puerto Rican churches expressed its desire to go through the manual together with others in their congregation who could not participate in the Sister Care seminar. Their insistence: they want men to be in the room, too. The women want the men in their lives to hear this work so that women from the Puerto Rico Sister Care are committed to lead workshops to co-ed groups from their churches.

During the final blessing ritual a participant said, "If nothing else had happened this whole weekend except the opportunity to participate in this blessing, it would have been worth all my time." Soto-Albrecht said: "The final ritual [showed] us how emotionally heavy their hearts were. You can see it in their faces when we're leading ... you can see how this material is touching them and working in them."

There are several upcoming Sister Care International seminars where co-presenters Heggen and Rhoda Keener will share Sister Care: in August they'll present in Paraguay and Argentina; in October they'll lead in Ontario, and in November they'll present it in Trinidad. Heggen and Soto-Albrecht will co-lead Sister Care in Cuba in November as well. —*Claire DeBerg of Mennonite Women USA*

# MCC helps respond to flooding in the Balkans

**Partners in Bosnia and Serbia and Herzegovina work on an emergency response.**



Davor Majstorović, left, coordinator of the Trauma Centre at Mennonite Central Committee partner Bread of St. Anthony, with Miriam Regier, a SALT volunteer placed with Bread of St. Anthony in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**W**hen three months of rain fell in only three days in mid-May and caused severe flooding, Serbia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina declared states of emergency, and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) quickly began working on its disaster response.

More than 40 people have died, hundreds are injured and hundreds of thousands more were forced to evacuate. With the displacement and lack of access to water and electricity, more than 3 million people have been affected.

“This is all very stressful, and people are extremely frustrated since the water is still decreasing very slowly,” said Davor Majstorović on May 26. As coordinator of the Trauma Centre at Bread of St. Anthony, an MCC partner, he added, “Water surrounding houses is also very dirty and poses a direct threat to health.”

The United Nations has identified water, sanitation and hygiene items as high priorities, as well as food for children under 5 years old in displaced families.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, MCC is providing funds for a one-time distribution of food and water purification supplies to 5,000 people affected by flooding in Sarajevo. In north-eastern Bosnia, 400 children under 3 years old will receive baby food, baby bottles and clean water. MCC is also sending containers of blankets, dried soup mix, hygiene kits, relief kits, infant care kits and school kits. MCC partners Merhamet and Bread of St. Anthony will distribute the supplies.

In Serbia, MCC partner Bread of Life Belgrade is providing 100 displaced families with emergency food packages as

well as 100 baby supplies with food and diapers to children under 3 years old.

**In addition to food and water concerns**, landslides in Bosnia and Herzegovina have dislodged land mines from the civil war in the 1990s. Furthermore, many warning signs around the minefields have been washed away.

The fact that “there have already been victims in this past week from landmine detonation is a sad reminder of the remains of war still in the region,” said Ruth Plett, one of MCC’s representatives for East Europe. “It is difficult to consider all those now affected, many of whom experienced war and trauma within their lifetimes, now experiencing trauma, again, due to this disaster.” Plett and her spouse, Krystan Pawlikowski, also an MCC representative, are from Kitchener, Ont.

People may give at [donate.mcc.org/project/balkans-flooding](https://donate.mcc.org/project/balkans-flooding), call 888-563-4676 or send donations to MCC U.S., 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501, specifying “Balkans Flooding.”

MCC also requests hygiene kits, [mcc.org/kits/hygiene](https://mcc.org/kits/hygiene), and relief kits, [mcc.org/kits/relief](https://mcc.org/kits/relief).—*Emily Loewen of MCC Canada*

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# Celebration marks change at AMBS Great Plains

## AMBS–Kansas Center to announce new coordinator soon

Veda Snider



Former directors of the Great Plains Conference-based Theological Education program joined those who celebrated the closing-yet-ongoing celebration of the AMBS extension site: Floyd Bartel, Jacob T. Friesen and Dorothea (Dotty) Janzen.

To deal with the winds of change, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is closing its Great Plains Extension in North Newton, Kan. It is being replaced by options that are responding to the needs of today's theological students and to fresh breezes of the Spirit, according to Sara Wenger Shenk, AMBS president.

In a "closing yet ongoing" celebration, the AMBS community gathered June 1 at Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton for a worship service and reception. Current and past administrators, professors and students and other guests marked the transition with reflections, responsive Scripture readings, hymn-singing and special music.

The celebration marked the birth of the Great Plains Seminary Education Program in 1980. Wenger Shenk and Rebecca Slough, AMBS academic dean, called the reconfiguration of AMBS–Great Plains into AMBS–Kansas Center a time for renewal rather than regret.

The change, fueled in part by declining enrollment, is replacing a full roster of on-site courses each semester with the offering of just one class each semester. This is in conjunction with the main AMBS campus in Elkhart, Ind., offering new online and hybrid course options.

The process of training leaders for God's reconciling mission is changing, said AMBS–Great Plains interim director Dorothy Nickel Friesen. Her charge was to conduct an in-depth assessment of the extension site during the last six months of 2013.

"In the late 1970s, there were no graduate theological centers of training within miles of central Kansas, which made an extension site a great idea," she said in a late May interview. "In 2014, a graduate education in theology is available at anyone's computer and is offered at many other centers close by."

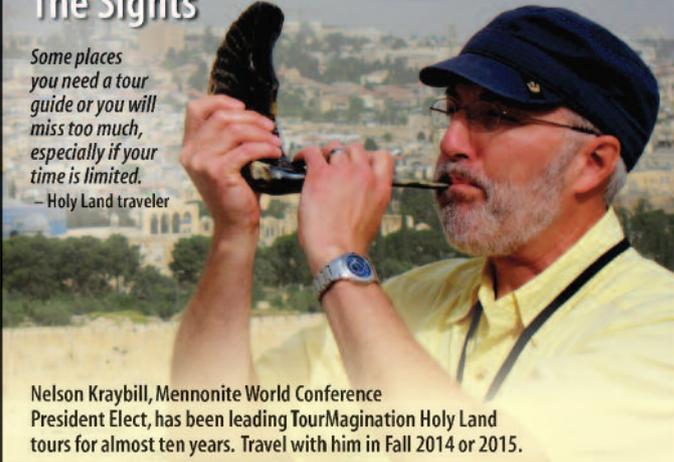
Slough helped honor many who have been part of the conference-based and seminary extension program in central Kansas. Eighty-two professors taught at least one course through the 34-year history, Slough said, including five core adjunct faculty members: Duane Friesen, Keith Harder, Patty Shelly, Cynthia Neufeld Smith and Jerry Truex. Thirty-eight people served on the advisory board for AMBS–Great Plains. Marlene Faul gave administrative support for more than nine years and Lois Barrett served as director of the extension site from 2002 until 2013.

Members of the administrative team for AMBS–Kansas Center and the coordinator will be announced soon. For more information about courses and other offerings go to [www.ambs.edu/kansascenter](http://www.ambs.edu/kansascenter).—Laurie Oswald Robinson for AMBS

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# MCC helps prepare young Gazan leaders

**Youth in Gaza develop their leadership skills and strengthen their education.**

**T**welve-year-old Siraa Moghrabi crouches beside student after student, helping the 6- and 7-year-olds and their mothers arrange flowers on their art projects. Moghrabi dreams of being a teacher some day and in many ways is already becoming one.

Moghrabi is growing in her understanding of what it means to be a leader through experience and also through leadership training. “Leadership means feeling responsible, to be confident, to be brave, to think creatively,” she says.

Moghrabi is a leader at Shoroq wa-Amal (Sunrise and Hope) Children’s Center of the Culture and Free Thought Association in the Gaza Strip. A Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner, CFTA operates three centers that run arts, drama, education, sports and other programs.

**Leadership training is integrated** into the centers’ activities, which provide opportunities for learning and expression for Gazan children and their young leaders. Many children at CFTA have been traumatized by violence and bombings they have witnessed because of fighting between Israel and Gaza.

Dan Bergen, an MCC representative for Palestine and Israel, says CFTA believes the leadership program that trains youth such as Moghrabi instills a strong sense of confidence and positive interaction with peers and provides a basis for coping with the stress that accompanies those trying to live under siege. Bergen and his spouse, Joanna Hiebert Bergen, also an MCC representative, are from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Some of the youth, including Moghrabi, become leaders when their peers elect them. Others work their way up to leadership programs through CFTA’s passport program for teens ages 13-17.

At CFTA’s Bunat Al Ghad (Builders of the Future) Center, the youth can earn a passport resembling an official document. Getting a passport—even an unofficial one—is meaningful to them because few Gazans have the chance to use passports, due to border closures by Israel and Egypt.

To use their passport, the youth apply what they learn in school by planning and participating in 10 activities, including science experiments, educational workshops and even talent shows. After they earn a green passport, they can earn a blue or red passport with leadership activities.

Young leaders with green passports receive leadership skills training and participate in activities planned by administrators and other young leaders. Those with blue passports receive advanced leadership skills training and are leaders at part of the center. Those with red passports are part of the leadership committee.

**With his previous passport**, Al Masri planned a workshop for children on the negative effects of smoking. He in-

vised a doctor to speak and the children’s parents to attend. He is organizing a talent show with two other leaders. He is eager to see other children show their talents in singing, beatboxing (vocal percussion) and theater.

Walid Nabahin, monitoring and evaluating officer at CFTA, says the passport program allows the young leaders “to feel responsible, build their confidence and give back to the community. And they can have a passport like many other people in the world.”

Moghrabi isn’t a participant in the passport program; she designed her own election campaign and competed for votes from other youth. In 2011, Moghrabi’s peers elected her to be a first-time leader and in 2013 to be the primary leader of CFTA’s summer camp. She is also a leader at her school’s library and at home. She helps some of her siblings—four boys and five girls altogether—study for school in the evenings. When her mother is not home, she often dresses her kindergarten-age brother and prepares him for school.

“Being a leader at CFTA has increased my desire to be a leader in other parts of my life now and my desire to be a leader in the future,” she said.—*Sheldon C. Good of MCC*



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# Two conventions in 2015

## What you need to know about MWC assembly and Kansas City 2015

**G**et ready for a busy July in 2015. The Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, Mo., is scheduled for June 30-July 5, and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly in Harrisburg, Pa., for July 21-26. These two gatherings are only 16 days apart. Both conventions' planners hope that Mennonite Church USA members are able to attend both, but for many people a decision must be made. Here is information about the conventions to help inform your decision.

### Why are these two gathering being held so close together?

There is a lot of history behind these decisions. In 2010, when MWC made the decision to hold its assembly in the United States, Mennonite Church USA had already signed contracts to meet in Kansas City, Mo., in 2015. To withdraw from these contracts would have resulted in significant financial penalties.

At that time, leaders from Mennonite Church USA and MWC had several conversations about how to best work at facilitating two major conferences so close together. Mennonite Church USA invited MWC to think about a joint gathering. MWC leaders felt that doing so would feel exclusive to other MWC members, since Mennonite Church USA is only one of the members represented in MWC. Mennonite Church USA leaders suggested having the youth join the MWC Assembly, but it became clear that MWC would not be able to accommodate the large numbers of youth who usually attend the Mennonite Church USA convention, in addition to other assembly attendees.

Although planners are hosting two separate gatherings, Glen Guyton, director of convention planning for Mennonite Church USA, and Liesa Unger, special event coordinator for MWC, have been working together to find ways to collaborate in order to assure that both events are meaningful and well attended.—*Mennonite Church USA*

### Which one should I attend?

Both. Mennonite Church USA convention planning and MWC are working together to identify incentives, and they hope to offer discounts for individuals who are able to attend both of these summer events. MWC has stated clearly that they do not have the capacity to host a full-fledged event for youth. The Global Youth Summit, which will occur prior to the MWC Assembly, is for young adults, ages 18 and older. High school age youth will have morning activities at the MWC Assembly but will otherwise be expected to join the overall adult programming. The Mennonite Church USA

convention will continue to offer full-fledged programming for people of all ages.

### Why should I attend Kansas City 2015?

**Faith formation:** Conventions are not only a fun place to hang out with friends but also a place where lives are transformed. Each year after convention, our inboxes are full of stories from youth and adults who felt called to commit themselves to walking alongside Christ, either for the first time or again. We also hear from people who are rejuvenated and re-energized to live out their call.

**The development of Mennonite identity:** The People in the Pew study, which surveyed leaders and people across Mennonite Church USA, showed a clear correlation between attending a convention and making a commitment to being an active participant in the church. Convention is also a place where people can catch a glimpse of the diversity that exists among Mennonites in the United States.

**Networking and fellowship:** Convention is a time to meet new friends, mentors and co-workers as well as visit with old friends.

**Opportunities for learning:** At each convention, we dig deep into a theme and into Scripture, and we offer workshops that provide education and open up space for conversation around pressing issues in the church.

**Opportunity to be a part of decision-making:** Delegates play an important role, representing their congregations and participating in discussing resolutions and discerning the way forward for Mennonite Church USA.

**Interact with Mennonite Church USA agencies and colleges:** The exhibit hall at convention provides a chance to get a snapshot of the good work that agencies and educational institutions across Mennonite Church USA are doing, and to learn how to get involved.—*Mennonite Church USA*



Mennonites participated in a prayer walk at Phoenix 2013.

Lowell Brown

## Mennonite Church USA: Kansas City 2015 facts

**Will Kansas City 2015 be different from past conventions?** Although we always strive to improve convention and to include new elements, you should still expect to come to convention and experience energetic worship, meaningful and engaging seminars, delegate sessions to discuss resolutions and issues impacting the church, special events and more. We are hoping the Mennonite Church USA convention will also have a bit more of a global flavor, as we host guests from around the world who are coming to the United States to attend both our gathering and Mennonite World Conference.

**Theme:** "On the Way/En el Camino." The theme Scripture for the week is Luke 24, a passage that includes the stories of the women finding Jesus' empty tomb, the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus and Jesus' ascension and commissioning of the disciples.

**Dates:** June 30-July 5, 2015

**Location:** Kansas City, Mo., at the Kansas City Convention Center: <http://www.kccconvention.com/>

**Frequency:** Mennonite Church USA plans conventions every two years. The 2017 convention will be in Orlando, and the 2019 convention back in Kansas City.

**Registration cost:** Adults \$229; Youth \$229; Jr. Youth (includes program and full meal) \$399; Children K-5 \$150; Preschool \$130. Registration begins Jan. 15, 2015.

**Lodging:** Hotels near the Kansas City Convention Center

**Meals:** Meals will be offered at the convention center. You can find prices on the registration website.

**Youth/children events:** Kansas City 2015 will include full-fledged programming for people of all ages.

**Volunteers:** Convention planning provides three categories (coordinators, associates and daily volunteers), with differing expectations and time commitments. Some roles start many months prior to convention, while others start when you arrive at the convention. Go here for more information and to apply: <http://convention.mennoniteusa.org/registration/volunteer/>.—*Mennonite Church USA*

**The 'fake family':** In 1997, several people in another Mennonite office decided to play a joke on the registrar. The jokesters prepared a fake registration for Mennonite Church USA Convention Orlando 1997 for Pat and Lee Schmeltz.

This fake couple planned to bring their fake twins and their fake Canadian brother-in-law to convention.

The registration form had every error a registrar has ever complained about: misspellings, outlandish special requests, calculation errors, payments in foreign currency, and the list went on.

Soon after the registration form arrived in our office, the registrar got a call from Mrs. Schmeltz (i.e., one of the jokesters). (At the same time, I was on the other line with the other jokester, providing information from our office.)



Scott Hartman

Mrs. Schmeltz needed to cancel the registration for the twins because they had passed away. The registrar handled the call delicately, despite several awkward statements by Mrs. Schmeltz.

At the end of the call, Mrs. Schmeltz revealed the joke to the registrar. Everyone laughed and laughed.

Days later, a picture of the Schmeltz family showed up in our office with the twins missing. Our office sent cards of condolence to the Schmeltz family. The joke continued for several months, with pictures surfacing from gravesides and family reunions.

Eventually, other Mennonite agencies got involved in the fun.

During some of the most stressful parts of the convention planning process, we found an opportunity to have a bit of fun.—*Scott Hartman, convention planning coordinator*



From left: A woman from the Bruderhof, Janti Widjaja and Paulus Widjaja (both from Indonesia) fellowship at the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Paraguay in 2009.

### What is the Mennonite World Conference Assembly?

A reunion of the Anabaptist-Mennonite family worldwide, usually held every six years, meeting on one of the major five continents on a rotating basis. Attendees engage in fellowship, worship, service and witness.

### Who is included in Mennonite World Conference?

- 1.3 million baptized members of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches around the world. (There are a total of 1.7 million in the family, but not all are MWC members.)

- 101 national conferences (about 9,500 congregations)
- located in 57 countries
- 78 percent of baptized believers in MWC member churches are African, Asian or Latin American.

### Why should I attend?

1. Because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience worship with our global Anabaptist family on our own continent. (If the MWC Assemblies continue to be held every six years, rotating among the five major continents, it will be another 30 years before the Assembly comes back to North America.)

2. Because it is relatively inexpensive to attend, compared with the next Assembly, scheduled for 2021 in Indonesia.

3. Because it will be global and colorful, full of character, stories and inspiration, even though it is in the United States.

4. And mostly because worship with our sisters and brothers from all over the world will feed and nourish our souls and faith for years to come. This will be an experience of Jesus that we cannot fully replicate in our own congregations or denominations, a taste of heaven as we worship the Lamb of God in many languages and cultures.

5. Because all of us who are members of the Body of Christ will learn about how to be more faithful Christ-followers today, as we fellowship and worship together.

6. Because we will all be encouraged and have our hopes renewed by engaging with individuals from our global family, many of whom live in inhospitable settings.

### I'd like to be a host family. What do I do?

You can be a host family for MWC Assembly if you live within one hour or less of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex. You are responsible to give your guest(s) a bed, breakfast and transportation to and from a local shuttle bus point. Hosts will receive a small compensation for this. Planners will send out more information at a later point regarding transportation and other details as they are worked out. We anticipate that the shuttle bus meeting point will be within 15 minutes of your home and that hosts may also use these shuttle buses as space permits. Go here for an application: [www.mwc-cmm.org/article/host-family-application](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/article/host-family-application).—*Phyllis Pellman Good for Mennonite World Conference.*

—Compiled by Anna Groff

## Mennonite World Conference: Assembly 2015 facts



**Theme:** “Walking with God.” Speakers each morning and evening will work with biblical texts and our own stories and experiences of joy and grief, uncertainty and hope.

**Dates:** July 21-26, 2015, Tuesday afternoon through Sunday morning

**Location:** The Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex and Expo Center in Harrisburg, Pa. This is close to the large Pennsylvania Mennonite and Brethren in Christ (BIC) communities of Lancaster, Grantham, Chambersburg and Franconia. And it’s an easy drive from Philadelphia, central Pennsylvania and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

**Frequency:** MWC Global Assemblies are reunions of the Anabaptist-Mennonite family worldwide and take place every six years. It’s the first time the event will be held in the eastern United States in MWC’s 90-year history. The Assembly was last in the United States in 1978 in Wichita, Kan.

**Registration costs:** Registration with a full meal plan for an adult from the Global North will be roughly \$575; for participants from the Global South, roughly \$90. Family discounts and sponsorships will be available. Registration begins this August.

**Lodging:** Hotel prices are \$109-\$159/night; dorms at local colleges are \$42-45/person per night, and homes are \$25/person per night. Shuttle service will be arranged from hotels, dormitories and meeting points for home stays.

**Travel:** Harrisburg International Airport is the closest airport, but other options include Philadelphia, Baltimore/D.C. and New York. A train system connects most of these cities. Shuttle buses will be arranged from major airports to the assembly site.

**Youth events:** PA 2015 will include a children’s program. After morning singing, children will experience their own multicultural program all day, including lunch. PA 2015 will also include a youth program (ages 18 and under). After morning singing, youth will meet for their own presentations, discussions and service projects. They’ll join the adults for workshops, sports, tours, music and relaxing in the Global Church Village.

**Young adult:** An international young adult convention, the Global Youth Summit (ages 18+), will take place July 17-19, three days before PA 2015. It will be held at Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pa., just across the river from Harrisburg. Its theme is “Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts.”

**Format:** Each day will begin with singing, led by a multinational worship team, with music from all continents. Each morning, one of MWC’s four Commissions (Faith and Life, Missions, Peace and Deacons) will present, and a young adult, selected by the Young Anabaptist group, will respond. Everyone attending will join a small multicultural group of 15-20 people for fellowship and a deeper discussion on the morning theme. The same groups will continue to meet throughout the week—a great opportunity for visiting and discovering new relationships. Afternoons will be filled with workshops, service opportunities, local tours, sports activities, and performances and exhibits in the Global Church Village. Each continent will contribute to each evening worship service, which will include testimonies, singing, prayer and times of encouragement.

**Volunteer opportunity:** Volunteers are needed and sign-up went online in September 2013. Volunteers will receive a reduced rate. Go to [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org) for more information.

**How can you get updates about the Assembly?**—Go to [mwc-cmm.org/pa2015](http://mwc-cmm.org/pa2015) and [Facebook.com/MennoniteWorldConference](https://www.facebook.com/MennoniteWorldConference).

**Registration:** Opens on Aug. 20. Go to [mwc-cmm.org/pa2015](http://mwc-cmm.org/pa2015) for registration materials.

## WORKERS

**Delp, Chelsea**, was licensed as Minister of Children and Youth at East Petersburg Mennonite Church, East Petersburg, Pa., on April 27.

**Rodriguez, Bernardo**, was licensed as co-pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Valle de Jesus, Brooklyn, N.Y., on May 2.

**Rodriguez, Linda**, was licensed as co-pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Valle de Jesus, Brooklyn, N.Y., on May 2.

**Shertzer, A. Willard**, was installed as intentional interim pastor of Erb Mennonite Church, Lititz, Pa., on May 4.

## OBITUARIES

**Aeschliman, Waldo Lee**, 79, Archbold, Ohio, died June 1. Spouse: Barbara Nafziger Aeschliman. Parents: Benjamin and Mary Aeschliman. Children: Terry, Max, JoAnn Short; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: June 8 at Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold.

**Burkholder, Anna Mary**, 95, Stuarts Draft, Va., died April 29. Parents: Alpheus F. and Mary S. Berry Burkholder. Funeral: May 4 at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.

**Campbell, Eva Marie Thompson**, 69, Stuarts Draft, Va., died April 7. Spouse: Richard Campbell. Spouse: James Thompson. Parents: Theodore R. and Elsie Bryant Thompson. Children: David White, Elsie Marie White, Tammy Woodson, Reeve White, Lori Ann Almond, Donnie Dalton, Richard Lee Campbell. Funeral: April 11 at Augusta Memorial Park, Waynesboro, Va.

**Friesen, Susanne M.**, 79, Goshen, Ind., died May 22. Parents: Adolf and Susie Unrau Friesen. Funeral: May 27 at Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen.

**Good, Lila Esther Birky**, 93, Kouts, Ind., and Sarasota, Fla., died Feb. 28. Spouse: Wilmer Martin Good (deceased). Parents: Jonas and Elizabeth Schantz Birky. Children: Ronald, Shirley Good, Mark, Steven, Arlan; eight grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 5 at Hopewell Mennonite Church, Kouts. Memorial service: April 28 at Bahia Vista Mennonite Church, Sarasota.

**Hershey, Paul Burkhardt**, 81, Harrisonburg, Va., died May 20. Spouse: Mary Elaine Moore Hershey. Parents: John K. and Anna Ruth Burkhardt Hershey. Children: Debra Bontrager, Sandra Kauffman, Beth Reigner; eight grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 26 at Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Blooming Glen, Pa.

**Hofer, Sarah Mendel**, 84, Freeman, S.D., died April 13. Spouse: LeRoy D. Hofer. Parents: Jacob H. and Sarah Wollman Mendel. Children: Carlos, Bruce, Geraldina Palumbo, Stanley; eight grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 19 at Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman.

**Huber, Daniel Arthur**, 95, Harrisonburg, Va., died April 13. Spouse: Ella Coffman Huber. Spouse: Welby Mae Harner Huber (deceased). Parents: Joseph E. and Emma L. Burkholder Huber. Children: Randal Lee, Kathryn Sue Huber, Larry Duane; five grandchildren; four step-grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 18 at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.

**Landis, Roy S.**, 76, Blooming Glen, Pa., died May 29. Spouse: Joan Y. Derstine Landis. Parents: Ephraim and Mamie Stover Landis. Children: Cynthia Mast, Michael; two grandchildren. Funeral: June 8 at Blooming Glen Mennonite Church.

**Lapp, Ben F.**, 82, Watsontown, Pa., died May 23, of a stroke. Spouse: Geraldine A. Derstine Lapp. Parents: Henry S. and Katie Lapp. Children: Karen Bowman, Joyce Lawler, Phil, Steven, Elaine Esch, Mark; 12 grandchildren. Funeral: May 26 at Community Mennonite Fellowship, Milton, Pa.



**Loepp, Franzie L.**, 74, of Normal, Ill., passed away surrounded by family on May 18 at OSF Richard L. Owens Hospice Home in Peoria, Ill. Franzie was born June 17, 1939,

in Liberal, Kan., a son to Franzie P. and Leona Dirks Loepp. He married Dorothy Harms at the Grace Hill Mennonite Church in Whitewater KS, on May 29, 1961. He is survived by his wife Dorothy (Harms) Loepp of Normal, his mother Leona (Dirks) Loepp of Liberal KS, his son Leroy Loepp of Normal, his daughter Susan Loepp of Williamstown MA, and his brother Dennis and wife Dori Loepp of Turpin Okla. Franzie was preceded in death by his father Franzie P. Loepp. Franzie earned his doctorate degree from the University of Northern Colorado, and joined the Department of Industrial Technology at Illinois State University in 1970. He enjoyed teaching introductory level laboratory courses, educational methods classes, and he loved supervising student teachers. His research focused on curriculum development for integrated science, mathematics and technology in middle schools, and was funded in part with grants from the Illinois Department of Education and the National

**For the Record** is available to members of Mennonite Church USA. Births and marriages appear online at [www.themennonite.org](http://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](http://www.themennonite.org) and use the "For the Record" button for online forms. You may also submit information by email, fax or mail: [Editor@TheMennonite.org](mailto:Editor@TheMennonite.org); fax 316-283-0454; 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517.

Science Foundation. He went on to serve as the chairperson of the Industrial Technology Department for six years (1990-1996) and then as Director of the Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology until his retirement in 2003 as a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Illinois State University. Franzie was devoted to helping others. He was an active member of Mennonite Church of Normal, where he played a vital role in the actual construction of the building in 1980. He gave leadership in many situations involving volunteers, and was known for his gift of bringing out the best in others. He volunteered twice weekly with Habitat for Humanity, and served on many Mennonite Disaster Service project sites, where he helped to repair and rebuild homes damaged by natural disasters. Franzie took a keen interest in the well-being of the wider Mennonite Church, most recently serving as a board member of the Mennonite Education Agency. In his spare time, he loved to bike and to work in his shop on woodworking projects. Funeral services were held June 2 at Mennonite Church of Normal, Normal, Ill.

**Musselman, Kathryn Y. Erb, 85,** Harleysville, Pa., died May 6. Spouse: Harold H. Musselman (deceased). Parents: Linford and Katie Young Erb. Children: Susan Moyer, David, Laurie Mason, H. Brent; 12 grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 10 at Salford Mennonite Church, Harleysville.

**Noll, Verna M. Good, 79,** Manheim, Pa., died April 27. Spouse: Grant G. Noll (deceased). Parents: Paul B. and Elsie Halde-man Good. Children: Beth A. Lehman, Grant Christopher; five grandchildren. Funeral: May 1 at Pleasant View Retirement Community, Manheim.

**Stogdale, Anne Jacqueline Yancey, 85,** Waynesboro, Va., died March 16. Spouse: William W. Stogdale (deceased). Parents: John and Maggie Yancey. Children: John William, Michael Ray; three grandchildren. Funeral: March 22 at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro.

**Summers, Ida M. Arment Stoltzfus, 92,** Gap, Pa., died May 6, of heart failure. Spouse: Leon Summers (deceased). Spouse: Steven K. Stoltzfus (deceased). Parents: Ralph and Lizzie Martin Arment. Children: Anna Mary Boettger, Jean Hoover, Rosella Coblentz, Galen Stoltzfus, Steven Stoltzfus, Virginia Ann Stoltzfus; step-children: Leon Summers, Jr., Nevin Summers, Cathy Miller, Nancy Garris; 13 grandchildren; eight step-grandchildren; 38 great-grandchildren; one step-great-grandchild; two great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 10 at Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Atglen, Pa.

**Unruh, Douglas LaMonte, 59,** Perryton, Texas, died March 27. Spouse: Patsy King Unruh. Parents: Eli and Marge Holdeman Unruh. Children: Monte, Lisa Beun, C.J. Byler; four grandchildren. Funeral: April 1 at Perryton Mennonite Church.

**Yoder, Hobert D., 81,** Iowa City, Iowa, died April 27. Spouse: Lois Yoder Yoder. Parents: Ray A. and Kathryn P. Miller Yoder. Children: Libby Hochstetler, DeVon; four grandchildren. Funeral: May 10 at First Mennonite Church, Iowa City.

**Yoder, Mary Schrock, 74,** Middlebury, Ind., died May 10. Spouse: Ray Yoder. Parents: David and Mattie Schrock. Children: Laurie Mast, Len; two grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 13 at Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa, Ind.



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**Bethany Christian Schools**, Goshen, Ind., is seeking a **head of school** to lead a private Christian school that provides Christian education to about 280 students in grades 4-12. Bethany Christian Schools is a dynamic learning community that integrates faith development with academic excellence. Grounded in Mennonite values, Bethany equips students for Christian discipleship in the church and around the world. Qualified candidates must have prior experience in school administration and organizational leadership, preferably in a senior administrative position, with church school experience. A master's degree in education from an accredited college or university is required. The candidate must have or be able to obtain an Indiana Building Level Administrator License prior to starting this job. Qualified candidates must possess proven skills in leading educational institutions while exhibiting a passion for entrepreneurial pedagogy and administration. The candidate must have a mature, growing commitment to Jesus Christ. The candidate must be a contributing participant in the mission of their congregation and must have a commitment to Anabaptist-Mennonite belief and practice. Cover letter and resume may be sent to: Kirk Stiffney, 1114 N. Main St., Goshen, IN 46528; 574-537-8736; [Kirk@stiffneygroup.com](mailto:Kirk@stiffneygroup.com).

**East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church** seeks **full-time associate pastor**. Our 162-member congregation in Lancaster City, Pa., attracts children, youth, young adults, adults, families and seniors. Members are involved in our neighborhood, Lancaster County Council of Churches, Lancaster Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite World Conference. Many of us serve in business, church agencies and various professions. Our congregation seeks to be transformed by God's mercy, grace and love; to introduce our children and neighbors to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to equip one another to live peaceably and generously and to contribute to the well-being of Lancaster City and the wider world. We seek an associate pastor to provide spiritual leadership for our children, youth and young adult ministries, to help us to connect with our surrounding neighborhood and community, to provide pastoral care, to preach monthly and to nurture a personal relationship with God. The ideal candidate for this position will have an Anabaptist perspective, seminary degree and, preferably, congregational leadership experience. For information, please contact search committee chair Harley Kooker ([hmkooker1@epix.net](mailto:hmkooker1@epix.net)) or Lancaster District Overseer and search committee member Jason Kuniholm ([jkuniholm@gmail.com](mailto:jkuniholm@gmail.com)).

The Mennonite Church of Argentina invites U.S. congregations to explore a new **mission partnership with the congregations in Buenos Aires**, in the central region of Argentina. **Mennonite Mission Network** invites interested congregations to contact [Partnership@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:Partnership@MennoniteMission.net) or call Dean Heisey at 866-866-2872, ext. 23085 (toll-free, direct).

**Calling all artists. Greencroft Goshen** is requesting proposals from artists (any medium) who would suggest ways to use art to honor two sets of donors on the Greencroft Goshen campus. Budget is up to \$20,000. Deadline for RFPs is Aug. 1. One donor recognition piece would have the names of 90 donors but would need to be expandable. A second donor recognition piece would be static (permanent) with 460 names. For the complete specs on these projects, contact [JimN@greencroft.org](mailto:JimN@greencroft.org).

Explore God's love with the new **Shine Sunday school curriculum!** *Shine: Living in God's Light* has engaging stories and activities that will teach children the Bible, understand that they are known and loved by God, and learn what it means to follow Jesus. Find sample sessions, Bible outlines and more at [www.shinecurriculum.com](http://www.shinecurriculum.com).

**Mennonite Central Committee** leadership openings in Latin America/Caribbean: **area director for Central America/Haiti** and **MCC Haiti representative**. Resume and letter of intent due Aug. 15, 2014. More information at [serve.mcc.org](http://serve.mcc.org) or 717-859-1151.

**Eastern Mennonite University** is seeking applicants for the following positions:

A **full-time director of career services** in the department of Student Life. The director of career services provides leadership and direction to a comprehensive career-development program that includes but is not limited to: career counseling for choosing/changing majors and alumni career changers; assistance with resumes, cover letters, interview preparation; searching for jobs/internships/service opportunities; graduate school preparation; programming; online resources; classroom workshops, selected career and academic testing services. Experience in providing career counseling and services for a collegiate and/or scholastic population or equivalent; skills in interpersonal and group communication; evidence of knowledge of college student development; and administrative competence. Master's degree required. Must be committed to and supportive of the mission and policies of Eastern Mennonite University. Start date around July 15. Submit application, curriculum vitae and three references to: Dr. Ken L. Nafziger, VP for Student Life, 1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, [stulifeseach@emu.edu](mailto:stulifeseach@emu.edu). For more information visit our website at [www.emu.edu/humanresources](http://www.emu.edu/humanresources). Persons who bring diversity are encouraged to apply. EOE.

An **associate provost** to provide leadership for academic programming at its Lancaster, Pa., instructional site. EMU at Lancaster

offers an MA in education, an M.Div. program in pastoral studies, an RN-BSN degree-completion program in nursing, several certificate programs and an array of undergraduate general education courses. The associate provost will be responsible for overseeing the marketing and delivery of the various EMU at Lancaster programs. He/she will also provide strategic leadership for growing current programs and developing new programs. The associate provost will supervise a director of operations, a marketing associate and administrative staff. He/she will provide coordination and oversight of academic program directors in collaboration with the respective academic deans on EMU's main campus in Harrisonburg, Va. We seek candidates with successful academic and administrative leadership experience at the university level, knowledge of the Pennsylvania context and constituents, affinity with the Mennonite faith tradition, and commitment to the mission of Mennonite/Anabaptist higher education as practiced at Eastern Mennonite University. A Ph.D. or other relevant terminal degree is highly preferred. Applications will be considered beginning June 15 and continue until the position is filled. Applicants should submit a letter of application, a short narrative statement of vision for EMU at Lancaster programs, a current CV and a list of references. Submit materials electronically to Dr. Fred Kniss, Provost, at provost@emu.edu. Eastern Mennonite University is an equal opportunity employer, committed to enhancing diversity across the institution.

A **lab coordinator** in the Department of Biology/Chemistry. Primary responsibilities of the lab manager are to oversee technical work in the science laboratories, primarily related to class-associated laboratory activities. Activities include setup and cleanup of class exercises, equipment maintenance, and keeping supplies well stocked, and other laboratory curricular needs. The laboratory manager recruits, trains and supervises work-study students. Previous experience in biology, biochemistry and chemistry laboratories, including equipment operation, basic maintenance and preparation of regents desired. Previous safety knowledge and/or experience including knowledge and use of material safety data sheets and working with potentially hazardous materials ideal. Bachelor's degree in a field of science required. Position is ¾-time with benefits. Submit application, resume and contract information for three references to: hr@emu.edu. For more information visit our website at www.emu.edu/humanresources. Persons who bring diversity are encouraged to apply. EOE.

Are you the one God has been preparing for us? **Fairview Mennonite Church** is seeking a **full-time lead pastor**. Located in rural northern Michigan, with weekly attendance around 100, the heart of FMC's vision is to build relationships in the community that meet people's needs. If you are interested exploring possibilities at Fairview Mennonite Church, please email the search committee at fmcpastorsearch@gmail.com or call Don Haskin at 989-335-3153.

## RESOURCES

**John XXIII: A Saint for the Modern World** by Lucinda M. Vardey (Paulist Press, 2014, \$4.95) outlines the life of John XXIII from his humble background to his election as Pope. It highlights the contribution he made to the Catholic Church and includes a brief summary of the Second Vatican Council.

**The Vision of Saint John XXIII** by Randall Rosenberg (Paulist Press, 2014, \$14.95) outlines the spirituality of John XXIII and guides readers into the movements of John XXIII's heart and mind as he made his journey from a simple and devotional home in northern Italy to become one of the most remarkable popes of the 20th century.

**The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years** by Steven P. Miller (Oxford University Press, 2014, \$24.95) chronicles the place and meaning of evangelical Christianity in America since 1970, a time of evangelical scares, born-again spectacles and battles over faith in the public square.

**Ellie: Book One, Ellie's People** by Mary Christner Borntrager (Herald Press, 2014, \$8.99) is a new edition with updated language for today's reader. It is a novel about Ellie Maust, a young Old Order Amish girl in the early 1900s. For ages 10 and up.

**Dancing Standing Still: Healing the World from a Place of Prayer** by Richard Rohr (Paulist Press, 2014, \$14.95) is a new edition of *A Lever and a Place to Stand*. It offers a critique of religion as a system that often creates an alternative, pious world without really challenging oppression, materialism and sectarianism in our modern world.

**Extending the Table: Revised Edition: A World Community Cookbook** by Joetta Handrich Schlabach (Herald Press, 2014, \$24.99) is a revised edition of the popular cookbook that first came out in 1991 and has sold about 122,000 copies. Commissioned by Mennonite Central Committee, it sought to promote global understanding and celebrate the variety of world cultures. The new edition contains more color photographs and new recipes as well as reader-selected favorites. It also contains prayers and many stories of hunger, hospitality, generosity, stewardship and celebration—often in the midst of few material resources.

**Openings: A Daybook of Saints, Sages, Psalms and Prayer Practices** by Larry J. Peacock (SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2014, \$18.99) is a prayer book for every day of the year that draws on a wide variety of resources—lives of saints and sages from every age, psalms, guides for personal reflection and suggestions for practice—and offers helpful guidance for anyone hungry for a richer prayer life.



## Integrate youth into the life of the church



### Jon Heinly

is former youth minister for Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Conference and Lancaster Mennonite Schools. He can be reached at [jheinly@lancaster-conference.org](mailto:jheinly@lancaster-conference.org).

The reality of leaving was gradually sinking in. I was coming to the end of my last year working as youth minister for Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite School before beginning full-time seminary study. Our faculty gathered for our annual year-end lunch, where faculty members are acknowledged who are not returning for the next year. I noticed a pattern developing. Each of us had started our professional careers within this very school, from one to 36 years ago. Several of us expressed gratitude for the people and the institution that gave us the chance to grow and learn. Giving opportunities to new leaders is risky, but our school had repeatedly shown the courage to hire young adults—some, like myself, fresh out of college.

**This came on the heels** of a recent conversation in which I was reminded of an opportunity I was given to share in a Mennonite Church USA delegate session. I was attending convention as a teenager and was invited to participate in a panel presentation about my call to ministry and the support I had received from my parents and my congregation.

With these experiences as a backdrop, there are two things I desire to do in this article. First, I want to express gratitude to those who have supported me in the development of my gifts. Second, I want my experience to challenge all of us to be courageous enough to integrate youth into the life and ministry of our churches.

The old expression says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” I believe it also takes a village to raise an effective leader. Multiple youth ministry scholars, including Kenda Creasy Dean, have noted that a major factor in faith retention among young adults is the experience of significant relationships with at least five adults during their teenage years. Certainly this is even more important in developing church leaders.

My parents played a crucial role in nurturing my gifts. They have been my most consistent cheerleaders throughout my life, even through my current transition. I also had a congregation full of supportive adults at Mount Joy (Pa.) Mennonite Church—pastors, mentors, Sunday school teachers and youth group sponsors—who pro-

vided many words of affirmation as well as opportunities for me to exercise my gifts.

Finally, there were adults with no particular connection to our church’s youth ministry who made a point to send me notes of encouragement, tell me they were praying for me or seek me out and greet me on Sunday mornings. This was not only true for me but in the lives of youth who went through the congregation before and after me. The congregation, from leadership to laity, was committed to nurturing its youth. While our congregation maintained an active youth group, youth were not separated out as a church

within a church but were integrated into all aspects of the life of the congregation.

**I’ve learned from the models I had** in my high school experience. As a result, I make a point to provide youth with opportunities for leadership and do my best to affirm the gifts I see in them. Involving youth in leadership takes more time and effort than leaving leadership and ministry to the adults in the congregation. It also increases the likelihood that things will be less polished. Youth will make mistakes (perhaps no more often than adults, but may feel less compelled to cover them up).

I also want to express gratitude to pastors who understand the value of integrating youth into the life of the congregation and who partner with both paid and lay youth ministers to cast a congregational vision that places high value on the role of youth within the church. This involves risk but also leads to a more vibrant congregational life. I desire to be the type of leader who displays the same courage I experienced from those who hired me at Lancaster Mennonite School and Lancaster Conference and who led at Mount Joy Mennonite.

With this in mind, I also want to challenge congregations, conferences and our denomination to grow increasingly more intentional about involving youth in significant ways in our shared church life. It is occurring in many places, as demonstrated by my experience as a youth, but it is an area where we can always grow. So I leave you with this question: How will you call out gifts and give opportunities to the youth in your congregation? 

How will you call out gifts and give opportunities to the youth in your congregation?

**Correction:** In June’s column by Janet Trevino-Elizarraraz, Haiam Shenk’s last name should be Shank.



**FILM REVIEW**

**The Immigrant** (R) is a portrayal of spiritual and psychological struggle. Just off the ship from Poland in 1921, Ewa falls prey to Bruno, a pimp who forces her to become a prostitute in order to make enough money to gain her sister's freedom from quarantine on Ellis Island. The cinematography and performances are outstanding. It is a powerful film about forgiveness.—*Gordon Houser*

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Walking Through Fire: Iraqis' Struggles for Justice and Reconciliation** by Peggy Faw Gish (Cascade Books, 2013, \$28) follows up on her earlier book, *Iraq: A Journey of Hope and Peace*, and relates the stories of Iraqis in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and the ongoing abuses of the Iraqi government. Working with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Gish is on the ground, bearing witness to people's lives, being present with them and crying with them. Relating her own struggles and grief enhances her account.—*gh*

**Ordinary Miracles: Awakening to the Holy Work of Parenting** by Rachel S. Gerber (Herald Press, 2014, \$12.99) juxtaposes the biblical story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus with parenting three young boys. Gerber reflects on experiencing God's presence in those exhausting, disorienting times. The book not only encourages young parents but all of us to look for God's presence in our lives.—*gh*

**Instead of Atonement: The Bible's Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness** by Ted Grimsrud (Cascade Books, 2013, \$22.50) shows that the Bible presents salvation as a gift of God and seeks to "help us break free from the violence that is encouraged by the acceptance of the logic of retribution." Grimsrud shows that the Bible's story of salvation is one of mercy and healing, and he encourages applying such an approach to our criminal justice system.—*gh*

# Many choose influential Mennonites

Last month in this column, I reflected on *Time* Magazine's annual list of the 100 most influential people. I asked, Who are the most influential Mennonites?

As of June 2, one week after we posted the question, 28 people had submitted 150 names (some were mentioned more than once). Actually they submitted more names than that, but the list is reserved for (1) Mennonites and (2) those who are living. (We've since received many other submissions. Those aren't counted here.)

In case you're curious, here are the nine individuals (in alphabetical order) who were named more than twice:

- Marion Bontrager
- Rachel Halder
- Joanna Harader
- Hannah Heinzekehr
- Mary Oyer
- John D. Roth
- David Shenk
- Ervin Stutzman
- Ted Swartz

Nineteen others were mentioned twice. A total of 102 names appeared, 66 men and 36 women. (See full list on our website, [www.themennonite.org](http://www.themennonite.org)).

In my article I quoted *Time's* managing editor Nancy Gibbs, who noted that "influential" does not necessarily mean "powerful." She wrote, "Power is a tool, influence is a skill."

*Time's* list focuses on people who are currently influential. And they don't limit their list to positive influences. Their list included an al-Qaeda leader and the president of North Korea.

My impression of the names of Mennonites submitted to us is that they were all people they felt positive about; some even wrote explanations to that effect.

Nevertheless, there are Mennonites, such as Theda Good, who was named more than once, who are clearly influential but are seen by some in the church as a good influence and some as a bad influence.

The list is also meant to include people who are influential today, not many years ago. Many named people who have been influential but who may not be as well-known today.

I also encouraged people to include people beyond our national borders, as *Time* did. While several Canadians were named, only one person who lives outside North America made the list, and he is in France.

This may reflect an inherent nationalism and/or a lack of awareness of the many influential Mennonites in the global church.

As I anticipated, many people objected to this exercise. Some saw it as competitive. (See the letters on pages 4-5 and 54 for responses to the idea.)

Others said we shouldn't focus on certain people more than others. Some saw it as celebrity worship or another attempt to make ourselves look good in the world.

Regarding that last critique, the list is meant to include Mennonites who are influential in the Mennonite community, not necessarily beyond that.

In a conversation, a friend (who is on the list) said that "Mennonites have a lot trouble talking about power or influence." We like to pretend that it doesn't exist.

But the vast majority of responses we received tended to celebrate those among us who have made our lives better and helped us become better disciples of Jesus Christ.

Because we mentioned a "top 10," some people thought we editors would be choosing "the 10 most influential Mennonites." Sorry. We never intended to do that. I used the number 10 simply to limit the submissions. But as it turns out, we made over 100. 



*Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.*

(Continued from page 5)

ships that advance the discussion in helpful ways; to Mark Thiessen Nation, thanks for your pointed and corrective observations; to Martin Shupack, wow!—*Ryan Ahlgrim, Indianapolis*

I commend *The Mennonite* for printing the articles by Martin Shupack and Mark Thiessen Nation. Shupack's exposition of the two narratives seems fair to both views. Nation's designations "squishy understanding" and "libertarian individualism" are unfair to those who are as committed to biblical authority and correct interpretation as he.

The heart of Nation's argument is that "Jesus and the New Testament as a whole reaffirms [sic] that the vitality of marriage bonds depends on sexual differentiation of male and female." He doesn't show why this is true. Yes, these texts—as does Genesis—speak of marriage between a man and a woman. Reference to a dominant pattern doesn't exclude the possibility of legitimate variations from the norm. Nation's view holds biological structure more determinative of sexual probity than psychological identity. Empirical data—the evidence from God's creation—indicates that identity is more important than body structure in marriage. As has been said, the brain is the largest sexual organ in the body.

Second, Nation equates same-sex desire for fulfillment with heterosexual temptation to immorality. Those of any sexual orientation experience temptations to sin but also experience healthy sexual desire. It is wrong to confuse the two. Paul and Jesus both lift up celibacy as better. It seems to violate Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as one's self while enjoying married life to demand that same-sex oriented singles not marry.

Third, Nation argues that because "Paul's world knew of long-term committed, equal gay and lesbian relationships as well as unequal, abusive ones" this is what Paul addresses in his writings. Various same-sex relationships were known in the Greco-Roman

world; careful research suggests none of those was equivalent to marriage in our society of consenting adults who love each other. In Romans 1, Paul addresses sexual practices resulting from idolatry. There are grounds to believe that in 1 Corinthians he has pederasty in mind. Even if one disagrees, as does Nation, it seems dubious to take the harsher stance on shaky exegetical foundations.

In sum, Nation argues that a "one-Jesus narrative" requires compassionate condemnation of same-sex marriage. I agree that Jesus is Lord and that grace requires costly discipleship. I disagree with a different requirement for our LGBT brothers and sisters from what the Lord requires of each of us.—*John M. Miller, Lancaster, Pa.*

#### **Influential Mennonites feedback**

I loved Gordon Houser's *Mediaculture* column about influential Mennonites (June). It is definitely something interesting to think about. The question of top "influencers" could also be applied in individual congregations, given that we need to be aware of who we look to most for leadership, financial support, spiritual advice, etc.—*Breanna Nickel, South Bend, Ind.*

Here's my struggle with even thinking about contributing to the influential Mennonites list. I find that the people that are most influential have been the ones that I've personally worked with because they've been influential for me. I don't presume to have the pulse of the larger community and wouldn't know from that perspective. Also, there are those that have been influential via social media because of the info they pass along—thought-provoking posts they've found and shared. I'm not sure that counts. It's more passive than being an active voice in the community. I wonder if others feel that tension as well. If I lived in one of the Mennonite hub cities, this would be easier to identify. Who are the people other people talk about?—*Janet Lynn Trevino Elizarraraz, San Antonio, Texas*

Although I resonate with some of the comments online that lists exclude and that the greatest among us are the ones who serve (often behind the scenes), still I thought this is a worthwhile project. It is good to have examples to look up to and recognize some who have had a wide influence.—*Joel Sherk, Toledo, Ohio*

Thanks for the opportunity to think on this and to think who in the Mennonite church speaks with wisdom, authority, knowledge, is persuasive and compassionate, poses questions in a way that allows others to contemplate more deeply their faith and their way of living. Someone who influences me is a person who makes me a better person in my community.—*Carol Honderich, Elkhart, Ind.*

In Luke, 9:46, 22:24, Jesus' disciples argue about who among them is to be regarded as the greatest. In both cases, Jesus' answer upsets conventional hierarchies by citing the child, the youngest, the one who serves at the table. But Jesus' phrasing also suggests that in simply setting up some kind of competition, the disciples are missing what is important—who Jesus is (the child of God, a servant) and what discipleship is (trying to be like him).

The word "influential" is not among the first descriptors that come to my mind when I think of discipleship.

Also, I would be more comfortable if instead of the competitive idea of making a list of "the most influential Mennonites" the editors simply asked for the names and descriptions of people whose stories would be inspirational or otherwise instructive to its readers, especially, though not necessarily exclusively, those demonstrating kinds of discipleship that are likely to be overlooked.—*Phyllis Bixler, Bluffton, Ohio*

**Editor's note:** To read more about the influential Mennonites list, go to [http://www.themennonite.org/issues/17-6/articles/Many\\_respond\\_to\\_question\\_of\\_influential\\_Mennonites](http://www.themennonite.org/issues/17-6/articles/Many_respond_to_question_of_influential_Mennonites).

# Keeping the main thing the main thing

*Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things. But few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”—Luke 10:41-42 (TNIV)*

Jesus loved to spend time with his friends Mary and Martha, who lived in a household with their brother Lazarus.

As the biblical story goes, Martha expressed concern, not only about meal preparation but other things as well. She pressed Jesus to intervene in her differences with her sister Mary, who preferred to sit at the feet of Jesus. I get the impression that Martha’s brow was permanently wrinkled, the fruit of undue worry about very legitimate things. Jesus put a different frame around her worries, reminding her of the most important thing.

The story reminds me that I can too readily become occupied by something that doesn’t deserve the amount of attention I give it. I may even become distracted by good things that take away my focus from the main thing. When this happens, I become troubled in mind and heart and lose my inner peace.

**As Jesus walks among** our church gatherings and listens to our conversations during this time of vigorous discussion regarding same-sex marriage, I sense him saying to me: “Ervin, Ervin, you are worried and upset about many things. But few things are needed—or indeed only one.” And when I ask him what that “one thing” is, I hear him say, “You can find it in your church’s statement of Vision: Healing and Hope: ‘God calls us to follow Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.’”

It reminds me that in the midst of our differences in the church, we must occasionally stop to ponder the main thing that holds us all together—a commitment to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Various stories in Scripture show us that even the most ardent followers of Jesus sometimes had seemingly irresolvable differences. Only by keeping their eye on the most important thing could they find their way forward together.

It brings to mind a sign I once saw hanging on the wall of a friend’s office: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” It has become a life principle for me, a mantra I try to follow in my leadership within Mennonite Church USA.

**I know that the things we count** as most important will finally shape who we become. Our subconscious minds are like the roots of a tree, out of sight under the surface. Like roots, our minds absorb what they are exposed to, the rich soil of thought patterns that serve as the source of nourishment. The hidden roots eventually produce visible fruit, the actions in our lives that are visible for all to see. I hope our life in Mennonite Church USA will show the fruit that comes from concentration on the life and teaching of our master teacher—Jesus Christ.

Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus was occupied with one purpose: reaching people with the healing and hope that came through the good news of God’s salvation.

The Gospels give us glimpses of Jesus ministering in open fields, at the side of a well, on the gentle slope of a mountain, in crowded marketplaces and even in a boat. He seemed equally at home in the public square as in the synagogue or temple. That’s a good example for our church.

I hope we can take a lesson from the words of Jesus to Martha, viewing all our goals and worries through the frame of our commitment to Jesus. Let’s keep the main thing the main thing. **TJM**

Only by keeping their eye on the most important thing could they find their way forward together.



**Ervin Stutzman** is executive director of Mennonite Church USA.





## Expecting new love



Anna Groff

It will be important to remember that caring for an infant is a spiritual act.

**M**y spiritual director suggested I read one Psalm a day, or as regularly as possible. I have read many of the Psalms at some point or another in my life, but a number of the phrases have taken on a fresh meaning as I enter a new chapter of my life. My husband and I are eagerly expecting our first child (a girl) on July 5—just a month away from the time I am writing this.

**I found that a lot of Psalms** can apply to pregnancy, childbirth and parenting but in new ways for me. I thought of the Psalms when I heard some advice from a friend who is a new mother: “Try to let go of distinguishing day and night.”

I take this to mean to care for the baby whenever and sleep whenever—regardless of what the rest of the world is doing or whether or not the sun is out. Psalms that relate include: “I lie down and sleep; I wake again for the Lord sustains me” (3:5), “Yours is the day, yours also is the night” (75:16) and, “You keep my eyelids from closing” (77:4).

Another verse reminds me of the connection between God’s love and a parent’s love—biological or otherwise: “Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast” (Psalm 22:9).

**Father Eddie at the Franciscan church** we attended while living in Whiteriver, Ariz., often relayed a similar message in his homilies. If you are feeling unworthy of God’s love, just remember how much you love your children or grandchildren, he would say. God loves you far more than that.

Furthermore, in one episode of the PBS show “Call the Midwife,” a character grieving a loss says, “I didn’t realize how much my mum loved me till I was a mum. It’s the kind of love that only goes one way—forward.”

While I am looking forward to experiencing this new kind of love, I am anxious as my due date approaches. As people tell me—and I readily

admit—my life will never be the same.

In this transition time, it will be important to remember that caring for an infant is a spiritual act. My spiritual director said that many young parents came to her when she was a pastor to express guilt that they didn’t have time alone to spend meditating and praying.

She attempted to ease their guilt by telling them, “Caring for a baby can be a spiritual discipline and even prayerful. We don’t need to separate baby care from God.” That includes the rhythm of changing diapers and breastfeeding. When children are older, it can mean sharing night prayers or dinner conversations about Scripture.

**In the June issue of *Sojourners***, editor-in-chief Jim Wallis’ main advice on how to further the common good was, “If you are a father or mother, make your children the most important priority in your life and build your other communities around them. If you are not a parent, look for children who could benefit from your investment in their lives.”

I have mistakenly viewed parenting from the outside as an inward-looking time when parents’ worlds dramatically narrow, and the energy they have for nonparenting tasks slips away. Wallis’ advice provides a new challenging take on this. To make a difference in the world, we must start by embracing the unconditional love we have for our children, spouses, friends and communities. The Psalms can guide us in this journey.—*ag*

**Editor’s note:** I plan to be on maternity leave July and part of August. Gordon Houser will serve as acting editor during this time. Rebecca Hel-muth will oversee *TMail* and web editing. Please send emails to [gordonh@themennonite.org](mailto:gordonh@themennonite.org) and [rebecca@themennonite.org](mailto:rebecca@themennonite.org).