

# The Mennonite

## Midwife of friendships in global mission

Sara Regier has served in Africa, Mexico and North America and learned to be friends with God and with people.

March 2015

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INSIDE:

- Hope arises out of Lenten gray
- The birth of Anabaptism
- Creative maladjustment
- Humility and the lessons of history
- Owning white privilege



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20

- 12 Midwife of friendships in global mission  
—Laurie Oswald Robinson
- 17 Believing the inconceivable  
—Tonya Keim Bartel
- 20 The birth of Anabaptism  
—Valerie G. Rempel
- 24 Welcome and discipleship  
—Bob Brown
- 27 A new way of doing church  
—Jeannette Hughes
- 32 'Hope for the Future IV' calls for power sharing  
—Wil LaVeist
- 33 Executive Board wants to keep membership guidelines—Anna Groff
- 34 Medical career starts with Service Adventure  
—Kelsey Hochstetler
- 35 John Howard Yoder documents made public  
—Anna Groff
- 36 Pastors Week asks, What is an Anabaptist Christian?—Mary E. Klassen
- 37 SLT addresses ministering to 'nones' and millennials—Laura Amstutz
- 38 Memories of the Selma marches 50 years ago  
—Gordon Houser
- 40 Mennonite churches help undocumented immigrants—Ardell Stauffer
- 44 Shared identity and shared purpose  
—David Brubaker



6



42

DEPARTMENTS

- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 4 Letters           | 32 News                 |
| 6 News Briefs       | 44 News Analysis        |
| 8 Grace and Truth   | 47 For the Record       |
| 9 Global Anabaptism | 51 Classifieds          |
| 10 Miscellany       | 52 New Voices           |
| 12 Features         | 53 Mediaculture         |
| 30 Leadership       | 55 Mennonite Church USA |
| 31 Opinion          | 56 Editorial            |

ON THE COVER: Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson

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POSTMASTER send address corrections to:  
3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4  
Elkhart, IN 46517

#### STAFF

Executive director: Anna Groff  
[annag@themennonite.org](mailto:annag@themennonite.org)  
Editor: Gordon Houser  
[gordonh@themennonite.org](mailto:gordonh@themennonite.org)  
Advertising, subscriptions: Rebecca Helmuth  
[rebecca@themennonite.org](mailto:rebecca@themennonite.org)  
Bookkeeper: Celina Romero  
Editorial assistant: Nora Miller  
Design: Mary Jo Veurink  
Editor emeritus: Everett J. Thomas

WEBSITE [www.themennonite.org](http://www.themennonite.org)

#### OFFICES

3145 Benham Ave.  
Suite 4  
Elkhart, IN 46517  
phone: 800-790-2498  
fax: 316-283-0454

718 N. Main St.  
Newton, KS 67114-1703  
phone: 866-866-2872  
fax: 316-283-0454

3414 E. Fifth St.  
Tucson, AZ 85716  
phone: 717-606-6853  
fax: 316-283-0454



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### Commends the Showalters

I commend Richard and Jewel Wenger Showalter for their good, scriptural letter on godly life we are to live and related to the LGBT issue (January). They are in a good position to write on the biblical way of love and truth.

I want to add a historical note: The people of Rome and others who were taken up in this sin were destroyed.

We see in Romans 1 that God let these people be deceived into a reprobate way and that because of the sin in Sodom and Gomorrah they were destroyed (Genesis 18-19).

Blessed are the pure and holy in Jesus (Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:14).  
—*Wayne Kratzer, Kidron, Ohio*

### The bonds of family

Re “An Open Letter to My Beloved Church” by Chester Wenger (December 2014) and the Showalters’ response (January): I celebrate that their differing convictions about same-sex practices did not break the strong, loving bonds of family. (Jewel is a Wenger daughter and Richard is a son-in-law.)

There is implicit counsel here for Mennonite Church USA life. Even sharply contrasting convictions are being expressed within the family. Family is still family, big enough and strong enough for four church leaders to publicly express their love for each other. As the Hutterites say, “Blood is not water.”

Few hearts and minds are being changed on either side of our discussion about same-sex attraction. The families of God who worship as Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians and others, including the Mennonite family, have articulate leaders who differ. Each sincerely believes that they are following God’s will. Can we remain committed to be church family? Can we have unity without uniformity?

Biological families also have rough patches. Sometimes we hurt each other. But when we take a deep breath, we remember that healthy family life requires kindness even when we don’t feel like it sometimes. Even in disagreement we know it is tragic to push someone out of the family. Living with profound differences is difficult but possible within both birth families and church families.

We can learn from Chester, Sara Jane, Jewel and Richard and their remarkable Mennonite family.—*Vic Stoltzfus, Goshen, Ind.*

### Christ’s love reconciles

Does God love only things and objects? No, God loves all of us. “Love on another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). That is Christ’s command. Have we learned from Jesus, from the Bible? Have you read anything in the New Testament that doesn’t fit that command? We are members of Christ’s body (Ephesians 5:30). Christ and the early church did all they could to grow the church and bring Christians together. Isn’t that a good example for us to follow? A friend of mine said the Bible is a love story. Wouldn’t it be fun to follow that love? Did Christ tear his body (the church) apart? Christ’s love reconciles.

I saw a church sign today: “When faults are thick, love is thin.”—*Carl L. Smeltzer, Harrisonburg, Va.*

### Organize more like MWC

I’m beginning to think we are dealing with this [LGBT] issue in too small a way. How many future issues will we

face. What if we organized more like Mennonite World Conference? Could Mennonites in the United States come together. We could have geographical conferences, and wherever needed they could cover a wide area, like happens with Conservative conference.

Mennonite Church USA leaders try not to operate in a top-down way, but have we really organized more like a top down?—*Raymond Martin, Lancaster, Pa.*

### National cultural values

Mark Wenger (Opinion, January) states that right-leaning congregations are tempted to absorb cultural values that nationalize allegiances, echoing pagan gods. Yet that is what he does, as in his hypothetical situations he imagines Jesus using the U.S. Constitution as part of the process of determining what is right. The Constitution was a product of national cultural values. Imagine Christians using the Constitution to answer the question of slavery back when that was an issue dividing denominations. The Constitution explicitly permits slavery. The Constitution has been amended, but it still is based on national cultural values and is therefore not a reliable guide to determine what is right.

Another problem with Wenger's piece is that he assumes the Pharisees and Herodians really wanted an answer to their question. I don't think they did. I doubt if any of them changed their view of paying taxes based on Jesus' answer, and I think Jesus answered as if they didn't—a marvelous nonanswer to a crafty nonquestion. If we took his answer out of context, we would conclude that our tax burden should be less if we used less of the coin of the realm, i.e. use barter or Bitcoin, and that people in developing countries that use U.S. dollars in international transactions or in their black markets owe something to the United States. I don't think that's right.—*Wendell Miller, Engadine, Mich.*

### Let's stop paying for war

How many of us annually pay a tithe or more of our income in the federal taxes that subsidize the U.S. global war-making machine but give less than that to churches and other institutions addressing human needs?

When some 45 percent of our federal income-tax dollars are used to pay for past, present and future wars, shouldn't we be seeking ways not to pay that portion?

During the current era of perpetual

warfare, when the United States spends more on its military than the next 13 nations combined, we fail in our Christian calling if we only remember our legacy of witness as conscientious objectors. Building on our history of faithfulness, we are challenged in our time to seek ways to refrain from paying for war. We are compelled to address conscientious objection to military taxation in our congregations and to encourage one another in the ways that make for peace.

Conscripted to pay taxes that underwrite the killing, maiming, population displacement and ecological disasters caused by the military, how can more U.S. Mennonites stop paying for war?

The June 2014 issue indicated that some Mennonites refrain from paying the entire portion of the assessment allocated by the government to military purposes. Others hold back 10.4 percent of the amount assessed, or only \$10.40 as a symbolic witness. Others decide to lower the tax assessment by using legal tax-avoidance techniques. Some pay what the government assesses but do so with a clear, public protest.

War taxes kill twice. First, they directly pay for war making. Second, *(Continued on page 54)*

## IN THIS ISSUE

This month's cover story features Sara Regier (page 12), who has served and made friends with people from around the world. Writer Laurie Oswald Robinson calls her a midwife of friendships.

Tonya Keim Bartel's Bible study (page 17) is the first of a series that interact with Luke 24, the Scripture this summer's Mennonite Church USA convention will focus on. The convention's theme is "On the way/ En el camino."

This year marks the 490th anniversary of the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. Meetinghouse, a group of Mennonite editors, asked

Valerie G. Rempel, to write an article marking that event. See page 20.

In "Welcome and Discipleship" (page 24), Bob Brown reminds us to take humility seriously and be aware of our own shortcomings.

Sometimes people equate news with bad news, but there is much good news from congregations in Mennonite Church USA. See stories of ministries of congregations on pages 27, 40 and 42.

Mennonite Church USA is committed to becoming an antiracist church. To help us toward that end, Wil LaVeist reports on a meeting of people of color in leadership positions

across the church (page 32), and Anna Groff (Editorial, page 56) encourages us who are white to own our privilege and recognize that being antiracist is spiritual work and "a significant part of being a Christian."

If you look at the masthead (page 4), you'll notice that Anna and I have new titles (see the story on page 6). She has been named executive director of The Mennonite, Inc., while I am now editor of the magazine you're reading.

Our entire staff welcomes your prayers for our work. And we always welcome hearing from you what's on your mind.—*Editor*

## Groff named ED, Houser named print editor

NEWTON, Kan.—The board of directors of The Mennonite, Inc., has named Anna Groff, interim editor, to a permanent role as executive director (ED) of The Mennonite, Inc.

The ED is a new role created by the board to bring broad vision to the organization as a content delivery system for Mennonite Church USA and beyond and to work to develop programs appropriate for the digital age.

The ED will continue to function as CEO of The Mennonite, Inc.

Gordon Houser is now editor of the print magazine *The Mennonite*.

Houser has been associate editor of *The Mennonite* since 1998. From 1992-1997, he served as editor of *The Mennonite*, the General Conference Mennonite Church publication, which merged with *Gospel Herald* in 1998.

After 13 years as editor, Everett Thomas left *The Mennonite* in January 2014, and Groff became interim editor Feb. 1, 2014.

With an increased focus on expanding the publication's web presence, the ED will prioritize development work—both fund-raising and grant proposal writing—and seeking out new web and print advertising opportunities.

The ED will continue to write articles and provide a portion of the editorials for the print magazine.

"The Mennonite, Inc. is seeking to grow our content delivery through digital technology," says Barth Hague, chair of The Mennonite, Inc. board of directors.

During Groff's year as interim editor in 2014, she launched a new website, [www.themennonite.org](http://www.themennonite.org), which experienced a record-breaking increase in web traffic and social media engagement this fall.

Groff has worked for *The Mennonite* since 2006, beginning as assistant/web editor and later becoming associate editor. She will continue to work from her home in Tucson, Ariz.

She is an elder at Shalom Mennonite Church and is married to Brian Miller, a

CPT photo



## Israeli occupation affects children as well

A 16-year-old boy is arrested in January by Israeli forces for the second time in four days without any cause or explanation being given. He was first detained with other teenagers on the way to school, then handcuffed and moved to the local Israeli police station. He was finally released after a few hours. A five-minute film shot in December 2014 by Christian Peacemaker Teams Palestine intern Yousef Natsheh of two 10-year-old boys being arrested garnered more than a million views on Facebook and more than 2 million views on the Gaza-based Shehab News Agency.—CPT

family doctor with the Indian Health Service. They have an 8-month-old daughter, Ella Miller.—*The Mennonite*

## Peter Derksen, 86, mission worker to Japan, dies

WINNIPEG, Manitoba—Peter Derksen never wavered in his belief that God called him to ministry in Japan. That conviction led him and his wife, Mary, to serve there as church planters for more than 45 years, creating a network of believers who are still impacting



Japan today.

They worked with the Commission on Overseas Mission, a predecessor to Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network.

Peter died Nov. 15, 2014, after a

valiant struggle with Parkinson's disease. A memorial service was held Nov. 26 at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

While Peter led their church-planting efforts and preached, Mary was involved in building the relationships fundamental to church planting, as their family grew to include six children.

The Derksens' ministry began by teaching English language lessons. That provided the opportunity to model faithful living and talk about Christ. Their commitment to their church plant in Oita, a city in southern Japan on the island of Kyushu, sparked the growth of a tightly knit group of young adults. Young leaders from that group became Christians and later pastors.

Shozo Sato was invited to serve as the first local pastor of Oita Mennonite Church. After a few years, he moved

back to his hometown of Miyazaki to start a Mennonite church there. Junji Sasaki, a member of the Derksens' youth group, followed Shozo as the pastor of Oita. Sasaki still serves there after 32 years.

Tadayuki Ishiya, another member of the original youth group, has served as pastor of Hiroshima Mennonite Church on the largest, most populated Japanese island, Honshu, for 30 years.

Derksen was born Aug. 12, 1928, in Reinland, Manitoba, but spent most of his formative years in Abbotsford. He studied at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., and the Biblical Seminary of New York.—*Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Mission Network*

## Chemist urges efforts against climate change

BLUFFTON, Ohio—Daniel Berger says global climate change is not only real, but if the problem is not addressed during our lifetimes, the Earth could become extensively damaged.

The Bluffton University professor of chemistry said Jan. 30 that if the planet continues to warm, ocean levels will rise and cover coastal land. If the aver-

age global temperature increases by just two degrees, Berger estimates, the sea levels could rise high enough to permanently flood parts of New Orleans. And if the trend continues, areas such as the East Coast and southern Florida could disappear as well.

Rising levels of carbon dioxide in the air will decrease pH levels in the oceans, making it difficult for shelled organisms to survive, Berger predicts. He also projects that the increased carbon dioxide could lead to a large decrease in agricultural productivity for as much as two-thirds of the world, leading to global food shortages.

He bases his comments largely on reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and other monitoring and policy agencies.

Berger stressed that people can prevent damage by taking initiative now, starting in our own homes. We reduce our carbon footprints by driving our cars less often and more efficiently—and by investing in a hybrid or electric car—turning down thermostats and water heaters a few degrees, switching to low-energy light bulbs and eating less red meat, as “livestock emits great amounts of greenhouse gases,” he said.—*Bluffton University*

## Goshen College students document stories of sustainability in Kenya

GOSHEN, Ind.—David Leaman-Miller has shot hundreds of hours of video, but he considers footage of pigs at a rural Kenyan farm to be the best thing he's filmed. The film he's talking about is an eight-minute documentary about sustainable farming in Ndeiya, Kenya, one of two short documentaries filmed by Goshen College students during a May term course in 2014.

The Goshen College Communication Department and FiveCore Media has released the two documentaries on the work of Foods Resource Bank (FRB) and its partners in Kenya: *Sunset to Sunrise: Sustainable Living in Ndeiya* and *Culture and Community: The Maasai Shift to Settled Life*.

The films document the work of two self-help community projects based on innovative sustainable farming and water security. The Ndeiya project is a partnership of FRB, World Renew and Anglican Development Service. The Ngong Hills project is a partnership of FRB, Mennonite Central Committee and Maasai Integrated Development Initiative. Both feature interviews with partners involved in these projects.

Ten Goshen students traveled to Kenya last May for the “Practicing Public Relations in Kenya” course to film the documentaries, write articles and take photographs of this work.

—*Goshen College*

## East Coast rep named for The Corinthian Plan

ELKHART, Ind.—The Corinthian Plan has hired James Miller of Sarasota, Fla., as area representative for eight Mennonite Church USA area conferences on the East Coast, effective Feb. 1. TCP is a Mennonite Church USA-sponsored health coverage and benefits program based on mutual care.

TCP area representatives include Joe Christophel of Goshen, Ind., and Keith Harder of Hillsboro, Kan. Ingrid Friesen Moser of Goshen, Ind., serves as wellness coordinator, and Duncan Smith, Lakewood, Colo., is director of the plan.—*Mennonite Church USA*

## Pacific Southwest names conference minister

Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower began serving Jan. 1 as conference minister of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

She replaces Dick Davis, who retired after 3½ years in the position.

Ruth-Heffelbower is a member of Mennonite Community Church in Fresno, Calif. She served as the conference's area minister for Northern California from 1994 to 1999 and 2003 to 2007.

Pacific Southwest Conference is reverting its conference minister position to half-time because of budget deficits.

—*Panorama*

Desiree Corona



## Anabaptist history

Hesston (Kan.) College history instructor John Sharp illustrates a story of early Anabaptist martyrs with help from middle school participants during the “Know Jesus” event Jan. 31-Feb. 1.—*Hesston College*

## Hope arises out of Lenten gray



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

It's a gray day here in Madison, Wis. There is snow on the ground. It's gray, too. It's cold and gray, and it's been that way for most of the winter. It's bringing me down.

I have friends who love this weather. They say it's invigorating. They cross-country ski and go ice skating and play hockey. Not everyone experiences Wisconsin winters the way I do.

In fact, it's not entirely the weather's fault that I'm down. I have struggled with depression for as long as I can remember. Over the years, I've learned how to manage it so that it doesn't sweep me off my feet. While it never goes away completely, it doesn't prevent me from being a pretty good father, husband and pastor.

Still, these long, cold, gray days are tough. They wear on me. They make me want to take naps and watch movies and eat cookies and hibernate. Too many cold gray days in a row and I start worrying that depression is getting the upper hand. This winter can't end soon enough. It's been a dreary season.

By the time you read this, we will be a few weeks into Lent. We'll be on that long, slow walk to Jerusalem and all the terrible things that await us there. We will follow the disciples as they listen to Jesus speak of his death. We will share their disbelief and then their sorrow as all that Jesus predicted comes to pass.

**It is fitting that we make this journey** when the sky is gray and the ground is frozen and the grass is dead and the air is as cold as the grave. During Lent we follow along as Jesus walks toward the cross. In the process we are confronted by our own mortality. Death awaits us all. Lord willing, it is waiting a long way out ahead of us. But death is out there, and sooner or later we'll enter its cold embrace.

The temptation is to be afraid. To do everything in our power to hold death at bay. That fear can cloud our vision. It can trick us into believing

death has ultimate power over us. It can prevent us from seeing beyond the cold and gray of winter. It can convince us that this is how it is and always will be. Fear of death narrows our vision until all we can see is the cross looming before us. We lose sight of the empty tomb.

The apostle Paul once said that if the resurrection of Jesus is a lie, then we Christians are to be pitied as the most hopeless people on earth (1 Corinthians 15: 16-19). If Christ was not raised, then death is the end of everything. Death has the last word, and we are a people without hope.

**Fear of death narrows our vision until all we can see is the cross looming before us. We lose sight of the empty tomb.**

**In this bleak midwinter**, I can easily imagine a world without hope. I can imagine a winter that never ends, a spring that never comes, a world forever cold and gray. I can imagine a world in which death holds sway.

But then, and for just a moment, the sun comes out. It climbs the sky, rising up from the horizon. Gray snow becomes silver so bright it makes my eyes hurt. There is a hint of warmth amid the cold air. The sun comes up and with it hope for the coming of spring.

The sun rises, and I think of my family and the love we share. I think of my congregation and the warm, safe and welcoming place they make for me. I think of all the good things God has given me. I feel my spirit lifting, resisting depression's downward pull. I catch a glimpse of hope. It is enough.

The sun hides again. It is cold and gray outside. We are still on that Lenten journey.

But we have seen the light. Even if only for a moment, hope broke through. And we remember. Beyond the cross there is an empty tomb. Death's power is broken. Christ is risen. Hope is alive. And the last word spoken comes from the mouth of God. Hallelujah. **IV**

## Mennonites and Seventh-day Adventists

On the evening of Oct. 21, 1844, hundreds of people, inspired by the prophetic teachings of William Miller, gathered to await the Second Coming of Jesus, which they believed would take place the following day. When the trumpet of Christ's return failed to sound, many of Miller's disappointed followers left the movement and rejoined their mainstream denominations. Others joined the Shakers. A significant group, however, clung to the belief that the basic elements of Miller's eschatological vision were correct, simply wrong about the timing. One such group eventually coalesced around the charismatic leadership of Ellen G. White. White's visions and biblical teachings—published in some 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books and eventually translated into 140 languages—became the foundation for the modern-day group known as the Seventh-day Adventists (SDA).

Today, the SDAs are the fifth-largest Christian communion in the world, numbering 18.1 million members. During the past 10 years they have added more than a million new converts every year, with the overwhelming majority today living in Africa and Central or South America.

**Most North American Mennonites** are skeptical about SDA theology, especially its teachings on Sabbath worship, the imminent return of Christ, strict dietary restrictions and the high regard they give the writings of Ellen White. But in several ways, the SDAs have much in common with Anabaptist-Mennonite groups. Some early Anabaptist groups, for example—particularly those in Moravia inspired by the leadership of Hans Hut—were caught up with the expectation of the imminent return of Christ (Pentecost of 1528 was one predicted date). Several of these same groups promoted the idea of Sabbath worship, thinking it more faithfully reflects the practice of the earliest church in Jerusalem. Both traditions earnestly seek to follow Jesus in daily life, with a strong emphasis on the church as a community. Both groups have been willing to take unpopular positions that go against the grain of the culture around them, including conscientious objection to military service. And members of the SDA church in North America today, like many contemporary Mennonite groups, find themselves in a vigorous discussion about whether the future of their church should be oriented more to the evangelical mainstream or to a separatist iden-

tity—to a missional outreach that focuses on commonalities with the larger Christian tradition or a renewed embrace of distinctive practices.

In the spring of 2014, representatives of Mennonite World Conference and Seventh-day Adventists concluded two years of ecumenical dialogues by publishing the results of their conversations in the book *Living the Christian Life in Today's World* (available from the MWC Faith and Life Commission website). In contrast to recent MWC dialogues with the Catholic and Lutheran churches, conversations with the SDAs did not receive much publicity. After all, our relations with Catholics and Lutherans stretch back nearly 500 years; we seem to have far fewer connections with SDAs.

But at a recent meeting of the MWC Faith and Life Commission, it became clear from brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Taiwan and parts of South America that the lives of ordinary Mennonites in these countries intersect with SDAs much more frequently than they do with Lutherans or Catholics. These relationships are sometimes collaborative—particularly in areas of relief and service work—but in other settings can also be competitive, since SDA evangelists preach a gospel that sounds similar to Mennonites but with a strong theology of hope rooted in the expectation of Christ's imminent return.

**In 2017, the Christian church** will begin a series of commemorations focused on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the division that separated Lutherans and Anabaptists from each other and from the Catholic Church. Clearly, MWC should take an active role in those commemorations. But at the same time, the weight of history should not blind us to the fact that from the perspective of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church, ecumenical engagements with groups such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Assembly of God may be even more urgent.

Like these groups, our tradition emerged as a minority renewal movement at the margins of the established structures of Christendom. Although it is flattering to be invited to the main table of ecumenical dialogue, we have much to learn as well from those groups at the edges of mainstream Christianity. In this venture, it may be our churches in the Global South who need to take the lead. **TM**



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

We have much to learn as well from those groups at the edges of mainstream Christianity.

# Private service doesn't always mean best service

Some ideologues like to promote phrases like “free enterprise” and “big government,” the former being good and the latter being bad. Yet they often fail to define these terms with any specificity. And they often fail to note the possible consequences of living out these ideals.

Increasingly, state governments are turning to the private sector to handle services previously performed by the state. The argument is that government spending is wasteful and inefficient. But often what gets lost is accountability as these for-profit companies make profit, not service, their main goal.

Brian Joseph investigates one such service in his article “The Brief Life and Private Death of Alexandria Hill” (*Mother Jones*, March/April).

**Alexandria Hill**, or Alex, 2 years old, died on July 29, 2013, in Rockdale, Texas, while under the care of Sherill Small, her foster mother. Last November, Small was found guilty of capital murder and sentenced to life without parole.

Not on trial was the private foster-care agency that okayed Small for being a caretaker, or “mentor,” for Alex. Joseph’s article looks at such agencies and asks how accountable they are.

The agency involved in Small’s case was the Lone Star branch of the Mentor Network, a \$1.2 billion company that specializes in finding caretakers for a range of populations. Private foster care, Joseph writes, is “a fragmented industry of mostly local and regional providers that collect hundreds of millions in tax dollars annually while receiving little scrutiny from government authorities.”

Finding foster care has always been difficult, and with high case-loads and tight budgets, many state and local child welfare agencies are turning to private agencies. This means that in many places, “the government can seize your children, but then outsource the duty of keeping them safe—and duck responsibility when something goes wrong,” writes Joseph.

As part of an 18-month investigation, Joseph asked every state whether it knew how many children in its foster system had been placed in privately screened homes. Only eight could, and not one had a statistically valid dataset comparing costs, or rates of abuse or neg-

lect, in privately versus publicly vetted homes.

Christina Riehl, senior staff attorney for the Children’s Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law, says: “There are so many places where the government puts money to fix a problem without adequately checking to see if the money is actually fixing the problem.”

Joseph talked to former workers at Mentor who said they faced great pressure to OK caretakers. How much money the company makes is tied to the number of foster parents on their roster. As a result, says Roland Zullo, a researcher at the University of Michigan, “the lives of these children become commodities.”

## Alex’s death is not the only such case.

Joseph notes many other cases where foster parents were not adequately vetted and harm came to children. And in most cases, the agency was not held accountable.

In one case, a child sustained permanent brain damage from nearly drowning during a private foster-care placement, but California only fined the agency \$500.

When Joseph asked a spokesman for the California Department of Social Services why the state didn’t penalize the agency more, he said, “There’s not a huge group of people trying to be foster parents right now, and that’s a challenge—finding enough homes.”

Finding homes for neglected children is a huge challenge, and there are many wonderful foster parents. But giving a blank check to private agencies and failing to monitor their success is not in the best interest of children. “Free enterprise” isn’t always best.—*Gordon Houser*

## Pontius’ Puddle

Joel Kauffmann



“To heal is to make whole, and is not so ideologically definable or so technologically possible or so hand-billable.”—Wendell Berry in *Harper's*

### Nun, 84, and two others arrested for nuclear protest

Sister Megan Rice, an 84-year old Catholic nun who spent 40 years teaching in the poorest parts of Africa and returned to the United States due to malaria, is now living in deplorable prison conditions, stuffed in with 111 other women into a single room at a federal prison in New York City.

In 2012, she and two other activists from the Plowshares anti-nuclear organization—Michael Walli, 63, and Gregory Boertje-Obed, 57—were dropped off in the middle of the night outside the Y-12 Oak Ridge nuclear facility outside Knoxville, Tenn., one of the largest nuclear facilities in the United States.

Armed with spray paint, bolt cutters and a few other supplies, they first hung large banners on the facility's chain-link fence, then cut 14-inch inverted L-shape openings in the three fences that “protect” the facility. They crawled through the openings they had cut, then stood up and walked to the building—easily avoiding any electronic motion sensors and video cameras—without encountering a single guard.

Once they reached the highly enriched uranium-materials facility, they wrapped some pillars in crime tape and splashed a vial of human blood on the wall. They spray-painted quotes from the Bible such as, “Swords into plowshares,” and banged on the building with hammers. Then they waited to be arrested. They waited some more. Finally, they saw a car with a guard slowly driving up. He stopped, and radioed to the police that protesters had gotten in.

Her actions, underreported by the media and downplayed likely because of the embarrassment caused to the White House and federal prosecutors, proved that it is harder to break into a convenience store than it is to break into a federal nuclear facility.—*New York Daily News*

### Leave it in the ground

If the nations of the world are to keep their pledge to combat climate change, vast amounts of fossil fuel—oil, coal and even natural gas—must be left in the ground and sea, according to a new study published in the journal *Nature*. Over 90 percent of U.S. and Australian coal and almost all Canadian tar sands must remain unused, and none of the oil or gas in the Arctic can be used—if the global temperature rise is to be less than two degrees centigrade, as nations have agreed. In the modeling done by this study, the Middle East must keep underground an amount equivalent to Saudi Arabia's entire reserves.—*Christian Century*

### Numbers to ponder

- Estimated portion of black U.S. men who are ineligible to vote because of a felony conviction: **1/8**
  - Number of prison inmates per 1,000 people in China: **1.2**
  - In Russia: **4.8**
  - In the state of Louisiana: **13.4**
  - Percentage of active U.S. physicians who are men: **68**
  - Percentage of the 300 highest-paid physician-consultants to pharmaceutical and medical-device companies who are: **90**
  - Days a schizophrenic inmate in North Carolina was held in solitary confinement before dying of thirst in March 2014: **35**
  - Amount the U.S. Navy paid the brother of a Navy intelligence official in 2012 for 349 MK-15 silencers: **\$1,675,750**
  - Total amount the silencers cost in parts and labor: **\$10,000**
  - Number of the silencers that effectively silenced weapons: **0**
  - Portion of the 100 best-paid U.S. CEOs who earn more annually than their companies pay in federal taxes: **1/3**
  - Percentage of Americans and Chinese, respectively, who believe their government is “on the side of average citizens”: **12, 80**
  - Who believe their government is “on the side of corporations”: **73, 17**
  - Number of people killed by gang and drug violence in Utah since 2010: **39**
  - By Utah police: **46**
- Harper's*

### Top 10 reasons church visitors don't return

1. Having to stand up and greet others during the service
2. Unfriendly church members
3. Unsafe and unclean children's area
4. No place to get information
5. A bad church website
6. Poor signage
7. Insider church language
8. Boring or bad worship services
9. A member asking a guest to move from the member's seat or pew
10. Dirty facilities

—*ThomRanier.com*

# Midwife of friendships in global mission

**Sara Regier has served in Africa, Mexico and North America and learned to be friends with God and with people.**

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

Sara Regier remembers starry evenings when she danced with Congolese women around campfires. The women teased each other about their different dance moves, and laughter transformed long-standing differences into new friendships.





Sara at Bethel Deaconess Hospital, where she graduated from nursing school in 1957.

Photo provided

In the 1970s, Sara drew together women from various regions of the Mennonite church in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, she said during an interview late last year at her home in North Newton, Kan. She coordinated two-week leadership seminars to help women learn to know each other in postcolonial Congo and explore ways to use their leadership and spiritual gifts in a male-dominated culture.

Sara wasn't questioning local customs but inviting women to learn new skills, spiritual growth and solidarity, she said. Yes, she stood out as a tall white woman swaying her hips out of sync. But their teacher had become their student, happy to learn, happy to be part of a gathering that brought unity and joy.

Until then, "only the men went to church conferences, and I saw this seminar as a way to energize and empower the women," she said. "I wasn't there to teach. I saw myself as a facilitator who invited women to talk with each other, to worship together, to claim their gifts."

It was this sharing of gifts in mutual friendship that excited Sara. Once a maternity-ward nurse, she now was a "midwife" of friendship amid differences, taking the role of a servant. From within these circles of women, far from her rural Kansas roots came some of the cross-cultural relationships she forged while joining her late husband, Fremont Regier, in a lifetime of global mission.

These seminars occurred in their second mission assignment, from 1965-1976. That's when the Regiers served with what is now African Inter-Mennonite Missions (AIMM) in Nyanga, in southern Congo. She taught maternal and child health classes for women and children, directed

an adult learning center for women, led leadership training and homeschooled her children—Chuck, Heidi [Regier Kreider] and Nathan. Fremont led an agricultural extension and demonstration program.

### Global perspectives first sown in prairie seeds

The free-spirited Congolese gatherings were far removed from Sara's younger life, including graduation with the Class of 1957 at the former Bethel Deaconess Hospital (BDH) in Newton, Kan. She stood prim and proper in her starched nurse's uniform. That day launched her into her vocation, which would change and expand during the next five decades. She and Fremont Regier, whom she married two days after graduation,

**She and her siblings were expected to read the Bible and memorize Scripture. They were shaped by a strong emphasis on mission and service.**

later served in missions in Mexico and Africa and engaged with North American church leadership and education.

Sara said her training days were "like being in a convent," with daily chapels, strict rules and classes taught by deaconesses who took vows and wore habits. This well-ordered, disciplined setting was an extension of her childhood and teenaged years growing up on a farm on the outskirts of Elbing, Kan. She was baptized at

Sara (left) shocking oats with her brother John.

Photo provided



Fremont and Sara in Mozambique.

Photo provided



Zion Mennonite Church in Elbing.

“I had a very strong spiritual formation, and the best way I can explain it was that it was somewhat like a monastic community,” Sara said. “Everyone was part of the same group and went to the same church, and our family had daily devotions and prayer.” She and her siblings were expected to read the Bible and memorize Scripture. They were shaped by a strong emphasis on mission and service. During wartime, young men found alternatives to the military in Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps and 1-W programs.

**My biggest challenge was raising children from a very affluent society to be compassionate and open to the cultures where this wasn't the case.**

Sara was born to the late Hilda and Louis Janzen on Nov. 6, 1935, the only daughter of four children. They were offspring of Prussian and Russian ancestors who immigrated to Kansas in the 1870s and helped found Zion Mennonite. She went to a one-room school through eighth grade and to high school at Berean Academy in Elbing. That's where she first dated Fremont in her senior year. She attended Bethel College in North Newton for prenursing studies prior to BDH and her marriage.

The newlyweds moved to Manhattan, Kan., where Fremont completed undergraduate and graduate studies in animal nutrition at Kansas State University to prepare for agricultural mission. Sara gave birth to Chuck in 1959, worked at Riley County Hospital and earned a bachelor's degree at K-State in family and child development.

### **Old Colony becomes new neighborhood**

In 1961, the former Commission on Home Ministries, part of the former General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC), called the couple to serve two years with Old Colony Mennonites in Cuauhtémoc, Mexico. Fremont worked in an agricultural extension program for the government. Sara shared about maternal and child health among her neighbors and gave birth to Heidi in 1961.

“I could teach maternal and child health in natural, easy ways because of our new baby and the hospitality in our home,” she said. “As we sat and visited, Heidi gave me opportunity to model good health and feeding techniques.”

Sara said rural life in the Old Colony setting was similar to her upbringing. The Regiers lived in town, and so when Old Colony folks came there to shop, they often visited the family. Serving a light supper was common. Breads, soups, meats and potatoes were abundant, and skilled cooks taught her how to make noodles. In this setting, she had opportunities for adapting and modeling, she said. “I never thought of wearing anything but a dress—and always a headscarf to church” she said. “And when we were out in public, I always deferred to Fremont. ... On the other hand, we were able to model some healthy ways of living as a family.”

Part of that modeling involved helping her children adapt to different cultures. In Congo, the children were homeschooled and at fourth grade went to a boarding home in Kinshasa to attend school. Nathan was born in 1967. In 1977, the family moved to North Newton so Fremont could teach at Bethel College, where Chuck and Heidi attended. Nathan attended middle school in Newton, then went to public high school in Botswana, where his parents co-directed Mennonite Ministries, a new program of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and AIMM, from 1981 through 1985.

“My biggest challenge was raising children from a very affluent society—with all its privileges of education and health care—to be compassionate and open to the cultures where this wasn't the case,” Sara said. In a recent telephone interview, Nathan, 47, said his parents' modeling shaped him and his siblings into adaptive, resourceful and open people.

“We were taught that if we broke it, we fixed it,” he said. “If we couldn't fix it, we built a new one. We had no option to buy a new one. My mom never seemed to be flustered, and she was uncon-

ditionally present and unconditionally accepting of everyone around us, including our gardeners and housekeepers.”

He spoke about when he was a fourth- or fifth-grader, experiencing a U.S. school for the first time. “Because I was a minority in Zaire, I didn’t see color as a thing that distinguished people from each other,” he said. “So back in the States, when I was telling someone about a friend of mine and was asked what color he was, I couldn’t answer because I didn’t know.”

### **Caring for self, making a home in transitions**

Sara suffered an identity crisis when they moved back to the States in 1976. After two decades of caring for family and befriending families from other cultures, she now needed to care for herself. After Fremont earned his doctorate in adult education at the University of Wisconsin, they moved to North Newton. “We bought our first and only home, and there I found myself depressed and crying,” she said. “I had spent a lifetime learning languages and doing education with nonliterate women, and none of that was any good here. People at church would say, ‘Isn’t it wonderful to be home?’ But this wasn’t home.”

Kansas became home again as she found new places to share her gifts in the North American context. She joined a growth group for women in transition, and later led a similar group at the County extension office and at Prairie View Mental Health Center. Sara also became a part-time youth pastor at Faith Mennonite Church in Newton, the family’s church home.

In 1981, they returned to Africa to serve with Mennonite Ministries in Botswana, the joint program of AIMM and MCC, where they gave leader-



Sara in 1998 in Zimbabwe with Brethren in Christ church secretary Mrs. Mayo. Photo provided

ship to 40 workers. These were good years but also exhausting, Sara said. “It was the anti-apartheid era, and we lived right on the border of South Africa. We lived next door to refugees and political activists. We faced the horror of across-the-border raids and the tragedy of friends dying from bombings.

The couple came back to the United States in 1985 so Nathan could attend college. Fremont did consulting and short-term assignments in international development. Sara coordinated the former Mennonite Women in Mission organization. In

**I feared they were coming to find things to criticize. Instead they were coming to look for things to affirm.—Rod Hollinger-Janzen**

1990, the couple moved to Elkhart, Ind. At what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Sara earned a master’s degree focused on spiritual formation and mission in cross-cultural settings.

In 1993, Fremont and Sara conducted a research project for PEW Charitable Trust on nonformal theological education in sub-Saharan Africa. One of the programs they surveyed was with the former Mennonite Board of Missions in Benin, where Rod Hollinger-Janzen and Lynda, his wife, both in their 30s, were working.

In a recent telephone interview, Rod, who now serves as AIMM’s executive coordinator, shared fond memories of the kind, older couple.

“I was intimidated at the thought of being visited by this very experienced Africa couple,” he said. “But they were so gracious and so gentle that my anxieties melted away. I feared they were coming to find things to criticize. Instead they were coming to look for things to affirm.”

### **Two last whirls around the world**

In their later 50s, the couple still found energy for two more assignments. From 1993 to 1996, they became MCC co-directors in Mozambique after its civil war. From 1996 through 2000, they served as half-time MCC program directors in Zimbabwe and half-time regional coordinators for MCC in southern Africa.



Sara having tea with women in Mozambique.

Photo provided

Mozambique was their most difficult assignment, she said. “Our bodies were physically able, but we needed emotional and mental stamina,” Sara said. “We placed young couples in communities where people were coming back from refugee camps to find homes destroyed and looted.”

The Regiers were robbed, feared bodily harm and witnessed the effects on society of a generation of boy soldiers. “But Mozambiquan church leaders had an amazing love for Christ, a desire for peace and a strong sense of call,” she said, “so we hung in there.”

## I long for us to learn anew the meaning of receiving a call to follow Jesus as part of an ethnically diverse, global Anabaptist church. —Sara Regier

In 1996, they left Mozambique for Zimbabwe, where they served until they came back to North Newton in 2000. That’s where they deepened relationships with their extended family, which now included eight grandchildren. In 2010, after 53 years of marriage, Fremont died from prostate cancer.

Today, Sara still lives in the home they bought in the late 1970s to become a base for their college-age children, who eventually married and raised families. It is here where Sara still dances, in a different, quieter way, to the beat of loving relationships with God and others. Her passion for

friendship with the divine and the human is still central to her core. A women’s group meets bi-weekly in her home to share breakfast, practice silence, and listen and respond to Scripture. Sara also shares spiritual friendships, listens to others and prays with them to help guide their journey with God.

She credits a spiritual director, a Catholic priest in war-torn Mozambique, for introducing her to practices that continue to deepen her spirituality, she said. “He had lived the horrors of war and was a good guide for becoming more peaceful and centered in the midst of evil and life’s big questions,” she said.

In a recent telephone interview, Ann Dunn, one of Sara’s longtime friends, said, “Sara has an incredibly loving heart for people. Her insights make a person feel loved not only by her but also by God. She has taught me the importance of friendship—Jesus with skin on.”

Sara said some of her most important teachers about being “Jesus with skin on” came from her Congolese friends, who knew the joy of dancing and the tears of death. For example, a dying Congolese baby was laid naked on a blanket on a porch. “Everyone sat and watched as the baby’s breathing thinned and finally quit,” she said. “You could say that was barbaric, but I think it reflected a culture that knew its limits with medicine and still wanted to give this child an honorable death.”

Sara said she misses the “over the top” expressions of worship, anguished expressions of grief and injustice and deep longing for God to “save us.” She found these around the world in places where friendship with God and others was the glue of the community, not material wealth or “right” behaviors.

“I long for us to learn anew the meaning of receiving a call to follow Jesus as part of an ethnically diverse, global Anabaptist church,” she said. “I long for us to learn to trust and rely on God’s generous love and care for us. I long for us to open ourselves to the risk of compassionate listening to our neighbor, whether in the pew, next door or far away. I long for us to build inclusive community rather than define boundaries.”



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



This is the first of four Bible studies by different authors on the key Scripture text for Mennonite Church USA's next biennial convention, to be held June 30–July 5 in Kansas City, Mo.

"On the way/En el camino" is the convention theme, and the Scripture text is Luke 24. See [www.mennoniteusa.org/convention](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/convention).

# Believing the inconceivable



The Holy Women At The Tomb - William Adolphe Bouguereau / wikiart.org

by Tonya Keim Bartel

"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." How often have you replied with this phrase when great things appeared? Are you guilty of giving in to that dull voice of doubt when fortune smiles on someone you love? I am. And the story of Luke 24 shines a bright spotlight on this glaring faith flaw.

As a teenager, I worked at a restaurant where, back in the kitchen, we servers scoffed at people who requested modifications to their orders. But there's this thing about life where you can count on what you made fun of happening to you. My 9-year-old daughter is severely gluten intolerant. Since discovering her intolerance three years ago, I'm the annoying one with the special food orders. Every time.

## Why is it so hard to believe that what we beg and hope for in our daily life—when it really happens—is too good to be true?

In the rush of everyday life, putting nutritious, tasty food in front of my family is tricky enough. It's doubly overwhelming to make modifications to every snack and meal, not to mention finding a doctor who understands the implications of what we eat on our health. We love our pediatrician, but he knows far less than we do about how gluten affects the body's organs. For instance, he'll prescribe medicine for a persistent cough instead of connecting the dots between my daughter's years of eating gluten and how her body is processing food now, causing asthmatic symptoms.

One normal day, after I'd been searching for three years, someone at church casually sug-

gested a medical doctor about 45 minutes away from us. And now I call him Dr. Unicorn—because he's just plain too good to be true. He has an office like a spa and an out-of-this world knowledge of nutrition, loves children and, above all, has helped my daughter's health tremendously. He is good—oh so good—news for our whole family. Yet when I drive to his office, I expect it to be replaced by a reasonable business like a dry cleaner's or a bank. I watch for a hiccup in his practice that would seal the deal on his being a flake and not the doctor we were seeking.

Why is it so hard to believe that what we beg and hope for in our daily life—when it really happens—is too good to be true? Why can't we embrace the good news and settle into it? Isn't believing and welcoming the everyday miracles of our great big God the whole point of faith?

**The Luke 24 story is the precise opposite of the doubtful nature of our culture.** Jesus' resurrection and ascension demonstrate the obvious: God is so incredibly big—so far beyond our wildest dreams and imaginations—and indeed shows up in everyday, inconceivable ways. The wonderment of our faith is that what sounds too good to be true is indeed true.

*The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! ..."* So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened (verses 5-6, 9 NLT).

They didn't hesitate. They saw it, heard it and got it. Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of Jesus had watched the man they love die and were the first ones to arrive at his tomb. As women, they were people whose word was least likely to be believed. But without giving thought to their perceived credibility, they hurried to tell the others. Imagine them running, tripping over their cloaks and interrupting one another as they relayed the news to the apostles.

And those apostles were exactly like me. And I suspect quite like you.

*But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it* (verse 11).

Look at that: Doubting is human nature; we are wired to exercise caution toward anything beyond our previous experience. Even the apostles did. Then there's Peter:

*However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened* (verse 12).

Peter, a leader among the disciples, had been part of the good news of Jesus' ministry for years. Yet, just three days earlier, in Jesus' most desperate hours, he had rejected him. It must have broken his heart to so adamantly deny Jesus. Maybe on this day he was grasping the reality of grace, the opportunity to redeem his lacking loyalty.

Imagine him going to the tomb alone, quietly pondering, returning multiple times to check it, inquiring of the people he met for their account of what really happened. Like Peter, we watch for

God, deny our Lord, beg him to show up, then try to make the pieces fall into place, to pair what we know and have experienced with what is clearly far too good to be true.

Later, on the road to Emmaus, the two followers of Jesus discussed his resurrection, and Jesus appeared to them, saying: *"You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures"* (verse 25).

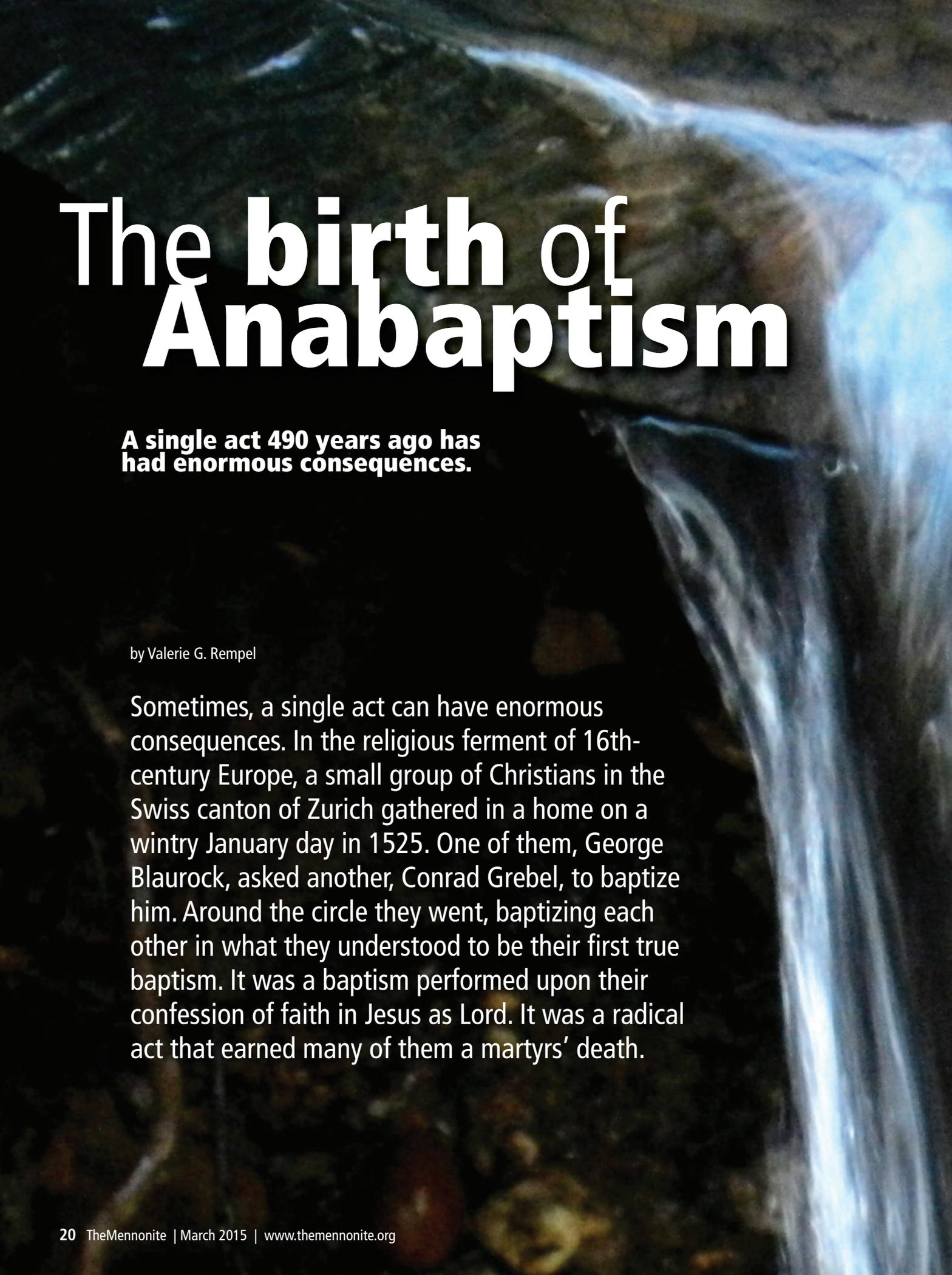
I know Jesus was talking to me, too. I say I believe in an inconceivably big God who can move mountains. I say the prophets were real and important. I say I believe in the Resurrection. Yet when resurrection shows up in my piddly, everyday existence, I get doubtful and cynical, thinking I made it up. At my best, I'm still waiting for the other shoe to drop.

As I prepare for convention, spend time in Luke 24 and go about my everydayness, I so want to more fully embrace the Resurrection. I want to lose myself in total trust in miracles like the three women; I want to grab onto grace like Peter; I want to walk alongside the prophets and my Jesus with complete abandon. I pray, with full expectation, that you, I and our church may embrace the inconceivable good news of Jesus.



*Tonya Keim Bartel (pictured with her daughter Eva), Hesston, Kan., serves as convention planning expeditor for Mennonite Church USA.*

I say I believe in the Resurrection. Yet when resurrection shows up in my piddly, everyday existence, I get doubtful and cynical.



# The birth of Anabaptism

**A single act 490 years ago has had enormous consequences.**

by Valerie G. Rempel

Sometimes, a single act can have enormous consequences. In the religious ferment of 16th-century Europe, a small group of Christians in the Swiss canton of Zurich gathered in a home on a wintry January day in 1525. One of them, George Blaurock, asked another, Conrad Grebel, to baptize him. Around the circle they went, baptizing each other in what they understood to be their first true baptism. It was a baptism performed upon their confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. It was a radical act that earned many of them a martyrs' death.



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**The 16th century was a time of great change** in the religious life and practices of many in Western Europe. A variety of voices from within the church were advocating for change. They were frequently critical of practices and theology that had developed over many centuries of church life.

In an earlier time, the criticisms of a few reform-minded individuals might have had little impact. Technology, however, had a hand in changing that. The printing press had been developed in Europe. Its advent was almost as revolutionary as today's Internet. In short order, the ideas of a few people could be shared among many. Reformation fever quickly took hold.

For centuries there had been only one church in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church. It exercised complete spiritual authority over all its members and had little tolerance for those whose thought or practice was different from the official stance of the church.

A primary symbol of that authority was the administration of the sacraments. Rites such as baptism, the Eucharist, hearing confession and assigning penance, even the last rites given at the time of death, were understood to be the means by which God's grace was given to the people. In essence, church leaders believed they held the means of salvation firmly within their grip.

To be unbaptized was to be undocumented.  
Neither the church nor the state considered that to be a good thing.

The practice of infant baptism was especially powerful. The physical act of baptism was understood to actually cleanse people of their sin. In Roman Catholic practice, the water of baptism was not just a symbol. Baptismal water actually did what it proclaimed. It made sense, then, to baptize infants in order to cleanse them of sin and secure their salvation.

Adult, or believer's, baptism called into question the Catholic Church's practice of conferring salvation upon infants who lacked ability or even the will to choose faith in Christ. This was more than just an attempt to challenge the authority of the institutional church. The practice of believer's baptism went to the core of the early Anabaptists'



understanding of what it meant to be Christian. Christian faith was not something one was born into. Christian identity came about by faith in Jesus.

## Early Anabaptists became radical Bible readers who tried to put into practice what they read in Scripture.

In declaring that salvation came through faith alone, early Anabaptists joined a host of other believers who were re-examining Scripture and coming to new conclusions about Christian faith and practice. Martin Luther, the former monk whose efforts to reform the Roman Catholic Church resulted in a new “Lutheran” church, argued against anything that appeared to be “works.” He echoed the Apostle Paul, who wrote that one was justified by faith alone and not by works, lest anyone should boast. Others, such as John Calvin in Geneva and Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, also attempted to reform the practices of the Catholic Church. Reformers insisted that Scripture was the sole spiritual authority, not the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Still, to be called an Anabaptist in 16th-century Europe was to be named a heretic. The term re-

ferred to being “rebaptized,” and it was a punishable offense. Even reform-minded leaders found it difficult to imagine a legitimate church refusing to baptize infants. None was willing to challenge the practice of infant baptism in quite the same way. Anabaptists stood alone.

**Unfortunately for Anabaptists**, the Catholic Church’s spiritual authority was connected to civil authority. Through baptism, one became a part of the church and a citizen of the state. One’s baptismal record functioned as a kind of birth certificate. To be unbaptized was to be undocumented. Neither the church nor the state considered that to be a good thing.

This relationship of mutual support between the institutional church and civil authorities formed a kind of “Christian” kingdom. Christendom provided a way of understanding the world that seemed to bring it into a harmonious whole. The state handled civil life, but the church offered something even more important—eternal life. Each ruled their respective sphere and supported the other.

By baptizing each other, these so-called Anabaptists denied the Catholic Church’s claim of spiritual authority and challenged its relationship to civil authority. Anabaptists were among the first to see a need to separate the church and the state. They declared their true citizenship to be in the kingdom of heaven rather than to any kingdom or ruler of the world. Anabaptists argued that their primary allegiance was always owed to Christ alone.

Civil and religious authorities throughout Europe moved quickly to quell what they viewed as a dangerous movement. Wherever groups of Anabaptist believers emerged, in the Swiss and German regions of Europe and as far north as the Netherlands, they met with great opposition. Thousands were imprisoned and put to death by burning at the stake or by being drowned in a local river. Drowning was considered a particularly appropriate death for Anabaptists. They had, said the authorities, sinned through the use of baptismal water so by the water they would lose their lives.

**In spite of severe persecution**, groups of Anabaptist believers continued to meet, often in secret. Men and women gathered together to read Scripture and to encourage each other in the faith. They shared the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, viewing them as symbols of Christ’s body which had been offered for their salvation. Here again they challenged a Catholic understanding of



Engraving by Jan Luiken in *Martyr's Mirror*, 1685 edition

the Eucharist as a sacrifice in which the bread and wine became the actual body and blood of Christ. For Anabaptists, the Lord's Supper was simply a memorial meal shared among believers who were committed to following Jesus in life and death.

Anabaptists believed that the core of Christian faith was expressed in a life of discipleship. Following Jesus as a disciple meant living as Jesus did during his time on earth. The Gospel accounts of Jesus were especially influential for sorting out what that meant. As a result, early Anabaptists became radical Bible readers who tried to put into practice what they read in Scripture.

For example, when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said to "love your enemies" and "do good to those that hate you," Anabaptists read this as the way that Christians should truly live. Many refused to arm themselves against those who threatened their lives or their property. That refusal to fight against so-called enemies was viewed as another threat to civil authority. How could Anabaptists be trusted if they refused to bear arms?

Anabaptists repeatedly witnessed that they respected the authority of the state but that their primary allegiance was to Christ and to the kingdom of heaven. To kill in the name of Jesus, the one who came to bring peace, was simply unthinkable.

By refusing to align themselves with any particular civil authority, Anabaptists left themselves vulnerable to ongoing persecution. They also began to establish a pattern of migration in response to persecution that helped spread Anabaptist practices to places far beyond Western Europe. Through migration and missionary work Anabaptist congregations can now be found around the globe.

### **What do Anabaptists have in common?**

Like all Christians who are rooted in the story of Jesus, Anabaptists look to what God has done in Jesus as the basis for salvation. They share with many other Christians a Trinitarian understanding of God, who is revealed to humankind as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Anabaptists place special emphasis on voluntary church membership and believer's baptism. They continue to call each other to a life of discipleship and seek to resist the temptation to find security in political allegiances. As much as possible, they seek to live at peace with their neighbors and to practice love of enemies. In the spirit of the 16th-century Reformation, they look to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and life.



Engraving by Jan Luiken in *Martyr's Mirror*, 1685 edition

Anabaptism was born as a movement of religious renewal. The varieties of Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, Amish and Hutterites all find their roots in this movement. They are not alone. Contemporary Christians from other church traditions are also being drawn to Anabaptist theology and church practices. These "neo-Anabaptists" are discovering the witness and the message of early Anabaptist leaders, many of whom were martyred for their faith. They are establishing new Anabaptist communities and networks of congregations that are exploring what it means to be Anabaptist in the 21st century.

## Contemporary Christians from other church traditions are also being drawn to Anabaptist theology and church practices.

Almost 500 years after Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock, the call to radically follow Jesus is still being answered.

*Valerie G. Rempel is associate dean of Fresno (Calif.) Pacific University Biblical Seminary and associate professor of J.B. Toews Chair of History and Theology. She wrote this article for Meetinghouse, a group of Mennonite editors.*



# Welcome and discipleship

**How do we reconcile Jesus' welcome and embrace of all people with his strong statements that following him will be difficult and transformative?**

by Bob Brown

Radical welcome is part of the biblical story, whether it is Jesus dining with "tax collectors and sinners" or caring for the resident aliens in our midst, as Exodus 23:9 instructs us to. Welcome is also a part of who our church desires to be. As our church explores the spiritual gift of hospitality, we face the questions of how to welcome new and different people.



Discipleship is also part of the story of God's people. Jesus tells us that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. He promises that when we follow him faithfully we will be persecuted. Christian discipleship will be challenging, uncomfortable and even costly.

Between these two truths about God and the church (welcome and discipleship) is a struggle: How do we reconcile Jesus' welcome and embrace of all people with his strong statements that following him will be difficult and transformative? If we welcome everyone into our church who wants to follow Jesus, does discipleship lose its meaning?

**One part of discipleship in our church** is that sin is often weighed and measured, ignored or lifted up. One example is the "works of the flesh" from Galatians 5:19-21. Churches lift up sexual immorality, witchcraft or orgies from this list and preach about how horrible they are. However, Paul mentions many other "works of the flesh" in this same passage: hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions or envy. These sins are not treated with the same repulsion. Why? I suggest it is because these sins are common in our churches. If the church were offended by envy and selfish ambition, we would need to

change. It is much more comfortable to ignore the sins that are rampant in our churches and complain about how bad sexual immorality is.

**It is much more comfortable to ignore the sins that are rampant in our churches and complain about how bad sexual immorality is.**

By ranking sins, we set up boundaries around our faith and our churches. If you are struggling with these sins, you can be part of us. If you are struggling with those sins, you need to be kept at arm's length, find another church family or leave the church altogether. These boundaries start to function like a high jump that dictates full participation in the church. It says, You must meet these moral requirements (jump this high) in order to be part of the church. Please notice that the bar is set by those inside, and everyone inside meets these requirements. This is part of human nature; we always think our sins are less serious than someone else's.

So, if the church ignores or tolerates some sins,



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should we ignore all of them? By no means. This issue should not encourage apathy, instead it should make room to call out the sins of the “faithful” insider.

This is where radical welcome and radical discipleship actually begin to walk the same path. We are well served in our own faith walk by making room for people with struggles that are not ours. It may mean welcoming those who continue to struggle with drugs, alcohol, sexual immorality, greed, lust and anger as part of our community. Their struggles may be like ours, or they may be different. Naming sin as sin, even though it still creeps into our lives and our churches, allows us to create a space where we can all journey toward Jesus together instead of pretending some of us have arrived.

## Doing church this way leads to communities where people would rather lie about their struggles than be honest about their life.

Setting up boundaries and high jumps actually erodes discipleship. In many churches discipleship is complete if you are married and do not abuse drugs or alcohol. Churches do not offer meaningful or challenging discipleship for those within the boundaries. This way of living out discipleship reinforces the stereotype that Christians are hypocrites. Doing church this way leads to communities where people would rather lie about their struggles than be honest about their life. Fear of rejection stands in the way of honest community.

**Our current models for discipleship** are overly simplified. We draw lines in the sand that exclude people with certain struggles from being full participants in our churches. These lines may come from our Confession of Faith or certain Scripture passages (like Galatians 5:19-21), but normally this high jump is designed so that those who set the bar can clear it with ease. We are upset about drugs, but we do not worry as much about gossip. We get mad about unmarried people living together but turn a blind eye to the marriage that is full of anger and spite.

A pastor with far more experience than I stressed the importance of welcoming people as

they are, loving them without any conditions. The basic idea is that in welcoming people to our church, we are not starting a new “project.” We cannot give conditional love based on some future transformation. God’s love isn’t conditional on making a high jump, even if we were able to clear it easily.

We wouldn’t expect a person with a physical disability to be able to jump as high as someone who is able bodied. At some point we must acknowledge that many people in the world have spiritual and mental disabilities that may prevent them from clearing the same high jump we have cleared.

Another pastor shared the story of a woman who has been homeless for most of her adult life. She has struggled with drugs and prostitution and spent years in jail. When she was 4 years old, she watched her mother drown her sister. She has never been the same since. How do we work for redemption when this woman may never function emotionally at a level we would consider normal? We will learn much about God’s powerful work of redemption if we are willing to embrace her instead of thinking we need to protect the church from her.

**Using this high-jump understanding** of discipleship, we diminish both discipleship and welcome. In this model, we cannot welcome fully those whose sin is “worse” than ours, and we no longer require Jesus to shape and mold our minds—our discipleship journey is over. The high jump confirms our worthiness while denying the worth of those unable to clear it. The boundaries give pride to those inside and shame to those outside. That is exactly the opposite of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

We are called to share the good news that God loves everyone as they are, and as we step into that love, we work harder to show and cultivate God’s love in all parts of our lives. If we have cleared the high jump, have we arrived? Or is baptism the beginning of a lifelong journey to get closer to God? I believe we are all on a journey together, and we must not leave anyone behind simply because they cannot jump as high as we can.



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

# A new way of doing church

**Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., celebrates 40 years.**

by Jeannette Hughes

Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., held its first worship service on Jan. 6, 1974. More than 40 years later and after much growth at Assembly, the congregation published a book, *Assembly Mennonite Church: A Collective History*, that tells its story. Many current and former Assembly members contributed to this work, which tells the story of many facets of the congregation's history, including beginnings, mission, worship, dance, nurture of children, fun, leadership and LGBT inclusion.



**The glue that has held the congregation** together since its inception is comprised of an inter-generational commitment to community, peace and justice, say Norm and Sharon Kauffmann, members of Assembly since the start. Another vital aspect of Assembly's identity throughout its history is the importance of small groups, the Kauffmanns say. Because relationship has always been an important theme of Assembly, small groups have been instrumental in helping form and deepen profound relations. "We're not doctrine-oriented, we're relational-oriented," says Norm. "That's always been the case."

## Small groups have been instrumental in helping form and deepen profound relations.

Merritt and Ruth Ann Gardner, members of Assembly since nearly its beginning, also stress the long history of small groups as central to the congregation, as well as the philosophy of broad participation and a sense that pastors don't do everything.

"I think Assembly's beginning at that time was an important event," says Ruth Ann. "We invested in small groups—that was rewarding. I think we've been an example; we've had people from all over the world come here—they've been interested by the way we do things."

But the importance of small groups was the result of an evolution of sorts, and was not without growing pains.

"It was a relief when Metanoia [one of the original small groups, predating Assembly] invited several house churches and interested small groups to come together to form the Assembly. Before, we were trying to do it on our own, without any larger groups to turn to in times of problems. We appreciated having more people involved for discernment, for worship planning, and for the mix of worship gifts," writes Dana Miller and Linda Schlabach Miller in chapter one, "Memories of Assembly's Early Days."

"A sense of community is a critical part of our history, and I still think it is, even though we've gotten bigger," says Linda Schlabach Miller. "Small groups play into that."

The first Sunday morning meeting of the congregation was held "in the basement of Coffman Hall, a rustic setting with exposed pipes and

beams. Norm Kraus spoke on the vision for the new congregation," writes Al Meyer in chapter two, "Assembly: Memories and Reflections."

Al Meyer and Mary Ellen Meyer, his wife, were two of Assembly's original members. Both now attend Open Table Mennonite Fellowship (an offshoot of Assembly) in Goshen but retain strong ties with their former congregation. Despite the inevitable changes that have taken place over the past 40 years, Al says Assembly has stayed true to course: "The vision has been realized to a remarkable degree."

**One of the earlier hallmarks** of the then-new congregation, says Mary Ellen, was peoples' attitude toward sermons. "Assembly in the beginning used the second hour in regard to what to do different this week based on the sermon," she says.

Both Al and Mary Ellen stressed the importance of small groups in congregational life, as well as the level of discernment and participation in congregational meetings.

"When serious discussions began in 1973 about forming an 'Assembly' of small groups and house churches, a ready-made population was poised, as it were, to take the plunge into a new kind of congregational experience," writes Dan Shenk in chapter five, "Mission: The First Fifteen Years."

Dan Shenk, a signer at the first Assembly covenanting in 1974, took a "Life in the Spirit" seminar from Harold Bauman, Goshen College campus pastor, in late 1973—it was then that Harold told Dan about the new "Assembly" church that would start meeting in January 1974.

"I had come to a deeper understanding of my faith in 1973," says Dan. "The Assembly was an alternative, different kind of church, and I soon felt at home."

In 1989, Dan and Vera, his wife, helped start Faith Mennonite Church, another Assembly offshoot that especially aims to meet the physical and spiritual needs of lower-income, previously unchurched people in the community. Dan and Vera are still members of Faith.

"As people enter the worship space at the Eleventh Street meetinghouse on the first Sunday of Advent, one can almost hear the sense of awe and wonder," writes Mary Lehman Yoder in chapter six, "Worship." "Beth Miller has created a new banner, stretching 14 feet from top to bottom and five feet across, a rich dark purple with a white satin arm reaching down from top to bottom, wisps of golden flame and the first three verses of John's Gospel in beautiful calligraphy across the banner."

“Worship was really important at the beginning,” says Mary, a current member and former pastor of Assembly. As worship quickly became an even more central focal point of the body, the themes of art and aesthetics emerged—these came from various gifts of people in the congregation. Lehman Yoder contributed her own artful and aesthetic contribution after reading *To Dance with God* by Gertrude Nelson, a book about ritual and celebration. One of her significant contributions to the worship life at Assembly is Carnival Sunday, an annual event held each February, which celebrates release and fun prior to the hard work of Lent.

Another central part of worship was (and is) dance. “Dance has been part of Assembly’s life almost from the beginning. Many people have been part of this dancing history, but its primary mover, the keeper of the vision of Assembly dance, has been Linda Schlabach Miller,” writes Michael Miller in chapter seven, “Dance.”

“There were too many words at Assembly in the late ’70s,” says Linda Schlabach Miller. “My faith grew best when moving. I would have insights when I was moving.”

Like other churches, Assembly had decisions to make regarding its stance on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) issues. At times it was agonizing and acrimonious, but the congregation’s eventual position came directly from the commandment to “love thy neighbor as thyself.”

“This part of the congregation’s history has grown into a primary value for the congregation,” says Karl Shelly, one of Assembly’s three pastors. “It’s a primary way of listening to how the Spirit is calling us to love our neighbor.”

“It’s the task of every congregation to discern where the spirit is moving in our time and our place,” Karl says. “That’s what the story of LGBT inclusion is about.”

“Without the bold and courageous acts of gay, lesbian and transgender people in our midst, Assembly would not be in the place of inclusion it is now. Thanks be to God for leading us to a place where we strive to welcome all who come our way,” writes J.R. Burkholder and Karl Shelly in chapter 10, “LGBT Inclusion: A Partial History.”

*Assembly Mennonite Church: A Collective History* was compiled by Anne Meyer Byler, Sally Weaver Glick and Sandy Fribley. Together they spoke to Assembly people, past and present, and compiled information from various records, including year-end state-of-the-congregation summaries, Sunday school records and other files. Some chapters con-

sist of interviews, while others were autobiographical.

Through helping tell the story of this congregation’s first 40 years, Anne, Sally and Sandy see themes running through the book and the congregation’s history that include openness to asking questions and receptivity to thinking in new ways.

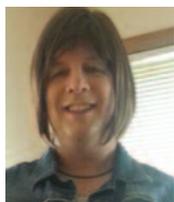
Especially in small group settings, it was safe to ask questions, says Sandy, who calls this “Christian free-thinking.”

A congregation that has been “hospitality-oriented” since its beginnings, says Sally, reached out through living its faith. “It was in the typical Mennonite way of being evangelical—living the good news,” says Anne.

**Dance has been part of Assembly’s life almost from the beginning.—Michael Miller**

Since its inception in 1974, Assembly has spawned two other congregations: Faith Mennonite and Open Table Mennonite Fellowship. “Assembly, Faith and Open Table are all living out that original vision (of Assembly), but in different ways,” says Sally, who notes that, partly due to its geographic proximity to Goshen College and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, more than 1,500 people have been involved with Assembly over the course of its history.

J.R. Burkholder, a longtime member of Assembly, was one of the people who made an effort 15 years ago to compile a 25th-anniversary book for the church. This book came 15 years later, and Burkholder sees it as a great tool to learn about how the congregation was founded and where it is headed today. “Assembly does represent a special experiment in founding a new kind of structure that then was a new way of doing church,” he says. “I sense that we’ve kept working at doing church our way.”



*Jeannette Hughes is a member of Assembly Mennonite Church.*

## Creative maladjustment



**Sarah Thompson** is executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams. Visit [www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org).

*There are certain things in our nation and in the world [to which] I am proud to be maladjusted and which I hope all people of goodwill will be maladjusted.*—Martin Luther King Jr.

**M**artin Luther King Jr. was at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., when he spoke these words about maladjustment for one of the first times. His call was for us to be creative in our maladjustment to society. He echoed Jesus in talking about a creative way of engaging with the violence and oppression of his day while extending a clear invitation for the human doing that harm or participating in an unjust social system to change their ways.

**A creatively maladjusted person** confronts us. In their best leadership capacity, they are conscientious and flexible, their firm conviction sits steady on a foundation of love, and they draw from a well of compassion. I encourage leaders wanting to be more confrontational to cultivate nonviolence in their spiritual practice because reconciliation is the goal of any confrontation.

That does not mean a leader who has been a target of oppression has to be nice or make people with privilege feel comfortable. Others may not understand what they are talking about at first. That's OK. Hurt feelings are not the same as structural violence.

The civil rights movement was disruptive, and we're on the cusp of another one. You will need to answer to your descendants when they ask, What were you doing when Michael Brown was shot by a police officer and left on the street for 4½ hours? What were you doing when the grand jury did not hand down an indictment of the responsible officer? How did you respond?

You still can respond. The invitation has gone out from Ferguson, Mo., and other places to come together and to follow the lead of those most affected by the racist and economic violence of this country. Let's move toward this conflict.

Some European-American Mennonite traditions are conflict avoidant. Those not raised in conflict-avoidant traditions or who have lived authentically in other cultures are a gift to a conflict-avoidant community. Do not scapegoat them.

Aversion to conflict can keep power static. Static power over time means power is not circulating and dynamic. Conflict is a natural friction

and can help create positive change. If those with more power and resources in the situation are willing to open their hearts, minds and practices, there are possibilities. But if they are not willing to address conflict, then change-makers have nothing to make friction with.

We are then susceptible to the general flow of a U.S. culture that is militaristic, racist and materialistic, as King said. We are to be creatively maladjusted to that. Pay attention to how historic power imbalances play into what you want to do.

Can you feel the knots in your stomach forming as you read this or think about a conflict you've had? Sit with that. Do you feel some adrenaline or emotion? Examine it but don't judge it. Take a deep breath. Breathing is one of the best tools we have to help us be present to our internal reality and the world around us.

The word for breath in the Bible is the same as the word for Spirit. Centering on your breath can help you listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stay present when a conflict occurs.

**To move away from the conflict** that is necessary to change ourselves, our families and our churches or to be passive-aggressive or avoid responsibility is to be complicit with racism and classism in this country and around the world. You may not be comfortable with the current civil rights movement, but don't turn your anger or indifference toward those who are out on the front lines trying to do something. Take a deep breath and release that anger to God and feel what is beneath your indifference to see how your own suffering connects with the world's suffering. Take steps in your discipleship journey toward beloved community.

Even in the beloved community—a vision of a world where all beings can share in the wealth of the earth in a sustainable way—there will be conflict. There is not a set way for us to share this planet with people of various truth claims. Conflict can be a generative force. Conflict is two or more ideas and/or experiences rubbing against each other; it is the friction that helps things move forward.

Nonviolent conflict is not a bad thing. We need to embrace it and learn to widen our ability to hold tension so that we can open space for new ideas to grow. **TM**

Conflict is the friction that helps things move forward.



# 'Hope for the Future IV' calls for power sharing

## Racial-ethnic members from Mennonite institutions discuss effects of racism.

Understanding how power works across Mennonite institutions was the theme of "Hope for the Future IV," held Jan. 23-24 at Iglesia Menonita Arca de Salvación in Fort Myers, Fla.

Everence, the Goshen (Ind.) College Center for Intercultural and International Education, Mennonite Central Committee U.S., Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Education Agency and Mennonite Mission Network sponsor the event, which gathers people of color in leadership positions across the church. Participants work to address racism to help Mennonite Church USA embrace diversity so that it can thrive amid the racial and ethnic demographic changes occurring churchwide.

This year's gathering included more than 100 participants. For the first time, Latino, Black, Native American and Asian young adults from all Mennonite colleges and universities were invited. Fourteen students from Hesston (Kan.) College, Goshen College and Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), Harrisonburg, Va., participated.

Christian Parks, a senior at EMU, said that as a first-generation African American Mennonite from Philadelphia, it felt great to be around so many people of color, since dealing with racial isolation has been a common church experience.

Among the 26 white participants at the gathering were key leaders of Mennonite institutions, including all Mennonite Church USA agencies and The Mennonite, Inc.

The gathering included structured work sessions, informal sharing and concluded with a recap of what people learned and with preliminary recommendations of what next year's gathering should focus on.

### Exploring power

Participants first gathered in separate rooms of small caucus groups for people of color, whites and college students. The caucus groups allowed for safe, unfiltered talk about racism, its effects and its influence on hopes and fears regarding change. They discussed the evolution of racial reconciliation efforts in Mennonite Church USA that launched Hope for the Future in 2011. Then participants moved to one large room and divided into mixed six-member table groups. They analyzed case studies about how power is used or misused based on racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes and perceptions. Participants wrestled with scenarios based on situations that often occur in real life.

For example, what happens if a white employee and a black employee are each accused of the same crime at work but treated differently? Their white supervisor appears more willing to give the white employee the benefit of the doubt. Why? Power resides not only in the supervisor's authoritative position but in perceptions based on race and culture.

Power can be hidden. A person who does not hold an official position in a congregation could still sway leadership decisions because of his or her financial wealth. Publicly, decisions could appear to be made by majority consensus while actually happening after a private meeting.

Power can also be visible but not always clear. A seminary professor could unknowingly make a culturally offensive remark to a student, but the student could feel powerless to address it. This might particularly be the case for an Asian student from a culture where questioning authority is frowned on. The student could become less frustrated after realizing he or she had the power to speak to the professor directly and that the remark was an honest mistake.

The table groups used Power Cube, an analysis tool that helps users determine where power is in a given situation and how it can be shared.

"The planners hoped to create a setting for open and honest conversations about power, an area that many times in the church we never talk about or want to address," said Carlos Romero, executive director of Mennonite Education Agency and one of the planners.

### Cultural acceptance

Another complex intercultural issue that emerged often during informal discussions is the belief among many people of color that "cultural acceptance" actually means that people of color must learn white culture, while whites do not believe they should reciprocate. An outgrowth of this is the perceived distinction between "Mennonite the culture" and "Anabaptism the theology."

People of color tend to identify more as Anabaptists than Mennonite. Mennonite church growth is occurring most among people of color in Africa and South America and declining among whites in Europe and North America. Identifying with the persecution and marginalization that early Mennonites in Europe endured during the 1500s, most people of color are drawn to the modern church because of its Anabaptist emphasis on following Jesus' way of peace and justice. For example, many African Americans agree that Anabaptism fits neatly with their civil rights movement tradition of nonviolent direct action and resistance.

People of color desire to express Anabaptist theology within their own cultural contexts, while experiencing other cultures on equal terms. Many of them view being "Mennonite" as a white cultural expression of Swiss German and Russian heritage that they can celebrate but should not be made to conform to. This tension often emerges during worship services, where music illustrates the unique and intimate cultural expression of a people. Mennonites are well-known for a cappella four-part harmony hymns in Eng-

# Executive Board wants to keep Membership Guidelines

## Survey available for delegates to fill out ahead of delegate assembly

During its meeting Jan. 29-31 in Kansas City, Mo., the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board (EB) voted to uphold *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership* as a working document. The document contains a statement taken from the Membership Guidelines about disallowing credentialed pastors to perform same-sex unions.

Delegates at Kansas City 2015 are invited to review the document (details on how to access the document are coming) and give feedback during KC 2015 and over the course of the next two years, with the understanding that the document could be revised, in consultation with Mennonite Church Canada, by 2017.

After much discussion, the EB also recommended that the Membership Guidelines remain unchanged and be used as interpreted in the June 2014 action taken by the EB to Mountain States Mennonite Conference.

The EB noted that Mountain States Mennonite Conference and any other groups that would move to credential people in same-sex relationships would continue to be found at variance unless the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly changes the stated policy on same-sex relationships.

### Delegate survey

New for this assembly will be a delegate survey conducted prior to the assembly. It is available at [www.mennoniteusa.org/2015-survey-of-appointed-delegates/](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/2015-survey-of-appointed-delegates/).

Gathering this kind of information in advance will help the delegates and the EB make the best use of their limited time.

“We will consider what we can manage in 18 hours of delegate sessions that will move us forward as a church,” said Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator, on Jan. 31.

## Hope for the Future IV

lish or German, while worship at Iglesia Menonita Arca de Salvación involves Latin and rock music fused through multiple instruments, including drums. Contemporary singers praise God in Spanish and English.

### Hiring ‘candidates of color’

This cultural complexity also emerges when hiring people to work for Mennonite institutions. A panel discussion of human resource representatives became visibly uncomfortable for some as their candidate outreach efforts were criticized. Though jobs are posted on institutional websites, many hirings occur via networking and word-of-mouth recommendations from insiders who are usually white.

As new congregations that are predominantly people of color join the fold, they often bring with them potential employees for Mennonite institutions. However, the human re-

### Polity change, not new structure

The restructure committee appointed by the EB in September 2014 reported that in their deliberations this fall, they found there is not a structural change that would resolve the tensions in Mennonite Church USA, so they recommend maintaining the current structure.

In their report, the structure committee members wrote: “We also recommend that the board clarify, in consultation with the Delegate Assembly, its understanding of how ministerial credentials function in our system and how the EB understands its leadership function in relationship to area conferences and congregations.”

Soto Albrecht said the authority of the EB and the area conferences is a bigger question for Mennonite Church USA than the question of a new structure.

The committee members include Katherine Jameson Pitts, Isaac Villegas, Joy Sutter and Keith Weaver. Villegas and Sutter are EB members.

### Meeting with ‘new network’

On Jan. 30, the EB met with Sunoko Lin, Matt Hamsher, James Wenger and Nahemiah (Nemi) Chigoji, representing a new network outside MC USA and Anabaptist Renewal Circles. Stutzman has been relating to these two groups, he said. “Some churches might remain within MC USA, they might join a new network and stay connected with [their] current conference or they might leave MC USA entirely,” he said.

During their meetings, the EB also received the resignation of board member Tyler Hartford, pastor of Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., due to other commitments, including a congregational assignment.—*Anna Groff, with information from a Mennonite Church USA release*

source representatives expressed being challenged by how to adjust recruitment efforts to reach these potential “candidates of color.” They asked the audience for help in navigating communication with these new congregations, where the correct person to contact or ideal communication method may differ from more established churches.

Speakers during worship sessions included Drew Hart, a doctoral candidate at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, who spoke on “radical unity,” Gilberto Perez Jr., senior director of intercultural development for Goshen College, who called people to bring God’s love to those who are suffering, and Sue Park-Hur, co-director of Reconcili-Asian, who said discipleship is the movement from “looking to seeing.”—*Wil LaVeist for Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Education Agency*

# Medical career starts with Service Adventure

**Volunteer placement leads Service Adventure alumna to medical school.**

Photo courtesy Mennonite Mission Network



The 2008-2009 Service Adventure unit in Philippi, W.Va.: back: Marcos Wright Kuhns, Tara Harms-Becker and Beth Wright Kuhns; front: Hannah Eberly, Ruth Wiens and Eva Michel.

**T**he 15-year-old girl sat in the doctor's office. Her eyes burst with tears, punctured by the sharp accusation of her mother's glare. Fear paralyzed the girl at the thought of raising a child when she was still a child herself.

Ruth Wiens, a 2008-2009 Service Adventure participant, saw this situation too often at her volunteer placement at Myers Clinic. "I was impressed at how the situation was handled by the physicians' assistants, and I wanted to be that person who helps people through that time in their life," she says. This is why Wiens is in medical school today, following in her father's footsteps—something that in high school she promised never to do.

Growing up, Wiens attended First Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan. The congregation has a long history of people serving after high school or college, including Wiens' parents and friends' parents. "The question wasn't, Are you going to do service? It was, When are you going to do service?" Wiens says. After high school, she and nine of her friends applied to serve.

Wiens chose Service Adventure, a 10-month Mennonite Mission Network program for high-school graduates and served in Philippi, W.Va. Other Service Adventure locations include Albany, Ore.; Albuquerque, N.M.; Anchorage, Alaska; Colorado Springs, Colo., and Raleigh, N.C.

"The beauty of Service Adventure is that young adults are given an opportunity to serve others while also being challenged to learn and grow," says Susan Nisly, Service Adventure director. "This comes both in their spiritual journeys and in vocational discernment. Often young adults discover their talents and gifts and what they are passionate about."

It doesn't take long to get to know housemates when four participants and two leaders, or mentors, live together in a unit house. During her time in Service Adventure, Wiens shared a room with Hannah Eberly, who also went into the medical field. Eberly later stood as maid of honor at Wiens' wedding last month. Their friendship, which grew as they lived together in college, is one of the many benefits Service Adventure has to offer.

## Meaningful service

Service Adventure matches participants with meaningful service work that often helps them explore what God is calling them to. Wiens was a medical assistant at Myers Clinic and served people of many income levels. She was the welcoming face at the counter, took vitals and worked with the physicians' assistants to communicate the patients' needs.

"The physicians' assistants I worked with were excited to teach me things," Wiens says.

Her experience at Myers Clinic, and now medical school, combined science and people, two of her passions.

## Community-based faith

A large part of Service Adventure is living out faith with others. This happened during daily unit life and worship nights but also by attending Philippi Mennonite Church. With no pastor, everyone in the congregation gives input, something Wiens appreciated.

"Some people had [studied theology] and others hadn't, but that was OK because everyone was respected and heard," Wiens says.

One church member who stood out to Wiens was Dr. Elvin Kreider. He is one of the founders of the Mennonite community in Philippi and is known for mentoring medical-minded Service Adventure participants like Wiens.

## Hands-on learning

Every week, Service Adventure units gather for a learning component. A weekend backpacking trip, professional watercolor and cake decorating classes and making apple cider were some of Wiens' favorite activities. Many times the church community joined in the fun, and sometimes even Service Adventure alumni. "A lot of alumni came back to visit because they liked it so much," Wiens says.

Wiens is now in her second year at the University of Kansas Medical School to become a family practitioner.

As she reflects on her Service Adventure experience, she's thankful how it prepared her for college and for life on her own. "I looked around at my freshman friends and felt like I knew what I wanted to do with my four years [in college]," Wiens says. "Taking a gap year, in whatever form that takes, is a great idea."—*Kelsey Hochstetler of Mennonite Mission Network*

# John Howard Yoder documents made public

## Historian Rachel Waltner Goossen has donated her research to the Archives.

**M**aterials related to John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse are now available. The public may access them onsite at Mennonite Church USA Archives in Goshen, Ind.

The materials came from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind., and Indiana-Michigan Conference of the Mennonite Church (IN-MI), as well as from historian Rachel Waltner Goossen.

Goossen, a professor of history at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan., wrote an article about Mennonite institutional responses to Yoder's legacy of sexual abuse for *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* after she was invited to conduct independent research by the Mennonite Church USA discernment group on sexual abuse. (An abbreviated version of the article appeared in the January issue of *The Mennonite*.)

"It is ... remarkable how much material was available to me, despite what was destroyed by Yoder and others," said Goossen on Feb. 6. "People by and large were forthcoming, and I appreciated how open people were in talking with me."

She said a number of the people she interviewed in person brought her files or small boxes containing documents related to Yoder that they either loaned to her temporarily or asked her to pass on to the Archives when she was finished.

**"People who had been hanging on** to secrets wanted to go the direction of openness," she said. "I couldn't have predicted that at the beginning of this project."

Goossen named one significant set of materials part of the available collection: documents from the Prairie Street Mennonite Church/JHY task force in Elkhart, Ind., that met during 1991 and 1992.

The task force originated within the Prairie Street congregation. Task force members sought support for investigating Yoder's actions and confronting him, so they successfully called on high-profile Mennonite Church (MC) leaders to join them.

In 1992, that group heard from eight women victims in person, and the task force then charged Yoder with sexual abuse. They turned over their findings to IN-MI, which held Yoder's ordination credential.

"This task force was a very important group, as they talked a lot with women victims," Goossen said.

On Feb. 4, Colleen McFarland, director of archives and records management for Mennonite Church USA in Goshen, described the Yoder material as "two linear feet of material," meaning it takes up that amount of space on the shelf.

While anyone may access the materials in the Archives, they may not be digitally reproduced, photographed or photocopied, according to the finding aid.

A statement from AMBS explains the onsite review ac-

cess: "This approach ... was deemed appropriate given the weightiness and sensitivity of the subject matter, allowing for the materials to be handled transparently and responsibly. The decision to release the documents was accompanied by an awareness that the documents are best understood in historical context and that allowing only onsite review is most respectful of those personally involved in the story, especially the victims and their families."

IN-MI's statement includes this: "Conference leadership tried to strike a balance with a release policy that encourages serious research into Yoder's misconduct and the conference discipline process while not fostering a frenzy on the Internet. Because conference is committed to proactive, positive engagement with the Yoder discernment process, we decided to release materials early for historical research."

**When Goossen began her research on Yoder** in January 2014, she had already developed a career as a Mennonite historian and a scholar of peace studies, but she had no personal connection to Yoder or, as far as she knew, any of the women victims.

Goossen asked that the AMBS and IN-MI documents be made public so that other historians and researchers would have access to the documents cited in her footnotes.

Goossen interviewed 29 individuals. Thirteen of those allowed her to share the interviews with the Archives.

"Those interviews—the ones now publicly available—were very significant," Goossen said.

The "Waltner Goossen Collection on Yoder" includes documents collected by various individuals close to Yoder, various intervention attempts and the disciplinary process, Goossen's correspondence with sources and 10 oral history interviews, according to the online finding aid.

Only one of the 10 available interviews is with a victim of Yoder—Carolyn Holderread Heggen. (Names of other victims were redacted out of all records before they were sent to the archives, said McFarland.)

The rest are interviews with administrators, accountability and support group members, Church Life Commission members and more—all with names attached.

In addition to the new collections, there are four boxes and three folders in the "John Howard Yoder Papers" that are restricted until 2033 at the earliest. Most of these are materials unrelated to Yoder's abusive behavior: for example, criticisms of Mennonite Central Committee in Box 8.

One of the boxes, "Sexual Harassment Charges and Conference Discipline," is restricted from public use by Yoder's family until 2047. Yoder's family gave this box to the Archives after Yoder's death in 1997.—*Anna Groff*

# Pastors week asks, What is an Anabaptist Christian?

## Speakers present metaphors of rhizomes, a flame, a midwife and mestizos.

Answering the question What is an Anabaptist Christian?, Pastors Week participants at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., pondered metaphors of rhizomes, a flame, a midwife and mestizos, and they heard challenges to trust God more fully and share authority more widely.

The biblical text from 1 Corinthians 3:11, declaring Jesus Christ as the only foundation, became the theme for the Jan. 26–29 annual gathering of pastors and church leaders. In addition to answering the question of what Anabaptists are today, five presenters, three preachers and 200 event participants also explored the issue named in the Pastors Week title, “Where Culture Blurs Theology.” Presentations and discussions mixed both affirmation and critique of the Mennonite church and the neo-Anabaptist movement.

In the opening session, Janet Plenert, vice president of Mennonite World Conference, suggested the image of a rhizome for the worldwide Mennonite church. A rhizome, she pointed out, is an extensive root system that sends up shoots to create new plants that share a single genetic code.

**“The growing edge of our denomination** seems to be new immigrant groups or new models of being the church,” she said. “If we are to see an Anabaptist expression of Christianity flourish, we need to embrace a rhizomatic understanding of our ecclesiology. It will be less homogeneous and it will be robed in a greater variety of cultural expression, language and richness.”

Greg Boyd, best-selling author and senior pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minn., spoke from the point of view of someone new to the Anabaptist faith. “We have to accept and even celebrate that the face of Anabaptism is going to change ... in some radical ways,” he said. “The challenge is to lighten the grip ... to welcome people who are going to look very different.”

“Where the Spirit of God is at work, the walls of Babylon will come down,” Boyd said. “Diversity is an intrinsic kingdom good; in fact, it’s an intrinsic kingdom necessity.” However, he said, Mennonites and other Anabaptists must never give up what is distinctive about their faith, including the centrality of Jesus in the Bible and in life, bearing witness to Christ with faithful living, and loving enemies.

Drew Hart, an African-American pastor and blogger, focuses his doctoral studies at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia on Anabaptism and black identity. He called on the Mennonite church to put less emphasis on traditional names and families and to loosen its hold on power and authority. “Can we enter into a mutual relationship in which people who come into the church actually shape and change and transform who we are collectively? That’s what hasn’t

happened. In the Mennonite church there still is a colonizing way of being, expecting everyone to assimilate. People of color have been willing to come in and receive, but it doesn’t seem to be functioning both ways.”

Hart also said, “I fear large portions of the Anabaptist movement are turning their eyes to the most privileged and turning away from the most vulnerable.” He continued: “We need to be open to receive others as a gift. The Mennonite church needs the black church more than the Black church needs the Mennonite Church.”

**“As Anabaptists, we were the mestizos** of the 16th century,” Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator of Mennonite Church USA, said. “We were a mixed group of people with diverse beliefs coming together to seek Christ.” Because of that history, she explained, “we have danced all the dances, from isolation to accommodation to assimilation.” Naming some of the concerns that come with this assimilation to North American culture, she said, “The culture of violence has found its place within our churches; we have created enemies among each other.”

She also called on the church to embrace people of color with more integrity. “We are given the blessing, but we are given a script that says, ‘This is the way we do it here.’”

David B. Miller, associate professor of missional leadership development at AMBS, challenged traditional Mennonites to be more vulnerable as they relate to people of color and newcomers to the church. “Guess what? We’re going to get it wrong,” he said. “We might need to be forgiven—by persons of color, by women. In which case, we will be honoring them as priests. When I take the risk of getting it wrong and the other person can correct me, they become my teacher; if I need to be forgiven, they become my priest.”

A sermon by Meghan Good, pastor of Albany (Ore.) Mennonite Church, compared the Anabaptist faith to a flame. She said: “It’s a candle burning in a deluge, defiant and vulnerable. The spiritual vigilance it has taught us is one of the gifts we offer to the wider church.”

Malinda E. Berry, assistant professor of theology and ethics at AMBS, talked about identity. “I want to be able to say, ‘An Anabaptist Christian is,’ then finish the sentence with something smart and compelling. But I can’t, and neither can you. That’s not just good news; that’s great news.”

Hyun Hur, co-pastor of Mountain View Mennonite Church, Upland, Calif., called the church to view unity as essential to its identity and witness and to trust God. “God lives in community, and this Father, Son and Holy Spirit are holding this church,” he said. And when you are struggling with division or issues of morality, “still the [triumphant] God is holding this church.”—*Mary E. Klassen of AMBS*

# SLT addresses ministering to 'nones' and millennials

**The religious landscape in the United States is changing, says scholar.**

Author, scholar and Episcopal priest Lauren Winner opened the annual School for Leadership Training (SLT) at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Va., with succinct advice for those seeking to understand the changing dynamics affecting the 21st-century American church.

"It might be good news for your church to get smaller," said the Duke Divinity School professor. "That is, if the people who are there are really curious about Jesus."

Approximately 250 participants, including church leaders, seminary alumni and students, met Jan. 19-21 to explore the concept of "nones," those 46 million Americans who identify themselves as agnostic or atheist or who simply claim no affiliation with organized religious denominations.

Winner reminded the participants that Jesus was not there when the women went to the tomb after he had been crucified and died.

**"Jesus has risen and moved on,"** she said. "One task for the church today is to ask where the resurrected Jesus is and to get our bodies to that place." She encouraged participants to think about what would be missing from their communities and the world if the church just stopped.

Using the metaphor of fire to describe the things a church does well, Winner asked, "Where is the fire in your church? No one church has fire everywhere. If there is not fire for something, stop doing it."

Winner's comments on "naming our fear, bringing it to light and allowing it to be transformed" were especially meaningful to church planter Chris Scott of Winchester, Va. "I also appreciated that she named that basically my job is to talk about God a lot."

"I appreciated the push toward continuing to clarify the gospel of Jesus in the context of the community and world," said Duane Beck, pastor of Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church. "How is the gospel transformational for us? It is out of that transformation that we experience and express who Jesus is more clearly."

Winner also participated in a panel discussion with Fred Kniss, Eastern Mennonite University provost, and Daniel Aleshire, president of the Association of Theological Schools, that dug into the statistics and sociological research of the current religious landscape in the United States.

Aleshire reminded participants that religious participation in the United States is the highest of any liberal democracy

in the world. It is significantly higher than any other western nation. However, for the first time, Protestant denominations are less than the majority of the U.S. population. The majority of those now claiming no religion are white and formerly identifying as evangelical and mainline Protestants.

Aleshire, who holds an M.Div. from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in psychology from Vanderbilt's George Peabody College, also said there is a rising number of single people, either never married, married and divorced, or widowed, in the United States. "How much of church life is based on family?" he asked. "It is important that we attend to the life space of people over time."

**In addition to keynote speeches** and plenary and panel sessions, morning and afternoon workshops provided insight into ministry across age ranges, generational differences and spiritual leanings.

Jeff Carr, pastor at Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren, attended a panel discussion of "nones," one of whom made a comment Carr says he won't soon forget. "The person asked, 'Why doesn't the church spend time working to create a good space for those who actually want to be there, instead of spending all its time and energy trying to get those outside the church in?'"

Emily Hedrick, a self-proclaimed "actual millennial" who studies at Wake Forest Divinity School, appreciated SLT's thematic focus. "It was great to get affirmation that people do care about us," she said. "It's important for millennials to learn our own role and that it is possible to be helpful [in addressing this issue]. Conversations across age groups are good and helpful and necessary."

Hedrick, a graduate of Goshen (Ind.) College, has published the allegorical novel *Confessions of a God Killer*, part of which was penned while working at the famous Iona Abbey in Scotland.

SLT participants came from a variety of denominations, backgrounds and generations.

The theme of change dominated discussion. "God and the Spirit are dynamic, always moving," said Kniss. "But the church is afraid of change."

SLT gave participants permission to identify and name their fear, to learn about the changing landscape of religion in the United States and to reflect theologically on what that means for churches and congregations.

To download worship resources or order a DVD of this event, visit [emu.edu/slt](http://emu.edu/slt).—*Laura Amstutz of EMU*



Lauren Winner: 'Where is the fire in your church? ... If there is not a fire for something, stop doing it.'

# Memories of the Selma marches 50 years ago

## Two Mennonite leaders took part in marches shown in the film *Selma*.

**F**ifty years ago this month, civil rights protesters marched from Selma to Montgomery, Ala. There were several marches, and these led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act later that year.

At least two Mennonites took part in one of these marches—Vic Stoltzfus and J. Lawrence Burkholder—and both men served as president of Goshen (Ind.) College.

As shown in the film *Selma*, the first march, on March 7, 1965, was called “Bloody Sunday” after its 600 marchers were attacked at the Edmund Pettus Bridge after leaving Selma. State troopers and county posse attacked the unarmed marchers with billy clubs and tear gas.

Stoltzfus writes that he was 31 and a part-time Mennonite pastor and a full-time instructor at Youngstown University in Ohio.

**What triggered his desire to go to Selma** was seeing a telecast of Bloody Sunday on a black-and-white television in a motel room while he was traveling. He had no television at home, he says.

To make the trip he had to borrow money from the bank for his plane ticket. He also bought a life-insurance policy.

At that time, he writes, Selma was a small rural town where 90 percent of its African-American citizens were not allowed to vote. Bloody Sunday brought it to the nation’s attention.

“When beatings are used against nonviolent defenseless people,” Stoltzfus writes, “we have our own homegrown terrorism. The tactic of terrorism is to dispirit and cow people into submission.”

**If we could not be nonviolent even in the face of beatings, we were invited to go home.—Vic Stoltzfus**

Stoltzfus had heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak at Goshen College, and he “admired his passion and courage for nonviolent social change,” he writes.

Witnessing Sheriff Jim Clark’s harsh tactics on March 7 led Stoltzfus to want to be a part of protesting such injustice. “I was interested in voting rights,” he writes, “but also as a person with convictions on nonviolence, I wanted King to succeed.”

Stoltzfus flew down on March 19, and a movement car took him to Selma that night.

“We slept in the brick row houses of the large black com-

munity,” he writes. “It was wall to wall people in beds and on the floor. [Our] hostess had lost her dishwashing job in a country club because she was seen with movement people. She asked us all for a donation for using her home.”

The next morning they attended workshops on nonviolence. “If we could not be nonviolent even in the face of beatings, we were invited to go home,” he writes.

Physicians for Social Responsibility made splints out of rolled-up newspaper to respond to broken bones.

Participants were urged to take the dome light bulb out of their cars so that the driver would not be visible for a sniper.

Many groups came, Stoltzfus writes, including Protestant ministers and seminarians from San Francisco, Catholic priests and nuns, and Abraham Joshua Heschel, a prominent Jewish theologian. People came from all 50 states, including Hawaii, he says.

**Participants were instructed to insist** on being arrested together with locked arms, black and white.

Stoltzfus became aware of the possible dangers of joining the march. One local church member told him, “If I were you, I’d stay just where you are.”

James Reeb, a Unitarian pastor from Boston, was clubbed to death one night. Viola Liuzza, a Unitarian housewife from Detroit, was shot to death because she was seen transporting a black man to participate in the movement. And Jimmie Lee Jackson, a young black man, was shot to death by police on Feb. 26.

On March 20, the day before the march, U.S. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard to protect the marchers. As shown in the film *Selma*, King had sought court protection for the march from a federal judge, and that was granted.

That evening, marchers met at Brown Chapel, an African Methodist Episcopal church. “The church was packed, and people were sitting in the window sills,” Stoltzfus writes. Multiple offerings were taken to support the movement.

They heard several speakers, including Andrew Young, who later became mayor of Atlanta and the United Nations representative from the United States. They sang many freedom songs and heard from Peter, Paul and Mary and other musicians.

“I’m sorry the film did not catch the way these songs kept up the spirits of suffering people, some of whom had bandages on their heads that evening,” Stoltzfus writes.

A local layman said at the meeting, “Your grandchildren will ask you, Where were you when these things were hap-



Vic Stoltzfus

Photo provided



J. Lawrence Burkholder at Brown Chapel in Selma, Ala., ca. 1989

pening in Selma, Alabama?”

In late January, Laura, Stoltzfus’ oldest grandchild, asked him to send her a note about Selma memories.

On the day of the march, a Sunday, a service outside Brown Chapel drew thousands. A Catholic priest read from the New Testament, Heschel read from the Old Testament, and King preached a sermon on the biblical theme of deliverance, freedom and the marching of the Israelites.

The march, which included about 3,200 people, began about noon as folks were coming out of their churches. “They looked at us with wonder and contempt on their faces,” Stoltzfus writes.

People lined the sidewalks as marchers went down the street, eight abreast.

An editorial in the local paper called the marchers outside agitators. The local clergy published a statement against the march, and business leaders published an opposing statement in the Selma newspaper.

From Brown Chapel they marched across the Edmund Pettis Bridge over the Alabama River, where Bloody Sunday had occurred just two weeks earlier.

**Stoltzfus saw jeeps, helicopters** and uniformed soldiers. He writes that disgust was visible on the faces of many of the soldiers and in their body language. “One took out his bayonet and made a scratch in the paint from one end of a movement car to the back,” he writes.

The marchers had access to two of the four lanes on U.S. Route 80, known in Alabama as the “Jefferson Davis Highway.” In the other two lanes were young people with large, hateful signs.

The march reached the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery on March 25. By then there were 25,000 marchers.

Stoltzfus went back on Monday, March 22, to teach his classes on Tuesday at Youngstown University.

Local media—TV, radio and newspaper—interviewed him

about his involvement in the march.

Later that year he talked to the editor of *Gospel Herald*. “His concern was that he had heard that some of the young university students in the movement were misbehaving sexually,” Stoltzfus writes. “I believe that was more important in his mind than the structural evil of denying citizens the right to vote.”

**J. Lawrence Burkholder**, who preceded Stoltzfus as president of Goshen College and who died in 2010, took part in the March 9 march in which Martin Luther King Jr. led a group of several thousand across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma and then returned the group for fear of what might happen if they went any further.

Burkholder’s daughter Myrna Burkholder writes, “My father claims to have been several rows behind Dr. King on this march.”

He also participated in several other civil rights events and was arrested in March 1964 at a sit-in demonstration in St. Augustine, Fla.

At the time of the Selma marches Burkholder was teaching at Harvard Divinity School. When Martin Luther King Jr. died, he was one of several speakers at a memorial service held at Harvard Memorial Church in Cambridge, Mass. He said it was the greatest honor of his life to be asked to give a speech at this event.—*Gordon Houser, with reporting from Vic Stoltzfus and Myrna Burkholder*

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# Mennonite churches help undocumented immigrants

## Congregations in Indiana, Illinois and Arizona advocate for detainees.

Sometimes one day can change your life. Youth from Walnut Hill Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., chose to participate in a one-day learning trip to the U.S.-Mexico border while attending Mennonite Church USA's biennial convention in Phoenix in July 2013. Convention planners had organized the learning trips—led by the BorderLinks organization.

“It was the first time most of our youth had engaged immigrants firsthand,” says youth sponsor Jason Harrison.

Since then their choice has led them to America's largest immigration detention center, in rural southwest Georgia. It took them to Guatemala to meet U.S. immigrants' families. They started an intergenerational Sunday school class to talk about immigration issues. Upcoming plans include a visit to an immigration detention center near Chicago and perhaps discussions with area politicians about immigration.

During the learning trip, the Walnut Hill youth group and their sponsors heard firsthand stories of divided families, detention and hardship. They watched the U.S. court system try 70 Spanish-speaking men in English, 10 at a time, in a confusing courtroom setting.

Three of the Walnut Hill youth spoke about their BorderLinks experiences to assembled Mennonite Church USA delegates who were considering an immigration resolution at the convention.

At a convention workshop later in the week on immigrant justice and Christian hospitality, the Walnut Hill youth met presenter Anton Flores-Maisonet, cofounder of Alterna, a Christian cross-border outreach community in LaGrange, Ga. From that contact, the Walnut Hill congregation chose a group of youth and adults to visit Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Ga., as their 2014 annual Sharing and Learning Together trip at spring break. At Stewart, youth and adults spoke by phone through heavy prison glass to imprisoned detainees. They learned about for-profit detention centers like Stewart that make money for the individual and corporate owners and where extended detention instead of deportation means profit from government contracts.

**The warm hospitality of immigrant families** in Georgia impressed the group members, who stayed in homes. In June, another group of Walnut Hill youth and adults visited Guatemala, where they met and stayed with families of some Georgia detainees.

Again the theme was hospitality, says Harrison: “Compared with the lack of hospitality most immigrants experience in the United States, it felt like a divide that was unfair and unjust.”

Walnut Hill youth brought their concerns home to their church, where after each of their trips they led a worship service. The congregation started an intergenerational Sunday school class using Mennonite Church USA's *Radical Hospitality* curriculum. An immigrant couple from Mexico joined the class and now attends the church.

Trip participants kept returning to the story of the Good Samaritan, Harrison says. “How do we respond to those in need? Which character are we in the story? Are we those who need help?”

One graduating high school senior from Walnut Hill changed his life choices based on his experiences, Harrison reports. Delaying college, the young man has gone to South Africa as part of Mennonite Mission Network's one-year Radical Journey program.

“It's been quite a ride in just 18 months,” says Harrison. “A whole lot has come out of a decision to go on a one-day learning experience in Tucson.”

### Welcoming the stranger

As immigration issues have headlined news in the past year, other Mennonite congregations have responded, too, reports Tina Stoltzfus Schlabach, a member of Shalom Mennonite Fellowship in Tucson, Ariz. Schlabach, a pastor cre-

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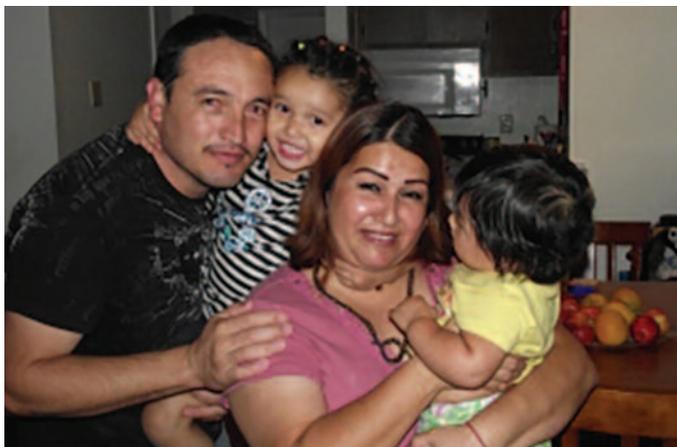
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Raúl (not his real name), a detainee from Mexico released on bond paid by Evanston (Ill.) Mennonite Church after 10 months of imprisonment, and his family

denied by Mennonite Church USA, visits women held in detention and offers spiritual direction.

Schlabach says thousands of women and young children—mostly from Guatemala—have crossed the border since 2013, traveling by bus to family members waiting to receive them in Florida, New York, Ohio, California and other destinations. Some are released by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and dropped off at local Greyhound stations across southern Arizona and Texas. Humanitarian groups from these communities have organized to welcome them, offering food, hydration and orientation before they begin their long trips to their families.

Peace Mennonite Church of Dallas, Texas, and Hyattsville (Md.) Mennonite Church put together hundreds of kits with drawing paper, crayons and small toys for the children.

“The children are so excited to receive these bags made just for them,” Schlabach says.

Members of Evanston (Ill.) Mennonite Church felt called to act as well.

“We sold our building over five years ago and had slowly been trying to figure out what to do with the money,” says Pastor Mitchell Brown. The congregation chose to bond out two imprisoned detainees.

“It is often impossible for migrant families to raise bond,” says Schlabach, noting that detainee bonds are often set from \$5,000 to \$15,000. When bond is granted and paid, immigrants can continue to fight deportation outside detention.

Evanston Mennonite paid bond for two detainees Schlabach had been visiting during the previous year. Raúl (not his real name) is Mexican and married to a woman living in Tucson with their two preschool-age daughters. He had been imprisoned 10 months and has been reunited with his family. Maricela (not her real name), the other detainee, had been in detention 20 months. She had fled a life of domestic violence in Honduras.

“What a joy ... to share resources to help two people walk out of the detention center!” wrote Schlabach in a memo to Mennonite Church USA staff.

Schlabach says the bond money may be returned as detainees meet their court commitments and their cases are settled over time. If so, it may go into a revolving fund to help other detainees with their bond fees. She and the Evanston congregation are exploring this possibility.

**How can churches help immigrants?** “Look in your community,” says Schlabach. Find out who are the newly arrived migrants from Central America. They may have children who have suffered trauma and/or have endured a harrowing trip, sometimes including family separation.

She points to the Sanctuary Movement—which has experienced a resurgence in Tucson—in which sanctuary churches allow an immigrant family member in danger of deportation to live in the church while the faith community advocates to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for a stay of deportation. Other congregations, called supporting churches, commit to visiting the person seeking sanctuary and providing what is needed through various expressions of support.

“We can support the new members of our communities wherever we live,” she says. “They don’t stay here [at the border]; they go elsewhere in the U.S.”—*Ardell Stauffer for Mennonite Church USA*

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# Lancaster churches share mission sharing meals

**East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church began ministry 10 years ago.**

Dirk Etzen



Members of East Chestnut Street Mennonite youth group dish out food on a Monday evening in Lancaster, Pa.

**W**alk east on Chestnut Street in Lancaster, Pa., and you will pass apartments, former factories, restored brick homes, cafes and bars. If it is Monday evening, you will come upon a crowd of people huddled at a door waiting to enter. It is not a sale, political rally or government handout. They want to enter East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church (ECSMC) for the community meal.

The crowd is comprised of 170 people who have no job, underpaid jobs or good jobs. Some have homes, some do not. All, however, are hungry for food and fellowship.

“A bunch of my friends got me to come here, and I have been coming for years,” says Bob as he waits in the lobby.

Bill confesses, “I come here for good nutrition and to talk to Annabelle. She encourages me.”

Bryana and Britney, two teens, come with their grandmother. They like the home-cooked food.

**Socializing is as important as the food.** Indeed, the church fellowship hall buzzes with conversation as folks go through the food line. Becky Thomas helps the children and the frail juggle their trays and drinks. Friends greet each other over plates of steaming chickenetti, peas, applesauce and cookies. Lois Hess, the coordinator, says, “It is a happy time—we look forward to seeing each other.”

The idea of serving meals began in the winter of 2001, when the Lancaster County Council of Churches called on churches to fill a need. Lancaster city, with a population of 60,000, had overflowing shelters then. (Currently the county has 500 homeless.) The goal was for churches to offer home-cooked, nutritious meals to their neighbors in an atmosphere of respect and peace. Along with other congrega-

tions, ECSMC, led by Pastor Ron Adams and the mission commission, stepped up to the plate.

The meals are the work of many hands. Each Sunday school class is responsible for one or two meals per year. Even the youth take a turn. On any Monday, 40 volunteers plan the menu, shop, prepare food, set tables, serve, pour coffee, mingle and clean up.

**This whole effort is an ecumenical endeavor.** Though ECSMC opens its doors each week, 15 other groups help cook and serve. Several Mennonite congregations take turns along with Methodists, Lutherans and Catholics. Two Lancaster businesses, L.H. Brubaker Appliances and Shady Maple Smorgasbord have also signed up.

Besides workers, serving the suppers requires funds. ECSMC has a \$3,000 line item in its 2015 budget for the meals. Many church members donate the dishes they make at home. When someone shops at nearby stores for the meal, managers often give discounts. All the members donate their time and energy.

Most evenings, Pastor Todd Friesen listens to people, prays with them and makes referrals to social agencies. He says this ministry allows him to meet Jesus.

In the end, most say these Monday suppers have changed ECSMC. First, says Pastor Todd, we are united in a mission of hospitality on which we work together. Second, we have learned to know our neighbors. We are more aware of the throes of city life. Third, we have learned to listen and have relinquished some of our pat answers about urban living. He says, “These meals keep the gospel before us in a challenging way. We cannot hide.”

Summing up after 10 years of attending Monday night suppers, Jim claims, “It is helpful—life sustaining, really.” People on both sides of the serving table seem to agree with him.—*Rose Breneman Stewart*



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# A new network separate from MC USA forms

## A Q & A with Matt Hamsher about the network, due to launch Sept. 1

**A** new network comprised mostly of churches that have left or plan to leave Mennonite Church USA is anticipating a launch date of Sept. 1. Its name is yet to be determined but is already meeting and working together.

On Jan. 16-17, more than 170 leaders representing 75 churches gathered in Hartville, Ohio, for a consultation around the theme “Reimagining New Life Together.”

The focus of the network is obedience to Scripture as expressed in the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, planting churches, evangelism and mission.

A group of 15 pastors and church leaders—all men—planned the consultation. Ten of the 15 are part of Anabaptist Renewal Circles. ARC facilitated the weekend but will not be a part of the new network.

The leaders were from churches in California, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Some represented Franklin Mennonite Conference, South Central Mennonite Conference and New York Mennonite Conference.

A perceived lack of accountability and lack of common theological understandings propelled this group to move forward and consider ways to be together outside Mennonite Church USA, according to Matt Hamsher, pastor of Longenecker Mennonite Church in Winesburg, Ohio, and one of the leaders of the network at this point.

LGBT inclusion in Mennonite Church USA, especially events that unfolded with Mountain States Mennonite Conference and the process of reviewing a change in the hiring practices at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., contributed to this perception, he says.

Hamsher spoke with Anna Groff on Jan. 28. (These are excerpts from that interview. See [www.themennonite.org](http://www.themennonite.org).)

### **Do churches have to leave Mennonite Church USA to join the new network?**

No. We are open to any congregation that desires to join in covenanting with us and agrees to be mutually accountable [with] the rest of the group. We will not require congregations to leave Mennonite Church USA in order to be a part of the new network. We are also hopeful about the possibility of exploring conversations with other Anabaptist congregations or groups with similar theological convictions.

### **What will be the size of the new network?**

The 170 individuals at Hartville represented about 75 churches. We have at least two dozen churches ready to join the network. It’s not unreasonable to say that there will be 100 or more churches by the end of the year that want to join the network—and perhaps some whole conferences.

### **What are the hopes of this new network?**

We want to be clear about our relationships with one another from the beginning rather than trying to clarify that

along the way, and with that I mean the polity differences. In our document we state, “We believe an organizational system of high accountability with low control is the healthiest environment for nurturing our relationships with one another.” We’re looking for that kind of commitment.

### **How is Anabaptist Renewal Circles involved?**

ARC, founded in 2011, facilitated the weekend in Hartville and will continue to be part of the ongoing conversation. However, ARC will not be an official part of the network, as it is committed to be a voice of renewal within Mennonite Church USA.

### **How will the new network relate to Mennonite Church USA agencies?**

It is too early to tell about relating with the Mennonite Church USA agencies. I can say we are open to partnering in ways that honor the covenant we make with one another.

### **What do the participants in this new network believe about the women in church leadership?**

We support the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* that includes the understanding that God calls men and women to ministry.—*Anna Groff*



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# Shared identity and shared purpose

## Two essentials for a healthy organization

Every congregation and organization I've consulted with or been part of the last 30 years included individuals and groups with widely differing perspectives on important issues. Much like in the natural world, a diversity of perspectives appears to be the default setting in our social systems. But while the great majority of these congregations and organizations managed their differences with grace and respect, several were ripped apart by them. Why do these inevitable differences tear some congregations and organizations asunder while others seem to be able to manage them with relative aplomb? Several hypotheses exist to explain this phenomenon.

### There are many other variables that are beyond leadership's ability to control or even manage.

Adherents of Family Systems Theory and other leadership theories point to the critical role of leaders and their ability to differentiate and maintain a “nonanxious presence.” There is no question that leaders set the tone for how an organization or congregation deals with conflict and anxiety. But I've witnessed several highly skilled and non-anxious organizational leaders swept away in a tidal wave of destructive conflict that overwhelmed even their admirable ability to self-manage.

Communication and Negotiation theories tend to emphasize process and skills more than leadership and encourage individuals to listen effectively and speak respectfully. This emphasis on process and communication skills is essential, as healthy communication increases the likelihood of reaching shared understandings. Yet I've known congregations that implemented well-designed collaborative processes (with substantial opportunities for respectful engagement) and still suffered significant losses due to high intensity conflict.

Why are such leadership and communication strategies sometimes inadequate? While both are critical variables, there are many other variables that are beyond leadership's ability to control or even manage. Many of these variables come from the external environment—particularly from the profoundly polarized culture (at least in the United States) in which organizational and congregational members now live and work. When some of the members of your congregation or organization watch only Fox News and other members only MSNBC, you are importing polarities into your system

that will eventually surface no matter how sophisticated your conflict avoidance strategies.

#### Leadership strategies

In the face of these powerful external realities, you as a leader fortunately have two formidable strategies at your disposal. The first strategy is to manage yourself well—to interact with others in open and nonanxious ways—and to engage conflict well. Leadership seems to have the greatest impact for good when it proactively deals with conflict when it is still at a manageable stage. Conflict-competent leaders learn to invite disagreement and move toward conflict rather than avoiding it, which keeps conflict manageable. And nonanxious leaders are a gift to any system—especially when they also possess the rare ability to hold themselves and their roles lightly.

The second strategy is to construct a shared sense of identity and purpose that will bind your congregation or organization together as you navigate the shoals of discord in the broader society. A clear sense of identity is expressed primarily through rituals (such as worship in a congregation and ceremonies in an organization) and artifacts (such as mission and values statements). A clear sense of purpose is articulated primarily through verbal reminders from leadership of why our organization or congregation exists and through written vision statements and goals.

### Conflict-competent leaders learn to invite disagreement and move toward conflict rather than avoiding it, which keeps conflict manageable.

#### Clear identity

As with an adult individual, clarifying its unique identity is a fundamental first step for a healthy organization or congregation. As Richard Rohr says in *Falling Upward*, “When you get your ‘Who am I?’ question right, all the ‘What should I do?’ questions tend to take care of themselves.” The importance of a clear identity is underscored in Paul's letters to the church in Corinth—a congregation wracked with internal divisions and immoral behavior by some members. In 1 Corinthians 1:1-10, Paul invokes the name “Jesus” (or “Christ”) 10 times, finishing with an appeal “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ... that there be no divisions among you.” This is more than an appeal for unity—it is also a clarion call for a shared identity in Jesus the Messiah.

Identity is vital not only for internal unity but also for our

engagement with others outside our organizations and congregations. As Rohr observes, “None of us can dialogue with others until we can calmly and confidently hold our own identity.” After facilitating hundreds of dialogue processes on multiple issues, I’ve noticed that the critical difference in how people communicate is not related to conservative vs. liberal perspectives but is highly correlated with secure vs. insecure individuals. Those who are calm and confident in their own identity and beliefs tend to communicate with calmness and confidence—regardless of where they stand

**Those calm and confident in their own identity and beliefs tend to communicate with calmness and confidence.**

on any political or theological spectrum. Others with less confidence and more anxiety seem to possess an insatiable need to condemn and convert others.

What is true for individuals also holds true for organizations and congregations. An organization or group that knows who it is and what it stands for is capable of engaging other organizations or groups without fear of being “tainted” and without any need to convert the “other.” Like Jesus (who knew who he was and from where he came), they are able to share who they are in a spirit of trust rather than fear. Congregations and other faith-based organizations with

strong identities are thus instinctively ecumenical.

#### **Shared purpose**

But while vitally important, a clear and shared identity is not sufficient for organizational effectiveness. Congregations and other organizations must also develop a clear and shared purpose. As with identity, a shared purpose provides a social glue to organizational members. When we work together at a common purpose, we find it more natural and more meaningful to also worship together or learn together.

The purpose-driven-church movement tapped into this intuitive desire to clarify why our congregations and faith-based organizations exist. Most Christian congregations function primarily to worship God, disciple members, fellowship together and carry out mission and service activities. Often congregations will structure themselves according to these core purposes in the healthy conviction that form should follow function. (In other words, that how we structure ourselves should reflect what we’re trying to accomplish in the world.) They will also engage in strategic planning or collective visioning to establish future priorities.

What does it look like when an organization or a congregation possesses a clear and shared purpose? The telltale sign is when any member of the organization can tell you clearly why the organization exists as well as his or her role in carrying out that purpose. An elementary school teacher reports that his job is to prepare the next generation to be educated and thoughtful citizens. The executive director of a faith-based not-for-profit organization tells you that her or-



ganization exists to eliminate homelessness in her city. If an organizational member can't tell you—in a sentence or less—why the organization she or he is part of exists, it is likely suffering from an unclear and/or unshared purpose.

## We resist the virus of destructive conflict not by directly attacking the virus but by preventive efforts and by strengthening the organism.

### Identity and purpose enacted

Organizations and congregations that have a strong, positive and shared sense of identity and purpose tend to attract adherents and financial support. Two examples of these in Anabaptist circles are Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS). Both organizations are utterly clear about their identity (Anabaptist Christian) and about their purpose (“disaster response in the United States and Canada” for MDS and “relief, development and peace in the name of Christ” for MCC).

I've worked with scores of organizations (including congregations, schools and universities, mission groups, camping/retreat ministries and retirement communities) that became equally clear about who they are and why they exist. Leaders of these organizations and congregations communicate the shared mission, values and vision in a variety of ways—including through speeches and websites—and members understand that they are part of an organization with a clear sense of itself and its calling in the world. As an organization becomes increasingly clear about who it is and why it exists, it's not unusual for some members to self-select out while others are drawn in. As Jesus' disciples discovered, once the direction of a group is known, not all those invited to follow are prepared to go the distance.

The cost of failing to clarify identity and purpose, however, is painfully high. When we are part of a congregation or organization that lacks a shared identity and purpose, even the smallest conflicts become a threat to the integrity of the group. Leaders are peppered by desperate cries to “address the issues,” even when the infrastructure is not adequate to support such an encounter. Such an organization is much like a middle-aged couple that loses all sense of connection once their children have grown and left the home. Their previous identity (as parents of young children) and shared purpose (to raise children) now concluded, they find that there is nothing left that holds them together.

### Ongoing work

This points to the final reality of the task of clarifying identity and purpose: It never ends. Since every organization is an organic (living) system in a dynamic (ever-chang-

ing) environment, leaders must give continual consideration not only to the communication of but also to the ongoing development of their organization's identity and purpose. Identity and purpose truly have no grandchildren—they must be appropriated (and usually tweaked) by each generation of organizational members.

The antidote to destructive conflict in our congregations and organizations is therefore not simply communication skills training or leadership development. It is, rather, a commitment to strengthen our shared identity (as 21st-century followers of Jesus in the Anabaptist tradition) and our shared purpose (which will vary from organization to organization). We resist the virus of destructive conflict not by directly attacking the virus but by preventive efforts and by strengthening the organism.

Preventing destructive, high-intensity conflict starts with leaders who move toward conflict when it is small and apply appropriate processes and skills. But strengthening the organism occurs when leaders work collaboratively to establish a shared identity and shared purpose for the organization or congregation. For leaders, these two commitments are our greatest personal and institutional assets when assaulted by the viruses of societal discord and polarization.

—David Brubaker, associate professor of organizational studies at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.

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## CALENDAR

The Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Non-Violence will host a ceremony at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va., to present the Gandhi Community Award to PAX. All former volunteers and related service personnel are especially invited to attend Sunday afternoon, April 26, 2015, in the Festival Highlands Room. Unite with friends and former colleagues in honoring a significant past contribution made in the name of peace and service. Please inform your PAX colleagues of this event. Time and space available for reunions and conversation.

## WORKERS

**Bomgardner, Ryan**, was ordained as associate pastor of Metzler Mennonite Church, Ephrata, Pa., on Feb. 15.

**Brody, Robert**, was ordained as bishop of LanChester, New Danville, and Willow Street-Strasburg Districts, Lancaster, Pa., on Feb. 22.

**Bucher, J. Calvin**, was licensed as lead pastor of Kauffman Mennonite Church, Manheim, Pa., on Jan. 4.

**Buckwalter, Richard L.**, was installed as interim lead pastor of New Providence Mennonite Church, New Providence, Pa., on Jan. 11.

**Clancy, Michael**, was ordained as lead pastor of Freedom in Christ Fellowship, Lebanon, Pa., on Feb. 1.

**Farrell, Jordan**, was licensed as associate pastor of youth and young adults for Landisville Mennonite Church, Landisville, Pa., on Feb. 22.

**Fasick, Joy**, was licensed as associate pastor of Slate Hill Mennonite Church, Camp Hill, Pa., on Jan. 18.

**Martin, Kenton**, was ordained as lead pastor of Palo Alto Mennonite Church, Palo Alto, Pa., on Jan. 18.

**Ramer, Nathan**, was ordained as pastor of Wellman Mennonite Church, Wellman, Iowa, on Jan. 25.

**Sharp, Don**, was installed as interim associate pastor of East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa., on Feb. 15.

**Weaver, Stephen S.**, was ordained as bishop of LanChester, New Danville, and Willow Street-Strasburg Districts, Lancaster, Pa., on Feb. 22.

## OBITUARIES

**Ardeel, Elsie M. Heyse**, 87, Mishawaka, Ind., died Jan. 16. Spouse: Raymond E. Ardeel (deceased). Parents: Charles and Marguerite Snauwaert Heyse. Children: Debbie Ardeel-Sullivan, Michael; four grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 19 at Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend, Ind.

**Davidhizar, Ellen Catherine Jennings Oyer**, 83, Canby, Ore., died Nov. 27, 2014, of a stroke. Spouse: Paul Samuel Davidhizar. Spouse: John Oyer (deceased). Parents: Ervin Brunk Jennins and Alice Louise Groff Jennings. Children: Phil Oyer, Stan Oyer, Gary Oyer; eight grandchildren; three great-grandchildren. Funeral: Dec. 13 at Zion Mennonite Church, Hubbard, Ore.

**Derstine, Beulah D. Landis**, 91, Souderton, Pa., died Dec. 25, 2014. Spouse: Marvin M. Derstine (deceased). Parents: Linford and Susan Landis Derstine. Children: Keith, Christine Derstine, Suzanne Young; five grandchildren; four great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 18 at Salford Mennonite Church, Harleysville, Pa.

**Detweiler, Elizabeth "Betty" J. Stonesifer**, 81, Souderton, Pa., died Jan. 20. Spouse: Norman S. Detweiler (deceased). Parents: James A. and Edith M. Stief Stonesifer. Children: Norman S., Jr., James A., John M.; two grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 27 at Souderton Mennonite Homes.

**Fisher, Evelyn Margeuerette Burck**, 94, Glendale, Ariz., died Feb. 1, of dementia related issues. Spouse: Lloyd Jacob Burck Fisher. Parents: Harley and Catherine Widmer Burck. Children: Darrell, James, Karen; two grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Memorial service: Feb. 7 at Glencroft Chapel, Glendale.

**Friesen, Anne**, 91, Altona, Manitoba, died Jan. 26. Spouse: Peter Friesen (deceased). Parents: Henry H. and Aganetha Schellenberg Hildebrand. Funeral: Jan. 30 at Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona.

**Friesen, Neta Funk**, 96, Altona, Manitoba, died Feb. 1. Spouse: David G. Friesen (deceased). Parents: Anton A. and Maria Friesen Funk. Children: Margaret, Vernon, JoAnne Born, Norma Neudorf; six grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Funeral: Feb. 5 at Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona.

**Gamber, Esther K.**, 89, Hesston, Kan., died Feb. 8. Parents: Bengamin and Martha Kliewer Gamber. Funeral: Feb. 12 at Schowalter Villa Chapel, Hesston.

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

**Glick, Norman**, 91, Belleville, Pa., died Jan. 19. Spouse: Sarah Glick. Spouse: Effie Glick (deceased). Children: Robert, Richard, James. Funeral: Jan. 26 at Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Belleville.

**Hernley, Elizabeth Sieber**, 99, Goshen, Ind., died Jan. 22. Spouse: H. Ralph Hernley (deceased). Parents: Charles E. and Bertha Shoemaker Sieber. Children: Rodney, Roger, Ellen Swanson; three grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 30 at Greencroft Evergreen Place, Goshen.

**Hershberger, LeRoy**, 89, Goshen, Ind., and Wakarusa, Ind., died Jan. 24. Spouse: Grace Gongwer Hershberger (deceased). Children: Cheryl Hershberger, Donna Skiles, Dawn Moneyheffer, Jerry; 20 grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 26 at Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa.

**Hochstetler, Roger L.**, 85, Arvada, Colo., died Oct. 22, 2014. Spouse: Glennis Hershberger Hochstetler. Parents: Earl and Mary Krabill Hochstetler. Children: Cindy Neely, Christina Hochstetler, Dean, Miriam MacKay; two grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 1 at First Mennonite Church, Denver, Colo.

**Hershberger, Marilyn J. Gerber**, 84, Akron, Pa., died Jan. 27, of complications following a stroke. Spouse: Paul A. Hershberger (deceased). Parents: Clyde and Fannie Sommers Gerber. Children: Stephen, Donna Roggie, Dora Sue; four grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Funeral: Jan. 31 at Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, Pa.

**Hershberger, Vida Leah Schloneger**, 95, Glendale, Ariz., died Sept. 29, 2014. Spouse: E. Eugene Hershberger (deceased). Parents: Amos and Amanda Sommers Schloneger. Children: Lowell, Donna Rempel, Vivian Jaberg, Bruce, Maynard; 14 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren. Memorial services: Oct. 2 at Trinity Mennonite Church, Glendale, and Oct. 12 at Beech Mennonite Church, Louisville, Ohio.

**Hochstetler, M. Jay**, 84, Goshen, Ind., died Feb. 18. Spouse: Helen E. Byer Hochstetler. Parents: John and Sarah Borkholder Hochstetler. Children: Shirley Hochstetler, Robert, Harold, James; 10 grandchildren; four great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 23 at Clinton Frame Mennonite Church, Goshen.

**Isaak, Roland Earl**, 76, Aberdeen, Idaho, died Jan. 21. Spouse: Edith Koehn Isaak. Parents: Peter and Eva Dirks Isaak. Children: Brenda Bartel, Sandra Duerksen, Diane Isaak, Mary Crist; eight grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Memorial service: Jan. 26 at Aberdeen First Mennonite Church.

**Johnson, M. Elaine Storm**, 91, Fort Collins, Colo., died Jan. 20. Spouse: Ralph C. Johnson (deceased). Parents: Howard and Mary King Storm. Children: Norma, Roger, Eugene, Ralph, Tim; six grandchildren; two great-grandchildren, five step-grandchildren. Memorial service: May 23 at Casselton Heritage Center, Casselton, N.D.

**Kehler, Tina Teichroeb**, 78, Altona, Manitoba, died Jan. 29. Spouse: John Kehler. Parents: Rev. A.A. and Tina Teichroeb. Children: Mike, Carilee Peters, Conley, Barry, Jodi Scott; 11 grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 2 at Bergthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Manitoba.

**Kurtz, Lola Anna Sheller**, 77, Salem, Ohio, died Jan. 29, of Alzheimer's disease. Spouse: Edgar Kurtz. Parents: Clarence and Doris Charlton Sheller. Children: Sherri Goodwin, Dan, Linda Witmer; nine grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 3 at Leetonia Mennonite Church, Leetonia, Ohio.

**Kulp, Sara Halteman**, 94, Souderton, Pa., died Jan. 9. Spouse: Henry Derstine Kulp (deceased). Parents: Melvin C. and Laura Landis Halteman. Children: Samuel, Gerald, Jacob; 10 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 15 at Souderton Mennonite Homes, Souderton, and Plains Mennonite Church, Hatfield, Pa.

**Martens, Edward K.**, 96, Inman, Kan., died Jan. 28. Spouse: Billie Jean Schroll Martens (deceased). Parents: Gerhard M. and Mary Klassen Martens. Funeral: Jan. 30 at Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman.

**Moshier, Alice Gingerich**, 89, Lowville, N.Y., died Jan. 21. Spouse: Harold J. Moshier (deceased). Parents: Moses and Netta Boshart Gingerich. Children: Bern, Stanley H., three grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. A graveside service will be held in the spring.

**Nafziger, Gladys Mae Yousey**, 86, Lowville, N.Y., died Dec. 15, 2014. Spouse: Elmer W. Nafziger. Parents: Chris B. and Katie Moser Yousey. Children: Lillian Steria, Harlan, Sidney, Wesley, Isabel Norris, Cora Zehr; 14 grandchildren; 17 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Dec. 22 at Lowville Mennonite Church.

**Neufeld, Lilly Ann Regehr**, 87, Inman, Kan., died Jan. 18. Spouse: Herbert Walter Neufeld (deceased). Parents: Jacob T. and Mary Regier Regehr. Children: Joyce Price, Jane Esau, Ruth Goertzen; five grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Funeral: Jan. 25 at Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman.

**Nunemaker, Willis Irvin**, 94, Wakarusa, Ind., died Jan. 3. Spouse: Miriam Harter Nunemaker (deceased). Parents: Carl and Mary Dils Nunemaker. Children: Paul, Lowell, Donald, Glenn, Ronald, Linda Nunemaker, Sharon Brooks; 14 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 8 at Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa.

**Peachey-Moyer, Esther**, 81, Harrisonburg, Va., died Feb. 15. Spouse: Richard S. Moyer (deceased). Step-children: Lynette Hughes, Dan Moyer, Darlis Moyer; four step-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 21 at Strite Auditorium of Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, Harrisonburg.

**Penner, Salina Waltner**, 97, Freeman, S.D., died Jan. 13. Spouse: Daniel E. Penner (deceased). Parents: Ben J. and Emma P. Miller Waltner. Children: Betty Poppinga, Wayne, Gene, Lyle, Don; eight grandchildren; 29 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 17 at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman.

**Reber, James H., Sr.**, 86, Telford, Pa., Jan. 6. Parents: Calvin and Stella Mease Reber. Children: James H., Wayne; five grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 9 at Salford Mennonite Church, Harleysville, Pa.

**Rohrer, Leonard E.**, 90, Columbiana, Ohio, died Oct. 7, 2014. Spouse: Esther M. Conrad Rohrer (deceased). Parents: Harvey E. and Maggie Kurtz Rohrer. Children: Cathy Hoover, Larry D.; three grandchildren; three great-grandchildren. Funeral: Oct. 10 at Leetonia Mennonite Church, Leetonia, Ohio.

**Rosenberger, Kathryn H. High**, 92, Souderton, Pa., died Jan. 15. Spouse: Abram G. Rosenberger (deceased). Parents: Elmer H. and Elizabeth Gehman High. Children: Kathy Moyer, Donald H.; three grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Private services will be held at the convenience of the immediate family.

**Shank, Audrey B.**, 82, Harrisonburg, Va., died Jan. 18. Parents: J. Ward and Stella Brunk Shank. Memorial service: Jan. 24 at Greenmount Church of the Brethren, Harrisonburg.

**Swartley, John LeRoy**, 85, Souderton, Pa., died Nov. 9, 2014. Spouse: Ada Metz Swartley. Parents: Henry and Ida Myers Swartley. Children: Christine Metz Schwab, Laurel Anne Landis Alleger, J. Ed Sawrtley; five grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 13 at Salford Mennonite Church, Harleysville, Pa.

**Thomas, Aldine Leroy**, 81, Goshen, Ind., died Feb. 10. Spouse: Esther Yoder Thomas. Parents: Ora and Mable Chupp Thomas. Children: Richele Hofsommer, Rick; seven grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 15 at Clinton Frame Mennonite Church, Goshen.

**van Donk, Jan**, 77, Harrisonburg, Va., died Jan. 27, of Parkinson's disease. Spouse: Carol Louise Hunter van Donk. Parents: Jan and Arina van Wijngaarden van Donk. Children: Kim van Donk, Tanya Craft, Daryl; two grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 28 at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

**Wenger, Erma H. Sauder**, 75, Lancaster, Pa., died Jan. 15. Spouse: Daniel Wenger. Parents: Samuel and Lydia Hollinger Sauder. Children: Heidi Wenger, Dr. Andrea Wenger, Jo Fisher, Daniel Ray; four grandchildren. Funeral: April 4 at Mellinger Mennonite Church, Lancaster.

**Widrick, Norman E.**, 84, Lowville, N.Y., died Nov. 19, 2014. Spouse: LeEtta Lyncaker Widrick. Parents: Ruben and Leona Marolf Widrick. Children: Carlton, Marcia Murphy, Martha Martinez; eight grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 25 at Naumburg Mennonite Church, Castorland, N.Y.

**Wiens, Sarah "Sally" E. Neufeld**, 91, Inman, Kan., died Jan. 19. Spouse: Simon E. Wiens (deceased). Parents: Abraham "A.T." and Anna Ediger Neufeld. Children: Sue Dudley, Sid; six grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 24 at Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman.

**Witmeyer, Donna Jean Unger**, 84, Burr Oak, Mich., died Jan. 15. Spouse: Byron Witmeyer (deceased). Parents: Donald and L. Berdine Folk Unger. Funeral: Jan. 15 at Hohner Funeral Home, Three Rivers, Mich.

**Yoder, Luke Edward**, 85, Archbold, Ohio, died Jan. 14. Spouse: Marilyn Rufe-nacht Yoder. Parents: Daniel M. and Nancy Hershberger Yoder. Children: Denton, Tim, Ruben, Ramon, Richard; nine grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 19 at West Clinton Mennonite Church, Wauseon, Ohio.



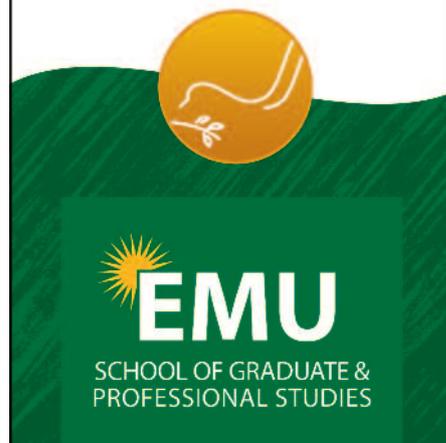
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## RESOURCES

**Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith and Evangelical Culture (Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies)** by Felipe Hinojosa (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, \$40.50) offers the first historical analysis of the changing relationship between religion and ethnicity among Latino Mennonites. Hinojosa traces the rise of the Latino presence within the Mennonite church from the origins of Mennonite missions in Latino communities in Chicago, South Texas, Puerto Rico, and New York City, to the conflicted relationship between the Mennonite church and the California farmworker movements, and finally to the rise of Latino evangelical politics.

**Called to Be Amish: My Journey from Head Majorette to the Old Order** by Marlene Miller (Herald Press, 2015, \$12.99) is a memoir about a woman's unhappy and abusive childhood and how she throws herself into cheerleading and marching band, then falls in love with Johnny, the gentle Amish man who helps her lace her ice skates. This is book two in the Plainspoken Series—real-life stories of Amish and Mennonites.

**California Mennonites** by Brian Froese (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015, \$49.95) places Mennonite experiences against a backdrop of major historical events and social issues. It includes

people who embrace a range of ideologies: many are historically rooted in the 16th-century ideals of the early Anabaptists, some embrace 20th-century American evangelicalism, and others are committed to a type of social justice that involves forging practical ties to secular government programs while maintaining a quiet connection to religion.

**Mennonites and Media: Mentioned in It, Maligned by It, and Makers of It** by Steven P. Carpenter (Wipf and Stock, 2015, \$25) describes how Mennonites have been portrayed in media and how they have shaped media for identity and outreach.

**A Hopeful View: Hoffnungsau, 140 Years** by Glen Ediger (Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church, 2014, \$15) is an illustrated, coffee-table book that tells the story of a Mennonite congregation in south central Kansas. It includes a summary of Mennonite origins, an account of the 1874 migration from southern Russia to Kansas and stories from seven generations over seven 20-year periods.

**Calling and Clarity: Discovering What God Wants for Your Life** by Doug Koskela (Eerdmans, 2015, \$15) distinguishes between "missional calling," "direct calling" and "general calling." It clarifies the relationship between gifts, passions and vocation while offering practical guidance for the process of vocational discernment.

**Eastern Mennonite University** is seeking applicants for a director of alumni and parent relations and annual giving. The **full-time director of alumni and parent relations and annual giving** is responsible for planning, managing and executing effective programs that inspire and enable alumni, parents and friends to consistently engage in the life of the university; developing and implementing strategies to enhance financial support of annual giving initiatives, including reunion giving, athletics and other programs; establishing an effective communications plan to engage alumni, parents and friends; providing leadership for engaging volunteers to serve on the alumni and parent councils and other groups; and directing staff associated with the department. Bachelor's degree and at least five years of related work experience. The position is full-time with benefits. Master's degree preferred. Submit application, cover letter, resume and three references to: [hr@emu.edu](mailto:hr@emu.edu). For more information visit our website at [www.emu.edu/humanresources](http://www.emu.edu/humanresources). People who bring diversity are encouraged to apply. EOE.

**Western District Conference (WDC)** of Mennonite Church USA seeks a **full-time conference minister** to provide leadership to the mission, ministry and well-being of WDC churches. M.Div. and pastoral ministry experience required. Individuals who bring diversity are encouraged to apply. Full job description appears at [mennowdc.org/wdc-conference-minister/](http://mennowdc.org/wdc-conference-minister/). Please send cover letter and Ministerial Leadership Information form to Sondra B. Koontz, Search Chair, 820 E 7th, Newton, KS 67114, [skoontz@bethelks.edu](mailto:skoontz@bethelks.edu). Applications will be accepted until position is filled.

**First Mennonite Church (Vineland, Ontario)** seeks a **full-time pastor** to lead our semirural congregation of 75-100 people in various stages of life. We are looking for someone with a strong commitment to Anabaptist values, a keen understanding of peace and social justice, and a love of music. We are the original Mennonite church in Canada and have a rich history of leadership. Application deadline March 31. Employment to commence in 2015. If interested, contact Henry Paetkau, MCEC conference minister: [hpaetkau@mcec.ca](mailto:hpaetkau@mcec.ca).

**Souderton Mennonite Church** seeks a lead pastor with strong Anabaptist theology and preaching skills as well as a seminary degree. Ideally, this person will have direct experience in leading a talented, multimember pastoral team and will be comfortable in a multidimensional congregational setting. Additionally, the candidate will have demonstrated success in community outreach as well as a passion for both inspiring and connecting with membership to enable them to effectively draw the unchurched to Christ. For further information, please contact Search Committee Chair, Ed Brubaker ([edlu.brubaker@verizon.net](mailto:edlu.brubaker@verizon.net)). Additional details about SMC and the job posting can be found on our website at [www.soudertonmennonite.org](http://www.soudertonmennonite.org).

Three couples, members of Park View Mennonite Church, jointly own a sailboat kept on the Chesapeake Bay. One couple needs to sell their share. See [tinyurl.com/meander4sale](http://tinyurl.com/meander4sale).

**Visit Europe the Mennonite Way!** Multiple Hotel Tours focusing on Mennonite-Anabaptist history in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine. Organized by Mennonite Heritage Tours, [www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu](http://www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu)

**Iowa Mennonite School** is seeking a dynamic educational leader for the position of **principal/chief administrator** in rural Kalona, Iowa, starting in the 2015-2016 school year. Iowa Mennonite School is a 9th through 12th grade high school that serves approximately 100 students. The successful candidate must have the following:

- master's degree in education or related field;
- the ability to attain a valid Iowa Administrator and Evaluator License;
- service as Christ-centered spiritual leader from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective;
- demonstrated success working with culturally and academically diverse students;
- high expectations for all;
- effective interpersonal and communication skills.

Iowa Mennonite School, in partnership with the family and the church, offers high school students an academically excellent, Christ-centered education rooted in an Anabaptist perspective. Within a caring community, IMS prepares students for lives of Christian discipleship, peacemaking and service. Candidates should complete an application found on the IMS website at <http://www.iowamennonite.org/jobs/> and submit a letter of interest, resumé, supporting documentation and three letters of recommendation to [sroppmiller@iowamennonite.org](mailto:sroppmiller@iowamennonite.org) or contact Stacy Ropp Miller at 319-656-3470.

**Eastern Mennonite University** is seeking applicants for a **head field hockey coach** position. The head coach is responsible to coach, direct, recruit and administer the field hockey program along with other duties as assigned by the director of athletics. He/she must be committed to the values and mission of the university and operate the program in adherence to the rules and regulations of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference and Division III of the NCAA. Master's degree or higher preferred, bachelor's degree required. Collegiate coaching with recruiting experience preferred, minimum of successful high school coaching required. The position is half-time, with the option for qualified individuals of additional responsibilities bringing it to a full benefit-level position of three-quarter time. Submit application, cover letter, resumé and three references to: [hr@emu.edu](mailto:hr@emu.edu). For more information visit our website at [www.emu.edu/humanresources](http://www.emu.edu/humanresources). People who bring diversity are encouraged to apply. EOE.

**Prince of Peace Mennonite Church**, Anchorage, Alaska, is seeking a **half-time pastor** to minister to a small but vibrant congregation. Responsibilities include preaching, spiritual nurturing, guidance on growth and community outreach as part of our Anabaptist faith. For more information contact Scott Bushee at [scottbushee@hotmail.com](mailto:scottbushee@hotmail.com).

## My family had no door



### Dominique Chew

is a student at Goshen (Ind.) College and a member of Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston, Kan.

As the sun set and the stars made themselves known in the Senegalese sky, I would watch the news with my eldest host brother, Amar. We would sit on a colorful, woven mat and watch televised images from devastation in places like Ukraine, Palestine, Democratic Republic of Congo and the innumerable fatalities from the Ebola outbreak in neighboring countries.

Language proved to be a barrier that hardly allowed for conversations about my pacifist stance, my frustration with U.S. military involvement or explaining my Mennonite background. In the midst of these frustrations, I took comfort in these commonalities I found with my Mennonite communities of Hesston, Kan., and my home during my college years in Goshen, Ind.

It's been about eight months since I've returned from Senegal, where I did my Study Service Term with Goshen College, and my heart aches to sit under the Senegalese stars again.

For the service portion of my semester I lived in Ndombo, a village of around 2,000 people that sits along the Senegalese River about 20 minutes from the Mauritanian border. The village was composed of predominantly Wolof-speaking people and almost entirely of Muslims.

**When people ask what I miss** most about Senegal, I immediately think of those delightful moments when I caught glimpses of familiar concepts and could make connections between the Muslim context I was immersed in and the Mennonite context I came from. This is what I tell people when they ask me what I've taken away from my three months in Senegal: My host family's home had no door.

Yellow and white paint was chipping off the cement entrance. It was wide enough for cars to drive through, for donkey carts to come pick up our trash and for hungry, sleepy young boys to enter in a row five wide.

My family had no door.

The entrance was wide enough to fit a crowd of people cheering for my uncle after he won the mayoral election. It was wide enough to fit a small crowd of women dancing and banging on pots and pans to celebrate my brother's acceptance into university.

My family had no door.

During every lunch and supper, there was a group of talibe—adolescent and preadolescent street boys, often orphans—who waited patiently in our courtyard, holding small buckets. When our meals ended, the leftover food always went to them.

After each trying day of Ramadan, when my family broke the day-long fast with sweet Nescafé, crusty baguettes and soft, chewy dates, I watched my younger brother give half his bread

to one of the boys his own age who had no bread.

Each day I listened to my yaye—mama—call the young boys by their names to give them bread.

“Muhammad,” she said,

“Come, take this.”

My family taught me lessons I thought I had already learned. All these lessons—about hospitality, sharing our variety of gifts and resources—suddenly made sense once I became the “other.” I didn't belong there.

**My light skin stuck out** among the rich darkness of theirs. Their language was difficult for me to learn and understand. I am Christian; they are Muslim. My home was across the ocean, and I was a stranger to their space. I didn't belong.

By the time my six weeks in Ndombo came to a tear-filled end, the doorless entry to my home became a metaphor for the type of hospitality I hope one day to apply to whatever community I'm a part of.

The importance of community seems ever pressing now as I encounter the beginning of the end of my undergraduate studies, and the realities of searching for a new community looms over me. I think of what it means, and what it will look like to share my bread with whatever kind of talibe or “other” I may encounter.

I am reminded that when our doors are open so are our hearts to new opportunities to celebrate the gifts of our sisters and brothers in our own communities and around the world, and to experience the rich diversity of our Maker's creation.

I am reminded that through Christ we are each called by name and given bread—or acceptance or unbounded love—whether or not we belong, no explanations needed. **TM**

Through Christ we are  
each called by name and  
given bread.

FILM REVIEW

**A Most Violent Year** (R) takes place in 1981, during the winter of one of the most violent years in New York City's history. An immigrant and his family try to expand their business amid rampant violence, decay and corruption. Throughout, Abel Morales maintains a nonviolent stance, refusing to arm his drivers or call in his wife's mob relatives, a refreshing change from the many revenge movies in theaters these days.—*Gordon Houser*

BOOK REVIEWS

**Mennonites and Media: Mentioned in It, Maligned by It and Makers of It** by Steven P. Carpenter (Wipf and Stock, 2015, \$25) is a treasure trove of information about how Mennonites have been portrayed in various media and their involvement in portraying themselves and their beliefs. It also offers analysis and notes the importance of media for doing mission.—*gh*

**Who's Afraid of Relativism?: Community, Contingency and Creaturehood** by James K.A. Smith (Baker Academic, 2014, \$19.99) argues that "relative" does not mean *arbitrary* or *subjective* but *related* to something or Someone. "Only the Creator is necessary, independent and absolute in himself," while we as creatures "are contingent, dependent and relative." While difficult and slow going in places, this important book clarifies our dependence on community.—*gh*

**Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice** by Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung (Eerdmans, 2014, \$14) claims that vainglory is as tempting now as in the fourth century, that "we can *all* be overly attached to how we appear to others and are acknowledged and approved by them." This vice, DeYoung writes, "is a disordered love for something that—if sought in a well-ordered way—is good." She points to practices that help us counter this pattern, such as solitude and silence.—*gh*

# Humility and the lessons of history

It's rare for a religious discussion to remain in our mediaculture for long, but that's been the case for President Obama's comments at the annual National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 5.

Obama gave a speech in which he compared Islamic violence with historic Christian violence. Political opponents expressed outrage. Jim Gilmore, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, called the remarks "the most offensive I've ever heard a president make in my lifetime."

In the speech, Obama said that "during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ." He then brought his historical analogy closer to home: "In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ."

From what I've seen, historians who've responded to the claims don't take issue with his statements. Others, though, don't like him criticizing Christianity or America.

**This raises a question:** Is it valuable to practice self-reflection (and self-criticism) as Christians?

A second question is, Is it fair to even call what was done in the Crusades, the Inquisition and in the American South Christian? Most Muslims would deny that what ISIS is doing reflects Islam.

In a Feb. 10 article at Slate.com, Jamelle Bouie explores the facts behind Obama's statement about Jim Crow. He makes two basic points: (1) it was worse than we may have thought, and (2) it was a religious ritual.

"In a recent report," Bouie writes, "the Alabama-based Equal Justice Initiative documents nearly 4,000 lynchings of black people in 12 Southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—between 1877 and 1950, which the group notes is "at least 700 more lynchings in

these states than previously reported."

He goes on to offer descriptions of a few of these "lynchings" (the word doesn't capture the brutality of the torture and butchery), which are too horrible to quote here.

Bouie then notes that these lynchings weren't just vigilante punishments or ... "celebratory acts of racial control and domination." They were rituals. He quotes historian Amy Louise Wood, who writes in her book *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940*: "Christianity was the primary lens through which most southerners conceptualized and made sense of suffering and death of any sort."

Another historian, Donald G. Mathews, writes in the *Journal of Southern Religion*: "Religion permeated communal lynching because the act occurred within the context of a sacred order designed to sustain holiness."

**But why bring this up?** What purpose does it serve?

Perhaps it's a lesson in humility and a warning against self-righteousness. Jesus certainly had plenty to say about the perils of self-righteousness (see Matthew 23).

What ISIS has done is horrible—and comparable to what those "Christian" lynch mobs did. But let's not judge all Muslims by that group. We don't want all Christians judged by what other so-called Christians have done.

And let's do some self-analysis as well. Are we not all prone to acts of domination or violence? Can we learn from our past in order to not practice such violence?

Maybe we need to practice confession and repentance on occasion. **TM**



*Gordon Houser is editor of The Mennonite.*

(Continued from page 5)

taxes allocated for war represent a distortion of priorities—spending taken away from where it's needed to benefit humanity.

David Swanson of [worldbeyondwar.org](http://worldbeyondwar.org) indicates it would cost some \$50 billion a year to end starvation and provide clean water to all human beings, compared with the \$1.9 trillion spent yearly on militarism—\$1 trillion of it expended by the United States alone.

We need to make the passage of the Religious Freedom Peace Tax legislation in the U.S. Congress a priority. When enacted, this bill will become a significant purveyor of nonviolence in our troubled world.

Let's resolve to do our part in demonstrating Jesus' exhortation to "do to others what you would have them do to you" so that communities around the globe can experience more "peace on earth."—*Harold A. ("H.A.") Penner, a member of Akron (Pa.) Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church USA representative to the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund*

### Authority, LGBT issues settled?

In preparation for the merger of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church (MC), in 1999 the proposed Membership Guidelines had statements giving congregations authority in regard to members as part of congregational polity and conferences authority in regard to members as part of conference polity. These statements were deleted in the Membership Guidelines adopted in 2001.

The issue of where authority resides has not been settled. Tinkering with structures likely will not resolve the matter. Will merger survive? MC delegates need to know that the Mennonite Church had congregational authority until late in the 19th century, when conferences began to take authority. Perhaps a minority group can teach the majority how to resolve the crisis. A group of Hispanic leaders in the Western District Conference has

stated, in essence, (1) we affirm the denominational position on homosexuality; (2) we ask that others respect us in holding this position; (3) we will respect congregations that accept celibate homosexuals and married homosexual couples; (4) we will not leave the conference but seek to keep the unity to which we are called.

Jesus calls us to love indiscriminately as the Father loves good and evil people, the righteous and the unrighteous.—*Harold Bauman, Goshen, Ind.*

### Defining Q

Re "Executive Board Releases Survey of Credentialed Leaders" (February): The survey must be skewed (and therefore biased) because of the definition of LGBTQ. This is defined as "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer." I understand the proper definition to be "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines queer as "strange, odd," which makes its use in the survey prejudicial. Questioning, on the other hand, connotes "feeling or expressing doubt," a more neutral expression.

I hope the Executive Board, the credentialed leaders and the membership will consider this bias when they make any decisions or take any action based on this survey.—*Steven Kauder, Newton, Kan.*

### Thanks for opinion piece

Rachel Nafziger Hartzler's "Sexuality: Commitment or Celibacy" (Opinion, February) was wonderful. Many thanks.—*Ryan Ahlgrim, Richmond, Va.*

### Wants issues other than sex

Re "On Issues Other than Sex" by Daniel Riehl (Letters, February), I have only three words: Amen, amen, amen.—*Gloria Nussbaum, Beaverton Ore.*

### What we don't know

Thanks for "We Think We Know More Than We Do" (Miscellany, February). In the last decade or so, I've thought it

is maybe just as important to know what I don't know as what I do know. I even saw a book by that title a couple of years ago.—*Mark Wiens, Phoenix, Ariz.*

### Open up discussion to everyone

How about we do like the Mennonite church of yore and open up the discussion to everyone—you know, like those old timey congregational meetings or even past conventions where any and all attendees could have their say? Just post a link to the questionnaire online [a delegate survey conducted prior to the assembly in Kansas City, Mo., this summer] and see what happens. Or are the powers that be too fearful to open up this discussion? Waiting and wondering.—*Debra Bender, Cape Coral, Fla.*

### I have questions

When we sing "You've got a place at the welcome table some of these days" (#4 in *Sing the Journey*), the following questions come to my mind:

Are there true followers of Christ who are unwelcome at the table in Mennonite Church USA churches?

Who should decide if a person is worthy or unworthy of a place at the table?

If some disagree about who should sit at the table, can't we all just love each other and enjoy the feast together?

Or will some of us get up from the table and leave because an "unworthy person" has been invited?

If Christ were sitting at the table with us, would he welcome his LGBT followers or tell them they are not worthy to join the church family?—*Ruby Lehman, Harrisonburg, Va.*

# Fire from heaven

*And [Jesus] sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village.—Luke 9:52-55 TNIV*

Followers of Jesus are tempted at times to torch the people who disagree with them. Take the case of James and John, disciples who moved in the inner circle with Jesus. When the Samaritans did not welcome Jesus into their town, the two brothers hoped to incinerate the inhospitable villagers. Jesus rebuked them for their vindictiveness and went elsewhere. He followed his own advice: "If you're not welcomed, leave town. Don't make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and move on," (Luke 9:5, *The Message*). We're used to reading Bible translations that speak of shaking the dust off their feet, but Eugene Peterson's paraphrase helps us catch a different sense of it.

We can become so accustomed to our particular practice of following Jesus that we look down on Christians who choose to follow Jesus in a different way. We may even call down God's judgment on others by fire, at least in metaphors. A careful study of church history would fill volumes of books with disturbing examples.

A brief backward glance reveals a notable example in the life of our own denomination. Several years ago, a pastor and a group of followers left a congregation in Mennonite Church USA after a crucial vote failed to pass. Before leaving, the pastor warned the congregation that if they opposed God's direction, God would remove his hedge of protection from them. Several months later, lightning struck the church building, resulting in extensive fire damage to the facility and consternation to the beleaguered people who remained. Had God sent fire from heaven?

While we all profess to follow Jesus, we work it out in significantly different ways. Thus, it is a good thing to regularly examine the way we practice our own Christian faith and to challenge the faith of others. Sometimes we arrive at new understandings of God's truth only after vigorous debate with those who disagree with us. But I urge us to do so in a charitable spirit, so that we generate more light than heat from the collar up. Questioning our opponents' motives and denouncing their actions, particularly via social media, too readily tears down the body of Christ. When has a scorching rebuke by email or social media motivated us to become more loving and faithful disciples of Jesus?

Over the past few years, some congregations in Mennonite Church USA have been so disappointed in our practice of Christian faith that they left their area conferences and/or the denomination. A mid-January gathering in Hartville, Ohio, revealed that others are planning to do the same.

Whether we are leaving or staying, times of parting can frazzle our nerves and tempt us to call down fire on those with whom we disagree. I hope that when we express our lament or anger against those on the opposite side of the divide, we do so with more wisdom and forethought than James and John at the Samaritan village.

God is calling us all to a deeper walk of faith, a journey that may well be marked by various streams of spiritual renewal. That's why I'm inspired by the words of Anne N. Rupp to pray down a different kind of fire from heaven on us all:

"Holy Spirit, come with fire, burn us with your presence new. / Let us as one mighty choir sing our hymn of praise to you. / Burn away our wasted sadness and enflame us with your love. / Burst upon [our denomination], give us gladness from above." 



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

When has a scorching rebuke by email or social media motivated us to become more loving and faithful disciples of Jesus?



## Owning white privilege



Anna Groff

It is helpful for white individuals to meet together to discuss ways to undo racism in our own lives and our own communities.

**W**e as white people often try to make ourselves feel better about our power and privilege by claiming that we use it for good.

At Hope for the Future IV in Fort Myers, Fla. (see the news story on page 32), Drew Hart told a story about when he was living in Harrisburg, Pa., after graduating from Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

One day he noticed a large group of white people in the “black/brown” part of town, all wearing bright, matching T-shirts and handing out free groceries.

Curious, he drove a bit closer and noticed that the group’s T-shirts read, “Harrisburg Invasion Day.”

Troubled, he thought, Is our community that pitiful to you? That pathological?

He later learned that this group planned this event without any guidance or partnership with Harrisburg leaders in that part of town.

Sometimes this mentality is as blatant as a white savior complex, as illustrated in the story from Hart. Other times it comes across in more subtle ways.

Either way, he said, it does not address the real problem. Then Hart challenged us to move away from the concept of using “white privilege for good.”

I found this to be the most challenging aspect of Hope for the Future IV, and it left me wondering what to do.

First, we as white people must work to own our whiteness. In other words, cease claiming that we are colorblind, that everyone can be successful if they try hard enough or that white people don’t have power.

Acknowledging this is usually one of the steps along one’s journey of being antiracist and can begin during a Damascus Road or other anti-oppression training.

Gina Crosley-Corcoran writes in her blog “Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person”: “It’s not your fault that you were born with white skin and experience these privileges. But ... you do benefit from it, and it is your fault if you don’t maintain awareness of that fact.”

Also, when we claim we’re using our power or privilege for good, we risk inserting ourselves into a situation.

“It’s crucial not to hog all ... the conversation or act as the spokesperson for people of color—because white people can’t truly present the perspectives of people of color,” writes Derrick Clifton in “10 Simple Ways White People Can Step Up to Fight Everyday Racism” on mic.com.

Second, it is helpful for white individuals to meet together to discuss ways to undo racism in our own lives and our own communities.

For example, Rick Derksen meets regularly with a group of individuals in Seattle, the “European Dissent Group.” (Derksen worked as a staff volunteer at Hope for the Future IV.)

This may sound counterintuitive when we, especially in Mennonite institutions, focus on diversity and connecting with people that look different from us.

However, we can share our mistakes and challenge one another in these intentional settings. I experienced this kind of growth in the white caucus group during Hope for the Future when we honestly talked about our reactions and experiences at the conference.

Finally, let’s remember that this is spiritual work that remains a significant part of being a Christian. Jesus commands us to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

Iris de León-Hartshorn, Mennonite Church USA director of transformative peacemaking and a Hope for the Future planner, says talking about power and racism isn’t easy, but it is a “Jesus thing” and “kingdom work.”—*ag*