Mennonites say no to war taxes

14 individuals from one Mennonite congregation are consciously redirecting their war taxes.

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- But we didn’t mean you
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- Social means more than ‘chit chat’
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On the Cover: Photos provided by Carolyn Yoder
This publication welcomes your letters, either about our content or about issues facing the Mennonite Church USA. Please keep your letter brief—one or two paragraphs—and about one subject only. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Publication is also subject to space limitations. Email to letters@themennonite.org or mail to Letters, The Mennonite, 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517. Please include your name and address. We will not print letters sent anonymously, though we may withhold names at our discretion.—Editors

'Tragic vision'
John D. Roth’s “From Tragedy to Apocalypse” (May) presents an insightful view of current struggles with LGBT issues. He makes a useful comparison with classical tragedy, and I agree with his basic vision. But he tends to dismiss classical “tragedy” as an “agonizing, irresolvable moral conflict” and point to another way. There may be other possibilities.

I think of the classical Oedipus who married his father—not a sin of choice but of “fate” or of ignorance, due to circumstances; he could not have known her identity. I think of Job, suffering on an ash heap through no fault of his own, but railing against his fate to his “three friends” and demanding justice from an absent Almighty. Both Oedipus and Job are condemned and isolated by their self-righteous communities: Oedipus’ community chorus and Job’s three “friends.” Both are honored for their honest struggle and endurance. The hurt may still exist, but the accused are restored, and community healing begins. So may it be for us: both Aristotle’s “tragic vision” and Roth’s “apocalypse.”—Wilbur Birky, Goshen, Ind.

Teaching versus speculation
Regarding the article “Easter Beyond Explanation” (April): We are better served by focusing on what Scripture actually teaches as opposed to theological sounding speculation. The article states that “we are all divine. … You are God. … God is human.”

These statements are not consistent with sound biblical doctrine; for example, see Romans 3:23 and Isaiah 55:9. If we were truly equal with God, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to have been born of a virgin, live a sinless life and die for our sins.

On the topic of the Resurrection, the article also states the possibility that it didn’t actually happen or that Jesus was merely “resuscitated.” Again, these thoughts are not aligned with biblical teaching. The Gospels vividly describe the horrific crucifixion of Jesus, his death on the cross, his burial and his glorious resurrection. This happened in fulfillment of the many Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah, who would come and save us from our sins, as stated in Isaiah 53:5.

Scripture points to the simple yet profound message of salvation. These are the truths of Scripture we should meditate on.—Randy Zehr, Columbus, Ind.

Good News is refreshing
On the evening before Easter, I longed to hear Jesus. The first words of Jesus in Matthew are in response to John the Baptist’s reluctance to baptize Jesus, “Let it be so now, it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus’ second sentence includes “but from every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus’ last words in Matthew, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (All quotes from the NIV.) Then is the Great Commission.

What a feeling of peace as I meditated on these words of Jesus the day after Good Friday and the day before the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection. They are so much more refreshing and soul nurturing than reading the opinions and ideas of humans. I repent and believe the Good News.—Carl L. Smeltzer, Harrisonburg, Va.
Is God in the conversation?
Given our long practice of nurturing and calling people to leadership positions from within the congregation, it should surprise no one that congregations who have members with an LGBT orientation might, sooner or later, identify and call forth those gifted for leadership. Natural as the process may be in our polity, some now see this as a point of crisis. In response, even though Jesus warned against it, we seem much more comfortable with judging than with facing each other in extended, open and honest conversations. Opting for a traditional Mennonite approach to problem-solving, we are not more discerning and wise, just more divided. Leadership is being called to make decisive statements, but leadership itself should be doing the calling. The call is to become a constituency with the guts to face one another, speak honestly, listen carefully and persevere as long as it takes to sense together the guidance of God. Leadership should invest resources and trained facilitation in regional, conference and local groups of un-like-minded Mennonites to embrace this challenge. Some will object that they are tired of talking, but I suspect our tiredness is miniscule compared with God’s weariness with our whining, while simultaneously, we won’t commit to doing the hard work of discernment (Hebrews 5:14). Is God in this conversation? If we believe so, then we must hold the disparate voices together in disciplined conversation. If we turn our backs on one another, neither the world nor the church will have gained one iota of wisdom, and God’s grace, like our body, will once again be broken.
—Don Rheinheimer, Lombard, Ill.

Ecumenical dialogue an option
I’m wondering if we can reframe our current anxiety over issues of sexuality into an ecumenical dialogue and partnership. Can we focus on points of convergence instead of one issue of divergence? We have the model of partnering together since 1920 in the mission and service of Mennonite Central Committee. Relief, service, peace and justice are the building blocks of this focused coalition of Anabaptist groups in North America. What holds us together is our common commitment to Christ. We give witness in word and deed through an Anabaptist theology and missional ecclesiology. We seek local and global partnerships while remaining true to our core identity. We are voluntarily accountable to one another, just as we are in our congregational life together. A congregational polity within an ecumenical framework allows us the breathing room to be who God calls us to be while providing the vehicle for greater partnerships. The structure serves our common mission and identity, not the other way around. I hope and pray that Mennonite Church USA can find a way forward that helps us be salt and light and a city on a hill in those communities where we live, work and worship.—Jim S. Amstutz, Akron, Pa.

Glimpses of the truth
In regard to LGBT people and Mennonite Church USA, the issues are many and also complex. The conservatives have some glimpses of the truth. And also, the liberals have some glimpses of The Truth. It is also important to recognize that any one glimpse of truth—isolated by itself—is a tricky thing.

On the one hand, it is an essential piece of the truth and needs to be acknowledged as such. On the other hand, one glimpse of truth is a half-truth. It is only part of the picture. Both conservatives and liberals are holding onto half-truths and thus polarizing the conversation. One size-fits-all solution, and I admire the creativity and dedication involved.

Martin Shupack and Mark Thiessen Nation offer their thoughts on same-sex marriage on pages 22-29. A goal of The Mennonite editors is to include a variety of voices on the issue of LGBT inclusion. We are pleased that these two men, who are long-time friends, can model a Christian way of addressing this issue from two different perspectives.

At the Associated Church Press convention in April, The Mennonite won three awards—one of which was for our in-depth news coverage of the allegations of John Howard Yoder’s sexual misconduct. We continue this coverage in this issue with an interview with James C. Juhnke, former professor at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., titled “The Decision to Disinvite John Howard Yoder to Speak.” In a Q&A format on pages 44-46, Juhnke explains in detail his role in the decision to disinvite Yoder from his role as keynote speaker at a conference on the Bethel campus and how it took place.

Finally, congratulations to the 1,148 graduates of the four Mennonite colleges and one seminary who celebrated commencements in April and May.—Editor
**The Mennonite wins first place for Phoenix 2013 convention coverage**

CHICAGO—The Mennonite won an Award of Excellence (first place) for convention/meeting coverage at the Associated Church Press convention April 23-25 in Chicago.

It won for its coverage in the August 2013 issue, “Walls Will Fail: Stories and Photos from Phoenix 2013.”

Gordon Houser, associate editor, won an Award of Merit (second place) in the seasonal article category for his feature article “When God Became a Baby” in the December 2013 issue. The Mennonite also won an Honorable Mention in the in-depth news coverage category for several articles on John Howard Yoder.—**TMail**

**Goerzen named campus pastor at Bethel College**

NORTH NEWTON, Kan.—Peter Goerzen has been named campus pastor at Bethel College. He begins that role, along with that of director of church relations, in July. He replaces Dale Schrag, who is retiring after 30 years at Bethel.

Goerzen will end his current position, as a pastor at Grace Hill Mennonite Church in rural Newton, Kan., where he has been since 2009.

Goerzen graduated from Bethel in 2007 with a degree in computer science. He worked as a software developer and system administrator at Excel Industries in Hesston from 2007-09.

When Goerzen’s wife, Katherine, started at Grace Hill as youth pastor in 2007, Goerzen “tagged along as a youth sponsor,” he says. In 2009, he became co-pastor with Katherine. He was ordained in 2011.

As a Bethel student, Goerzen helped pioneer what was then a new ministry for Bethel, that of student chaplain, serving for two years. Part of his role as campus pastor will be to work with the student chaplains.

Goerzen has also studied at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and the North Newton-based Great Plains Extension of AMBS. He has completed nearly all required hours for a Master of Divinity degree and plans to graduate in 2015. —**Bethel College**

**New edition of Extending the Table released**

HARRISONBURG, Va., and KITCHENER, Ont.—Extending the Table cookbook, the second in the World Community Cookbook series commissioned by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and published by Herald Press, is being rereleased with new recipes and many more color photos than in the original edition.

An estimated 122,000 copies of Extending the Table are in circulation, a testament both to readers’ and cooks’ interest in broadening their worldviews through what they eat and to changing times.

When Extending the Table cookbook first came out, in 1991, many of the recipes were unfamiliar to cooks and families in North America. Today an ethnically diverse array of restaurants and food trucks serve up dishes in urban centers as well as smaller towns. Home cooks have favorite recipes for pad Thai, enchiladas, curry and more.

The new edition includes regional menus, gluten-free and vegetarian tags on recipes, new dishes (including some from countries not represented before) and numerous photos of prepared dishes to help those who are unfamiliar with the food. More than 120 cookbook users helped choose which recipes made the cut for the revised cookbook. —**MennoMedia**

**MDS ends long-term response in Bastrop, Texas**

BASTROP, Texas—Mennonite Disaster Service has ended its response in Bastrop County after three fall and winter seasons of work in the Central Texas community. The response included a group of long-term volunteers who live in their own RVs and a site where short-term and long-term volunteers are housed by MDS.

Over 1,000 volunteers took part in...
Elizabeth Hostetter, EMM worker, remembered
HARRISONBURG, Va.—Elizabeth Hostetter, an Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) worker who served over 22 years in Eastern Africa, was remembered at a memorial service at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community in Harrisonburg, Va., on May 7. She was 87.

The service celebrated her life, her love of travel, and her deep faith.

She began overseas service with Mennonite Central Committee in 1952 at a children’s home in the Netherlands. In March 1960, she started service as an EMM missionary at the Mennonite bookstore in Ethiopia. After serving there four years and four months, she transitioned to serving as hostess at the Mennonite Guest House in Nairobi, Kenya. She remained in that role for 16 years.—EMM

Albuquerque Mennonite receives JoinHands grant
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—Albuquerque Mennonite Church received a $40,000 grant through Mennonite Men’s JoinHands program in February.

The funds will be used to insulate and repair a 60-year-old roof, rewire lighting and create access ramps compliant with the American with Disabilities Act. The congregation is hoping to match the grant over the next several years to do some landscaping and build a new exterior circulation corridor, which would create more space for an often-crowded sanctuary.

The congregation purchased the 9,000-square-foot church building in the fall of 2006, more than 18 years after organizing as a Rocky Mountain Mennonite Conference congregation in 1988. The group had initially gathered in homes, then in a seminar room at a local adoption agency, then in a Jewish Messianic synagogue and eventually in the basement of a United Methodist Church for 10 years.—Mennonite Men...
Kudos!

For years and years, friends recommended keeping a “gratitude journal” in which I could write—daily—things for which I’m grateful.

“You’ll feel better,” they promised. “It’s a life-giving spiritual discipline,” they insisted.

Nah.

My journal is for bellyaching, and I like it that way. I write a pleasant report now and then, but mostly I kvetch about what’s difficult or disheartening in my life. I reread it from time to time, which is mostly a downer, unless I can summon up some gratitude that at least I’m not that distressed nowadays.

Then a 9-year-old kid moved in with me, and I had to tuck her in every night, not just when I felt like it. It didn’t always go smoothly. I needed routines to help, and taking time at the end of the day to say our “thankfuls” seemed a good bedtime strategy.

I finally had my gratitude journal, but in a form that worked better for me than the daily journal entry that friends had so often recommended to me. That’s the beauty and the challenge of spiritual disciplines: to find ways to stretch oneself toward the divine and simultaneously to honor one’s particular humanity.

Even scientists have begun saying that gratitude is good for us. In one 10-week study, the participants who wrote in a weekly journal about gratitude were more optimistic and felt better about their lives than those who wrote about irritations or even those who wrote about events—good or bad—that had affected them. The gratitude-loggers “also exercised more and had fewer visits to physicians than those who focused on sources of aggravation” (Harvard Mental Health Letter, November 2011).

I certainly want to reap those benefits. But it can be difficult to add activities, even such obviously beneficial ones as expressing gratitude, to one’s already busy or distracted life. A doctor’s or pastor’s recommendation only gets most of us so far—and often not far enough. We need the power of the Holy Spirit and the support of our friends, families and churches, too.

Two books have taught me well about spiritual practices of “being still and knowing that God is God.” Stillness is not identical to practicing gratitude but is the grand oak under which the redbud of gratitude thrives. Just reading Marjorie Thompson’s Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life in a coffee shop in downtown Elkhart, Ind., for a class I was taking at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., prompted a mystical experience of gratitude. I was overcome by God’s love and by people’s longing for that love. In that moment, I saw that all the praying, the praising, the flirting, the gardening and the studying we do is to seek God’s love for us and for all creation, and I was profoundly grateful.

The second book is a new one by April Yam asaki that I checked out from our conference library: Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal. In her chapter “Paying Attention,” Yam asaki shares an outline for the examen of consciousness that includes looking at your day with gratitude. She says this is usually easy for her, but take courage if you find it as difficult as I do.

A year after my kid and I began our nighttime litany of thankfulness, we began sharing something that was difficult in the day, too, to round out our bedtime examen. Adding a low point from the day helps us acknowledge what is life-sucking in a space where pain or fear can be held in loving prayer.

A few months later, I started writing a weekly list of kudos to my kid. After a month of this, I asked her to start doing the same, sharing at least three things I’ve done for which she’s grateful. This has added up to a wellspring of gratitude in my life.

I’m not sure if I’m exercising more (probably not) or have fewer visits to the doctor (possibly so), but I am sure that I have become more anchored in assurance of God’s abundant provision rather than in fear and scarcity-thinking that dominates much of our nation’s public conversation.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

In this much-loved verse from the Gospel of John (1:5), I hear a 2,000-year-old assurance that good will not be overcome by evil, and gratitude need not be overcome by bitterness, if only we have eyes to see or ears to hear what God is doing for us. TM
A spiritual pilgrimage by bicycle

Each year, thousands of people from all around the world give up the familiar routines of work, the comforts of their homes and the convenience of their cars to walk the pilgrim’s trail known as the Camino de Santiago. Carrying only what can fit into a backpack, these modern pilgrims travel by foot westward across northern Spain, sometimes for weeks on end, before arriving at their destination—the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. (See the cover story in our February issue.)

The motives of these footweary travelers are undoubtedly varied. Some are merely adventure seekers, looking for a physical challenge or a simple change of scenery. But others are on a spiritual quest, hungrily seeking the face of God by slowing down their lives and practicing new forms of vulnerability.

Stories of pilgrims run deep in the Christian tradition. From Abraham and Sarah’s departure from Ur to the Exodus out of Egypt, from the journeys of the early apostles to John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Christians have always recognized that God is revealed in a special way to refugees, to exiles, and to “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2:11).

On the evening of April 18, several dozen family and friends gathered at the main entrance to Goshen (Ind.) College to welcome three young wayfarers who were returning home from an epic pilgrimage. In May of the previous year, Abe Stucky, Levi Smucker and Michael Miller joined 17 classmates in Paraguay for a three-week, intensive Goshen College course on “Anabaptist History in Paraguay.” But when the rest of the group returned by plane to the United States, the three young men mounted bicycles and began pedaling from the capital city of Asuncion through the Paraguayan Chaco to Bolivia. Over the next 11 months, they made their way northward—along the Andes mountains in South America to the Panama Canal and through Central America, Mexico and the southern United States—before arriving in Goshen some 10,300 miles later.

As with pilgrims throughout the ages, the motives behind the journey were varied. They were hungry for adventure but also eager to become more fluent in Spanish and to experience the rich diversity of Latino cultures. And they had a special interest in learning more about the wide range of Mennonite groups that have taken root over the past century in Central and South America. Thus, their journey included visits with indigenous Quechua Mennonites in Peru and Bolivia; Latino Mennonite congregations in Colombia, Ecuador and Nicaragua; Beachy Amish groups in Costa Rica; and a variety of Low German “colony” Mennonites in Bolivia, Belize and Mexico. But the primary focus of their panamerican pilgrimage was, in the words of one young man, “to force ourselves to become vulnerable and look for the face of God in the people we met along the way.”

In the course of their journey, they were transformed. We learned, one said, to adapt to a new understanding of time. A flat tire, an unanticipated village fiesta, a chance encounter with another traveler constantly “disrupted” the schedule. “But that meant every day was an adventure. As long as we were heading in the right direction, keeping to a tight schedule was not that important.”

They also came to appreciate the gift of good conversation. Like countless pilgrims before them, the young men passed the time in their long journey by talking—with each other, of course, but especially with the strangers they met along the way. In each new setting, the travelers made it a point to listen carefully to the stories of their hosts, asking questions about their history, customs and convictions. Despite profound differences of perspective and culture, those conversations always revealed surprising glimpses of a shared humanity—the face of God suddenly made visible.

Perhaps most important, the journey gradually turned the vulnerabilities of each day into a spiritual discipline. Frequently, the travelers entered a small town at the end of a day not knowing where they would spend the night. Over time, they learned to rely on God’s providence, usually expressed as the kindness of strangers: Catholic priests still practicing the ancient tradition of hospitality to pilgrims, Pentecostal pastors who turned their churches into hostels, firefighters who welcomed them into the fire station or dozens of newfound friends who simply opened their homes. “We return aware of the deep debts of hospitality that we have accumulated,” they said. “We have no option but to share with others.”

Perhaps the global church is best understood as people on a pilgrimage—taking time, sharing in conversation, practicing hospitality.
Be skeptical of those fast, definitive answers

This spread called Miscellany uses lots of numbers and often refers to the results of studies that draw certain conclusions. But how trustworthy are those studies? Should we accept their findings simply because they are “scientific”? In an article in *Pacific Standard* (May/June) called “The Reformation,” Jerry Adler asks these questions, particularly in regard to studies in the field of behavioral sciences. He notes that “for the last several years, a crisis of self-confidence has been brewing in the world of experimental social science, and in psychology especially.”

Papers have been retracted, and prominent researchers have resigned their posts, including Marc Hauser, an evolutionary psychologist and acclaimed author, and Diederik Stapel, a Dutch psychologist, “who admitted that many of his eye-catching results were based on data he made up.”

Some scholars have tried to expose these problems through hoaxes. In 2011, a psychologist named Joseph P. Simmons and two colleagues wrote a paper hypothesizing that listening to The Beatles’ “When I’m Sixty-Four” makes people younger. That paper actually appeared in the journal *Psychological Science*. It was a hoax.

This isn’t just a problem for the academic community. “A whole industry has grown up around marketing the surprising-yet-oddly-intuitive findings of social psychology, behavioral economics and related fields,” writes Adler. Think of TED talks, Malcolm Gladwell, the *Freakonomics* guys.

Many of us are complicit in this. We want fast, definitive answers. One person criticized TED talks for being simplistic. He did so by giving a simplistic TED talk.

Why do these scientists fake or manipulate their data? There is much pressure in the academic community for publishing cutting-edge material. There are incentives such as tenure, advancement, grants and prizes. And with fewer dollars available to fund research, scientists are loathe to spend the money and time to do an experiment and not get the results they want.

Often, people begin an experiment with a hypothesis. If their data doesn’t quite support that hypothesis, they may keep at it until it does or simply alter the data.

Simmons points out that “psychologists who deploy enough statistical sleight of hand can find ‘significance’ in almost any data set.”

One research psychologist, Brian Nosek, directs the Reproducibility Project, which reproduces certain experiments to see if they get the same results as those published. This doesn’t necessarily disprove an experiment’s findings, and it may even help refine its point. It may also turn up a failure that is glaring, and the paper must be retracted.

Adler notes that problems of fraud, statistical analysis and replication also apply to other fields. Biomedical research is one example. In search of new drugs, researchers at the pharmaceutical firm Amgen “selected 53 promising basic-research papers from leading medical journals and attempted to reproduce the original findings with the same experiments,” Adler writes. “They failed approximately 9 times out of 10.”

Those involved with the Reproducibility Project and other scientists are part of “a whole new approach to experimental social science, emphasizing cooperation over competition and privileging the slow accretion of understanding over dramatic, counterintuitive results,” writes Adler.

He goes on to point out that “pretty much all scientific findings are tentative.” The Apostle Paul said, “Test the spirits.” Scientists need to keep testing their results.—Gordon Houser
The First Amendment protects the right of every citizen to speak freely. It does not protect the right to give money to politics.—Rabbi Justus Baird

Blacks, Latinos losing economic ground, says report

African-Americans and Latinos are losing economic ground when compared with whites in the areas of employment and income as the United States pulls itself out of the Great Recession, the latest State of Black America report from the National Urban League says.

The annual report, called “One Nation Underemployed: Jobs Rebuild America,” noted that the underemployment rate for African-American workers was 20.5 percent, compared with 18.4 percent for Hispanic workers and 11.8 percent for white workers. Underemployment is defined as those who are jobless or working part-time jobs but desiring full-time work.

The report also said African-Americans are twice as likely as whites to be unemployed. The unemployment rate for blacks was 12 percent in February, compared with 5.8 percent for whites.—Associated Press

Anti-Semitic incidents decline in U.S.

Continuing a decade-long drop, anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. declined by 19 percent, according to the Anti-Defamation League’s most recent annual audit. In 2013, the ADL counted 751 anti-Semitic incidents, a decline from the 927 incidents in 2012. Compiled since 1979, the ADL annual report includes assaults, vandalism and harassment targeting Jews.—Religion News Service

The Bluto Syndrome

According to a 2000 survey of college students, men overestimate how much muscle women find attractive. Muscle dissatisfaction in men strongly correlates with higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. —Pacific Standard

Voters favor prayer, minus Jesus

While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled May 5 in favor of allowing prayer at public meetings, a new survey finds U.S. voters clearly favor prayer—as long as the public prayer is generic and not specifically Christian.—Religion News Service

Poverty ‘myths’ according to the Gates

1. Poor countries are doomed to stay poor. Not so, says philanthropist Bill Gates. In fact, “incomes and other measures of human welfare are rising almost everywhere, including in Africa.”

2. Foreign aid is a waste of money. People often cling to a few anecdotes about wasted aid money to claim it doesn’t work, says Gates. To him, aid is a “fantastic investment” that saves and improves lives and lays the groundwork for long-term economic progress.

3. Saving lives leads to overpopulation. Actually, saving lives does the reverse, says Melinda Gates, noting that many poor families have extra children to make sure at least some survive.—The Marketplace

Advocates needed for the mentally ill

Donald Capps continues to teach a seminary course on mental illness even though he’s officially retired. He believes pastors need to know more about the subject, as they will most likely have people with mental illness in their congregations. They can also suffer from it themselves. Capps urges pastors to serve as advocates for the mentally ill, especially when society is less willing to fund institutionalization of the mentally ill. A positive outcome of this deinstitutionalization trend is that more of the mentally ill are able to lead productive lives. But many others are adrift, homeless or living in substandard housing and are not getting the treatment they need.—Christian Century

Numbers to ponder

- Hours a day the average American spends online with a computer: 2.3
- Hours a laptop could be powered from the energy saved by recycling one aluminum can: 5.2
- Aluminum cans recycled in 2012: 62 billion
- Aluminum cans shipped by the U.S. Aluminum Industry in 2012: 92 billion
- Percentage of American adults who text who admitted texting while driving: 47
- Number of Americans that died in driving accidents due to cell phone use in 2012: 3,328
- Pieces of mail processed by the U.S. Postal Service in 2012: 160 billion
- Miles driven by U.S. Postal Service letter carriers and truck drivers annually: 1.3 billion
- Number of career people employed by the U.S. Postal Service in 2012: 522,144
- Tax money paid to the U.S. Postal Service for operations in 2012: $0
- U.S. cities expected to be affected by sea level rise in 2050: 315
- Mayors who signed the “Resilient Communities for America” agreement for climate preparedness: 78

—Yes! Magazine

85
Richest people in the world have as much wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population, 3.5 billion people.—Oxfam

85

— compiled by Gordon Houser

Mayors who signed the “Resilient Communities for America” agreement for climate preparedness: 78

Richest people in the world have as much wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population, 3.5 billion people.—Oxfam
Mennonites say no to war taxes

14 individuals from one Mennonite congregation are consciously redirecting their war taxes.

compiled by Carolyn Yoder

April 15 is tax day in the United States. But while most people pay their taxes by that date, a group of us at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., take a different route. Concerned with the high percentage of our federal tax money that goes to the military while we pray for peace, we witness to our Christian faith through how we deal with this dilemma. This often includes redirecting a portion of our military taxes to life-giving causes.
Estimates of the share of the federal budget allocated to military spending are as high as 47 percent (www.warresisters.org/piechart.htm). Our congregation provides a letter of support that can be included with our tax returns and that backs our individual efforts.

**We are not against paying taxes.** In fact, some of us would willingly pay higher taxes if they supported education, health, infrastructure, sustainable and clean energy sources, bike paths or efforts to learn nonviolent ways to address complex domestic and international conflicts. That’s why we prefer a term other than “tax resistance” to describe what we do.

And we don’t think we have necessarily figured out the best way to exercise our constitutional freedom to live by our conscience when it comes to taxes. We’re ordinary people on a journey. We offer here a summary of what we do in the hope that it will encourage others who take similar actions to share their experiences in their congregations and communities. We also hope it will inspire more people to consider this type of witness.

Along with the Salvadorans on the bus, we prayed for safety as guns from 10 U.S. helicopters strafed the area around us. That day, we became tax resisters for life.—Nathan and Elaine Zook Barge

Nathan and Elaine Zook Barge, restorative justice specialist and STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience) director

**How long have you engaged in an act witness through your taxes?**
Over 30 years

**Why do you do it?**
Living and working in a Catholic and Mennonite community in Colorado Springs, Colo., in the early 1980s, we became aware of the dissonance between saying we were conscientious objectors to war while paying for war. Our commitment deepened during the 14 years we worked in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Many friends or their family members had been killed or wounded by U.S. weapons, and many people suffered hunger, homelessness and illness because money was used for weapons rather than for food, health and education.

Ironically, it was on tax day, April 15, 1985, that we experienced too closely the fear and trauma of war. Along with the Salvadorans on the bus, we prayed for safety as guns from 10 U.S. helicopters strafed the area around us. That day, we became tax resisters for life.

**How do you do it?**
It’s a journey, finding the way that works for our stage of life. Early on, we withheld 50 percent of our taxable income and redirected it to MCC. Then for many years, we lived below the taxable level, first as a couple and then as a family of four. The past number of years, we have withheld a symbolic 10 cents for every $1 billion in the U.S. military budget and redirected that money for life-giving efforts rather than war. We also reduce our taxable income through charitable donations and deductions.

David Jost, ESL Instructor

**How long have you lived under the taxable level?**
One year

**How do you do it?**
By making a small reduction in my pay-
check to ensure that I owe no federal income tax.

Why do you do it?
Because I want to avoid financially supporting the U.S. military any way I can, and I believe that church institutions (such as Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, to which I contribute by reducing my paycheck) are better stewards of my money than the government.

Ray and Wilma Gingerich, retired peace and justice professor and retired hospice nurse

How long have you redirected a portion of your taxes?
Since 1976.
Why do you do it?
We are Mennonites (inheritors of a nonviolent way of life); we are followers of Jesus, who taught us to practice love toward our enemies. This is the explanation we give to the IRS. But our primary reason to resist the payment of military taxes is to witness to our church, to our Mennonite brothers and sisters. We are simply seeking to live lives consistent to the faith we profess. If we, the church, all those who profess Jesus as Lord of our lives, lived more like Jesus, faithfully refusing to pay for war, our country would not go to war. (That is a political fact.) How can we pray for peace while paying for war? On a more personal level, we taught our children (our own sons) not to join the military. Our two youngest sons are nonregistrants. How inconsistent then it would be for us as parents to pay others to prepare for war and to practice violence on our behalf!

How do you do it?
We withhold payment of the military portion of our federal income tax (approximately 47 percent) and send that amount to life-giving organizations (e.g., our local congregation’s compassion fund, Christian Peacemaker Teams and the National War Tax Resisters Coordinating Committee). A letter of explanation is sent to the director of IRS and included with our annual IRS report. Most importantly, copies of our letter to the IRS are sent to key Mennonite Church USA leaders and heads of organizations. With these letters, a handwritten note is included—an encouragement to promote the witness against the payment of military taxes.

Sue Klassen and Johann Zimmerman, public health nurse and structural engineer

How long have you redirected a portion of your taxes?
We have always kept our earnings low, not only for a lifestyle choice but to pay as little tax for military as possible. About eight years ago, when we came back from overseas with MCC and had taxable earnings, we started deducting taxes directly for military reasons.

Why do you do it?
We do it in order to inform our elected officials of our stand for peace. We send a statement to the local paper each year, and it has brought us into conversation with many different people from many walks of life about pacifist beliefs and peace initiatives.
How do you do it?

During the year, we underestimate our tax payments. Then when we have to pay what is due at the end of the year, we withhold a symbolic amount of 10 cents for every $1 billion that is annually spent on military funding, which adds up to approximately $80.

Jennifer and Kent Davis Sensenig, lead pastor at Community Mennonite Church and EMU adjunct professor

How long have you redirected a portion of your taxes or minimized what you owe?

About 15 years.

Why do you do it?

It is a small witness for peace, a part of our life of discipleship to Jesus Christ and a way of expressing that we seek a more just, peaceable and sustainable U.S. public policy. Kent’s parents lived in Vietnam for a decade during the U.S. military intervention into that civil war and saw firsthand the destructive consequences U.S. foreign policy can have.

How do you do it?

For some of the early years of our marriage we withheld a symbolic portion of our taxes (less than $100), which provided a reason to send letters to our Congressional representatives, the President and the IRS, expressing our faith-based resistance to U.S. budgetary priorities vis-à-vis discretionary federal spending.

We’re not always consistent. Some years we have withheld the entire percentage of federal taxes for military expenditures, and some years we have withheld a symbolic portion. Some years we have filed under protest and written letters. For the last five years, we have managed to not owe any federal taxes (beyond Social Security) by maxing out a variety of legal tax-break options, such as charitable giving, IRA investments and mortgage-interest deductions. One of us also only has part-time paid employment, which keeps taxable income lower.

Kent’s parents lived in Vietnam for a decade during the U.S. military intervention into that civil war and saw firsthand the destructive consequences U.S. foreign policy can have.—Jennifer and Kent Sensenig

Dorothy Jean Weaver, seminary professor of New Testament

How long have you engaged in an act of witness through your taxes?

Thirty years or so.

How do you do it?

I got this idea years ago from an MCC info sheet. I split my monies and write two checks: 55 percent to the U.S. Treasury and 45 percent to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. I mail both checks to the IRS along with a letter, copied to my legislators, explaining why I am doing this. I also send a symbolic sum of $45 to MCC for their “taxes for peace” fund.

Why do you do it?

In the letter I say that as a follower of Jesus Christ I cannot in conscience pay the portion of my federal taxes that goes to military purposes. I note that I have no intention to avoid paying the money I owe to the federal government. I simply wish to designate that these funds go to a cause that is life-giving, not death-dealing. And I submit these checks as an expression of my freedom of religion, protected by the constitution, the freedom not to have to take an action that is contradictory to my Christian beliefs.
Anna and Ben Wyse, public health nurse and owner of Wyse Cycles, with their children Martha, Desmond and Sam.

How long have you been living below the taxable income level?
Since we got married, 13 years ago—with the exception of one year when we accidentally made a little too much money.

Why do you do it?
Living below the taxable income level is at some level an act rooted in helping us sleep at night.

One component of American militarism has to do with protecting our consumptive lifestyles. The uneven distribution of wealth and uneven consumption of resources are one factor that drives conflict both in some localized conflicts and some international conflicts. As Americans, we cannot help but participate in and benefit from the violent structures that underpin our economy and society. By living under the taxable level, we at least are attempting to reckon with the dissonance we experience between what we believe and the broken world in which we all live.

We often feel like this is sort of a token act that will never really make a difference. We also know there are still numerous ways that we are complicit in the machinery of violence that our society relies on. Despite all that, this is one of the important choices we have made about how to express faithfulness and a longing for a different kind of world.

How do you do it?
By bringing home one income. When Anna had a job, Ben did a lot of volunteer work, and when he worked for folks he asked them to donate to various nonprofits in lieu of payment for services. Now Anna is a full-time stay-at-home parent, and we live on Ben’s income. We have to be careful with our budget, but we still live a far more abundant lifestyle than many of our neighbors in Harrisonburg and many of our global neighbors.

Living below the taxable income level is at some level an act rooted in helping us sleep at night.
—Anna and Ben Wyse

Rick and Carolyn Yoder, retired business and economics professor/semiretired international health systems consultant and psychotherapist

How long have you redirected a portion of your taxes?
Since we were married 38 years ago.

Why do you do it?
Our work has taken us to many countries where we have seen both the positive and negative effects of our tax dollars. Carolyn’s work in psychosocial trauma healing often involves dealing with the fallout of violent conflict. We believe it’s
a moral issue that nearly half our taxes go to military spending and that we spend more than the next highest 15 countries combined on the military while cutting domestic spending on programs such as health care, education and the social safety net. Redirecting a portion of our taxes to life-giving causes helps reduce the gap between our stated values on peace and nonviolence and our actions.

The research on bystanders says that silence in the face of harm or wrongdoing emboldens harm-doers, leading them to assume others support and agree with them. Doing something, even something small, puts them on alert that someone has noticed and doesn’t agree. We’re not under the illusion that our letters and voice will change things, but it does change us. And knowing what we know, how can we be silent bystanders?

How do you do it?

We first take steps to ensure that we owe the IRS on April 15, rather than having a refund due us. Then we redirect a symbolic amount, a couple hundred dollars, from our federal income tax payments to the National Peace Tax Fund and MCC. We enclose a letter with our tax returns, stating what we are doing and why, with copies to the U.S. President, our legislators and our congregation. We also enclose a copy of the formal action taken by Community Mennonite Church to offer its support morally, financially and otherwise to its members.

A question many people have for those of us who redirect our taxes to life-giving causes is about the consequences from the IRS. Sue and John’s experience is typical: “We receive quarterly letters from the IRS each year, informing us that we owe them money. We respond to them with a letter restating our reasons. If in a given year we have prepaid too much tax, the money that we have withheld gets subtracted from our return. We do not really mind that this happens, because we find that we have already achieved the goal of bringing attention to our stance on military spending and war.”

Rick and Carolyn have had a lien placed on their bank account for the amount owed plus interest and a small penalty. They have also had the IRS get the amount due by electronically taking their state tax refund. Ray and Wilma have been audited numerous times, likely due to the high amount of deductions they have for contributions.

In summary, the words of Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream fame express our sentiments well: “We Americans need to measure our strength not in terms of how many people we can kill but in how many people we clothe, feed, house and care for.” Somehow, that sounds a lot like a Rabbi from Nazareth, the one we serve, the one who said, “Follow me.”

Carolyn Yoder is a member of Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.
But we didn’t mean you

Two key rules for mission that come from Deuteronomy 31:8 and Matthew 28:18-20

by Barry C. Bartel

I studied the mission and values statements of Mennonite Mission Network carefully before agreeing to serve on its board. They sound good to me, even though “mission” has not always been a positive word for me.
**Back in first or second grade,** my parents took me to a concert on the Washington State University campus in Pullman. It was by a singer/songwriter member of the Sioux tribe named Floyd Red Crow Westerman. I don’t remember a lot about the concert itself, but my parents bought the album, and that album captivated me. I remember lying on the living room floor listening to it. When the album played to the end, I got up and started it again. Over and over and over.

Floyd Red Crow Westerman sang with passion about how the white man had come to this sacred land and conquered the Native Americans. One of the songs was called “Missionaries.” Here are some of the lyrics:

“Spread the word of your religions
Convert the whole world if you can
Kill and slaughter those who oppose you
Its worth it if you save one man
Go and tell the savage native
That he must be christianised
Tell him end his heathen worship
And you will make him civilized.”

And after several stanzas of passionate critique, the last stanza instructs:

“Missionaries, missionaries
go and leave us all alone
Take your white god to your white men
We’ve a God of our own.”

Westerman’s signature song was entitled “Custer Died for Your Sins.”

Fortunately, I also had good models of service and mission work growing up. We often had presentations at church by Mennonite Central Committee workers or mission workers on furlough. I had cousins who served with MCC in Brazil and Jordan and married women they met in their assignments. I owe a lot to my parents for the exposure they gave me to many different types of church service.

I was also fortunate to meet and marry a wonderful woman at college. We shared values and wanted to do Christian service after graduating. We applied to the mission boards and to MCC.

I still remember when we told my parents we had accepted a three-year assignment in Haiti. My mother said, Yes, we took you to programs about service and mission workers and helped develop a broad perspective of the world, and we support workers who go overseas, “but we didn’t mean you.”

I knew that she meant, We’re proud of you, and this will be hard in some ways. But of course, we meant you. She said something similar when we later decided to go to Bolivia.

**In our overseas experience,** we saw many positive models of mission. In Bolivia, the Spanish-speaking Mennonite church had started when local people meeting with MCC workers in Bible studies in their homes said they wanted to start a church. Service work in the name of Christ led to the formation of new churches.

In my regional role in Bolivia, I also interacted with mission workers throughout South America and visited the Argentine Chaco. The mission board sent missionaries to work with the Toba indigenous group in the early 1940s. But the missionaries got more and more frustrated. The Mennonite missionaries were frustrated as they tried to start churches and learned that after people left the Spanish mission service, they held their own services in Toba. An evaluation team that came in 1954 had one main recommendation: The missionaries had to “get out of the way of what God is doing.”

An evaluation team that came in 1954 had one main recommendation: The missionaries had to “get out of the way of what God is doing.”

I can hear Floyd Westerman singing: “Missionaries, missionaries, go and leave us all alone. Take your white god to your white men; We’ve a God of our own.”

But in 1954, the Mennonite mission did heed the recommendation, and they did try to get out of the way of what God was doing. Rather than try to plant new Mennonite churches, they changed their approach to walk alongside the local expressions of spirituality.

As my thinking about mission has evolved, I think I can boil mission down to two key rules:

**First, make sure you recognize God in the other.** This is what is missing when mission becomes conquest. Deuteronomy 31:8 instructs that, wherever we go, the Lord goes before us and goes with us. We forsake our God if we don’t recognize God in all people. We should recognize God in the loving acts of others and recognize that...
We should recognize God in the loving acts of others and recognize that God does indeed go before us.

What I call the second key rule about mission is similar: **Make sure others can recognize God in you.** I gained a new insight about the Great Commission Scripture in preparing this message. It came through the worship resources on the Mission Network web page.

Sandy Miller provided this insight: “In Matthew 28:19, the Greek verb *poreuomai* (por-yoo’-om-ahhee), or go, is a participle, not an imperative, and notes ongoing action. A better way to understand this Great Commission is to consider ‘go’ to mean ‘as you go.’ In other New Testament texts, this Greek verb is interpreted as how one should conduct oneself, or how one should live and walk in faith. The Great Commission is for the entire congregation.”

I like that. It means that a key rule for mission is to make sure that others can recognize God in us.

Willis and Berdalene Horst demonstrated these two rules in their 38 years of service in the Chaco of Argentina. At the memorial service for Willis on Sept. 19, 2013, Lindy Shelly shared these words from Willis: “The indigenous people themselves taught us the profound value of intercultural theological dialogue. The format of the circle for the conversation with the biblical texts permits us to hear the voice of God from the indigenous perspective. In the Bible Circle, everyone teaches and everyone learns. Together with the indigenous people, the Mennonite team continues learning to be present without conquering—neither for the Christian denomination that sends us nor for the culture in which we were formed.”

**There are many ways to share the Good News**—through preaching, through sharing, through serving “in the name of Christ.” When we seek to proclaim the Good News in mission, it is key that we first recognize God in the other and that we make sure others recognize God in us.

I like the way Stanley Green puts it. He offered...
these thoughts in his column in the November 2013 issue of The Mennonite, titled “From a ‘crusading mind’ to a ‘crucified mind’”: “The great new reality of our time is the shift from subject-object relations that have characterized missions in the last two centuries to a new era in which every church can embrace and live into its own identity as a subject of mission.”

He goes on: “What we need is not a moratorium. Rather than indulge a withdrawal syndrome, based on our sense of guilt because of past failures, what we need in Western mission is a continuing conversion from what Koyama calls a ‘crusading mind’ to a ‘crucified mind.’”

We need a commitment to participation in the global mission community in the spirit of servanthood, humility and relationships.

We like to describe it as Third Way Mission or, simply put, mission in the way of Jesus.

My understanding for and appreciation of mission has evolved. Willis Horst got it right. Linda Shelly shared these words of Willis at his memorial: “I went out to help others convert to Jesus and discovered that I was also converted in the process. ... I realized that those to whom I had gone were already engaged in a spiritual journey long before western missionaries ever arrived on the scene.”

And this last sentence sums it up the best:

“God wants to save people by redeeming their own story, making it possible for [people] to keep their own identity.”

I have often felt reluctant to respond to a request to serve the church, and I engage in some form of discernment process. When you hear that voice saying, “I can’t do that,” maybe you need to hear someone say, “Of course we meant you.” I can hear God best when I am able to open myself to say, “Here I am, Lord.”

A key rule for mission is to make sure that others can recognize God in us.

Barry C. Bartel is a member of Glennon Heights Mennonite Church, where he gave this sermon on Mission Sunday in November 2013.
Dual[ing] narratives on same-sex marriage

The Bible, experience and Christian charity allow for the exception of same-sex marriage.

by Martin Shupack

The debate today among the churches on same-sex marriage has focused on the meaning of the texts—what behavior exactly was Paul condemning—and whether or not this prohibition is a culture-specific or timeless command. There are many biblical instructions once viewed as universal and timeless that wisely have been revised because of profoundly changed historical contexts and fresh perspectives on God’s dynamic work in the world. Women’s role, subordination and slavery are the most cited, but there are many others.
Scholars have made sophisticated cases from Scripture on both sides of these questions. Their respective arguments provide Jesus’ followers with two contrasting narratives for discerning God’s will on same-sex marriage.

**Narrative #1: Affirming only traditional marriage**

The createdness of human beings as male and female and their physical and biological fit for sexual union with a view toward procreation is presented in Scripture as God’s creational intent and foundational to human existence. This is the meaning of marriage for Scripture, in the wider religious world and in human history and culture generally.

This affirmation is not simply assumed as the normal cultural practice but is set forth as inherent in our created humanness at the beginning of Genesis, in Jesus’ teaching, when he says, “At the beginning of creation God made them male and female, and for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife” (Mark 10:6-7), in Paul’s reference to “nature” in Romans 1:26-7 and implicitly in every biblical discussion of marriage.

Redemption of creation in Jesus doesn’t erase and replace the original creation but restores and perfects it.

If we are created physical beings, and if material creation is important to God, which all Scripture affirms, the physical and biological fit of male-female sexuality and its intrinsic connection to procreation cannot reasonably be denied. God ordained marriage between men and women, giving them complementary sexual organs, so that humankind could “be fruitful and multiply.” Same-sex sexual intimacy is clearly different from what our bodies and our species are made and fitted for. Redemption of creation in Jesus doesn’t erase and replace the original creation but restores and perfects it.

God promises grace and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to all who are called to celibacy, including those with a same-sex orientation. A compassionate church will relate to those with a same-sex orientation with understanding, patience and grace. It will not treat same-sex practice as more egregious than other behaviors that fall short of God’s perfect will. But this does not change the truth of God’s will or the ultimate goal of pastoral guidance and discipleship.

**Narrative #2: Affirming marriage between couples of the same gender**

God declared at creation that human beings are not made to be alone. Human beings need intimate social and physical companionship, and it is God’s desire that we have this. For many people this need is met in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Yet a small percentage of people discover that this innate need for intimate companionship is fulfilled only through a relationship with someone of the same sex.
Many young people raised in the church respond to this discovery in themselves by praying for God to change their sexual orientation or, if not, to grant them the gift of celibacy. Often other church members accompany them in this prayer. A few find their prayers answered, but many—probably most—do not. Their need and longing for intimate companionship remains unchanged, no matter how rigorous their self-discipline.

This should not surprise us. Both Jesus and Paul recognize that not every believer has the gift of celibacy. And the evidence clearly indicates that many Christians with a same-sex orientation, like many who are heterosexually oriented, have not received this gift from God. What are they to do?

Paul writes that “it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:9). It is not God’s will for believers to live in chronic frustration and distraction, which undermines mission, or in promiscuity, which destroys holiness.

In the New Testament, marriage and procreation are no longer foundational imperatives. According to Paul, marriage serves to satisfy sexual needs in a holy manner and provide the blessings of intimate companionship. Above all, marriage is, or should be, a reflection of the relationship of Christ and the church.

It is increasingly apparent that many Christians in covenanted same-sex unions manifest the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministries, just as Peter recognized the work of the Spirit in uncircumcised Cornelius. This witness is significant because the Holy Spirit’s presence suggests a life in faithful relationship with God and because the Holy Spirit often runs ahead of the churches’ formal decision-making. First came the Holy Spirit baptism of Cornelius and the irruption of the Gentile churches, followed by the Jerusalem Council’s process of discernment and authoritative decision.

Above all, it is clear that mutual, self-giving love can and does occur in a marriage between two Christians of the same gender, reflecting the union of Christ and the church. That is, a couple of the same sex can meet the “sacramental” requirements of marriage, illuminating Christ’s presence and serving as a means of grace to the world. No less than heterosexual marriage, such unions can be exclusive, permanent and issue in shared lives of service to God.

Must we decide between these two biblically based narratives?

Surely it is more biblically faithful to seek to reconcile and apply the entire range of relevant biblical material—and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the experience of the churches—to today’s context. While heterosexual marriages are the foundational biblical template and most accord with creational parameters, may we not recognize an exception for covenanted, monogamous same-sex unions/marriage, where a settled same-sex orientation exists and the gift of celibacy is lacking?

For biblical parallels to such an exception, we might think of God’s act of compassion in Numbers 9:1-8, permitting those who are ceremonially unclean at the prescribed time for the solemn Passover to celebrate it one month later. Ordinarily the penalty for such a violation was to be “cut off from Israel.” And in 1 Samuel 21, David’s men are allowed to eat the consecrated bread, an unlawful act granted as an exception. Jesus later points favorably to this act, in defending his own disciples, who, contrary to a strict interpretation of the Law, pick grain heads on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8).

Perhaps the closest parallels are Jesus’ (Matthew 19:9) and Paul’s (1 Corinthians 7:15) exceptions to the prohibition of remarriage after divorce, as Protestant Christians understand them. For Christians, such remarriage is generally prohibited, and it was completely banned as contrary to Scripture for 1,500 years. But since the 16th century, Protestant churches—including Mennonites—have affirmed specific exceptions. Might monogamous, lifelong, covenanted unions or marriage between a couple of the same gender constitute a similar exception to the general prohibition against homosexual practice?

Such an exception is especially compelling, given that our historical and cultural context today is very different from that of the society in which Paul’s instructions were given.

Whether or not Paul’s condemnation of same-sex relations is best understood as specific to the depraved sexual practices that characterized the
ancient world, this was clearly the predominant social-sexual context in which Paul wrote. Today, the broad social context is very different. Mutual, loving, long-term unions—not of jaded heterosexuals but of ordinary men and women who are constitutionally homosexual—are common.

**Affirming this exception would account** for all the relevant underlying biblical affirmations and values. It acknowledges the created biological fit of heterosexual unions while also recognizing the sacramental capacity and witness of the Holy Spirit in the lives of many brothers and sisters in same-sex covenanted/married unions. And finally, it is to follow the classical Christian practice of making moral judgments with a predisposition toward charity.

Augustine, Calvin and some Anabaptists emphasized that all Scripture must be interpreted in light of Christian love. According to Augustine, “We must meditate on what we read [in Scripture] until an interpretation be found that tends to establish the reign of charity.” And, “Whoever finds a lesson [in Scripture] useful to the building of charity, even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived” (*Augustine: On Christian Doctrine* by D.W. Robertson).

Calvin, who emphasized biblical authority, argued for discerning the proper application of Scripture’s moral instructions according to the “rule of charity.” “Everything,” he wrote, “should be examined in the light of Christ’s precept: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This precept is applicable every time” (*Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Advice*, translated by Beatty and Farley). (In discussing when one may and may not lend money at interest, in view of the strong Scriptural injunctions against it, Calvin gives this principle of “charity” for determining the morality of any particular applied practice in view of biblical teaching.)

And the Anabaptist leader Blesdijk, opposing what he believed to be some Anabaptists’ overly rigid biblical literalism, argued that the words of Scripture must be understood according to what he called the foundation of all Scripture—“faith acting through love” (*Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* by C. Arnold Snyder).

Recognizing this exception does not mean simply tolerating couples in same-sex unions as second-class church members. Rather it involves the judgment that God sanctifies this exception and accords these believers equal status in the Christian community, including access to licensed and ordained ministry.

**Ultimately it falls to the churches**—whether at the denominational, conference or congregational level—to discern and decide what the Holy Spirit is saying today about marriage between couples of the same gender. The term Jesus used for making such judgments is “binding and loosing.” John Howard Yoder identified binding and loosing as a vital church practice of moral discernment and reconciliation that “deserves to be considered one of the sacramental works of the community” (*Body Politics*).

This requires careful reflection together on Scripture as God’s written Word. But it is not con-
The narrative of the one Jesus

Jesus is both compassionate evangelist and commanding Lord.

by Mark Thiessen Nation

As I was in the midst of writing this essay, I was also preparing a sermon on John 4:1-42, the story about the Samaritan woman at the well and Jesus. A well-known story, it is one of many in the Gospels that display, narratively, what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself.” We are provided a vivid portrait by Jesus of what welcome and compassion look like. Attentive readers are reminded that those who seek to be followers of Jesus must, like our Lord, embody this unusual, engaged and honest love.
Just after presenting my sermon, I remembered that a dear friend of mine is in some ways similar to the Samaritan woman in John 4. About eight years ago, my friend sat at a kitchen table and wept. His life was out of control. He had been married five times and was living with a woman who was not his wife. He had multiple addictions, he said; his “gateway” addiction was sex.

**Ever since that day,** I have known two things. First, his full story clarified for me that sexuality is never a discreet issue. Second, he needed me to be as Jesus was to the Samaritan woman—someone who listened and elicited his own honesty about who he was. In the midst of my ongoing relationship with him, I have tried, when possible, to help him encounter the transforming power of Jesus—so he could know Jesus and the “spring of water gushing up to deep, lasting life,” in the way she did. (For that I still await.)

As I was finishing the preparation for my sermon on the woman at the well, I realized that most everyone I know likes what might be called the “evangelist Jesus,” the one in this passage who is welcoming and loving. However, I wonder how many of us today like the “commanding Jesus”?

What we read in John 4 is only the beginning of that story. If this woman—and the others from her city—truly became followers of Jesus, then they, like all other followers of Jesus, would hear him say words like the ones he uttered later in John’s Gospel. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (14:15).

*Our covenants of sexual faithfulness (to God and others) are fragile according to the New Testament.*
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his extraordinary book *Discipleship*, has helped many of us more fully grasp the wonders of grace and how it is costly and therefore inherently entails a costly discipleship. From what he says about the vital importance of sexual fidelity, it appears Bonhoeffer agrees with me in affirming what I have sometimes described in the following way:

**A traditional Christian view of marriage:**
God created human beings as male and female—not wanting either gender to be alone—and made them both in the image of God. As the images of God, the Lord commissioned them to be stewards of the earth. They were created as sexual beings and are not to be ashamed of that. A man and a woman leave their parents’ households in order to join together as husband and wife and become one flesh in a covenant for life. As husband and wife, God blesses them and tells them to “be fruitful and multiply.”

The New Testament clarifies that the central purpose for all of us who are in a covenant relationship with God is to witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. This leads to three sometimes offensive conclusions. First, though family is important, we should not idolize the family. Second, a corollary of the first: whether situated within families or not, our lives are to be given to praise of God, which necessarily includes compassionate service and hospitality in his name. Third, we should also honor a life of celibate singleness as a worthy way to serve God.

Our covenants of sexual faithfulness (to God and others) are fragile according to the New Testament. Many passages strongly emphasize various sexual temptations often simply subsumed under general warnings against sexual immorality. In the midst of these warnings, Jesus and the New Testament as a whole reaffirms that the vitality of marriage bonds depends on the sexual differentiation of male and female.

The New Testament does not view sexual intercourse as essential for a healthy fulfilled life—sex is less important than we make it today. On the other hand, these passages make sex more important than the view of “casual sex” often does. Instead, sexual intercourse is a powerful gift intended to bond the married couple—a gift effective enough that when it is divorced from this union it becomes the sins of lust and sexual immorality. Without sex being connected to the past (parents), the future (through the possibility of children) and the Christian community that lives in light of the vision of the coming reign of God, sex can easily lose its moorings and purpose (and thus resist appropriate constraints).

There have been dissenters from this normative position (as there are from any normative Christian teaching). And as is implied by my summary, almost all of us have struggles at one time or another. But having struggles, being honest about temptations or even moral failings is qualitatively different from redefining or effectively dismissing the call to the specifics of sexual faithfulness. Or what seems common today: pronouncing as oppressive any notion of faithfulness that doesn’t fit neatly into a squishy understanding of love and inclusiveness. Such pronouncements gain traction largely because—despite mostly empty rhetoric about community—our approach to subjects like sexuality is, mimicking our larger culture, mired in an almost unquestionable affirmation of a libertarian individualism.

Marty Shupack and I are long-time friends. He used to be my pastor; he was a board member of my Christian peace and justice organization in central Illinois for the six years I directed it. As it happens, it was with him in an ecumenical study group that I first started seriously studying the same-sex issue in, if memory serves, 1983. At that time, among other things, I read books by John Boswell and Robin Scroggs on the same-sex issue. I remember that Scroggs said that Paul, when he discussed same-sex relationships, was not talking about the same thing we are. Paul only knew about pederasty: unequal and abusive man/boy relationships.

Ever since this book, the claim that the Bible is not talking about what we are talking about has become a mantra among those who want to marginalize the 2,000-year-old consensus Christian view rooted in apparently clear biblical teachings. The claim is that our knowledge of homosexuality
and homosexual relationships has changed. In some ways that’s true. Our understanding of many things has changed. However, in this case not in the dramatic ways imagined.

From considerable reading over the last 30 years, I now know, e.g., that, according to lesbian scholar Bernadette Brooten, the ancient Greco-Roman world at the time of Paul had its own concepts of orientation; according to primary source material collected from his time, Paul’s world knew of long-term committed, equal gay and lesbian relationships as well as unequal abusive ones; and in the midst of this, according to William Loader’s massive study, there was a consensus among ancient Jewish teachings that all same-sex sexual relationships were wrong.

(I should also mention that the most obvious reason that Jesus never mentioned same-sex relationships would have been because he agreed with the Jewish consensus. Paul, on the other hand was much more fully engaged with the Gentile world, so it was an issue for some of the churches he addressed in a way it was not for Jesus’ mostly Jewish world.)

**What has changed dramatically**, however, is not our understanding of homosexuality but a sexual revolution, beginning with my generation, joined to an ever deepening form of radical individualism and a weakening of the church’s influence in society at large (along with the Mennonite church’s greater engagement with popular culture).

For approximately six years I tilted in an affirming direction (influenced by writers like Scroggs and Boswell). Then I read more. I read not only more in biblical studies and theology but more facts (in light of my lifetim e of relationships with various gay and bisexual boys and men, as well as more limited relationships with lesbians).

I repeatedly noticed the apparent disinterest in facts on the part of many well-meaning people (read chapters four and five of *Unprotected* by UCLA psychiatrist Miriam Gross for a sample of what I mean). Facts, it seemed to me, confirmed the traditional view regarding heterosexual marriage. And I typically observed an apparent slim range of reading in terms of theology and biblical studies.

I totally agree with Marty that Augustine, Calvin and Anabaptists such as Menno Simons all agreed that we must interpret Scripture “in light of Christian love.” They—and the early church fathers before them—are following Paul, who says in Colossians, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience” (3:12). Earlier in the same chapter, though, he says, “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)” (3:5). The whole passage is instructive (along with Ephesians 2-5). But the problem for Marty is that Paul, Augustine, Calvin and Menno agree with me, not him, on same-sex relations. The only reason a reader of his essay can’t imagine true love would be joined to a prohibition against sexual immorality (including same-sex relations) is because “love” functions in our present culture the way Karl Barth said “grace” was functioning for Dietrich Bonhoeffer in mid-1931 (six years before he wrote *Discipleship*); it was being made “into a principle and bludgeoning everything else to death.”

Let me end with this. At a prominent place in every presentation I now give on this subject, I say something like the following: I wish I could devote almost 100 percent of my time on this issue to helping us discern how we can, in real ways, know what it means to be loving and supportive of real gays and lesbians— with names, faces and particular lives—who are among us (after having affirmed the traditional view of marriage). That is to say, I want us to live with the question of how we embody what it means to be true followers of Jesus, the compassionate evangelist and commanding Lord.

Mark Thiessen Nation is professor of theology at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Va., and is on the elder team of The Early Church, a Virginia Conference congregation in Harrisonburg.

I wish I could devote almost 100 percent of my time on this issue to helping us discern how we can, in real ways, know what it means to be loving and supportive of real gays and lesbians.
Where saying yes can take you

As we approach age 30, Justin, my husband, and I have talked about our goals, especially as they relate to our sense of career and calling. For Justin there’s a clear trajectory he can visualize and would like to see materialize. We know that even the best-laid plans sometimes fail, but Justin at least has a clear sense of where he’d like to be and what he’d like to be doing in 10 more years.

For me, the answer to this question has proved more elusive. It’s not that there aren’t things that I’m passionate about or that there isn’t lots of work out there I could get excited about. On the contrary, I can get excited about almost any opportunity put in front of me if I pause to consider it long enough and it involves working with people (I’m an extrovert).

Over the last eight years since I graduated from college, I can see that the places and spaces I’ve engaged with my work have been less about intentionally moving toward one set career and more about saying yes to good opportunities when they’ve presented themselves.

Before she left her role as president at Bluffton (Ohio) University, Lee Snyder sent me an email with this poem by Sheri Hostetler (a poem she also quotes in her recent memoir), and she sent it to me as an encouragement to do just what I’ve been talking about: to say yes to opportunities when they present themselves.

Say yes quickly before you think too hard or the soles of your feet give out.
Say yes before you see the to-do list.
Saying maybe will only get you to the door, but never past it.
Say yes before the dove departs for, yes, she will depart and you will be left alone with your yes, your affirmation of what you couldn’t possibly know was coming.
Keep saying yes.
You might as well.
You’re here in this wide space now, no walls and certainly not a roof.
The door is always an illusion.

There’s no one right way to seek a vocation; what’s most important is to be open to God’s call.

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You’re here in this wide space now, no walls and certainly not a roof.
The door is always an illusion.

There’s no one right way to seek a vocation; what’s most important is to be open to God’s call and to say yes when we feel her Spirit urging us to act or be present somewhere.

One of the greatest gifts of these varied roles I’ve assumed across Mennonite Church USA over the past eight years has been encountering people across the country who have embodied the words of this poem and who enact their “yes” in response to God’s call.

I think of Jeff and Cheryl Landis, who spent years giving leadership to Pine Lake Fellowship Camp in Meridian, Miss., a holy place of retreat for many members of Gulf States Mennonite Conference. I think of the Williams family in Tampa, Fla., who have devoted their lives to leadership development and faith formation for young adults. I think of the members of Maranatha Christian Fellowship, a multicultural congregation in Northridge, Calif., who have learned to celebrate their Indonesian roots but also to embrace new worship styles and ways of being together so that their young adults feel at home in church. I think of Hyun and Sue Hur, who live out Jesus’ call to be peacemakers throughout the Korean and Mennonite communities in Los Angeles County. I think about conference minister Herm Weaver preaching one of the most powerful sermons I’ve ever heard three years ago, reminding those gathered that God is always faithful. I think of Rachel Halder, who has bravely shouted from the rooftops our need to acknowledge the ways sexualized violence is made invisible in our church. And I think about Doug and Cindy Baker and Lois and John Mast, four individuals who have devoted countless hours and energy to nurturing junior high and high school students at the congregation where I grew up, Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Ind.

My work has given me hope. There are so many good people across Mennonite Church USA, striving to be faithful to God’s call in their local contexts. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” This does not mean the journey will always be easy or clear. It doesn’t mean there’s only one good choice we can make. But it does mean God wants us to join in the work unfolding in the world. I may not know where my next step will lead or where my career may take me over the next 10 years, but I can be ready to say yes when the Spirit nudges me.
Bread or recipe?

John 6 tells the story of Jesus feeding people with bread and calling himself the Bread of Life. As a large crowd gathers around Jesus because of the healings they have seen, Jesus asks his disciples where they can buy bread to feed the people. Philip, overwhelmed by this question, realizes there is no place to go to buy so much bread. What they find within the crowd is one boy’s lunch, and Jesus is able to feed the multitude with it, with some left over.

In Mennonite Church USA, we gather around Jesus, hungry for nourishment. How will we be able to satiate our appetites when there seems to be not enough grace, not enough holiness, not enough healing, not enough bread to go around? It’s overwhelming to meet so many differing needs at once, so we divide ourselves into smaller groups based on doctrine, ethnicity, social standing, financial resources, our degree of attachment to tradition and common ministry goals, which can skew our understanding of the bigger picture.

Unlike Philip, who recognized that the problem of caring for the multitude was too overwhelming to be solved, we try desperately to find the right ingredients for bread. We gather our intelligence, our logic, our knowledge, our beliefs and our favorite way to interpret Scripture to try to meet differing needs ourselves, resulting in numerous, conflicting recipes, as we wrestle with these questions: What kind of church do we want? Who is in and who is out? What do we believe? What is our mission? What are our responsibilities to one another? How do we determine what sin looks like today? What should be our response to sin? Who is in charge here? No matter how often we revise our Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective, our hymnbooks and our polities, before long they need revision. Yet we keep trying to find a formula, a recipe that works.

Let’s face it. It’s hopeless. We’ll never get it right.

Jesus didn’t ask us to create the recipe or make the bread. He reminds us that we are not in charge of the church or anyone else. He is in charge, so why are we arguing about what he wants? He has not given our leaders a limited supply of bread to disseminate to those who deserve it. The bread we receive from the church may be good, but it’s always a day or more old and a little stale. Jesus gives bread (himself) to each person each day—just what we need for that day or that meal. He wants us to learn from him, directly, and incrementally. His bread won’t taste the same to everyone, and it won’t taste the same at different times in our lives.

We can learn from one another’s wisdom and journeys, but we need to recognize that we’re all a bit skewed in our understanding. We don’t all start our journey with God in the same place, and we’re not all in the same place in our journey with God. Jesus gives himself to each of us and gives us what we need to live abundant, eternal lives. Since each of us is unique, we won’t all have the same perspective, never, unless we reduce faith to whatever recipe we think we understand in our heads and can convince others is truth.

God intends much more for us. We don’t have to create a recipe. We don’t have to follow a recipe. He gives us the real bread, Jesus. All we have to do, once we have a relationship with Jesus, is to listen to him in order to understand what we need for the day and to run to him when we realize we’re being tempted. He will transform us from the inside out in his own time so that we will desire something better for ourselves. This is good news. Creating, handing out and following recipes is a lot of work and distracts us from our responsibility to share the good news that Jesus is the Bread.

If we are truly submitted to God, we won’t need to argue to prove we are right and others are wrong. We can trust God; we can have faith in God’s love for each person and in God’s ability to transform hearts in God’s own way, which might be different from how we would choose to do it. Transformation of others is neither our responsibility nor our right. We don’t have to make a recipe for bread and knead it with our own hands. We’d only mess it up. Jesus himself is a limitless supply of bread and the only bread we will ever need. Let’s give him room to work.

We’re not all in the same place in our journey with God.

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

Diane I. Bleam is a member of Bally (Pa.) Mennonite Church.
Directors transition at The Corinthian Plan

Church benefits plan continues to be stable in its fourth year.

Keith Harder of Hillsboro, Kan., retired March 31 from his position as director of The Corinthian Plan (TCP), a Mennonite Church USA-sponsored health coverage and benefits program based on mutual care practices.

Duncan Smith of Beaverton, Ore., who has been an area representative for the plan for the West Coast since 2010, began March 15 as interim director for a one-year term.

Harder led a project team in developing TCP in response to a resolution passed by the denomination’s Delegate Assembly in 2007 that called for the Executive Board to develop a plan that would provide all pastors with basic health coverage.

Inspired by 2 Corinthians 8:14, in which Paul urges the church to share its resources, it was launched in January 2010.

The self-funded plan provides benefits for pastors and staff members in 401 congregations within Mennonite Church USA and for employees of some area conferences and church agencies. It represents about 70 percent of Mennonite Church USA congregations with eligible employees.

Since the plan’s inception, participating congregations have contributed more than $2 million to the plan’s mutual care component—the Fair Balance Fund—which helps smaller congregations participate in the plan. Currently 51 congregations are receiving subsidies totaling just under $450,000 per year.

Harder’s background as a pastor and denominational minister helped equip him for the unique task he faced in 2007. He began working with the General Conference (GC) Mennonite Church in the Office of Ministerial Leadership in 1999.

When the GC merged with the Mennonite Church to form Mennonite Church USA in 2002, he became co-director of the new ministerial leadership team. One of his responsibilities was overseeing the Covenant Mutual Benefits (COMB) Plan—the health-coverage plan offered to congregations and area conference staff at the time.

According to Harder, participation in the COMB plan was limited, partly because area conferences needed to have a specific percentage of congregations participating to qualify for the plan.

This meant that some pastors were not able to participate and were uninsured.

The mutual aid component of the redesigned plan helped address this issue, he says, adding, “We also made other changes to make it a better product than what we were able to offer before.”

“Working with the plan has been gratifying, especially in knowing that we’re providing coverage for people who might not otherwise have any,” Harder says. “I describe that as a small step toward being a more just church.”

Everence—the denomination’s stewardship agency—administers TCP, and claims are paid by Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Though he is retiring, Harder will continue to serve TCP as an area representative for Western District, South Central and Central Plains Mennonite conferences.

Smith will continue in his area representative role—serving Pacific Northwest, Pacific Southwest and Mountain States Mennonite conferences—in addition to the role of director.

“One of the reasons I wanted to serve as an area representative was to work with congregations on the margins—immigrant and lower-income congregations—especially in gaining access to health care,” Smith says.

Smith has served as a pastor, conference minister and interim pastor, working in both rural and urban settings. He also works in church consulting and mediation and has chaired the Leadership Discernment Committee for Mennonite Church USA.

——Annette Brill Bergstresser of Mennonite Church USA

Corinthian Plan renewals strong for 2014

According to Keith Harder, outgoing director, and Duncan Smith, incoming director, the plan continues to be in a stable, financially strong position.

Twenty congregations did not renew their coverage for 2014, and of those, about half a dozen opted to purchase coverage through an Affordable Care Act exchange plan. That amount was not enough to cause concern, Harder says.

While the number of 400 participating congregations has proven to be a sustainable level, the number of congregations is not as important as the risk profiles of the members, Harder says. He notes that there will still be people without access to coverage due to their income level and because some states are choosing not to expand Medicaid coverage. In The Corinthian Plan, eligibility is based on hours of paid work/ministry, not on income.—Mennonite Church USA
Hilary Scarsella leaves Women in Leadership Project

Project hopes to build on her contributions

Hilary J. Scarsella, co-coordinator of Mennonite Church USA’s Women in Leadership Project (WLP), ended her service as an Executive Board staff member April 30. She has accepted an opportunity to continue her academic work in a Ph.D. program at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn., which led to her leaving the position earlier than originally expected. Due to budget constraints, Scarsella’s quarter-time position was set to end July 31.

Scarsella co-led the WLP for two years with Joanna Shenk, who has been leading the project since its inception in 2009-10 and will continue to coordinate it. Scarsella’s responsibilities included coordinating four focus groups (Undoing Sexism, Mennonite Monologues, Empowering Resources and Mentoring), editing the Do You See This Woman? worship resources and being the primary planner of “All You Need Is Love,” the Women Doing Theology Conference held Feb. 20–22 in Leesburg, Va. (See our April issue, page 32.)

“I’ve really enjoyed working alongside Hilary and am grateful for her significant contributions; they continue to enliven the WLP,” says Shenk. “Her work in organizing the Women Doing Theology Conference created a lot of momentum that continues to benefit our ongoing work.”

“It’s been a joy and privilege to work alongside Joanna and many women and men across the country who are excited about strengthening equitable structures and relationships in the church,” Scarsella says. “While this is the sort of work that encounters resistance, it is also work that allowed me to catch more than a few glimpses of how beautiful our church is when we love and care for each other. I hope the WLP will find the support and funding needed for its work to continue in meaningful and creative ways.”

Scarsella says she will continue to stay connected with the WLP as her schedule allows, editing a book of papers and other materials from “All You Need Is Love.”

Due to budget uncertainties and continued discussion about how best to continue the work of the project, no final decision has been made about hiring a new co-coordinator to work with Shenk. According to Shenk, she and the steering committee of the WLP are continuing to build on the success of “All You Need is Love” as well as other existing initiatives and are looking to involve more women and men.

They invite prayers as they seek ways to fund and continue the work.—Mennonite Church USA

The Mennonite, Inc., anticipates new website in fall

Board encourages increasing online content, broadening audience

At the annual meeting of board and staff April 26 in Elkhart, Ind., members discussed ways to broaden the audience and increase online content of The Mennonite, Inc.

Interim editor Anna Groff presented plans for a new website, to be launched in September. “The website will provide a place for daily news updates, as well as articles and blogs from a broader variety of Mennonite voices and sources,” reported Groff. “There will also be more separation between the new site and the print magazine.”

“We’re pleased with the web traffic and engagement on our current site,” she said. “We believe they will only increase with the new site’s updated functionality and social media features.”

Board chair Barth Hague noted that The Mennonite, Inc., “continues to search for new ways to distribute content that serve our mission to Mennonite Church USA and its congregations while creating a viable business model for our small organization.” Further, he said, “We believe the web and digital media are the foundation for how Mennonite Church USA members will gather information and communicate in the future.”

Groff reported that the magazine plans to use a new online subscription-fulfillment service in the coming year. This should enhance efficiency and provide better access to online subscription management, she said.

The board approved a 2014-15 budget of $404,000, about 9 percent below the previous year’s budget. While income is projected to cover expenses, subscriptions to the print magazine continue to decline.—Gordon Houser
Ten years after the train bombings in Madrid, 50 choirs sang “Despertar (Awakening),” a song with a commitment to work for national peace.

It was especially meaningful for Mennonite Mission Network’s Connie Byler and Soli Deo, a gospel choir associated with the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Burgos (Burgos Evangelical Mennonite Church), because their choir director, Nohemy García Soria, wrote and composed the song.

“The cold, dark night when we sang on the main plaza, I think we all just felt happy to bless our city in a new way and join the many groups around the country at the same time,” says Byler, who serves in Spain with her husband, Dennis Byler.

Soli Deo has about 25 members who mostly come from Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Burgos. Some members heard the choir on the street and asked to join. García Soria has directed the choir for about five years. She grew up in the Burgos Mennonite Church and still attends the church.

A few months earlier, the Pacto de Convivencia (Coexistence Pact), an organization formed to remember the victims of the Madrid bombing and promote peace in Spain, asked García Soria to participate in a nationwide contest to write a song for the 10th anniversary of the bombings.

The bombs planted in the train killed 191 people and injured 1,800. Islamist extremists carried out the attack because of Spain’s participation in the war in Iraq.

At the time of the bombing, García Soria lived in Germany. She had started to write a song back then, but never finished it.

“So when [the organization] asked me, I thought to myself that there was no coincidence in God’s plans,” she says.

A month later, the group called her and told her they had chosen her song.

“They loved the song,” says García Soria. “They said it was the perfect way to call Spain, to gather them together and to sing an anthem of peace for the country and for all nations suffering terrorism.”

García Soria prepared all the choir parts, instrumental parts and recorded the song. The materials were placed on the Pacto de Convivencia website so that other choirs and groups could join in and sing their support for peace in Spain.

The song’s lyrics call for a new awakening to a peaceful future in Spain.

“I like the song because it is pure gospel without being religious,” says Byler. “We could sing it in our churches, because we all need healing, peace and a new awakening.”

The Pacto de Convivencia called this 10th anniversary celebration “En la clave de paz” (“In the key of peace”).

“Choirs from all over the country joined the project and literally thousands of people gathered in hundreds of cities that week, singing together: an awakening, for Spain,” says García Soria.

Aside from the groups in Spain who sang, groups from Australia, the United Kingdom, Mexico and Japan joined the initiative and showed their support. García Soria says even TV channels in Argentina reported and played the song.

“God showed me a way to be a blessing through music: a universal language that everybody understands and receives in better ways than just words,” says García Soria, who says that music is a big part of her life. She participates in music projects constantly.

“I felt proud and happy for Nohemy, because she was so much a part of our family as she grew up with our girls,” says Byler. “The piano in our home inspired her to learn to play the instrument, and I never thought she’d get so far.”

As a result of this project, García Soria hopes to continue to write songs.

“This little adventure has given me the courage and the motivation to keep writing songs for God’s kingdom,” says García Soria. “I know that God has a plan for me, and worship is definitely something that God has called me to do. It’s about finding the heart of a worshiper that God put in me.”

See the music and choral parts at http://www.cervantes-manhattan.org/pactodeconvivencia/en-clave-de-paz/canciones-de-paz-para-un-pacto-por-la-convivencia/.

Listen to García Soria and Soli Deo perform the song in Burgos at http://youtube/jLAylbeoYM0.—Sara Alvarez of Mennonite Mission Network

Florida students embrace global education

Sarasota Christian School encourages students to develop global awareness.

No more water bottles in class, Bible teacher Don Fry tells the group of 10th graders as they come into his classroom at Sarasota (Fla.) Christian School. Usually congenial, this time Fry speaks in the no-nonsense voice teachers use when they know students are likely to object.

Looking confused, students pull water bottles from their backpacks and put them on the table.

School administrators, Fry says, have decided that water bottles are too disruptive. From now on, students can use the water fountain in the gym between classes and drink at lunch.

But the gym isn’t always open, students object, and it’s out of the way.

Anticipating their reaction, Fry pulls three water bottles from under his desk that he says they can drink when they are thirsty.

One of them holds brown river water. Another looks clear, but he says it has 50 times the amount of arsenic that is acceptable in drinking water. The third has clean water.

The students realize they have been duped.

“You were mad at me because you believe it is a human right to have water,” Fry tells students as they reclaim their water bottles. Yet, he says, in Bangladesh, some people only have access to river water or water with arsenic. In the lesson that follows, the class explores the problem and discusses possible solutions, including education.

Fry’s lesson is one of many at Sarasota Christian School this year that are designed to stretch the global awareness of its 425 students in kindergarten through grade 12.

To focus the teaching, school administrators have been working with Mennonite Central Committee’s Global Family education program. Each grade is connected to a school in another country that Global Family helps support.

The Sarasota students not only learn about the school, the children, the culture and the country, they also raise $3,900 each year to support 13 schools on four continents. Schools use the funds in various ways, from student tuition and teacher education to extracurricular programs and food.

“We want our students to graduate with a global perspective,” says Jeffrey Shank, superintendent. “Part of loving our neighbors means that we understand them, get to know them and engage in conversation with them and really work at just helping our students understand people from around the world.”

Understanding can be as simple as kindergartners praying for the Zimbabwean children they see on their teacher’s electronic tablet or second graders drawing their own design like those seen on kangas, a traditional women’s dress in Kenya. Fifth graders read Palestinian folk tales and turned one into a play they performed for the other students in a Global Family chapel.

Seniors in Spanish class who are connecting with a school in Palestine were introduced to Arabic. Juniors worked with Spanish because their school is in Nicaragua and sophomores learned some Bengali.

Each subject on every grade level incorporates lessons related to the country their students are studying, which requires some creativity for some subjects.

Ratio tables was the answer for sixth-grade math teacher Arika Chupp, who taught students how to use the tables to compare U.S. dollars to Burundi francs. In science class, groups analyzed the environmental impact of deforestation in that African country.

Learning about other countries and the schools leads to a desire for personal connection. Third graders made a video to send to the school they sponsor in Cambodia. Students in Ovalle’s Spanish III class are going on a learning tour to Nicaragua in the fall.

Gradually, teachers are figuring out how to fit the global perspective into their existing curriculum and understanding how the program ties into the school’s values of community, service and peacebuilding, says Dawn Graber, director of academics, who was instrumental in starting the Global Family program at the school.

—Linda Espenshade and Miriam Copp-Johnson for MCC

Karla Mumaw, Sarasota Christian middle school math and Spanish teacher, hands out worksheets about Colombia to her students.
Colleges, seminary graduate 1,148 students

Speakers include mayor, moderator, Nobel Laureate and others.

Bluffton (Ohio) University
260 graduates, May 4

For many college students, graduation means that life in the “real world” is beginning and “studying is over,” the mayor of Lima said May 4 at Bluffton University’s commencement.

“I understand this perspective because I lived it,” added David Berger, noting that he skipped two graduation ceremonies—at the undergraduate and graduate levels—because they weren’t important and he didn’t have time for them. “I was done studying,” he recalled.

But the seven-term Lima mayor also offered a different perspective to the roughly 260 graduates he addressed at Bluffton’s 114th annual commencement, saying the event marked “the beginning of your education, not the end of it.”

Berger called the ceremony “the start of a learning process that you are personally in charge of; that you get to design, direct and make choices about; and that does not involve going into debt to make happen and to sustain.”

The mayor made four recommendations to the graduates, including that they read at least one newspaper every day—“staying connected and knowledgeable about current events in the community you are a part of is important to how you will live your life,” he said; get and use a library card and discuss what they discover in their “self-directed learning” with family and friends.

He also urged them to think long term. He is a member of the San Francisco-based Long Now Foundation, whose purpose, he explained, is “to challenge us to think about human civilization as far into the future as human civilization has already existed—10,000 years.”

Also at commencement, the university:
• Granted a posthumous bachelor’s degree in organizational management to Cecilia Rittenhouse of Bryan, Ohio. Her son, Joseph, accepted the diploma on behalf of his mother, who died at age 71 on March 24, several weeks before she would have completed her academic program.
• Granted emeritus status to Gregg Luginbuhl, professor of art, who is retiring after 30 years at Bluffton and 38 years of college teaching overall.

Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., 17 graduates, April 26

“This is a beginning disguised as an ending,” Jon Swartz told his classmates at Eastern Mennonite Seminary’s baccalaureate worship service. Swartz and 16 others received degrees and certificates on April 26.

These graduates have big plans for ministry. Some expect to be pastors in the United Methodist Church. Some expect to be chaplains or work in pastoral counseling settings. Some are planning for church planting or ministry combined with work in another field. Others are still waiting to see where God calls. The 11 graduates and 6 certificate students are United Methodists, Mennonites, Episcopalians and “none of the above.”

Students have already begun the work that Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, the seminary commencement speaker, encouraged them to do. “You are asking how to be church differently,” Soto Albrecht said. “Examine the container that we call church and examine what we put in the container. Sometimes the church becomes a holy bubble that no one can touch. Sometimes we need to burst that bubble.”
Soto Albrecht is the first Hispanic woman to be moderator of Mennonite Church USA. She is also coordinator of field education at Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary. “The church is in the middle of major changes,” she said. “Lift up your prophetic voices but always stay within the church, because once you are outside you can’t change it. Be the change you wish to see.”

Ten students received master of divinity degrees this year. One student received a master of arts in church leadership degree, and six students received certificates in ministry studies. This was a small class by recent standards, but vice-president and seminary dean Michael King noted that class sizes typically vary year to year and the graduating class of 2015 is expected to be larger than usual.—EMS

Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., 467 graduates, April 27

Under a postcard-perfect blue sky at Eastern Mennonite University, 467 members of the graduating class of 2014 heard Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee call them to “take action in the present” rather than be paralyzed by uncertainty about what their future holds.

“Begin with what you have,” she said, using “your little gift to change the world.”

Gbowee referred with pride to being a graduate of EMU (she earned a master’s degree in conflict transformation in 2007) and to being the mother of a 2014 graduate, Joshua Mensah. “My home is 5,000 miles away from this campus, but this is a place that is very close to my heart.”

She said she chose EMU for her eldest son because she wanted a university with “a whole lot of Jesus and lots of churches” in the vicinity but “limited partying.”

Mensah, a digital media major, was one of 351 students receiving bachelor’s degrees. Eighty graduate degrees were conferred, including the first graduates from EMU’s two-year-old master of arts in biomedicine program. Graduate certificates, associate degrees and pastoral ministry degrees were also conferred.

Among the thousands of family members and friends in the audience were 10 relatives of Andrew Thorne, a well-known figure on campus for his basketball prowess. Less well-known is that he flunked out of EMU after his freshman year. Thorne appealed for readmission, hoping to prove he could be the first member of his extended family to finish college. The following years were not smooth, including at least one brush with the law. But, in Thorne’s words, basketball coach Kirby Dean “stayed in my ear to push me along and to be honest. He never gave up, and he’s been getting on my nerves for four years. But that’s what people need.”

Thorne’s 27-year-old brother (named James like his father) got leave from his work as a Norfolk-based petty officer in the U.S. Navy to be present. “I knew he was going to make it,” said his brother, though “it was not an easy ride for him.” Their mother, Wanda, said she is sure “Drew is going to be successful; he’s proven that he can overcome a lot of obstacles in his life.”—EMU

Leymah Gbowee does a dance move to celebrate the graduation from EMU of her eldest child, Joshua Mensah (behind her).
Mennonite schools (continued)

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Bethel College yet to come

**Goshen (Ind.) College**

246 graduates, April 27

Members of Goshen College’s Class of 2014 received undergraduate and graduate degrees on April 27 after being advised by speaker Joyce Bontrager Lehman to make decisions in life with passion, courage and patience.

The Class of 2014 consisted of 246 graduates who were awarded the following degrees: 159 Bachelor of Arts, 56 Bachelor of Science in nursing, 13 Bachelor of Science, 13 Master of Science as family nurse practitioners and five Master of Arts in environmental education.

In her commencement address, “The Imperative of Providence,” Bontrager Lehman used the story of making the decision to come to Goshen College to teach accounting in 1997 and her subsequent decision to work for Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) as turning points in her own life of seeking providence.

First, Bontrager Lehman advised the graduates to pursue passions and “do what you love.” Though she acknowledged that accounting and business might not be everyone’s passion, she gave a shout out to the business graduates and encouraged them to help solve global poverty.

Second, she said, have courage to take risks and make difficult decisions. “A lot of decisions are not made because of fear—financial fears, fear of uncertain consequences, fear of failure or even fear of what people will think,” she said. “Bold decisions take courage, and it’s not easy to walk through one open door without knowing exactly where it will lead.”

Finally, Bontrager Lehman said that preparation takes time, and patience is needed, along with faith. “You need to get to be good at what it is you want to do,” she said. “So whatever it is—start your own business, find a cure for malaria, be a master teacher, take your family on a trip around the world, climb a mountain, run a marathon, write a novel—come to it with passion, with courage and with patience. Figure it out. Commit. And providence will move.”

Bontrager Lehman was a program manager on the Financial Services for the Poor team at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, after working in international development with the Mennonite Economic Development Associates, World Bank and USAID. (See our September 2012 cover story.) Bontrager Lehman also taught accounting at Goshen College for two years (1997-1999). She grew up Amish in Kalona, Iowa, graduated from Eastern Mennonite University in 1965, received a master’s degree from the Bentley Graduate School of Management and now lives in Keene, N.H.

At the baccalaureate worship service in the morning before commencement, President James E. Brenneman delivered a sermon titled “Footprints: Evidence of History and the Promise of Future.”

“As evidence of history, footprints of past pilgrims may
serve as our guides, but that cannot be the end of the story for you,” he said. “It is also the case that your very own footprints leave trace evidence for others of where you’ve been. You bear some responsibility to leave some clues for others to learn from.”

Almost 130 graduates took the Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility, a national program at more than 100 colleges and universities. By signing the pledge, the graduates promised to “explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organizations for which I work.”—Goshen College

Hesston (Kan.) College
158 graduates, May 11

Graduates of Hesston College’s Class of 2014 were encouraged to take Hesston College values with them as they go everywhere during commencement exercises May 11.

Commencement speakers Joyce Huber, nursing faculty, and Marelby Mosquera, natural science faculty, spoke on “Passport for Your Dream: From Here to Everywhere,” highlighting the values of Christian community, diverse cultures, caring and joy as important for graduates to carry with them in their life and professional journeys.

“Today as you graduate, take your passport, stamped with the Hesston College values you have experienced here; they will nurture your dreams as you go from here to everywhere,” said Huber, who has been a member of the nursing faculty since 1973. Mosquera, a 2004 Hesston graduate, completed her first year as part of the science faculty.

Together they commissioned the graduates with a blessing from Philippians 4:23: “Receive and experience the amazing grace of the master, Jesus Christ, deep, deep within yourself.”

Presenting the student address were Nathan Peters of North Liberty, Iowa, and Hannah Weaver of Inola, Okla. Faculty and staff nominated student speakers, and their classmates chose them.

President Howard Keim conferred 158 degrees for the Class of 2014—60 associate of arts degrees, 14 associate of science degrees, 80 associate of applied arts and sciences degrees and four associate of general studies degrees.

Individual student groups were recognized in special ceremonies May 10. Paul Unruh, longtime Mennonite Disaster Service volunteer and member of the binational MDS Board of Directors and a 1958 Hesston Academy and 1960 Hesston College graduate, presented the message at a recognition ceremony for five students completing the Disaster Management Program.

Marcy Renollet, a 1995 Hesston College graduate and risk manager at Via Christi Hospitals Wichita (Kan.), Inc., presented the message at the nursing pinning ceremony recognizing 52 nursing graduates.

John Murray, lead pastor at Hesston Mennonite Church and a 1981 graduate, brought the message for two graduates at the pastoral ministries commissioning.

The Aviation department honored eight professional pilot graduates and seven air traffic control graduates. Ken Kropf, a Hesston College flight instructor, brought the message.

—Hesston College

Hesston College natural science faculty member Marelby Mosquera (right) and nursing faculty member Joyce Huber (left) deliver a joint-address encouraging graduates May 11 to carry Hesston College values with them throughout life.
Latin American church leaders seek hope, shared identity

Seventh consultation since 1986 draws 137 Mennonite church leaders

In a context of widespread poverty, violence and competing religious currents, where do Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in Latin America find hope?

On Feb. 10-14, 137 Mennonite church leaders from 19 different countries gathered in Guatemala City for conversations around the theme “Toward a Ministry of Hope: Social Reality, Faith, Word and Pastoral Action.”

The “Seventh Consultation of Anabaptists in Latin America” sought to move forward in forging a stronger regional identity for Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Latin America.

According to several participants who were present at the first consultation of Latin American church leaders in 1986, much has changed in the intervening years. “I was impressed that all the presenters were Spanish speakers, deeply rooted in a Latin American context, and by the depth of theological teaching,” said Tomás Orjuela Gutiérrez, president of the Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia.

Sandra Campos, president of the Asociación Iglesias Cristianas Menonitas de Costa Rica, celebrated the active presence of women at the consultation. About half the participants were women. A significant number of youth also attended.

Plenary addresses challenged participants to a renewed commitment to a Christ-centered view of the church as a movement responding to human needs rather than a theological abstraction, an institution or a personal project of a charismatic pastor.

The church is a witness to the Good News, but we do not possess it.

“The church,” said Gilberto Flores in the opening session, “is a pilgrim people living in relationships—with Christ, with each other, and the society around them. … This means that its theology must always be improvisational and dynamic.” Flores, from Guatemala, is associate conference minister in the Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

“The church engages the world not as its owner,” he continued, invoking an image that would recur throughout the consultation, “but as its guest. The church is a witness to the Good News, but we do not possess it.”

Jenny Neme, director of the Justapaz in Colombia, noted that only a small portion of the violence in Colombia—as in most countries in Latin America—is directly linked to armed combatants. The majority of violent deaths are associated with domestic disputes, street crime, and narco-traficking that often reflects the structural realities of poverty, unemployment and despair. In the midst of this suffering, hope emerges in the wholistic Christian witness of shalom.

“We are a people with gifts, talents and ministries, gathered in the name of Christ to share a message of nonviolence and hope,” she said. Neme spoke of the challenge of helping young men in Colombia find ways of resisting mandatory conscription into the army. She also called on Mennonites to integrate peace into every aspect of their daily lives and be open to forming alliances with other peace-minded Christians.

Daniel Schipani reminded participants that “God has hope in humanity,” and is “always inviting humans to a life of transformation into the image of Christ.” He also challenged Mennonites to think of discipleship as citizenship in the world, attentive to the ways that God is at work outside the formal structures of the church. Originally from Argentina, Schipani teaches at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

Ofelia García, who works with Mennonite Central Committee in Mexico, highlighted the liberating gift of giving and receiving forgiveness as an expression of the Spirit’s presence. Fernando Pérez, a pastor in Mexico, called on congregations to challenge the divisive forces of culture by becoming truly integrated communities.

César García, general secretary of Mennonite World Conference, spoke largely out of his context in Colombia. But participants from other regions expressed appreciation for his analysis of contemporary religious currents feeding into Anabaptist-Mennonite identity in Latin America.

García highlighted ecclesial models focused on reason (fundamentalist emphasis on doctrine), justice (liberalist emphasis on social transformation), and experience (neo-Pentecostal emphasis on personal health, wealth and success), before describing an Anabaptist-Mennonite alternative understanding of the church rooted in Scripture, discipleship, worship and peacemaking.

The goal, García said, is not to defend a distinctive identity out of arrogance or as an end in itself but out of faithfulness to the gospel in ways that seek to break down boundaries.

Several participants described the event as a landmark moment in an emerging Latin American Mennonite identity.

“Gatherings like this,” said Edgy Zambrano, pastor in the Iglesia Evangelica Menonita Ecuatoriana, “remind us that we are not alone.”

The consultation was sponsored by Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite World Conference and the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Guatemala.—John D. Roth
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Goshen College
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Russian video seminary addresses religious pluralism

David Shenk’s lectures are reaching many across Central Asia.

Trinity Video Seminary (TVS) in Kursk, Russia, recorded a new video course taught by David Shenk in March. “What Difference Does Jesus Make in a World of Many Religions?” will be made available in several languages through the Internet.

“David has so much he could share. His experiences could help many people, and the course we recently videotaped is so needed,” says Aleksandr Spichak, academic dean at TVS. “People need to know what difference Jesus makes. David travels so much, but he cannot teach at two places at the same time. If his seminars are videotaped, many people can learn what is so unique about Christianity at any time and place.”

Shenk, global consultant for Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), described the ways the gospel is heard as good news within the context of other religious belief systems throughout the video course. The lectures were structured around the three ultimate questions asked by almost everyone: What is the purpose of life? How can I deal with my shortcomings and find forgiveness? What is the meaning of death?

“Religious pluralism is an issue the whole region of Central Asia is addressing,” says Shenk. “Each religion offers answers to each of the three ultimate questions. People will consider the gospel answers to those questions if they come to believe that the gospel is good news and that it is true.”

Shenk drew much of the course content from his book *Global God: Exploring the Role of Religions in Modern Societies*. The final course will include more than 50 video segments totaling just over 25 hours of instruction.

The lectures were structured around the three ultimate questions asked by almost everyone.

TVS’s first work with Shenk happened three years ago, when he taught a 20-segment video course titled “The Gospel in Lively Engagement with Islam.” The videos are now available in several languages through the Internet, and the Russian translation is being widely received across the region.

“Responses from Muslims about my understanding of Islam are generally positive,” says Shenk. “A cursory overview of the feedback reveals that a good number of respondents state that the gospel as presented in this course merits careful consideration and discussion by Muslims. I do not mean that there have been no negative comments, but the spirit of the responses on the whole is remarkably positive.”

TVS was originally founded as a two-year residential Bible college in 1998. Over several years, seminary administrators observed that while many pastors could not afford to leave their work and families for two years, there was a high level of interest in their courses throughout Central Asia. In 2005, they began recording class lectures on DVD and sending them to interested pastors and church leaders. Shortly after that they developed a professional video studio with cameras, lighting and sound equipment and began offering video courses through the Internet.

“Our courses are accredited by Euro-Asian Accrediting Association and could be used in bachelor’s or master’s programs in many seminaries in the post-Soviet Union,” says Spichak. “We are so grateful to God for sending David to teach with us. We were impressed by his endurance. He could teach on video for eight hours a day; our young workers were tired, but he could go on and on.”

The seminary is now working on editing and translating the lectures, with plans to release the course to the public in a few months.—Chris Fretz of EMM
Seminary begins new involvement in central Kansas

**AMBS—Kansas Center will offer one course each term, four per year.**

A nabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind., will begin a stepped-down level of involvement in central Kansas this summer, continuing to offer some courses while also exploring additional ways to provide resources in the area.

AMBS has received accreditation approval for an “ongoing course offering site,” which will be named AMBS–Kansas Center. June 30 will mark the end of the current AMBS–Great Plains Extension and the beginning of AMBS–Kansas Center with a simpler structure. The new program will offer one course each term—fall, interterm, spring and summer—for students pursuing a master’s degree from AMBS and students who wish to take occasional courses. Those pursuing a degree in ministry will be enrolled in the seminary’s distance program, Master of Divinity Connect.

Rebecca Slough, AMBS academic dean, reports that this new program will focus on courses especially applicable to churches in the area, including rural ministry and faith formation in the context of the prairies.

In addition to the master’s level courses, AMBS–Kansas Center will explore ministry and theological resources in partnership with organizations and institutions in the region, including Anabaptist-related colleges and Western District and South Central Conferences. These partnerships and continuing education options will be pursued in the next months.

**The new program will focus on courses especially applicable to churches in the area.**

An administrative team is being formed to guide the work of AMBS–Kansas Center with members representing churches and organizations in the area and AMBS.

A celebration of AMBS–Great Plains Extension and the earlier Conference-based Theological Education program is set for June 1 at Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton, Kan. The event will include a service of thanksgiving for the ministry and theological resources offered over the last 34 years along with celebration of the beginning of AMBS–Kansas Center.—**AMBS**

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The decision to disinvite John Howard Yoder to speak

An interview with James C. Juhnke, former history professor at Bethel College

Editor’s note: Allegations of sexual misconduct led the Church Life Commission of the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference to suspend the ministerial credentials of Mennonite theologian and author John Howard Yoder on June 27, 1992. Earlier that year, Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., disinvited Yoder from speaking at a conference. In the following interview, James Juhnke explains his role in that decision and how it took place.—Gordon Houser

How were you involved with the decision by Bethel College in April 1992 to disinvite John Howard Yoder from his role as keynote speaker at a conference on campus?

For two years I worked on planning and raising funds for an April 10-12 conference at Bethel entitled “Violence and Nonviolence in the American Experience.” My strategy was to get John Howard Yoder to agree to be the keynote speaker and then use his name to attract other participants. That strategy worked well. We had a great line-up of excellent scholars on the program. When Bethel became aware of Yoder’s abusive treatment of women, we had extensive discussions on campus. I worried that Bethel’s decision would undermine our conference.

Didn’t you know about Yoder’s reputation at the time you invited him?

I was not well informed. As far as I knew, Yoder had left Anabaptist [then Associated] Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., in 1984 because he wanted to move up the academic ladder. Later I learned that at the time of Yoder’s dismissal, AMBS had agreed not to release any information about his controversial behavior. In retrospect, this appears to be part of an unfortunate “conspiracy of silence” that protected Yoder. Of course, colleges and seminaries typically do not publicize the reasons their employees are fired. In a broader historical context, we know that enforced secrecy has long been an effective arsenal of defense by men who abuse women. Contributing to the silence was the fact that the women abused by Yoder did not come forward with their stories. Many folks in the AMBS community, I learned, were remarkably ill informed about what Yoder had done.

Why was it important for you to have Yoder at your conference?

One of my central passions as a history teacher was to interpret main themes in American history from the viewpoint of Christian pacifist values. Back in 1965, I was a graduate student at Indiana University when Yoder circulated an unpublished memorandum entitled “The Search for a Nonresistant Historiography.” His theological argument and historical examples were immensely stimulating. During my teaching career at Bethel College I sought ways to teach American history from that revisionist pacifist viewpoint. I corresponded intermittently with Yoder about this challenge. In the 1990s, as I faced the conclusion of my teaching career, I wanted to write a revisionist pacifist history of the United States. The conference in 1992 was one step toward that goal.

How did you and Bethel College become aware of Yoder’s abuse of women? What brought down the “conspiracy of silence”?

The times were changing. In 1991, there was a national media frenzy over Anita Hill’s testimony at the Senate hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court. Hill testified that Thomas had sexually harassed her. Thomas claimed to be a victim of a modern-day lynching. I remember watching with great interest the news coverage of the hearings. I assumed that Hill was telling the truth and that Thomas was lying. The Clarence Thomas hearings helped launch modern public awareness about sexual harassment issues.

The Clarence Thomas hearings helped launch modern public awareness about sexual harassment issues.

Do you think the Clarence Thomas case affected Mennonite attitudes?

That would be difficult to document. But something did lead Mennonite agencies to an unprecedented focus on the issue. In the early 1990s, the Mennonites, along with other denominations, put the issue of men’s violence against women toward the top of their agenda. There were many important conferences. In November 1990, the Mennonite Central Committee Domestic Violence Task Force sponsored a conference in California about violence and sexual abuse in the family. In October 1991, the Institute of Mennonite Studies and the Peace Program at AMBS sponsored a consultation on violence against women. In February 1992, the General Conference Mennonite Church’s Commission on Education and the Mennonite Church’s Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries sponsored a consultation at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp in Colorado entitled “Men Working to End Violence Against Women.” That consultation was modeled after an interdenominational meeting of the National Council of Churches that had impressed Mennonite participants. In the summer of 1992, the GCMC
triennial conference in Sioux Falls, S.D., adopted a “Resolution Against Personal Abuse.”

The February 1992 meeting in Colorado took place two months before our “Violence and Nonviolence in American History” conference at Bethel College. Mennonite leaders in Colorado promised to do something positive about patriarchal violence. The case of John Howard Yoder was discussed there, including some testimony from his victims. It was natural for freshly motivated people to focus on Yoder’s prospective appearance at Bethel. Three men (Fred Loganbill, Ken Hawkley, and Gordon Houser) wrote on Feb. 13, 1992, to President John Zehr: “We have learned that Dr. Yoder has sexually abused at least 30 women. Many of these women first met him at conferences like this one, we understand. We do not want more women abused by him.” I never saw the list of 30 names. But Bethel had to respond.

Were the charges against Yoder credible? Did you at Bethel do anything to check whether the charges were true?

We had only about two months until our conference started on April 10. On Feb. 15, I had a long telephone conversation with Yoder. He told me, “Seven years ago I formally asked to meet with and have the opportunity to apologize to whoever was making the allegations.” I asked if he was willing today to meet the alleged victims and apologize to them. He said, “I have asked for the opportunity for seven years.” I then did my own research in talks with current and former staff and students at AMBS (including president Marlin Miller) and with several of Yoder’s victims. Their claims were credible. Yoder repeatedly introduced explicit sexual dimensions into relationships with women, taking advantage of his authority as a powerful mentor who faced vulnerable students. As long as he did not engage in sexual intercourse with them, he was able to rationalize his behavior as acceptable and even therapeutic.

On the Bethel campus, the faculty and students engaged in vigorous discussion of the disinvitation, both before and after Feb. 21, when President Zehr wrote to Yoder that until “serious accusations of a moral and ethical nature” were resolved, “the General Conference Mennonite Church and Bethel College community will be better served if you were not to participate.” I wrote a letter to Yoder and told him I had talked with some of his victims. I tried to explain their viewpoint: “In so far as any woman has, at any level, accommodated your invitation for mutual sexual gratification, she cannot ‘go public’ without condemning herself. Even if she resisted your proposals from the beginning, she is likely to blame herself for having elicited advances and to assume that others would blame her, even if she is innocent. These women really do feel frightened and powerless.”

Who at Bethel was involved in the actual decision?

In my files is a memo from president Zehr’s secretary dated Feb. 18, 1992, inviting 10 people—faculty and administrators—to an ad hoc committee meeting. Included on the list was Robert Hinshaw, director of the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution. KIPCOR was the agency on campus that was officially responsible for the conference on Violence and Nonviolence in the American Experience. Louise Hawkley, administrative assistant in the KIPCOR office, did most of the detail work for the conference and the editing of the conference papers for publication. Zehr made the final decision.

How did you fill Yoder’s place as keynote speaker at your conference?

I asked Duane Friesen, a teacher in the Bible and religion department at Bethel, to take Yoder’s place. He refused. It was too late to find someone else. With more than a little anxiety, I decided to do it myself. I took off time from teaching and wrote a “Manifesto for the Nonviolent Reinterpretation of American History.” I realized that conference participants were disappointed not to hear Yoder. But for me it turned into an opportunity to present to a wider public my own thinking about the agenda for Christian pacifist historians. That address, “Manifesto for a Pacifist Reinterpretation of American History,” was published in Fides et Historia, the journal of the Conference on Faith and History.

Did the Bethel faculty and students support the decision to disinvite Yoder?

We were divided on the issue. My impression was that most people on campus wanted Bethel to go ahead with the invitation. My wife, Anna Kreider Juhnke, a teacher in the English department, was a feminist. She said that if Yoder were to speak at Bethel in this context, she would join protesting picketers outside Krehbiel Auditorium. On the other side, the March 5, 1992, issue of the student newspaper, The Bethel Collegian, printed criticisms of the disinvitation by Don Lemons, physics professor, Thane Chastain, manager of the radio station, and Nancy Leppert, a sophomore student. “What happened to ‘innocent until proven guilty?’” asked Leppert. Lemons argued that colleges and universities must “provide for the absolute free discussion of ideas” regardless of the character of the proponents.

Did the disinvitation of Yoder in fact “break the silence” about his abuse of women?

Bethel did not attempt to hide the issues. The coverage of the issue in the Collegian apparently emboldened Paul
Schrag, editor of *Mennonite Weekly Review*, to publish something about the issue for a wider audience. Schrag wrote an article that appeared in the March 12, 1992, issue, “Bethel Withdraws Invitation for Theologian to Speak; Sexual Misconduct Alleged.” That article was the first time anything about Yoder and his problems had appeared in the denominational or secular press. It was if a dam had broken. Other Mennonite and non-Mennonite publications reported on the issue. In July, Tom Price, religion editor of *The Elkhart Truth*, wrote a series of articles exposing his misbehavior and its consequences. (See “Price Told the John Howard Yoder Story” in our October 2013 issue, page 44.) It would not be accurate to say that Bethel College intended to “break the silence” on the Yoder case. But we inadvertently play a part in that outcome.

Some readers of *Mennonite Weekly Review* were critical of Bethel’s decision. Two women, wives of professors at AMBS (Winifred Waltner and Juliette Kuitse) wrote letters to the editor accusing Yoder’s alleged victims of bitterness and revenge. One reader (Brian D. Arbuckle) said that Zehr and Juhnke lacked integrity. “They have shown by their wimpish concern for political correctness that due process is not important,” he wrote.

**How did the event affect your relationship with Yoder?**

Yoder was not upset or angry. He said this was not the first time he had been refused. I sent him a draft of my substitute keynote speech, and he sent helpful comments in two separate letters. Later, when we published the proceedings of the April conference, we invited Yoder to contribute an essay to our book based on his reading of the papers. His essay, “The Burden and Discipline of Evangelical Revisionism,” appeared as Chapter 3 in *Nonviolent America: History Through the Eyes of Peace*. In subsequent years, when Carol Hunter of Earham College, Richmond, Ind., and I wrote our book *The Missing Peace: The Search for Nonviolent Alternatives in United States History* (Pandora Press, 2001, 2004), Yoder kept in touch with suggestions for the project.

**Yoder’s case continues to get popular attention more than two decades after the 1992 conference. Why does it not go away?**

Yoder died in 1997, but his theological reputation and influence are growing. His victims and their supporters are still hurting. There are many elements in this story that I know little about, including Yoder’s reconciliation with his congregation, Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., and the decision by the Indiana-Michigan Conference to withdraw his pastoral credentials. Neither do I know about the dynamics of the community of his victims. I assume that the issue is still alive in part because patriarchal violence against women remains rampant in American society.

**As you consider this case in retrospect, should the disinvitation of Yoder be a matter of pride for Bethel College?**

Probably not. It was something we fell into accidentally. Our decision was more to protect Bethel College and the planned conference than it was to make a clear statement about male abuse of women. We did not do anything note-worthy on behalf of the women who had been abused. More important than the disinvitation itself was the fact that Yoder’s case broke into the Mennonite press for the first time. The editors of *The Bethel Collegian* were not aware that their coverage of the issue had significance for the Mennonite denomination beyond the campus. They were simply reporting about events that had taken place on their own turf.

I read an essay by Ruth Krall, a former teacher at Goshen (Ind.) College, who wrote an extensive manuscript on John Yoder, male abuse of women, and the Mennonite church. Krall called the events at Bethel College a “pivotal moment.” She said the moment “needs to be further explored when church documents become unsealed and unrestricted.” In fact, the relevant documents for this event are all open and available at the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel. These include the files of President John Zehr and the files of the GCMC Commission on Education. I still have my own files at home. They are available to anyone interested.—*James C. Juhnke retired as professor of history at Bethel College in 2002.*

**A discernment group** to continue healing and reconciliation work in the wake of John Howard Yoder’s abuse of women and ongoing questions about how the church responded to it has identified several goals for its work:

- Review the evidence to document the scope of Yoder’s abuse and the church’s response to it.
- Publicly thank the women who “tenaciously persisted over many years to bring [Yoder’s] abuse to light to prevent further victimizations and to seek healing” and also thank those in church leadership who worked hard to hold [Yoder] accountable with a desire for his restoration.
- Work through area conference leaders and the Mennonite Church USA website to provide resources for victims of sexual abuse and to encourage educational experiences to prepare pastors and leaders for caring for abuse victims.
- Arrange for a public service of lament, repentance and healing at a large church gathering, most likely the 2015 convention.
- Explore the possibility of a denominational statement addressing sexual abuse.—*Mennonite Church USA*

Also, see www.mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/transformational-peacemaking/a-way-forward/frequently-asked-questions/
**CALENDAR**

Bridgefolk, the Mennonite-Catholic ecumenical organization, will hold its 13th annual conference July 24-27 at St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minn., under the theme “Mennonites and Catholics: Service—an Overflow of Christ’s Love.” Speakers include Vincent Guider of the North Lawndale Kinship Initiative in Chicago and Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator of Mennonite Church USA.

**WORKERS**

Honigmann, Ralph, was licensed as youth leader at Blainsport Mennonite Church, Reinholds, Pa., on March 30.

Honigmann, Val, was licensed as youth leader at Blainsport Mennonite Church, Reinholds, Pa., on March 30.

Landis, D. Isaac, was ordained as pastor at Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kan., on May 18.

Landis, Karl, was ordained as lead pastor at Mount Joy Mennonite Church, Mount Joy, Pa., on March 30.

McLain, Jeffrey, was licensed as associate pastor for young adults and families and community connections at East Petersburg Mennonite Church, East Petersburg, Pa., on Feb. 2.

Wenrich, Jonathan, was ordained as deacon at Blainsport Mennonite Church, Reinholds, Pa., on March 30.

Wise, Clint, was licensed as youth leader at Blainsport Mennonite Church, Reinholds, Pa., on March 30.

Wise, Kristin, was licensed as youth leader at Blainsport Mennonite Church, Reinholds, Pa., on March 30.

**OBITUARIES**

Amstutz, Judy Ebersole, 80, Wheat Ridge, Colo., died April 5, of cancer. Spouse: Mahlon Amstutz. Parents: Clarence and Ruth Ebersole. Children: Lynn Amstutz Ferguson, Lori Campbell, Rita Sommer; Rod; six grandchildren. Funeral: April 15 at First Mennonite Church, Denver, Colo.


Friesen, William “Bill” L., 97, died March 26, 2014, at Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton. He was born July 9, 1916, to Bernhard A. Friesen and Katie (Abrahams) Friesen on a farm near Henderson, Neb. A resident of North Newton most of his life, Bill taught at Bethel College, managed the college farm, served as the business manager and treasurer of the General Conference Mennonite Church, and as president to Showalter Foundation. On Nov. 30, 1944, he married Margaret Reimer in Beatrice, Neb. She survives. Other survivors include: two sons, Randall and Warren; daughter, Michelle Friesen-Carper; brother, Elmer; sisters, Martha Friesen and Nina Heiser; six grandchildren; and four great-grandsons. He was preceded in death by his parents; infant sister, Alma; and sister, Goldie Peters.


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**For the Record** is available to members of Mennonite Church USA. Births and marriages appear online at www.themennonite.org. Obituaries are also published in The Mennonite. Contact Rebecca Helmuth at 800-790-2498 for expanded memorial and photo insertion options. To submit information, log on to www.themennonite.org and use the “For the Record” button for online forms. You may also submit information by email, fax or mail: Editor@TheMennonite.org; fax 316-283-0454; 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517.


Knutson, Anna Miriam Dunn, 37, Dalton, Ohio, died Nov. 17, 2013, of cancer. Spouse: Joe Knutson. Parents: Peter and LeAnna Gerber Dunn. Funeral: Nov. 23 at Kidron Mennonite Church, Kidron.


Leatherman, Mary L., 73, Hatfield, Pa., died May 1. Parents: Samuel D. and Ada B. Lewis Leatherman. Funeral: May 7 at Franconia Mennonite Church, Telford, Pa.


Odour, Castro Ochieng, 20, South Bend, Ind., died April 18. Parents: Leonard Amouk and Eunice Odour. Siblings: Sylvia Odour, Wendy Odour, Brian Otieno. Funeral: April 26 at Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend.

Paden, Roxanne, 52, Belleville, Pa., died April 1, of cancer. Parents: Tom and Freida Paden. Funeral: April 4 at Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Belleville.


Williams, Dorothy Louise Locher, 94, Bluffton, Ohio, died April 2. Parents: Christian and Clara Suter Locher. Children: James D., Ronald J.; two grandchildren. Funeral: April 26 at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton.


**Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)** is seeking a **full-time communications specialist** in the Lititz, Pa., office. The primary responsibility is to effectively shape, enable and promote the communications strategy of MDS’ vision, mission and values. Applicants must be active in an Anabaptist church and committed to the Anabaptist faith and peace position. See the full job description at http://mds.mennonite.net/about-us/employment. Resumes may be sent to jobs@mds.mennonite.net or MDS, Attn: Human Resources, 583 Airport Rd, Lititz, PA 17543. Review of resumes begins mid-May. Recruitment continues until the position is filled.

**Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)** is seeking a **full-time volunteer development team leader** in the Lititz, Pa., office. Duties include, but are not limited to leading the volunteer development staff team in recruiting, training and placing volunteers at MDS responses. This position also provides vision and strategy to grow the volunteer base within MDS. Applicants must be active in an Anabaptist church and committed to the Anabaptist faith and peace position. See the full job descriptions at mds.mennonite.net/about-us/employment. Resumes may be sent to jobs@mds.mennonite.net or MDS, 583 Airport Rd, Lititz, PA 17543, Attn: Human Resources. Review of applications begins mid-May. Recruitment continues until the positions are filled.

**Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)** is seeking a **part-time staff accountant** (30 hours) in the Lititz, Pa., office. Primary responsibilities include: month end closing and preparation of monthly financial statements, working with volunteer bookkeepers, reconciliations, general ledger, fixed assets and assistance with preparation and analysis of budgets. Working in an Excel and Quickbooks environment. Applicants must be active in an Anabaptist church and committed to the Anabaptist faith and peace position. See the full job descriptions at mds.mennonite.net/about-us/employment. Resumes may be sent to jobs@mds.mennonite.net or MDS, 583 Airport Rd, Lititz, PA 17543, Attn: Human Resources. Review of applications begins mid-May. Recruitment continues until the positions are filled.

**Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)** is seeking a **full-time pastor** in serving our growing congregation. FMCSF is a vibrant, open and affirming, urban Anabaptist congregation of about 150, located in rural Nebraska, is a member of Central Plains Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA. Interested persons should contact Central Plains Conference Minister, Tim Detweiler at timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org. All candidates must have an updated Ministerial Leadership Information Form (MLI) on file with MC USA.

**Iowa Mennonite School** has an opening for a **full-time volunteer development team leader** in the Lititz, Pa., office. The school is seeking a full-time, **one-year special education instructor** for the 2014-15 school year. Also needed is a **full-time, one-year special education instructor** for the 2014-15 school year to fill in for a leave of absence. Interested applicants should send a letter of application (found on the IMS website iowamennonite.org under the "about IMS" tab) and credentials that include at least three references to Norm Yoder, Principal, Iowa Mennonite School, 1421 540th St. SW, Kalona, IA 52247. Questions: email to nyoder@iowamennonite.org.

**The Fransen Family Foundation** is accepting applications from 501(c)3 organizations for **micro-grants**. See details at fransenfamilyfoundation.org. Submission deadline is July 31, 2014.

**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.

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.

**Want a website?** We spent time, energy and money building beautiful church-specific WordPress themes so you can focus on your message. For more info about reasonably priced managed hosting plans, call 1-888-868-7099 or email info@mennonite.net.

**Kalona Mennonite Church** of Kalona, Iowa, a congregation of about 250 members, is seeking a **full-time associate pastor**. This person will serve alongside a lead pastor and have normal preaching and administrative responsibilities. Other duties include a focus on youth and young adult ministries as well as nurturing spiritual growth and faith commitment. Interested persons can request a position description and congregational information by contacting Frank Yoder at franklin-yoder@uiowa.edu or conference minister Tim Detweiler at timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org. All candidates must have an updated Ministerial Leadership Information Form (MLI) on file with MC USA.

**Bethesda Mennonite Church**, located in Henderson, Neb., is seeking a **full-time pastor** to be part of a multi-pastoral team. The candidate should have a strong commitment to Anabaptist values and theology along with strong preaching, communication and community outreach skills and interests. An M Div degree with pastoral experience is desired, but not required. The Bethesda congregation, located in rural Nebraska, is a member of Central Plains Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA. Interested persons should contact Central Plains Conference Minister, Tim Detweiler, PO Box 352, Kalona, Iowa 52247 or call 319-458-0224.

**First Mennonite Church of San Francisco** seeks a **half-time to three-quarter-time associate pastor** to partner with our pastor in serving our growing congregation. FMCSF is a vibrant, open and affirming, urban Anabaptist congregation of about 150, 20 percent of whom are children under the age of 18. Details: http://www.menno.org/. 

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For more classified ads, visit www.themennonite.org.
Are you the one God has been preparing for us? Fairview Mennonite Church is seeking a full-time 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 in exploring possibilities at Fairview Mennonite Church, please email the search committee at fmpastorsearch@gmail.com or call Don Haskin at 989-335-3153.

VP of finance. MHS Alliance, a national membership and consulting organization based in Goshen, Ind., seeks a VP of finance to serve as a key leader in our mission to support Anabaptist and other Christian nonprofits. Responsibilities include oversight of all financial management and accounting as well as representing MHS with Anabaptist and Peace Church constituencies. Minimum five years experience in financial operations and supervision. Graduate degree in accounting or related field preferred. If you want to use your skills in a church-affiliated setting, send cover letter and resume to hr@mhsonline.org or 1112 N. Main, Goshen, IN 46526.


All Things in Common by Holly Grace Duane (Creation House, 2014, $13.99) calls for the body of Christ to embrace God’s heart for the poor and explains why the Bible links giving to the poor with revival. It unpacks what it means to assist the poor while offering practical ways to do this in a biblical manner.


What’s in a Phrase: Pausing Where Scripture Gives You Praise by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre (Eerdmans, 2014, $14) offers reflections on more than 50 scriptural phrases that prompt readers to pay attention, to pause where we sense a beckoning. McEntyre encourages readers to see such “words within the Word” as invitations and, in doing so, to discover that they are places of divine encounter, epiphany or unexpected guidance.

Beginning with the Word: Modern Literature and the Question of Belief by Roger Lundin (Baker Academic, 2014, $24.99) conducts a sustained theological dialogue with imaginative literature and with modern literary and cultural theory.

How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor by James K.A. Smith (Eerdmans, 2014, $16) is a practical philosophical guidebook, a kind of how-to manual on how to live in our secular age. It is also a reading guide to Charles Taylor’s monumental work A Secular Age (2007).

Instead of Atonement: The Bible’s Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness by Ted Grimsrud (Cascade Books, 2014, $31) traces the Bible’s salvation story through God’s liberating acts, the testimony of the prophets, and Jesus’ life and teaching, then argues that Jesus’ death gains its meaning when it exposes violence in the cultural, religious and political powers. God’s raising of Jesus completes the story and vindicates Jesus.


Strangers and Pilgrims Once More: Being Disciples of Jesus in a Post-Christendom World by Addison Hodges Hart (Eerdmans, 2014, $18) suggests how Christ’s disciples can say yes to much that was preserved during the age of Christendom and why they should say no to some of the accretions of that passing epoch.
**NEW VOICES**

**By and about young adults**

### Mennonites on the margins: Haiam Shenk

In my last column (February), I committed to bringing you stories of non-Mennonite people of color who serve Mennonite institutions and offer you a peek into their perspective in their work in Mennonite agencies. Not only is this a unique opportunity to meet someone you may not have known, but their perspective as an outsider can help us see ourselves differently.

I didn’t know what to expect, and I put out a few feelers to see who would enjoy sharing their story. It was more difficult than I thought, but, thankfully, Mennonite Mission Network has a strong, diverse presence of people of color. It’s encouraging to read positive stories like that of Haiam Shenk (right), who lives in Goshen, Ind. Thank you, Haiam Shenk, for sharing this encouraging perspective.

**In what ways do you work or serve with Mennonites?**

I work at Mennonite Mission Network with the Global Ministries team as assistant for Africa, West Asia and the Middle East. I also coordinate the International Ministry websites and the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM).

**How did you meet Mennonites or how were you introduced to the job where you work?**

The first person who welcomed me when I moved to Goshen was my Mennonite neighbor. She came to welcome me and my family, only a few minutes after our moving truck arrived, with a five-course meal, a big smile and godly love. Soon after that, we became friends, and she told me later, “I believe you should work for the church; you have that serving heart, passion for ministry, mission and God’s work.” When she learned about the opening for my current position, she introduced me to my now co-worker, who encouraged me to apply, and God did the rest.

**From your perspective, how would you define Mennonites or Mennonite culture?**

Mennonites are a group of Christian believers who believe in the Holy Trinity, Anabaptism and the Bible. The Mennonite church places strong emphasis on peacemaking, service around the world and living a Christ-centered life.

**What has surprised you about your work with Mennonites?**

Their openness and acceptance of having people with other beliefs working among them. I don’t think all Christian denominations will allow that.

**What challenges have you met with working with Mennonites?**

The biggest challenge is my ignorance of Mennonite history and how it affects what’s going on in the church today. Even though people are open to having me and others among them, I still sometimes feel like an outsider.

**Have you considered joining a Mennonite community outside your work/service? If not, why not?**

I don’t see anything in Mennonite beliefs and mission that comes against my own beliefs to stop me from joining the Mennonite church. In fact, I visited a Mennonite church a few times, and I like it. I think I just have to find the church that meets our needs as a family.

**Anything else you’d like to add to give us a peek into your Mennonite experience?**

I have felt supported and respected by Mennonite Mission Network since I started working here. It is such a blessing to see and know there are people who apply the Word of God so truly to their lives and try to live out the Great Commission. It is a church that wants to spread the good news of Jesus Christ around the world, a church that loves and supports all people without looking at their color, a church that makes every effort to live in peace with all people.

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Janet Trevino-Elizarraraz lives in San Antonio, Texas. She can be reached at alpasofirm@gmail.com.

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My Mennonite neighbor welcomed me and my family only a few minutes after our moving truck arrived.
The top 10 most influential Mennonites

Each year Time Magazine publishes a special issue featuring “The 100 Most Influential People.” Whether or not one agrees with its list, it’s fascinating to read.

By “influential” Time doesn’t necessarily mean “powerful,” as managing editor Nancy Gibbs writes in the May 5-12 issue. Influence, she writes, is subtle. “Power is a tool, influence is a skill.”

Spectrum: Time divides its list into five categories: Titans, Pioneers, Artists, Leaders and Icons. This year’s list includes 41 women and features people born on six continents, ranging in age from 16 to 78. They include Pope Francis and Abu Du’a, a key al-Qaeda in Iraq leader. They cross the political spectrum, from the Koch brothers to Tom Steyer. Influence may be positive or negative. It may be obvious or nuanced.

And Time does not simply list the 100 people and describe them. It also includes profiles that are really appreciations written by friends, admirers and mentors.

Unknowns: One value I find in the list is that it introduces me to people I may not have heard of before. For example, Bill Gates, who has appeared on the list four times, writes about Nigerian billionaire Aliko Dangote, who is fighting polio in Africa. Erwiana Sulistyaningsih is a migrant worker from Indonesia who endured months of torture from her Hong Kong employer and now advocates for better laws to protect migrant workers. Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe of Uganda helps girls who were forcibly enlisted as child soldiers find healing.

Celebrity culture: Such a list can be seen as a product of our celebrity culture, which tends to ignore the daily lives most people lead. And it certainly includes people who are celebrities. But it also includes people who work behind the scenes, who don’t otherwise receive much publicity at all.

Hope: Reading about some of these people brings me hope. Although our world is littered with the destruction of powerful forces, there are also many people doing much good in our world. It seems important to celebrate that and let their lives inspire us to be better people in our own contexts.

Influential Mennonites: As I read through Time’s list and the articles about these influential people, I wondered what such a list might look like if we limited it to Mennonites. Who are the most influential Mennonites?

I already hear the objections. In our bones, we resist focusing on individuals or lifting some up as more important than others.

But we’re discussing influence. Do we deny that some people in our midst have influence? What might we learn by naming them or at least debating who they might be? Is there some value to talking about influence?

Top 10: I imagine such a list—and I’m thinking 10, not 100—would range well beyond our institutional leaders. What about our artists? Who are our pioneers? Let’s expand our list beyond our national borders, as Time did.

Are there Mennonites who represent a more negative than a positive influence?

An idea: If you’re interested, send us your list of the 10 most influential Mennonites. Or any number up to 10. You may address me: gordonh@themennonite.org. We’ll also post the question on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/themennonite) and website, www.themennonite.org.

Whether or not you nominate someone, think about who has influenced you. What kind of tribute would you write about them?

Have you thanked them? TM

Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.
(Continued from page 5)

Heartaches for Stutzman
The discussion of sexuality throughout our denomination has been less than desirable and my heart aches for our Executive Board and Ervin Stutzman, executive director.

Our community in Berne, Ind., was blessed to have Dr. Christopher Yuan and his parents speak at First Mennonite. I urge those who have never heard them speak to go to YouTube and listen to their story. You will find several to choose from: Christopher’s testimony as he spoke at Cedarville (Ohio) University, “A Christian Response to Homosexuality, Nature or Nurture.” Or you may wish to purchase the book Christopher and his mother wrote together, Out of a Far Country (2011).

My prayer for Mennonite USA is and always has been to be a people filled with the power of our risen Lord and Savior.—Orlyn Lehman, Berne, Ind.

Unborn rights
In his May letter, Willard H. Albrecht denies that making abortion illegal solves the abortion problem. I’ve never understood this attitude. The reason abortion is wrong is that it is a violent, lethal assault on a fellow human being, a form of child abuse and domestic violence and a fatal form of discrimination. Should all laws against murder and assault be taken off the books? If not, why deny protection to the unborn that we grant to others? People who claim that abortion is wrong but refuse to support making it illegal apparently don’t really believe that unborn children have rights that everyone is bound to respect.—Jerry C. Stanaway, Villa Park, Ill.

A treasure for the church
Thank you for the wonderful cover story on Marcus Smucker (May). Sue Conrad Howes did a fine job with the limited word space available to profile such a prolific life. In addition to what she included, Marcus chaired the now defunct Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries board of directors for most of the 1990s. As such, he was essentially my boss while I served as MBCM president. What a wonderful mentor for a young leader to have! Blessings, Marcus. You have been a great treasure for the church.—Everett Thomas, Goshen, Ind.

Family relationships
Family relationships are dear to us. In our family of children and grandchildren, as we have increased through the years, differences have increased and we don’t agree at times. But we remain a group of people with familial ties and gracious consideration for each other.

I think of the church as God’s family. We are brothers and sisters in our faith. But the church is not basically a culture-centered group of people or a scientific organization. The church was founded on God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his Word, the Holy Scriptures. So we accept with thankfulness the 12th chapter of Hebrews that follows the faith chapter, 11. The 12th chapter begins with encouraging us to continue the race of life in Jesus Christ and then tells us how to run and accept God’s training. Read all of chapter 12 to the closing verses, Hebrews 12:28-29.—Julia Penner, Mountain Lake, Minn.

Absolute values
Read what the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. In verse 13b he writes, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” In verses 18-20, he tells the Corinthians to “flee from sexual immorality.” Nowhere does Paul condone them to continue to live a sexually immoral lifestyle.

I am a sinner saved by the grace of God. Yet I do not attempt to continue to live a lifestyle of sin. Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We should love all people no matter their lifestyle, but we should not condone their sinful lifestyle.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) wrote: “Christianity stands for absolute values, and the church falls from grace every time she compromises about them. For the world detests absolute values; they are so inconvenient.” My fear for Mennonite Church USA is that it is allowing the world to change our absolute values as we find them in the Bible.—Claude Schrock, Grabill, Ind.

Appreciate May issue
I want to express appreciation for the May issue. I found the articles stimulating and encouraging. Cyneatha Millspa’s Grace and Truth column reminds us how the global church can help North American Anabaptists find new life by nurturing “a living tradition, enlivened by local readings of Scripture, strengthened by the insights of many members, enriched by conversations with other Christians, that bears witness to the gospel in a rich variety of cultural forms.” I also appreciated his suggestion of apocalypse rather than tragedy as a lens for viewing the current moment in our denominational life.

Relentless love (Sabrina Falls), spiritual integrity (Marcus Smucker), healing through restorative justice (Ted Lewis), reasonable risk (Gordon Houser), challenging disparities (Harvey Yoder) and setting captives free (Exaucee Toffa) have provided a month’s worth (and more) of spiritual nourishment.—Joetta Schlabach, St. Paul, Minn.
God’s footprints in the ‘crisis’

The church stands at a door of an opportunity that comes along only once every generation or more. We have the prospect to engage in a broad forum for discussion that will likely shape the church for the next generation. The current crisis, as some speak of the unsettling debate on human sexuality or same-sex issues, is really as much an opportunity as it is a danger. This is particularly true for young adults, who have a profound interest in the subject at hand but seldom have the occasion to make their voice heard in church circles beyond their local congregation. This is a chance to study the Scriptures together and listen for God’s voice regarding a vitally important issue.

A few weeks ago, I joined a discussion group that met late one night in a packed dorm room at Goshen (Ind.) College. I came away from that meeting with new hope for the church. Why? Because these two dozen young adults demonstrated their deep care and concern for the church by the very nature of their thoughtful questions. I hope they will participate in a much wider forum for engagement regarding their questions and concerns.

I have heard it said that the Chinese symbol for crisis is a combination of two symbols for “opportunity” and “danger.” This may be a fit descriptor for this moment in history in Mennonite Church USA.

First, let me focus on the opportunity.

Loren Johns, a professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., says: “This crisis has kicked up more interest in—and more intense discussion about— theology, ethics and ecclesiology than I think I have seen in the Mennonite church in my 59 years. Thanks be to God. I continue to think that the theological discussions this crisis has elicited in the church can be a wonderful gift to the church—an almost unparalleled opportunity … if we are able to approach these discussions with appropriate patience and love.”

The “if” in his last sentence identifies one of the dangers we face. At this moment of profound opportunity for young adults to witness the church wrestling deeply with significant issues, some of us may not have the patience or the love to engage respectfully in the churchwide forum for discernment. I am not suggesting that Mennonite Church USA must stay together just as it is now or that it would be unfaithful to God for people to form alternate fellowships. I just hope that people who choose to leave Mennonite Church USA will go about it thoughtfully, with adequate time for spiritual discernment and exploration of unintended consequences.

Frankly, I see God’s footprints in and around many of places where people have discussed the current “crisis.” For example, I was heartened to observe the way the delegates of Franklin Conference engaged questions about their church affiliation at their delegate assembly on March 31. Franklin is one of the conferences that expressed concerns about the recent action by Mountain States Mennonite Conference to credential a minister who is in a same-sex relationship, so when they met as a conference, they examined “Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities” regarding their relationships across Mennonite Church USA. Their deliberations demonstrated careful thought and care for the church, both in its local and its national expressions.

They demonstrated that the current debates present a moment of great opportunity for us:

- to renew our commitment to be God’s church in mission;
- to clarify our core biblical, theological and ethical convictions;
- to set our eyes on a vision on the future;
- to clarify our aspirations for tending our common life together;
- to implement the Purposeful Plan for Mennonite Church USA.

I hope many people will engage in respectful conversations in small group settings, congregational gatherings and beyond. I’ll do my best to facilitate broader forums for the discussion so that together we may seek to align ourselves with God’s purposes in the world.
While not new, it remains important for us to acknowledge the way social media impacts our relationships and conversations within the church.

Meredith Gould, a speaker at the Associated Church Press convention April 25-27 in Chicago, outlined four areas of our understanding that digital technology has changed. Gould is a sociologist and digital strategist for churches.

She began by addressing the misconception that “social” in “social media” means “chit chat.” In fact, “social” refers to providing tools for “creating, nurturing and fostering community.” I will address three of her four points below and their impact within Mennonite Church USA:

1. **Time and timing:** Expectations surrounding how long a process takes have completely changed, she said. People are aware of news happenings much faster than they used to be, and they expect immediate feedback. She provided the example of the falling popularity of RSVPs. Millennials (those born after 1980) often disregard that practice as they think that by the time they RSVP, the “train has left the station.”

I thought of the news that broke in December 2013 regarding Mountain States Mennonite Conference’s decision to license pastor Theda Good. I heard some individuals express frustration about the amount of time it took the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board to respond. The EB wanted to wait until its scheduled meeting in February before releasing a response. Prior to social media, I doubt there would have been the same expectation for a response within weeks of hearing this kind of news.

2. **Privacy and disclosure:** Gould said “transparency” is now another buzzword overused by leaders. It actually means telling the truth and admitting that all information on the web is public. I thought of an example within Mennonite Church USA when I called a conference minister to ask if a letter to the EB from some congregational leaders within his conference was a “public document.” He said he had seen it floating around over email, so he assumed it was public. I admired this particular leader’s realistic and open attitude. One can’t take back an email after it is sent.

3. **Leadership and authority:** Finally, Gould said that digital technology is democratizing and flattening hierarchies within the church world. As Mennonites, we may think the hierarchy piece applies less to us, but the democratizing dynamic surely impacts our life as a church.

For example, at the Constituency Leaders Council meeting March 20-22, Ervin Stutzman, executive director, said the Executive Board hopes to conduct a congregational survey in the coming months to gather fresh data on church member responses to LGBT inclusion.

Digital technology could allow for an extensive online survey that could potentially reach almost every member of Mennonite Church USA. This is exciting. However, a challenge remains: how best to reach the varying parts of the church? For instance, the pro-inclusion part of the church tends to be more digitally savvy and comfortable with online surveys, so the response rate from that group could be higher. The EB will want to hear from as many people as possible—not just those eager to respond online. This could involve mailing and emailing as well as offering a link to the online survey.

For Mennonite Church USA, democratization due to digital technology is not straightforward or even predictable.

As we move forward, let’s consider ways to embrace these changes—thanks to digital technology—that Gould calls “irrevocable.” At the same time, it would be prudent to consider ways not to leave others behind.—ag