

TheMennonite

Go to church because it fails

Why church conflict can be
a source of renewal and hope

April 2016

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INSIDE:

• Joy in the midst

• Yieldedness is the way forward

• The children are listening

• The Bible and *Downton Abbey*

• Lessons from New Zealand

Imagine if forgiveness and love were commonly spoken, if conflicts were resolved with a healing touch and everyone felt value and worth. Our children are ready to learn that language and we have been given the words of life. So let's speak to them of peace and justice. Let's tell them of Jesus and God's shalom. Let's teach our kids to shine in this world.

* Start small



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ON THE COVER: creativecommons.org / Paul Sableman

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LETTERS

This publication welcomes your letters, either about our content or about issues facing the Mennonite Church USA. Please keep your letter brief—one or two paragraphs—and about one subject only. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Publication is also subject to space limitations. Email to letters@themennonite.org or mail to Letters, The Mennonite, 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517. Please include your name and address. We will not print letters sent anonymously, though we may withhold names at our discretion.—*Editors*

To all who are considered an 'issue'

I want to send a message to all who are considered an “issue” in Mennonite Church USA because of your sexual orientation. You are definitely a part of *my* church family. I am so sorry some of you have felt the need to leave our family to find places where your gifts are welcomed. I am also sorry some people feel the need to leave MC USA because they see that some of our church institutions are reaching out to include and welcome you. To them, I say “thank you” for making room at the table for our gifted sons, daughters and grandchildren.

I have no official position in MC USA, but you may know me as “Pink Menno Grandmother.”—*Ruby Lehman, Harrisonburg, Va.*

Objection to war taxes

Over the years I’ve observed a dramatic rise in (apparent) interest in politics in presidential election years. People seem to think voting for a president is important. Millions of others don’t think it is so important.

What difference would it make if all the people who don’t vote took a different kind of political action by protesting the rampant corporate welfare program of military contracts and spending? And what if millions of people who do vote also withheld \$10.40 from their federal tax when they send in their 1040 Form on April 15 as a protest of the U.S. corporatist policy of perpetual war, which has killed hundreds of thousands in the

past generation and drags the whole citizenry of this nation into compliance with homicidal behavior?

Conscientious objection to war taxes would be significant political action for the betterment of this nation and the welfare of global humanity. American history has valorized tax objection with far less at stake in the Boston Tea Party.

With actions such as this, citizens could model the courage and honesty they say they expect of public officials.—*John Stoner, Akron, Pa.*

As a conscientious objector to war, I believe that paying for war is participation in war. While preparing my federal income tax returns, it is a moral dilemma to know that 45 percent of my federal tax dollars underwrites war making and militarism (www.warresisters.org/resources/wrl-pie-chart-flyers-where-your-income-tax-money-really-goes).

As I have done in previous years, I will pay that portion of my taxes that goes toward peace-oriented systems that support human life. But I will again withhold \$10.40 as a symbol of my refusal to participate in war. I will join the 1040forpeace.org movement that chooses to support peaceful alternatives to war by contributing to the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund (peacetaxfund.org).

Many U.S. citizens have religious scruples against financially underwriting the military. Shouldn’t their rights, based in historical beliefs that are foundational to their faith, be respected?—*Harold A. Penner, Akron, Pa.*

“Those That We Crucify” (Editorial, March) expresses a theology I sincerely believe. She quotes Father Jon Sobrino, the only surviving priest of the group that included six Jesuits murdered with their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador in 1989 by Salvadoran soldiers, including ones trained at the “School of the Americas” in Georgia.

Heinzekehr says, “Sobrino reminds me to think about all of the ways that I am complicit in nailing people to the cross.”

Paying federal income taxes helps prop up this imperialistic, militaristic, racist society in which I live. I ask God's forgiveness for all the federal income taxes I have paid in the past that I would not have had to pay if all my life I had given as much as possible to kingdom-oriented, tax-exempt organizations and used every means possible to avoid payment of federal income taxes. I have helped nail peoples from all across this globe to the cross, the American Empire's cross of murder, torture and oppression. I ask God's forgiveness for not having spoken out against these evils much earlier.—*E. Daniel Riehl, Lititz, Pa.*

Playing the guilt melody

"Those That We Crucify" (Editorial, March) and "A Letter to My Elders" (New Voices, March) played the guilt melody well. I suspect some guilt-ridden people might hear echos of guilt in "Love Is a Verb" (Mennonite Church USA, March) as well. Love is not only a verb but a noun. One cannot give what one has not received, and only the Spirit of God can give us what we need.

I'm glad Dawn Araujo-Hawkins learned to act justly, love kindness and walk humbly when competing in a beauty contest ("Pageants and Micah," March). I'm sure she showed the world

that black girls are smart and beautiful and talented, and it sounds like she didn't even have to act "white" in order to get the awards—good for her. But many people also have learned these three lessons in the military and at war. I want to create a world where few will get passionate about beauty pageants or self-congratulatory Oscar celebrations or football temples of worship or visit monuments to the great generals who bought our liberty with someone else's blood.—*Philip E. Friesen, Minneapolis*

The power of culture and freedom

We are witnessing a chain of events that demonstrate the power of culture and freedom in the human psyche.

By "culture" I mean the historical institutions of family/tribe/religion that express themselves in language, education, food, music, habits, spiritual rituals.

By "freedom" I mean the personal flexibility to express one's instincts without harm to one's group and to have some control of one's destiny. So far, it seems the best political institution to insure this is democracy.

In the Middle East we see incredible population turmoil, primarily because country borders and dictatorships were imposed (mainly by the

"West") without regard to local ethnicity.

In Europe, the great "EU" experiment may not survive in its intended form.

Even in America, incredible things are happening. The middle and lower classes are generally worse off economically than the previous generation. There are more millionaires and billionaires than ever before. In spite of his rude and uncultured manner, Donald Trump is able to draw the support of people who are sick and tired of ineffective "fine tuning" and ready to support a "bloodless revolution."—*Richard Penner, Calgary, Alberta*

Don't believe Petraeus

As a newer Anabaptist and student at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, I agree with John Murray's assessments and sentiments and am glad he is engaged in the kinds of things he is doing ("Wider Horizons," March). However, as a former (actual) soldier, an army intelligence analyst that worked under the occupation of Iraq in 2006-2007, I don't believe a single thing Petraeus says and discount anything associated with him. There are many good articles out there to back this incredulity up.—*Evan Knappenberger, www.themenonite.org*

IN THIS ISSUE

The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are counterintuitive to our way of thinking. Jesus said that to save one's life, one must lose it. He said the kingdom of God belongs to children, the weakest members of society. His death looked like a failure, yet it led to his resurrection and to salvation.

Gerald Mast's cover article (page 12) is also counterintuitive. He argues that the church's failure should attract us to it and that embracing church conflict should become a spiritual practice, like Communion.

Likewise, David Boshart (page 21) says that the way forward through

church conflict is to practice *Gelassenheit*, or yieldedness.

Both articles are particularly relevant in our current climate of conflict in Mennonite Church USA.

Also relevant is Hannah Heinzekehr's report on the meetings of the Constituency Leaders Council (page 32), which is working to build and understand trust.

Carol Duerksen writes about Merv Stoltzfus (page 16), whose life exemplifies the value of God working in all of us.

Hannah also writes about the Community Mennonite Early Learning Center in Markham, Ill., which primarily serves families in the Markham community surrounding the

church (page 25), which are mostly African-American.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention month, and Carolyn Hold-erread Heggen (page 28) provides 10 ways your church can prevent child abuse.

Among our fine columns, Claire DeBerg tells us how to look for leaders (page 30), Addie Liechty reminds us that our children are listening to our words (page 31), and Matthew Shedden discusses the advantages of macro and micro churches (page 38).

My editorial (page 40) offers lessons from Jeanne and my recent trip to New Zealand. Thanks to our staff for covering for me while I was absent.—*Editor*

Efforts continue to bring back pastor Max Villatoro

Members of Central Plains Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Central Committee Washington are continuing their efforts to reunite Max Villatoro with his family. Villatoro, a Mennonite pastor from Iowa City, was deported to Honduras by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on March 20, 2015.

His deportation followed his detention by ICE on March 3 and weeks of advocacy efforts, including more than 47,000 signatures collected on three petitions seeking Villatoro’s release from detention. One of the petitions, hosted on MoveOn.org, was signed by more than 22,000 people.

Villatoro and his wife, Gloria, are co-pastors of Iglesia Menonita Torre Fuerte (Strong Tower). Gloria and their four children remain in the United States.

The Friends of Pastor Max Steering Committee, consisting of individuals from Central Plains congregations, continues to meet monthly to discuss next steps.

To learn more about the Villatoro family and efforts to help Pastor Max, visit <http://www.friendsofpastormax.org/>.—*Hannah Heinzekehr*

MCC uses \$34.6 million to respond to Syria, Iraq

Since the Syrian war began five years ago in March, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has spent about \$34.6 million to relieve the suffering of Syrians, Iraqis and people in neighboring countries who have been impacted by violence.

The war has caused trauma, homelessness and hunger among 11 million Syrians who have been forced from their homes and prevented many children from continuing their education.

The upheaval has stirred ethnic and religious tensions in Syria and neighboring countries, including Iraq. The conflict spilled into Iraq in 2014, increasing the number of displaced people there to 3.3 million—a total that includes those forced from their homes



Hesston community responds to shooting

Four Excel T-shirts, representing the four lives lost on Feb. 25, line the roadside by Excel Industries in Hesston, Kan. On Feb. 25, an Excel employee went on a shooting spree, entering the factory and opening fire on co-workers, killing three people and wounding 14 before being killed by Doug Schroeder, Hesston police chief and a member of Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, Kan. Excel is owned by the Mullet family. Paul Mullet’s family is connected to Hesston Mennonite Church. Paul’s brother Bob is vice president at Excel and a member of Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston. People from Hesston, Newton and surrounding areas gathered at Hesston High School on Feb. 28 to share their sorrow and grief and to pray for those affected by the tragedy.—*Becky Helmuth*

by the U.S. invasion in 2003 and other conflicts.

MCC has responded to the vast, ongoing need in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan with a larger financial response than it has ever conducted in the 96 years of the organization’s existence—larger than the response to the Haiti earthquake or the Indian Ocean tsunami.

“This is the largest humanitarian crisis in a generation,” says Bruce Guenther, MCC’s director of disaster response. “The world is grappling with the highest number of displaced persons ever recorded—more than 60 million people—with about a quarter of them from Syria and Iraq.”—*MCC*

UK Mennonites end Sunday services

A Mennonite congregation in the United Kingdom held its last worship service last month as age, mortality and changing attitudes to faith forced it to abandon regular services.

The numbers attending Sunday services dwindled to single figures from a peak of 40 in the 1990s, says Ed Sirett, who was an elder of the church, based in Wood Green, north London, until last year. “In the last five years, there have been some untimely deaths of highly committed individuals, which has been a huge blow,” he says. “We’re older and less energetic, and it got to the point when just keeping ... Sunday worship going was taking most of the energy of the last half a dozen people.”

Another factor in the church’s decline was changing attitudes toward religion in society generally. In the 2011 census, about a quarter of the UK population reported that they had no religion, up more than 10 percent since the previous census in 2001.

“As with many Christian churches, we failed to convince the next generation that following Jesus was the best way,” says Sirett.

The London Mennonite Centre closed in 2010, and the church has

struggled to fill the positions of elders. Members decided at the end of last year that “we could no longer sustain our usual pattern of community life, despite a perceived obligation to maintain the UK’s only fully functioning, English-speaking Mennonite church,” said a statement from the last remaining elder, Sean Gardiner.—*The Guardian*

Southeast Conference assesses relationships

“Ask. Seek. Knock.” was the theme of the Southeast Mennonite Conference (SMC) annual assembly held Jan. 29-30 at Bayshore Mennonite Church in Sarasota, Fla. The theme was apropos for a gathering filled with questions about God’s leading for the conference’s future structure and relationship to Mennonite Church USA.

SMC, which includes 27 congregations in Florida and Georgia, faces questions about future financial sustainability and Marco Guete, executive

conference minister, also announced that he will retire in January 2017.

Last October, the conference reviewed its 1987 “Statement on Homosexuality,” which states, “As a church conference we want to clearly articulate our belief that God’s creation intent is that we be heterosexual. We do not see homosexual practice as another choice to be accepted and approved as part of our practice and beliefs.”

During delegate sessions, the conference appointed a six-person task force that will connect with representatives from every conference congregation over the next eight months. Congregations will be invited to give feedback on hopes for the conference in the future, the conference’s relationship to Mennonite Church USA and their congregation’s future relationship with SMC. The task force will bring recommendations for SMC’s future priorities and affiliations to the fall annual assembly, Oct. 7-8.—*Hannah Heinzekehr*

Vibrant legacy of Latino culture at EMU

Last month saw a symbolic “passing of the torch” in the Latino Student Alliance at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., as four “comadres,” their friendship forged by a common love of heritage and culture, moved out of leadership positions they have held for the past three years. The women, all seniors, are largely responsible for the visibility and resurgence of the club, known as LSA, over the past four years.

Their friendship began with LSA, which makes for four years of learning and growing together, most commonly communicating “in Spanglish,” they say. Though each has held formal leadership positions in the club, in reality “there is no hierarchy,” says one.

- Ana Cruz, New Market, Va., plans a career in elementary school special education.

- Fernanda “Fer” Hernandez, a senior business administration major, is from Honduras.

- Paola Diaz, from McGaheysville,

Va., is a kinesiology major, double-minoring in psychology and coaching.

- Rebecca Cardwell, from Maryland, is a Spanish education and TESOL major, who has been “welcomed with open arms” into the Latino community, she says.

The four friends have been “fabulous leaders,” says Susannah Lepley, director of Multicultural Services. “They have grown in confidence, learned to stand up when the situation warrants, to manage conflict effectively and persevered when things did not work out ... they show this leadership not just on campus, but in their churches and communities, too.”—*EMU*

Bluffton to receive multi-million-dollar investment

President James M. Harder announced Feb. 19 that The Austin E. Knowlton Foundation of Cincinnati, Ohio, has made the largest single gift in Bluffton (Ohio) University’s history. The \$4 million gift spearheads the development of a transformational new science building located at the heart of campus. The university’s goal is to open the building by fall 2019.

The \$14.5 million, 32,500 square foot Austin E. Knowlton Science Center on Bluffton’s campus will feature 10 energy-efficient, high-tech learning labs for biology, chemistry, physics and dietetics, all designed for hands-on-experimentation. All labs will be equipped with digital technology and A/V to integrate instruction with experiments.

The new facility will include three classrooms designed for science instruction plus 15 faculty offices and adjacent learning/study spaces to enhance student-faculty interaction. Public spaces will be designed for students and visitors to experience science in action with views into all labs and an accessible green roof area. The building will also serve as home to academic programs in the natural and applied sciences including biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and dietetics.

—*Bluffton University*



Tornado cleanup

Volunteers from Mennonite Disaster Service rebuild an Amish school in Lancaster (Pa.) County after a tornado swept through Salisbury Township Feb. 24. More than 7,000 volunteers helped in the cleanup and rebuilding efforts.—*MDS*

On love



Isaac Villegas
is pastor of
Chapel Hill (N.C.)
Mennonite Church.

Rabbi Akiva: “Had the Torah not been given, the Song of Songs would have sufficed to guide the world.”

The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) to guide the world, to guide us in this world. No need for the Torah; no need for the Law—the love songs of Solomon would have sufficed, they are enough, Rabbi Akiva said. In those pages are enough Scriptures for a lifetime, enough of God for you and me.

That’s not how I usually think of the Song of Songs, Solomon’s love poetry. Once, as a teenager, bored during worship at church, I sat in my pew, flipping through my Bible and stopping at these lush pages, my eye catching on the pomegranates and grape blossoms, the heaps of wheat and clusters of the vine, the flocks of goats and fawns and gazelles, eyes as doves. I quickly closed the book and made sure no one noticed what I was reading. I thought there must have been a mistake, that these pages were glued into my Bible as a test—a test by my youth leader, perhaps, who was probably looking over my shoulder, monitoring my faithfulness.

Those pages are full of love, love stories, love poems, lovers calling out to one another. “You have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes” (4:9).

I take it that for Rabbi Akiva the Song of Songs is enough because God is the love that happens in those chapters. God is the love that happens between the verses, between the lines, unwritten, unspoken yet holding it all together. Here, in these passages, there is enough of God, though God is hidden, hidden in the love. “I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me.... You whom my soul loves” (1:6-7).

There is enough of God here, in these pages, because there is no separation of loves—a heaven of love pierces through our earthly loves.

The Song of Songs reminds us that all we have to go on, when we think about God’s love, when we think about our love for God and God’s love for us—all we have are divine likenesses in the flesh, human metaphors, words we learn with one

another: how to say them, how to feel them, how to believe in them. And as we say these words to one another, we learn how to say them to God, we learn how they reveal to us something about God.

This life is a fleeting education in how to love—a brief time with one another, moments that reveal to us how to draw close to an invisible God, how to draw close enough to say, “I love you,” how to whisper to the one hidden in the darkness, and to learn how to wait for a response, learning patience with the silence, undergoing the long suffering of love.

“My beloved had turned and was gone,” the lover says in the Song of Songs. “I sought him but did not find him; I called him, but he gave no answer.... If you find my beloved, tell him this: I am faint with love” (5:6-8). I am faint with love.

How close does God have to be for God to be present to us? Can we love from a distance?

The lover sits up at night, calling into the darkness, into the silence, waiting for something, anything, reassurances that she is loved in return—a whisper in the silence, a glance in the darkness.

I wrote a book once, with a friend, called *Presence*. It’s all about how God is present to us in our lives, in the

lives of the people around us—Emmanuel, God with us, closer to us than we are to ourselves, as Augustine would say.

Presence is important to me. Yet here in the Song of Songs there’s a distance between lovers. God seems to have pulled away, to have withdrawn into silence, into darkness. “My beloved had turned and was gone.” The distance is devastating. The lover is undone by the separation. “I am faint with love.”

How close does God have to be for God to be present to us? Can we love from a distance? How far can love reach—through how much silence, through what kind of darkness—and still hold us?

Faith is this: to love from a distance, to stare into the darkness and whisper into the silence; to look and listen, to wait. **TVM**

Indonesian churches to host MWC Assembly in 2021

In July 2009, an unlikely group of Mennonite church leaders from Indonesia found themselves in a conversation outside a dormitory in Asunción, Paraguay. Although the participants in the discussion were not strangers, their paths rarely crossed. The three groups they represented had complex histories, each rooted in a particular set of memories that included stories of separation and division.

But there in the relaxed context of the 15th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference something significant shifted in their relationship. “At one particular moment,” recalls David Meijanto, “we realized that all of us were of a similar age and that we shared many of the same concerns and values.” For the first time, members of the group asked an obvious question: Why don’t we get together more often back in Indonesia?

The church leaders returned to Indonesia with a commitment to meet every three months with the simple goal of sharing together and encouraging each other. At one of those “Inter Menno” meetings the idea emerged that the three groups could together host the 2021 MWC global assembly in Indonesia.

For many outsiders, the three synods that make up the Mennonite church in Indonesia—GITJ, GKMI and JKI—seem like an intimidating welter of acronyms. But their history, individually and collectively, is a beautiful microcosm of the global Anabaptist church.

GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa / Evangelical Church of Java) is the oldest group, with roots going back to the Dutch Mennonite missionary Pieter Jansz, who arrived in Java in 1851. A gifted linguist, Jansz compiled a Dutch-Javanese dictionary and played a crucial role in the first Javanese translation of the Bible. The church that emerged in 1854 was the first Anabaptist-Mennonite congregation in the world whose members were not primarily of European or North American origin. But an even more influential figure in the early history of the GITJ was Kyai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung, a local mystic whose resistance to Dutch colonialism, vision of a coming “Just Prince” and commitment to creating self-sufficient agrarian Christian communities helped enculturate the missionary message into a distinctively Javanese idiom. Since then, the GITJ has had a complex history, shaped—like all the Mennonite groups in Indonesia—by the trauma of World War II, the long struggle for democracy in

Indonesia and the ongoing challenges of living as a tiny minority in a country with the world’s largest population of Muslims. Today, members of the 110 GITJ congregations tend to live in rural areas around Jepara and Puti, speak Javanese, work as laborers and worship in a somewhat formal liturgical style.

The GKMI (Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia / Union of Muria Christian Churches of Indonesia) traces its roots to Chinese immigrants who settled in Java in the early 20th century, especially in the region around Kudus. In 1917, Tee Siem Tat, a Chinese businessman, became a Christian when he and another family member were miraculously healed after listening to stories in the Gospels of Jesus’ healing ministry. Almost immediately, Tee embarked on a journey of Bible study, preaching and church planting. From the beginning, the Malay-speaking congregations had contact with Mennonites, but that identity was particularly strengthened in the 1950s and 1960s, when Hermann Tann, a descendant of Tee Siem Tat, consciously worked to introduce Mennonite theology and polity. Today, some 55 congregations make up the GKMI. Its members tend to be of Chinese background, well-educated and strongly committed to missions.

JKI (Jemaat Kristen Indonesia / Christian Congregations of Indonesia), the youngest of the Mennonite synods in Indonesia, emerged in the late 1970s as a charismatic renewal movement within the GKMI. Led by Adi Sutanto, a small GKMI prayer group began to incorporate speaking in tongues, faith healing, visions and prophecy into their regular worship. In 1985, a group of like-minded congregations joined to form the JKI, which has since grown to include 155 congregations, including several in the United States, Australia and the Netherlands. The best-known JKI church—and the likely site of the MWC assembly in 2021—is the 20,000 member “Holy Stadium,” which combines charismatic worship with a remarkable array of social ministries and a strong outreach program to the city of Jakarta.

Clearly, each of these indigenous synods has its own distinctive history and identity. But today leaders are looking beyond those differences to seek new partnerships with each other and with the larger Mennonite world. MWC Assembly 2021 will offer a great perspective on the various ways that Anabaptism has taken root in Indonesia. It’s not too soon to put it on your calendar. **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*.

The history of these synods is a beautiful microcosm of the global Anabaptist church.

MISCELLANY

Items of interest from the broader church and world

“Science, like art, music and literature, has the capacity to amaze and excite, dazzle and bewilder.—Lawrence M. Krauss in the New York Times, on the discovery of gravitational waves from two black holes colliding a billion light years away”

Women clergy: 85-90 cents for a man's \$1

Women clergy in the United States receive about 90 cents for each dollar paid to men. Data from 2015 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that male clergy earned \$1,021 per week, while the median earnings for women were \$924. The average yearly income for male clergy was \$44,164. For women, the average was only \$38,533. Because women are more likely to have skewed toward lower incomes, the pay gap is larger when comparing average (mean) incomes and median incomes. Using median incomes, women received 93 cents per dollar paid to men. For mean income, the figure is 87 cents.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that the pay gap does not diminish (and may grow wider) when we take into account education and experience. Women in the clergy tend to be better-educated than their male colleagues. As a result, when we take into account age, years of schooling, and having a theology degree, the number becomes 85 cents.

In other words, female clergy really do earn less for the same education and experience.—*Religion News Service*

Better dead than wet

A law passed in Texas, set to take effect Aug. 1, on the 50th anniversary of the nation's first mass campus shooting, at the University of Texas at Austin, will allow students to carry concealed handguns on campus and in dorms. But, as the *San Antonio Current* noted, some state universities will still ban dormitory possession of Nerf and squirt guns, because those things are dangerous.—*In These Times*

Oily behavior

Two separate, independent investigations of the petroleum company Exxon conclude that Exxon knew about the effects of global warming years ago but hid its findings from the public, denied global-warming science and participated in efforts to obstruct the politics of global warming. As early as 1978, insider scientists told top executives at Exxon that climate change was real, was caused by human activity and would raise world temperatures. Instead of alerting the rest of the world, Exxon used its knowledge to buy oil leases in areas where it knew ice would melt and used its finances to fund efforts to squelch global-warming research.—*Christian Century*

Voting apathy

Randy Richardson, a candidate for school board in Riceville, Iowa, received a grand total of zero votes, despite being the only candidate for the seat he was seeking on the Sept. 8, 2015, ballot. Asked by the *Mason City Globe Gazette* why he didn't vote for himself, Richardson explained, "I was too busy."—*The Progressive*

- Estimated amount G20 nations spent in 2014 on climate-change-adaptation assistance for poorer nations: **\$4.5 billion**
 - On direct subsidies to fossil-fuel producers: **\$77 billion**
- Harper's



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LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS

BY STEVE EDWARDS



Steve Edwards © 2015 Steve Edwards 1/17 edwardscartoons@yahoo.com

Quotable

“We don’t have to rescue everyone. We do need to do what we can, with God’s help. We are called to listen to God’s voice and do just what we’re asked to do. Those small things—and sometimes big things—may save lives. Maybe even our own lives. We won’t ever know, this side of heaven, and that’s OK.

“We give people what they need, not necessarily what they deserve.”—*Michele Hershberger in her blog “Shalom Justice: Reflections on Events in Hesston”*



Most-read online-only posts



5. ‘Mennonite college students push for expanded focus on sexual abuse’ by Hannah Heinzekehr
850

4. ‘Should I stay or should I go’ by Ben Wideman
1K

3. ‘Our struggles with discernment’ by Jerry Kahlert
1.1K

2. ‘Evana Network grows to 16’ by Hannah Heinzekehr
1.2K

1. ‘Shalom justice: Reflections on events in Hesston’ by Michele Hershberger
5.4K

My top 10 songs: Claire DeBerg

1. Dolly Parton, “Wildflowers”
2. The Beatles, “Blackbird”
3. Rodgers and Hammerstein, “Edelweiss”
4. U2, “Stuck In A Moment You Can’t Get Out Of”
5. Tchaikovsky, “Act 11 No. 14 Pas de Deux”
6. Coldplay, “Fix You”
7. Band of Horses, “No One’s Gonna Love You”
8. OneRepublic, “Good Life”
9. Bruno Mars, “Count On Me”
10. Phosphorescent, “Song for Zula”



You can read about why these songs are meaningful and listen to Claire’s full playlist online.

Recipe of the month

Homemade Bagels



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Go to church because it fails

**Why church conflict can be
a source of renewal and hope**

by Gerald J. Mast

I published a book in 2012 entitled *Go to Church, Change the World: Christian Community as Calling*. In the book, I invite people to receive the life of the church as the primary vocational calling of all Christians—the calling we receive in baptism to be joined with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection and thus with his body as it is present in the world today.

I claim that the practices of the church—reading and understanding the Bible together, offering and receiving baptism, joining together in the Lord’s Supper, sharing resources and discernment, and serving the life of the world—are all activities by which we learn those habits of truth and excellence that the world needs to become transformed and holy—a dwelling place for God. Such churchly practices help change the world, even though they are often neglected or performed poorly or displayed within flawed contexts that are frequently full of conflict and failure. God is accomplishing God’s work through God’s people despite our weakness, I’ve been assuming.

However, because the book highlights the life of the church when it is at its best, readers sometimes respond to the book by expressing disappointment that their experiences of church involvement fall short of the examples of world-changing faithfulness that appear in the book. As a result of such conversations and some additional study, I’ve adjusted my thinking about the church and failure. I’m now convinced that Christ’s healing and hope flow through the church to the world because it is weak and full of conflict and not merely despite such failure. Go to church because of its weakness. Go to church because of its conflict.

The weakness of the church

How can the weakness of the church strengthen our faith and witness? My colleague Alex Sider, who teaches theology at Bluffton (Ohio) University, has written a book entitled *To See History Doxologically* about how to receive the often disappointing and faithless history of the church as an occasion for praise and thanksgiving rather than as a project of control or meaning management. While Sider’s book focuses on the way we tell the story of the church, his argument could be extended to the way we discuss or display the life of the church to one another and the watching world as well.

Drawing on the picture of salvation history exhibited in the book of Hebrews, and by critiquing the work of modern political historians and theologians, Sider argues that the salvation being brought about in the life of God’s people is a gift that is received amid frequent faithlessness. The story of God’s people in the Old Testament, for example, is riddled with leaders who did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, some of whom are described as entirely corrupted and others who exhibited both obedience and disobedience. The group of 12 disciples chosen by Jesus included not only Judas the betrayer and Thomas the doubter but Peter, who both takes up the sword to defend

Jesus and denies any relationship to him when the going gets tough.

Such biblical stories remind us that God’s work is being received and offered in the life of an often faithless and failing people; as a result, we can actually experience the gospel as both radical gift and plausible promise. The fallible church offers the gospel as radical gift when it acknowledges this gift as good news, which we flawed and failing humans are only able to receive thankfully, rather than control strategically. The fallible church offers the gospel as plausible promise when it demonstrates that our weakness is a condition of possibility for exhibiting God’s living city rather than being a compromise of perfection that threatens to sidetrack the march to Zion. Ordinary and flawed people like us are precisely the instruments that God chooses to display God’s great salvation.

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This approach is confirmed by Anna Jansz of Rotterdam’s letter to her son, as found in *Martyrs Mirror*. Jansz was a young adult Dutch Anabaptist martyr who made the transition from being a revolutionary Münsterite to a spiritualist Davidite and who before her execution at age 29 on Jan. 24, 1539, in Rotterdam left a letter for her son that has become a classic Anabaptist text. In the letter, she tells her son: “Do not regard the great number, nor walk in their ways....But where you hear of a poor, cast-off, simple little flock, which is despised and rejected by the world, join them; for where you hear of the cross, there is Christ; from there do not depart.”

Anna’s statement to her son about the “little flock” is typically regarded as a description of what is sometimes called the persecuted church—the church that is regarded as a threat to the established order. And while that is certainly part of what is meant here, I also think that for Anna Jansz this experience of a poor, cast-off flock included her experience as a Münsterite—which constituted a much larger part of her church expe-

rience than being affiliated with the group led by David Joris. Moreover, both the Münsterites and the Davidites were failures not just in the sense of being persecuted by the authorities but also in the sense of representing visible moral and theological failures, including the lapse into polygamy and the use of the sword by the Münsterites as well as the sexual utopianism and esoteric spiritualism of the Davidites. And these radical church projects were also failures in the sense that they were not savvy enough to survive, as was the Mennonitism that eventually appropriated Anna's story and testimony for its martyr literature.

Anna's experience reflects in a perhaps more dramatic way the deliberate decision of Menno Simons in 1536 to finally leave his respectable position in the Catholic priesthood and join a completely discredited and fragmented Anabaptist group—"sheep without a shepherd," as he put it. In Menno's conversion testimony, the violent and misguided actions of the Münsterite Anabaptists are responsible for ultimately convincing him to give up his comfortable and successful clerical career. Discussing the armed Anabaptist takeover of the Olde Klooster monastery that led ultimately to a massacre of these Anabaptists by the authorities, Menno writes: "After this had transpired, the blood of these people, although misled, fell so hot upon my heart that I could not stand it, nor find rest in my soul."

Perhaps the time has come for us to invite people to join our churches not because we are more Christlike or biblical or spiritual but because our churches are places where sins are forgiven and weakness is vindicated.

Menno also discusses the influence of many other Christian reformers, such as Luther, Zwingli, Bucer and Bullinger—all of them church leaders he regarded as partly right but also partly wrong. In other words, Menno Simons, like Anna Jansz, was converted to Anabaptist faith through the failure and weakness of the church, not by any exhibition of great spiritual success. And so it is not surprising that in the early editions of Menno's writings, he described the Münsterite Anabaptists as "dear brothers who erred only a little when they sought to defend their faith with

the sword." While such statements were edited out of later editions of Menno's writings, they do accurately reflect the sometimes forgotten fact that the Mennonite church is named after someone who joined the Anabaptist movement primarily because of the dramatic mistakes, failures and sins of the revolutionary and polygamous Münsterites, and was himself baptized by the former Münsterite Obbe Phillips.

Mennonite historians have often been tempted to cover over the flaws of early Anabaptist leaders and communities. And Mennonite churches today inspired by the Anabaptist Vision often seek to burnish a public image of Christ-centered cities on a hill, proof that the Sermon on the Mount can actually be achieved. Such a sense of moral superiority has no doubt made it difficult to acknowledge the sins and failures of the church and thereby established a dishonest basis for the church's reputation.

Perhaps the time has come for us to invite people to join our churches not because we are more Christlike or biblical or spiritual but because our churches are places where sins are forgiven and weakness is vindicated. Such churches would reflect Anna Jansz's description of the church inhabited by Christ: a poor, simple, despised, rejected and cast-off little flock that teaches the cross. In such a church, failure is a reminder that the Lamb's triumph is not a success story but a resurrection story. And we know that a resurrection story will involve conflict.

The conflict of the church

Mennonite theologian Sara Wenger Shenk discusses how the body remembers through habit and ritual in her important book *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing*. In this book, Shenk draws on Paul Connerton to explain the transmission of communal conviction and history through practices that become habitual. She discusses specific habits and rituals that have been part of Mennonite church life in the past—such as Bible study, singing together, simplicity in attire, bedtime prayers, Communion, Sunday rest and so on. She identifies a decreasing regard for such practices in the church and urges a critical recovery of Anabaptist practices that renew the bodily knowledge of communally centered discernment and, to use Rebecca Chopp's terminology, "emancipatory transformation." Shenk urges a renewed partnership among families, churches and schools to recreate a communal culture that values the Scriptures, strengthens family life, baptizes new believers, teaches discipleship and prepares Christians to live as resident aliens—loyal first of all to God's peaceable reign. She suggests a number of bodily

practices and celebrations that can help believers remember in their bodies who they are: Sabbath keeping, cultivating sacred spaces, engendering a unique identity, weaving relational networks, and writing and telling stories.

I would like to add a practice to Shenk's list: embracing church conflict. Part of what it means to be a baptized believer is to experience in our bodies the difficulty of salvation history, the memory of conflict and cross. At least in my experience of the church, conflict has been as basic and routine as communion and Sabbath keeping, even if not as pleasant.

Anglican theologian Ephraim Radner has written a large and rambling book entitled *A Brutal Unity* on the often painful and divisive unity that marks the life of the church, including its capitulations to the bloodiest conflicts and crimes of history such as the U.S. Civil War and the German Holocaust. He argues that divisions and traumatic conflicts are unavoidable realities in the church, a truth that Christ announced when he said he had not come to bring peace but division, dividing a household of five, two against three and three against two (Luke 12:51-53).

Radner argues that church conflicts reflect the divided work of salvation that Jesus Christ displayed and accomplished: "Division is bound to Christ's very coming and presence," he writes, just as "separation also lies at the center of creation," when God divided light from darkness, waters from earth, day from night. Defining for authentic and true reconciliation is the division that precedes it. Intrinsic to the Resurrection is the death that is defeated by it. Citing *Martyrs Mirror* editor Thieleman van Braught's admonition, as summarized by Reformation historian Benjamin Kaplan, that "toleration is a greater threat to the soul than persecution," Radner concludes: "We are called to be one, but our life depends on the sharp edge of division."

The current denominational conflict we experience in Mennonite Church USA confirms that the life of church flourishes on the sharp edge of division. While the sorrow and trauma of this conflict is undeniable, such conflict also helps us remember the whole and unvarnished truth about our baptism. This truth includes the devastating conflict that Christ promised is unleashed in faithful discipleship, just as it includes the new life in Christ that is sown in weakness and raised in power. Understood this way, conflict in the church

is a confirmation of our baptism, of the transformative potential of Spirit, water and fire.

We should remember that the Mennonite church was birthed in the great church division known as the Protestant Reformation. The Christian church came to life in a Jewish schism. The creation itself involved division among the elements. Conflict and division are intrinsic to the

The current denominational conflict we experience in Mennonite Church USA confirms that the life of church flourishes on the sharp edge of division.

flourishing of life. Violence, on the other hand, arises from the effort to suppress conflict and division, as is illustrated by the "bloody theatre" of the *Martyrs Mirror*.

Viewed this way, the failures and conflicts of the church can be a source of renewal and hope rather than cynicism and disappointment. Failure is now an opportunity to display the power of confession and forgiveness. Conflict is now an occasion for truth-telling and enemy love. Division is now the condition of possibility for honest unity and reconciliation. When our bodies remember who we are in Christ, part of this remembrance will rightly include bearing the cross of conflict.

Go to church because it fails. Go to church because it divides. Follow the way of the cross to experience the life of the Resurrection. This is also how the world changes and the New Jerusalem arrives.

Gerald J. Mast is professor of communication at Bluffton (Ohio) University and author of



Go to Church, Change the World: Christian Community as Calling (Herald, 2012). This article is drawn from his presentation last fall at the conference at Bluffton on Mennonite Education: Past, Present and Future.



Joy in the midst

Merv Stoltzfus stands for the value of God working in all of us.

by Carol Duerksen

“College was a surprise.”

Merv Stoltzfus pauses. He swallows several times, and his eyes mist over.

“It’s been 40 years and it still impacts me deeply,” he says. “Jan and I were engaged. We were at a church meeting with some friends, and a missionary was speaking. In the middle of the service, I suddenly felt the words ‘I’m supposed to go to college.’ I was sure it was God speaking to me. At the same time, I’m thinking, This is ridiculous.”

Ridiculous because Merv was all about carpentry, particularly cabinet work. After three years of Vo Tech in high school, he was now working his way up in a local cabinet shop. He loved it and was good at it. Going to college made no sense. Not to mention, he didn't have the emotional or financial support of his and Jan's families.

Six months later, in April 1976, on their honeymoon in Florida, Merv took his SAT test for college admission. Without any college prep classes in high school, he knew the score would not be good. He also remembered going to see admissions counselors when they came to his high school because it was more fun to meet with them than sit in class. He remembered a recruiter telling him he didn't have what it took to get into Messiah College.

But when he and Jan did college visits, it was Messiah in Mechanicsburg, Pa., that felt right to them. And Messiah accepted him, SAT score notwithstanding.

They moved into the basement apartment of a family that lived in Mechanicsburg, Jan got a job working at Messiah, Merv put his construction skills to work on the side, and he enrolled in classes. They connected immediately with the teenagers in the family upstairs, and on their one-year anniversary, Jan and Merv were asked to be youth sponsors in the church they were attending.

While other college students were cramming on Sunday night, they were leading the youth group. "We loved it," he says, "because we came from a healthy youth group in our high school years and brought what we learned to this experience. We'd come home after youth group to work on my class papers, with Jan doing the typing. This was in the days of typewriters, and profs didn't like white out. Sometimes we had to start over. Sometimes we worked together until four in the morning. We were in this together and we gutted it out."

Four years later, the youth group had grown, Merv and Jan had welcomed a daughter, Karen, into their family, and Merv graduated with a behavior science major and almost-minors in Bible and business. The carpenter who had no college prep classes took three semesters of Greek and loved it.

He had no idea what kind of foundation was being laid.

After a year of doing social work in Harrisburg, Pa., Merv got a call from his home congregation, Ridgeview Mennonite in Gordonville, Pa., inviting him to a half-time youth pastor position. Soon after that, Atlantic Coast Conference asked him to be its half-time conference youth pastor.

He wanted to do it. He said yes. But there was the matter of his legs.

A genetic trait caused less muscle in his legs and bone structure that wasn't quite normal, leading to weakness in the legs. He wore leg braces and had surgery as a kid. That helped, but his walking gait showed a pronounced disability.

"I had a lot of energy as a kid, and the disability didn't hold me back at all. Going into middle school, I had to wear a crazy brace alternately on different legs. Not what a junior high boy wants to deal with. I felt the disability affected my personhood. I wanted to be normal.

My healing has been the process of allowing God to be God. It's not up to me to understand my disability.—Merv Stoltzfus

"When I was 12, John Smucker, a pastor from New York, came to our community and held meetings that included healing prayers. I thought I could use some healing. I didn't really want to go up there, but I really wanted healing. I believed God could heal, although I didn't know if God wanted to heal me. They prayed for me that night and nothing happened physically. But years later I realized..."

Merv stops again to wait out the emotion that comes with the memory. 



Karen, Jan, grandson Brendan, Merv, Karen's husband, Mark. Photo provided



Marlene Frankenfield, Curt Weaver and Merv Stoltzfus energized each other in youth ministry for a decade. Their friendship has been life-changing for Merv, he says. Photo provided

“I realized there was healing that night for me. Because you see, when I knew I had a call to ministry, I also knew I didn’t want to be watched as I walked or navigated stairs. I didn’t want to trip and fall in front of people. My healing has been the process of allowing God to be God. It’s not up to me to understand my disability. We are human.

Merv got the dreaded phone call. It was Karen.

We are dust to dust. God can do anything, but we don’t control God. We let God be God and we find joy in the midst of what life gives us.”

After serving Ridgeview and Atlantic Coast Conference in a variety of part-time arrangements for seven years, Merv stepped back from ministry for several years to evaluate his sense of call. In 1991, Merv once again accepted the conference youth minister position for ACC. Then, a year later, Merv and his family entered an intense decade of welcoming foster children into their home. For

nine years, they poured their hearts into eight different youngsters, all of them with significant needs and issues.

“We wanted to give them a normal home, but they would sabotage us because they didn’t know how to handle normal. It was so different from what was ‘normal’ for them. They had no stability and had never been nurtured. They had been abused physically and emotionally. Parenting those foster kids totally changed how I saw youth ministry. I asked: Who is God for people who don’t really have a chance? Where is grace for that? What choices do they get held accountable for and how?

“My demeanor and expectations changed. I care deeply about Scripture and faithfulness, but I care just as much for relationships in youth ministry. I realized it’s my responsibility to be there and love the youth, share Scriptures and share my passions, invite them into faith; and it’s the Holy Spirit’s job to convict them and do whatever he wants with them. It’s not my job to make sure those kids turn out OK. I let that go. Foster care helped me see that.”

When Merv and Jan’s daughter turned 16, Merv was thrilled to share one of his favorite hobbies with her: cars and driving.

But everything changed the morning of March 10, 1995.

Karen was on her way to a school event with three of her friends in her car. She didn’t see a stop sign at an intersection where many accidents had happened before and have continued to happen since. That morning, another car T-boned Karen’s Honda Civic.

Merv got the dreaded phone call. It was Karen.

“She was not seriously hurt, but what I saw when I got there...” Merv’s voice trails away.

“It was bad, a lot of blood, her friends unconscious, the beat of the lifeline helicopter blades. I’m thinking, The innocence is all gone. I had so much fun teaching her how to drive, and as I stood there with Karen, we looked over and saw the emergency people covering a body. I wondered, Who could that be?

“It was the Amish man who had been standing in the yard when Karen’s car was pushed through the intersection. He was killed instantly.”

And so began another journey. The journey of visiting Karen’s best friend as she recovered from severe injuries and trauma. The journey of relating to the Amish man’s widow and family. The journey of walking with Karen in the nightmare that wouldn’t go away.

“Karen was the caregiver of her friends—the least likely person to have this happen. She

always wanted to be a nurse since she was a child, but she couldn't deal with the sight of blood. She remembered the accident for months, falling asleep and waking up, seeing blood.

"But she learned how to deal with it. And she decided to be a nurse. And now, she works trauma—doing the level of nursing care that her best friend needed for three weeks. She knows how to relate to the families. She's been there."

The journey of the accident deepened their family life and taught Merv, Jan and Karen how to trust God in seemingly impossible moments. Physically, they were OK yet completely empty emotionally and spiritually. Deep hurt, angst and an inability to pray filled their days, yet they still had to function. Somehow they knew God was with them. They trusted there would be a better day.

"I experienced God in a new way, I needed grace in a new way, I had to find myself in a new way," Merv says. "I still wanted to live life, a full life. But I had to learn how to hold that in a new way."

Over the years, Merv's role as conference youth minister broadened to include providing leadership for congregations as they navigate the life of their church. Effective Jan. 1, he is the new executive conference minister for Atlantic Coast Conference.

"I am excited about working with the team in these difficult times. We talk about the reality of what is, but also the hope for what could be. I have a dream/hope that we can learn a new way of being church from congregation to congregation. I still want to believe that despite how hard it is, we can experience unity. We are all trying to be faithful—it's just expressed in different ways. We

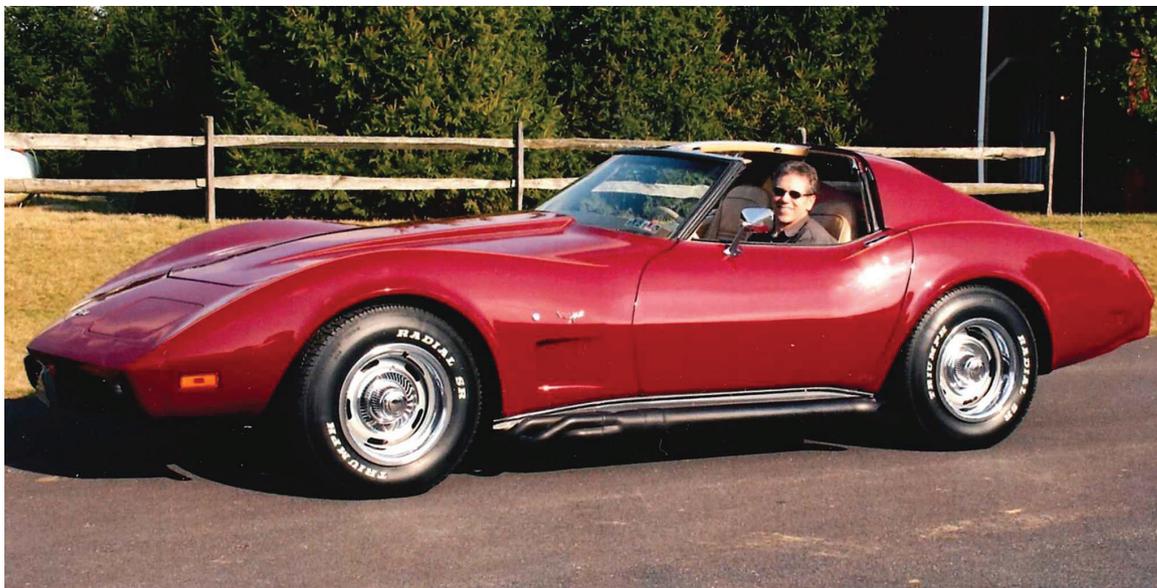


Spiritual director group selfie: Marlene Frankenfield, Ruth Roemer, Debby White, Merv Stoltzfus, Kim Denyes. Photo provided

agree on so much, but there's going to be an issue here and there that we hold in a different way. Could we just believe that God is still with us and that holding things differently doesn't affect my eternity?

"It's hard and awkward and difficult when

Radical would be knowing you disagree but still being willing to appreciate, value and be in community with somebody different.
—Merv Stoltzfus



Merv in one of his favorite cars. Photo provided

you feel passionate about something theological and somebody else feels passionately in a different way, but I would like us to believe that would be more fruitful than the splintering we have been using for generations upon generations. For people who are looking for a church, spinning off

it, tough, I don't need to be around you. Radical would be knowing you disagree but still being willing to appreciate, value and be in community with somebody different. I think there is more place for that in the future of the church.

"My disability, my experience with foster kids, Karen's accident—many different pieces of my life allow me to know I need to look at life through allowing God to look at the judgment part. We need to teach what we believe, but we need to allow people time.

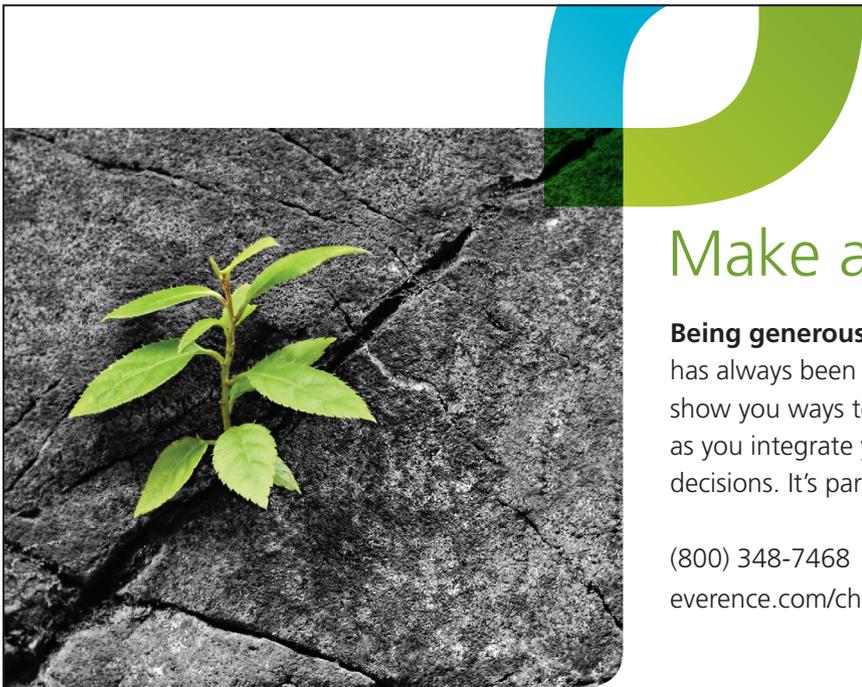
"It is a lot harder to stand and hold the tension of a difference than to pick a view and run with it. We hear from some who say, 'Take a stand.' I do stand for something. I stand for the value of God working in all of us, and we are all at different places, and we are called to be loving. That's the stand I am taking."

We hear from some who say, 'Take a stand.' I do stand for something. I stand for the value of God working in all of us, and we are all at different places, and we are called to be loving. That's the stand I am taking.—Merv Stoltzfus

and splintering is not very invitational to somebody. If you are looking for something different, different would be disagreeing with somebody and still really caring for them. Our world is aware of individualism and the individualist spirit of life—of doing things my way, and if you don't like



Carol Duerksen is a freelance writer from Goessel, Kan.



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Yieldedness is the way forward

With the power of the Holy Spirit, past division doesn't have to be the future

by David Boshart

How many ways can we say, "We are living in challenging times"? We find ourselves in challenging times whenever people who love each other deeply experience reality in very different ways. It reminds me of the Unity song, "Many times we disagree o'er what's right or wrong to do. It's so hard to really see from the other's point of view."



In the midst of our challenging times in the church, some things are becoming clear. The promises we made to each other when Mennonite Church USA began may not be adequate to guide us in the present or lead us toward a hopeful future. Congregational and conference leaders are not waiting for a national consensus to emerge about the moral issues related to same-sex marriage before acting on their convictions.

As Christians who have the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, our history of division does not need to determine our current aspirations.

Division has been the persistent habit of the Mennonite church in the face of intractable disagreement. Division results when we conclude there is no way forward. It comes at a cost to our witness as the body of Christ. When we separate, we are destroying God's reconciling work among us (Romans 14:20). In these challenging times, it

is not God who is creating division in the church. It is us, all of us.

As Christians who have the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, our history of division does not need to determine our current aspirations. I am reminded of an elderly saint in our conference who testifies, "The reason I am in the Mennonite church today is because when I was a young man I witnessed two brothers reconciling with each another." When we believe we can do no better than breaking fellowship in the face of our disagreements, we have decided that the outcome for everything finally depends on us.

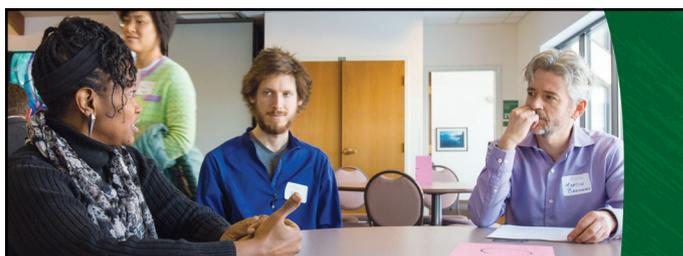
The Bible gives us a different answer. The Bible tells us the way forward does not depend on us. The way forward is always made by God, especially when it appears there is no way forward. A hopeful future for our church will be found in spiritual rather than human resources. If we believe the future is in God's hands, we can be patient with one another when we disagree about anything because "this too God will reveal to you" (Philippians 3:15).

One important resource for leaders

in times of change is to anchor change in the positive, sometimes forgotten gifts of the past. The Anabaptist tradition has a treasure within it. If we were to recover this treasure, there might be hope for a future as one church. The early Anabaptists called this gift "gelassenheit." Gelassenheit means "yieldedness" or "letting it be." It is the disposition of Mary at Gabriel's announcement ("Let it be to me as you have said") and the prayer of Jesus in the Garden ("Not my will, but yours be done").

In the Anabaptist tradition, the appeal to yieldedness has spiritual and relational applications. The examples of Mary and Jesus are a spiritual form of yieldedness. They yielded to the plan and purposes that come from God. Spiritually speaking, yieldedness calls all in the church to yield to God's will revealed through the Scriptures as discerned under the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is what Anabaptists refer to as a "hermeneutic of obedience."

In the relational application of yieldedness, when the church moves toward a consensus in biblical discernment, dissenting individuals are asked to yield themselves to the wisdom of the emerging consensus. This does not mean dissenting individuals are pressured to agree with the larger group or that all debate should end. Space is reserved for the prophetic voice to hold forth an alternative view. Yet the dissenting voice is asked not to paralyze the larger mission of the church. Stuart Murray writes, "Anabaptists believe that



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the value of biblical discernment is seen in how believers agree to live together and witness in society.” Both the spiritual and relational aspects of yieldedness intersect in the discernment work of the community as it interprets and applies the Scriptures to life.

This is all fine and good when the church can come to agreement. The ideal of *gelassenheit* is thoroughly tested where there is no emerging consensus, even more when the emerging wisdom in the body polarizes. This is our experience in these challenging times.

When no agreement is on the horizon, in our impatient self-reliance, we take it upon ourselves to force an outcome, to stake a claim: “Here I stand. I can do or conceive of no other place to stand.” We decide that the ultimate responsibility for the outcome of the polarized situation depends on us and our ability to design the solution in our own wisdom. When we cannot design such a solution, we reduce our options to one of two: stay and fight, or leave. Either of these options results in a division. We destroy God’s reconciling work among us. This reduction of options is a result of an over-reliance on our expectation that the other will yield and an under-reliance on our own willingness to yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit, waiting for God to make things clear to us.

Imposing the expectation for relational yieldedness on others and under-relying on the Spirit’s leading, we lack faith that God’s wisdom will be revealed in our history according to God’s time. God sees all things perfectly. We all see things imperfectly. Under-relying on the Spirit to lead us to all truth betrays our lack of faith that God’s wisdom and purposes for all of us will be revealed in spite of our insufficiency.

A proper balance on spiritual and relational aspects of yieldedness can lead us to greater trust in God and one another as we face the polarizing disagreements among us. First, it is not possible for sincere followers of Jesus to over-yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be done to excess. When it is apparent that no consensus will emerge in the foreseeable future, the church’s primary task is, “Don’t do something, stand there.” With no clear agreement forthcoming and relationships rupturing, the faithful and yielded church will stop, pray and listen.

Second, we can expect too much from human wisdom. When we become overly fixated on the decisions and actions of others, we become the subject of our disagreements and the hope of our solutions. We forget that we are not the subject. We are all the objects of God’s grace

and mercy poured out on us through the Crucified One. When “we” become the subject of our discernment in the face of increasing polarization we will try to make the other behave as we want. When they don’t comply we blame. When we can’t have our way we play victim. Our mistrust toward one another grows, and we destroy God’s reconciling work among us.

Yieldedness has integrity as long as it is not reduced to a matter of arbitrating our differences.

Third, relying more on spiritual yieldedness makes it possible for leaders to create space for the dissenting voices without putting the church at risk of going off the rails into unfaithfulness. We see this possibility in the biblical record when the people of God acted against God’s will (1 Samuel 8) and within God’s will (Acts 5:17-42; Acts 15). Rather than evidence of a compromise, such yielding demonstrates strong faith in God’s

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sufficiency for the future and demonstrates the spiritual maturity of those who will “let it be.”

Fourth, it is possible for members and leaders of Mennonite Church USA to “hold” multiple understandings of reality when we retain a proper view of our role as objects of God’s grace and mercy. Holding different understandings of reality does not compromise past discernment. It is trusting that God’s purposes will ultimately prevail. In doing so, all are placing greater faith in God’s sufficiency than our own.

Fifth, spiritual yieldedness calls for humility and patience on the part of all. Those who are aligned with what the church has said have faith that God who has led in the past will lead to a future with hope. Forbearance is extended toward those with whom they differ, waiting to see how God will work among those who offer a dissenting witness. For those who are dissenting, humility is demonstrated in acknowledging what the church has discerned even while explaining that their biblical and spiritual discernment has led to a different understanding. Pastors express patient humility when they debate their dissenting opinions with their credentialing bodies and in peer group gatherings while respecting the ethical boundaries articulated in our polity.

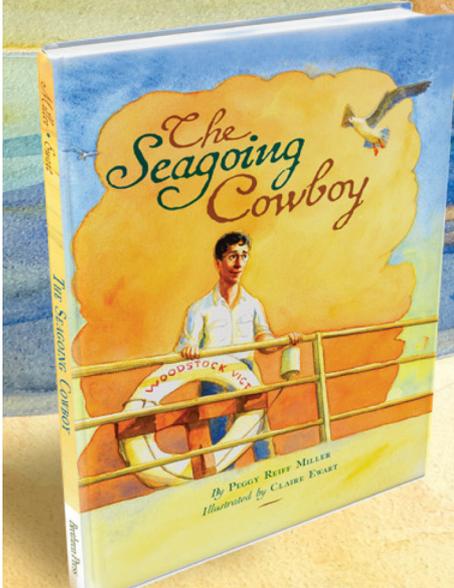
Sixth, yieldedness has integrity as long

as it is not reduced to a matter of arbitrating our differences. Our determination to find a third way results in a different way, not a middle way. We are ever tempted to privilege grace or truth in our ethical positions. But we are reminded that Jesus came full of grace and truth. Our discernment isn’t finished until it reaches that fullness as well, and we aren’t there yet. We can expect it will take disciplined biblical and spiritual discernment over a long period of time to embody a witness full of grace and truth. Living together trusting that in God’s time all things will become clear to us, we yield ourselves to perpetual prayer and biblical, communal discernment. We stop, pray and listen. All remain yielded, always conforming our thoughts to the mind of Christ.

“Jesus, help us live in peace.
From our blindness set us free.
Fill us with your healing love.
Help us live in unity.”



David Boshart is executive conference minister for Central Plains Mennonite Conference and moderator-elect of Mennonite Church USA.



A long time ago,
when I was looking for adventure,
I became a seagoing cowboy.

We didn't ride horses. We rode
waves

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Telling our story

The Community Mennonite Early Learning Center in Markham teaches tools to succeed in learning and life

by Hannah Heinzekehr

Walking through the halls of the Community Mennonite Early Learning Center in Markham, Ill., is like walking through an interactive black history exhibit. Along one wall, biographies of Mae Jemison, the physician and NASA astronaut who became the first African-American woman to travel in space, are adorned with construction paper rockets, handcrafted by 3-year-olds in the Sky Blue classroom.

On another wall, construction paper hands in varying shades of brown and listing the names of famous African Americans frame the words, "Heart of history in our hands." Pictures of President Barack Obama decorate almost every classroom.

Hannah Heinzekehr



And a big cardboard display is filled with pictures of students surrounding Mr. Wheeler Parker, the cousin of Emmett Till. Till was lynched and thrown into a river at age 14 in Mississippi. Although the story is a gruesome one, teachers at CMELC took students to listen to Parker speak at an apartment building in Chicago last fall.

“We do quite a bit of work with telling and knowing our story,” says Etheal Gore, CMELC director and a longtime educator in Chicago.

Begun in 1961, the preschool’s goal has been to serve families in the Markham community surrounding the church. The idea was developed when Larry Voth, then pastor of Community Mennonite, realized that in his visits to people in the community, it was often children who would greet him at the door.

“He would come home and tell me, ‘When I go to the door, it’s little kids that answer, and sometimes they are the only ones that are home. No mom and dad are home yet, or there’s just mama and there’s just daddy and they have to work,’” says Jane Voth, Larry’s wife and his partner in ministry.

As the church brainstormed ways to respond to these needs, the idea of starting a low-cost nursery school was born. At first, the members of the congregation ran the nursery school on their own out of the church building. In its first season, the nursery school was open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and was attended by 24 children.

According to Jane, the school grew rapidly, to the point where church members weren’t able to keep it running on their own, and the building

was stretched to its limit. As the ministry grew, Larry Voth approached leaders of the Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) program and recruited young adults to come keep the program running in Markham.

Today, the school serves 68 children from the surrounding community and is primarily staffed by teachers and aids from the neighborhood.

“First we just wanted to reach out to the community,” says Cyneatha Millsaps, current pastor of Community Mennonite. “This used to be run primarily by MVS participants, but we realized we should be employing people from the community to be a part of the program. We want to be intentional about teaching these kids about who they are as African Americans and have leaders that share that story, too.”

In the 1980s, the center outgrew the church building, and pastor David Ewert and other members of the congregation applied for a grant through the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF).

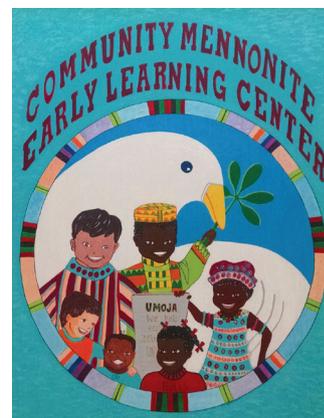
“What they were intrigued by was the history of the church in regard to generating community ventures, like sheltered care, youth workshop and the center,” says Ewert. “Part of our portfolio was that we had spawned all these programs.”

The church went on to become the smallest agency to earn an IFF grant, allowing them to build a new facility on a lot adjacent to the church building.

Today, each classroom has a lead teacher, a teacher’s aide and a “foster grandma,” an older woman from the neighborhood who helps with classroom management. The school not only focuses on teaching students the academic skills they’ll need to succeed in school but provides other services for families, including bringing doctors and dentists on site, hosting workshops and trainings for parents, and serving two meals each day. Teachers and staff are also given opportunities to pursue bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

Tyrone, the onsite chef referred to affectionately as Mr. Tee, tries to cook food that’s healthy and that the students like. The students’ favorite meal?

“Fried chicken, mac n’ cheese and green beans,” he says. “They like soul food.”



Pastor Cyneatha Millsaps (right) talks with children from the 2-year-old class.
Photo by Hannah Heinzekehr.

Staff members of the center pride themselves on providing top quality care and following best practices for child safety and education. They are accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children; a status achieved by only 20 percent of U.S. child-learning centers. They also carry a Gold Circle certification for Quality Care from ExceleRate Illinois, a statewide program.

Despite the high levels of care and education provided at the center, however, CMELC leaders are seeing more parents in the community choosing relative care over learning centers, leaving the future of CMELC uncertain. Shifting laws in Illinois have added stringent guidelines that make it harder for parents to access subsidies and grants to help cover the cost of sending their children to private care centers. Although CMELC tries to keep fees low, it takes money to keep the center operating.

“We’re seeing more people not able to afford childcare,” says Millsaps. “Kids are staying in homes with grandparents or other relatives, and that’s not the healthier choice. Centers get kids out of these homes. These laws are pushing families that are already vulnerable back.”

The center is actively trying to reach out to parents in the community to recruit them, but Millsaps says many parents and kids face big hurdles associated with poverty.

“Parents that come to this level of bringing their kids to the center are trying their hardest,” says Millsaps. “They have a desire, but poverty holds you back.”

Ms. Gore and her staff work hard to educate parents about what it means to advocate for their child in public school systems after they leave the early childhood learning center, too.

“We want them to know, you are the first teacher of your child,” says Gore. “This is a partnership. We can teach you how to be advocates for your kids.”

On the CMELC website, Gore writes “From the Director’s Desk” notes that educate parents about developmental milestones for different ages and offer tips and tricks for tough parenting situations.

According to Millsaps, although the church hasn’t been as involved in the day-to-day running of the center in recent years, they are planning to be much more engaged in the coming weeks and months. Members of Community Mennonite are launching the Peace, Justice and Conflict Resolution Initiative to provide peace-and-justice-focused education for kids and parents. Millsaps envisions workshops that teach parents nonvio-



A student in the Sky Blue classroom reads to her peers.
Photo by Hannah Heinzekehr.

lent tools to soothe and calm children when upset; education around issues of systemic violence in the neighborhood, including fighting and bullying; and training to help students think of nonviolent ways to get out of conflicts.

They also want to explore issues of justice that hit close to home, like the recent shooting of Laquan McDonald, a young black man, by Chicago police.

“We want to ask, What happened there? How could the family have handled that situation?” says Millsaps. “These are real-world issues facing our community.”

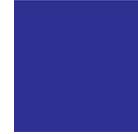
The church is looking for partner congregations or leaders to help them develop this curriculum.

We want [parents] to know, you are the first teacher of your child. This is a partnership. We can teach you how to be advocates for your kids.—Etheal Gore, CMELC director

The church will also be stepping up its fundraising efforts, working to raise money to help keep the center afloat and make it possible for more children to attend.

“Often I’m out in the community, and when people find out I’m at our church, they’ll say, Oh, we went to the Mennonite [school],” says Millsaps. “People have fond memories of this place and it’s one of those things we want to see again, the church and the day care seen as a collective force.”

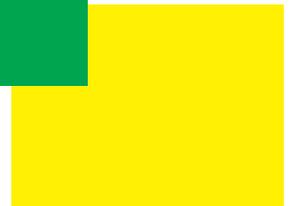
Hannah Heinzekehr is the executive director of The Mennonite, Inc. To support the Community Mennonite and CMELC, email cyneatha@sbcglobal.net.



10 ways your church can prevent child abuse

by Carolyn Holderread Heggen

April is National Child Abuse Prevention month. Here are 10 practical steps that all churches can take to prevent abuse.





1. Name the sin of abuse: Unnamed abuse cannot be healed or stopped. Adequately named, we can begin to exert dominion over this evil.

2. Dispel the notion that what happens in homes is private and no one else's business: Children need opportunities within the congregation to talk about fears or concerns they have.

3. Communicate that the pastoral staff is trained and willing to intervene in abusive families: Everyone on the pastoral staff should receive training to know how to intervene effectively with abusive families.

4. Examine the church's theology for teachings associated with abuse: Any teaching that is not good news for both women and men, both children and adults, is surely a distortion of the gospel and must be reconsidered.

5. Expect leaders to model exemplary sexual lives: Because of their high calling, high visibility and high influence among us, pastors and other church leaders should be expected to live godly lives.

6. Get members informed about and involved with issues related to sexual abuse: By investing congregational time and money, members not only become more intensely involved but also realize the church is serious in its commitment to working against abuse.

7. Use congregational influence to fight pornography and other media that eroticize violence: Pornography that depicts children in sexual ways may communicate that children are appropriate, desirable sexual partners and may put children at increased risk of victimization.

8. Become advocates of children: Children can only be as strong and effective in their own defense as the adults who stand beside them.

9. Educate children to recognize and report abuse: Children need help understanding that while the Bible says children are to obey their parents, the biblical command for obedience is conditional: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).

10. Call both males and females of all ages to responsible, healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors: The church must communicate its belief in the importance and goodness of human embodiment and teach that sexuality is an intrinsic dimension of human life.

This content is extracted from a chapter of Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches by Carolyn Holderread Heggen (1993). Holderread Heggen, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist specializing in trauma recovery. Although she spent most of her clinical and academic career in Albuquerque, N.M., she currently lives in Corvallis, Ore., and is an active member of Albany Mennonite Church. This piece originally ran on DovesNest.com.

April Is Child Abuse Prevention Month

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Need a leader? Look behind you



Claire DeBerg is communications manager for Mennonite Women USA.

At the beginning of 2016, I launched a full-fledged writing agency called Cicada (cicadacreate.com), since I am working on being a leader—essentially creating opportunities to lead instead of waiting around for someone in front of me to tap me for those roles. I decided that if I'm going to be a leader I had better just turn around and tap myself.

But something interesting happened when I turned around to tap myself. I saw leaders behind me. Not people behind me in terms of experience or education but in terms of the leaders now. I saw my team, my co-workers, my co-creators. In the writers I have gathered around my business I see leaders. They will lead in different ways than I do. They will want different things, go after different dreams, but they are leaders just as much as I am.

I caution people against saying today's young people are tomorrow's leaders. That's wrong. Today's young people are today's leaders. They're already here and are watching for you to turn around.

So when you do decide to turn around, how will you discern the leader? Here are my top three signs of a leader in your midst:

- **Clear on their "why."** Pay attention to the people doing work you're unwilling to do and find out why they're doing it. During my undergrad work at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn., my honors program organized profile interviews with faculty and staff to learn their faith and vocation stories—how they melded and intersected. One session surprised all of us because the profile interview was of the school's custodian. Everyone knew him. He was kind and worked hard and was always right there after every performance in the Great Hall or on the court after every big game—setting things right and preparing for the next event. We learned he had an advanced degree and had been a professional in his field for several years until he saw a job opening for a custodian at Bethel. When he assessed his passions and what really mattered to him, three things stood out: he wanted to serve the kingdom of God, he wanted physical labor and he wanted to use his gifts of trustworthiness and organization to improve a community. Custodian on a Christian liberal arts campus it was.

Pay attention to the people doing work you're unwilling to do and find out why they're doing it.

- **A willingness to say hard things.** Leaders ask challenging questions. I remember being in a women of faith group also during my undergrad years at Bethel. I would describe myself then as gregarious and over-the-top outgoing (I was freshman class president). In this group, we were discussing the best way to handle a troubling situation on campus and I loudly ticked off a handful of what I thought were brilliant ideas about what to do. The shiest girl in our group, who rarely contributed, not only quietly countered what I said but offered the most thoughtful solution. I was stunned to realize I had been in the presence of an unassuming powerhouse with a willingness to say hard things. She was a leader.

- **A commitment to respite.** Leaders get away from the rat race, the go-go-go, the noise, the pressure.

They say no. I'll give you an example of what not to do. Over the course of a month this year, I had been very ill with an awful throat situation. I was not OK, yet I kept slogging through work. The day before a scheduled meeting I had with a client, I emailed him to ask if we were still on, and his reply was, "I'm not feeling well; I'm taking a sick day; we'll have to reschedule." The irony is that I was also sick. I forgot that people take sick days and actually do nothing but heal themselves with their preferred wellness cocktail of chicken noodle soup or Vitamin C or clinic visits or bad TV. What a concept! What a leader he was!

Notice I'm not saying the mark of a leader is the person who works the latest or the one who shouts the loudest or the biggest risk taker. Those are tired examples of leaders, and I don't even believe those traits are good indicators of the kind of leader I'm interested in following or discovering when I turn around. The leader I follow when I turned to the light was kneeling at his disciples' feet, and he was saying hard things to people in high places, and he was challenging a slew of questions with new ways of thinking, and he was spending time by himself on a mountain, away from all the noise and heartache.

Look for your leaders behind you—they're the ones living into their "why" and saying hard things and spending time apart. 

The children are listening

I cannot remember my exact age, but I do remember my exact feelings when two women were denied membership to my home church.

I sat behind them as the news was delivered to the congregation. I saw them cry—sob actually—and I felt my heart breaking. It was an odd reckoning that their pain was also my own, followed by immediate distancing—a splitting of self.

My thought process put simply, “Being gay hurts. I don’t want to hurt. Being gay means people will reject me. I don’t want to be rejected.”

Fast forward to my junior year of college, when this internal split caused my body to shut down. I was not eating or sleeping. I dropped 15 pounds in two weeks and was having difficulty making simple decisions. I called my mom, who brought me home from college and began therapy.

This process eventually led to my coming out. Make no mistake, my coming out was not an act of courage. It was an act of survival.

Survival shifted into revival as a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. Here the queer voice was a dominant narrative. This was a stark comparison to LGBTQ meetings in the basements of off-campus houses at Goshen (Ind.) College.

Now in fertile soil, I was learning what it meant to be queer and thrive—something I never saw in Mennonite environments. There I was always hiding or pining for acceptance and tolerance. At Smith, I became proud. I cut my hair short and felt attractive rather than weird. I embraced myself.

However, there was something missing.

My amazing queer and queer-allied community did not understand the part of me that was Mennonite. As good as I felt about my gender and sexuality, I still felt fractured. Perhaps this is why I nearly burst into tears every time a queer identity is celebrated at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco.

There is an important distinction between tolerated and celebrated. I actually had no idea what celebration of queer identity felt like in a Mennonite context. It took me completely by surprise. The emotions that well up in having a pastor who will unequivocally stand by my side, embrace my partner (even dance with us at weddings) and marry us, if we ask, feels like a true gift. In actuality, though, it is just what every other Mennonite heterosexual couple receives (except maybe the dancing).

The impetus for sharing my story is twofold.

First, I want all LGBTQ Mennonite children to know there is a way to happiness. If you feel fractured now, there are places and spaces where you can be whole.

Second, to adults of Mennonite Church USA who are roadblocks to LGBTQ membership and inclusion: The children are listening.

I remember by name all the people from my childhood church who were strongly opposed to the lesbian couple becoming members. I remember my extended family having debates on the issue and who was “for” and who was “against.”

On some level, I was taking a tally on who was for and who was against me.

I thank God I knew who my parents were for or I may not have made that desperate phone call to my mother in college.

Many if not all these adults in my early life have come around to acceptance and even celebration. I’m certain they had no idea they were hurting me. They likely thought they were just having a heated discussion about a topic.

Perhaps they recognized they were talking about LGBTQ adults with some internal resource, community and capacity to cope. They did not know a little girl was listening and thinking. They are talking about me. They did not know that for years I carried this around with no one to talk to.

I guarantee that in every Mennonite church there is an LGBTQ or gender-variant child tuning into this current discussion and taking notes. They are listening to your debates and they are taking an internal tally of for or against.

There are children in Mennonite churches who have taken their own lives, and you may have never known why. There are children who have ventured away from the church and developed addictions and other risky behaviors because the tally “against” seemed too big a cross to bear. So long as their identities are prodded and questioned, there will be more.

The child and adolescent mind does not understand the gray area of continued discernment. It only understands “for” or “against.”

Finally, I will not engage in debates about my legitimacy as a person or member in the larger church. I am not mad anymore and I’m not pleading. I am simply sharing my story in the hope that hearing a perspective different from your own may deepen understanding. 



Addie Liechty practices psychotherapy in Oakland, Calif., and is a member of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, where she was baptized in 2011.

In every Mennonite church there is an LGBTQ or gender-variant child tuning into this current discussion and taking notes.

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

CLC talks about trust and being elders

Constituency Leaders Council discusses conference-to-conference conflict

The Constituency Leaders Council ended its meetings with a “trust fall.” Rodger Schmell, Eastern District Conference moderator and member of the CLC Listening Committee, called eight volunteers representing theological diversity across the church to come forward and catch him as he fell from a ladder.

“Hopefully this will show us what is possible with Mennonite Church USA,” said Schmell, just before the fall.

This dramatic reenactment, ending with a safe catch, illustrated a key theme of CLC meetings: building and understanding trust. CLC members met March 7-9 at Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

This was the first meeting after Lancaster Mennonite Conference and North Central Mennonite Conference made decisions to leave Mennonite Church USA. Two representatives from a group of 16 LMC congregations who are still discerning their affiliation did attend the meetings.

“This meeting mattered as we come together in the wake of losing two conferences and others are in the wake of making decisions,” said Jennifer Delanty, moderator for Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference, reporting from the listening committee. “In the midst of all of this, we are beginning something new. There’s some healing going on. There’s some need for us to continue to be together and to discern and figure out what God has in place for us going forward.”

Members of the CLC planning committee tested a proposal with Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests to invite queer persons to participate at table groups during a future meeting, but BMC did not want to carry the proposal further, so CLC did not discuss the possibility. In February, the Executive Board voted not to include BMC as an official denominational constituency group, which would have included formal representation on CLC. In its action, the board also encouraged CLC to find spaces for dialogue with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer church members.

Marv Friesen, pastor at University Mennonite Church in State College, Pa., reflecting on conversations with other BMC-affiliated congregations, said, “There is thankfulness for the invitation for queer people to join us at the tables but also concern that our queer sisters and brothers are fatigued and, in some cases, even finished wanting to have conversation in which it feels like their humanity is being questioned one more time. Perhaps we could think about inviting allies or others to be those representatives around the table.”

CLC as elders: The group affirmed a statement about its role as elders that was developed out of work begun during its October 2015 meeting. The statement says: “Given the biblical/theological foundations for our role as denominational elders, the CLC understands that our primary work on behalf of the church is to listen deeply in order to hear/see the ‘big’ picture; pay attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

God (Bible and prayer); model a missional community/collective; and offer counsel and direction to the Executive Board as well as the broader church.”

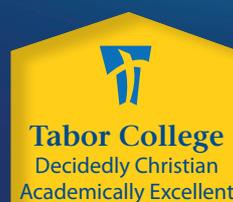
The statement also included descriptions for how the actions and conversations at CLC should influence area conferences, guidelines for dealing with conference-to-conference conflict and best practices for “when conferences and congregations question their willingness to be part of their conference and/or Mennonite Church USA.”

CLC members responded to a model for conference-to-conference peer review proposed by conference ministers. The proposal would include the formation of a standing three-year Assessment Team to be called upon as necessary. In times of review, the team would conduct a review on site, provide a written report to CLC, invite the conference under review to make an oral report to CLC (including experiences, biblical/theological rationale and other information pertinent to its decision). CLC would then process this information and make a recommendation as necessary. CLC expressed general support for the proposed model, with the understanding that more clarity was needed for when and how a review would be initiated.—*Hannah Heinzekehr*



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Molding our children

Four books with important lessons to read to the children in your life

Many of us can remember important or fun books from our childhood that shaped us in some way. If you were not read to as a child, perhaps you've since been the reader. Either way, some stories stick with us and form our character in ways we don't think about unless someone asks us specifically to contribute to a list such as this.

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney. Alice Rumphius longed to travel the world, live in a house by the sea and do something to make the world more beautiful. The lupines that bloom along the coast of Maine are the legacy of the real Miss Rumphius, who scattered lupine seeds everywhere she went. These flowers become the physical example of what it looks like to spread joy and beauty. This book teaches that small acts of love and beauty are what matter most because they live on after us.—*Melissa Jantzi of Harrisonburg, Va.*

Brother Juniper by Diane Gibfried. Brother Juniper was a generous Brother, so much so that he ends up giving everything away to those in need while the other Brothers are out of town. On returning, they are astonished to find Brother Juniper standing where the church once stood. On Sunday, hundreds of people come to the site, and Saint Fran-

cis says, "See what a fine church Brother Juniper has built." My family enjoyed the illustrations and laughed in some places during the story, but in the end, we were so touched, we cried. The truth of what an act of generosity can do to touch another, and how one person had touched so many, was overwhelming.—*Cynthia Friesen Coyle of Goshen, Ind.*

The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf. Ferdinand's fellow bulls' greatest goal is to take part in the bullfights in Madrid, spending their days snorting and fighting and showing off. But Ferdinand wants only to sit under the cork tree in the meadow and smell the flowers. Ferdinand ends up going to the bullfight but proves true to himself in the end. This story has an underlying pacifist theme, but the work also speaks to me of nonconformity to a peer group or society that has specific expectations and norms, of the contentment in being satisfied with one's own company, and of the satisfaction gained in an appreciation for the simplest things in nature. The long-suffering and unconditional love shown to Ferdinand by his mother is also notable.—*Heidi Eash of Bristol, Ind.*

King Midas from Greek mythology. Dionysus was pleased with King Midas and asked what he wanted most in his life. Midas wished everything he touched could turn to gold, even after being warned of potential tragedies. Unfortunately, after being granted his wish, he was unable to eat or drink, and everyone he touched turned into golden statues. Realizing his mistake and greed, Midas went back to Dionysus, desperately pleading with him to free him from the "curse." His wish was granted again. As a child, the story of King Midas had a profound insight in my life. To me it showed that tragedy happens when greed takes over. Materialism does not constitute true happiness, love and peace.—*Rose Mtoka of Musoma, Tanzania*

To see more great children's books, visit the Beyond Blog at www.MennoniteMission.net.—*Lauren Eash Hershberger*



Mark Eash Hershberger

Lauren Eash Hershberger reads to her son Jonah.

OBITUARIES

Amstutz, Doyle Edison, 78, Apple Creek, Ohio, died Nov. 23, 2015, of cancer. Spouse: Ella Marie Geiser Amstutz. Parents: Albert J. and Delia Gerber Amstutz. Children: Terry Amstutz, Douglas Amstutz, Ron Taylor, Patricia Amstutz; one step-granddaughter. Funeral: Nov. 28 at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church, Kidron, Ohio.

Augsburger, Martha Louise Kling, 89, Harrisonburg, Va., died Feb. 18. Spouse: A. Don Augsburger. Parents: Willis and Barbara Stauffer Kling. Children: Phyllis Anne Ressler, Patricia Louise Augsburger, Don Richard Augsburger; five grandchildren; four great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 28 at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

Berryman, Donnel, 86, Pulaski, Iowa, died Feb. 19. Spouse: Virginia Augsburger Berryman. Parents: Steve and Alvina Peplow Berryman. Children: Connie Cagle, Garry Berryman, Doug Berryman, Kent Berryman; seven grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 27 at Pulaski Mennonite Church.

Bishop, Marie Shelly, 90, Hilltown, Pa., died Feb. 18. Spouse: Lloyd L. Bishop (deceased). Parents: Erwin and Cora Alderfer Shelly. Children: Diane B. Hunsberger, Marjorie Brenneman, L. Darrell Bishop; five grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 23 at Summit View Auditorium at Souderton Mennonite Homes, Souderton, Pa.

Blue, Jeff, 62, Fort Wayne, Ind., died Feb. 17. Spouse: Ann Halpin Blue. Parents: Charles and Pauline Wagner Blue. Children: Caroline Gephart, Abigail Blue; one grandson. Funeral: Feb. 24 at North Leo Mennonite Church, Fort Wayne.

Christophel, Paul L., 88, Elkhart, Ind., died Nov. 17, 2015. Spouse: Flora Jane Lechlitner Christophel. Parents: John B. and Cora Nice Christophel. Children: Steve Christophel, Tom Christophel, Randy Christophel; eight grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 21 at Olive Mennonite Church, Elkhart.

Goosen, Lowell, 87, Freeman, S.D., died March 1. Spouse: Eva Goosen. Parents: Nick and Laura Miller Goosen. Children: Lowayne Goosen, Jerry Goosen; five grandchildren; three great-grandchildren. Funeral: March 5 at Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman.

Graber, Clarence Ray, 92, Freeman, S.D., died Feb. 15. Spouse: Gertrude Goering Graber. Parents: Joseph C. and Alvina Waltner Graber. Children: Monica Hofer, David Graber, Gwen Hartwig; six grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 20 at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman.

Landis, June Marie Moyer, 84, Goshen, Ind., died Jan. 15. Spouse: Jacob C. Landis. Parents: William H. and Irene Kulp Moyer. Children: Geoffrey W. Landis, Douglas A. Landis; three grandchildren. Funeral: March 11 at College Mennonite Church, Goshen.

Loewen, Jacob Gerard, 64, Goshen, Ind., died Nov. 15, 2015. Spouse: Nancy Liechty Loewen. Parents: Melvin and Elfrieda Regier Loewen. Children: Emma Dugger, Nick Loewen, Jesse Loewen; two grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 21 at College Mennonite Church, Goshen.

Mace, Dennis E., 73, Macungie, Pa., died March 6. Spouse: Marilyn Nester Mace. Children: Deanna Olson, Jeffrey Mace, Anita McSloy; nine grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Funeral: March 11 at Upper Milford Mennonite Church, Old Zionsville, Pa.

Miller, Chester "Chet" Dennis, 89, Hesston, Kan., died Feb. 12. Spouse: Nellie F. Zimmerman Miller (deceased). Parents: Billie D. and Ada F. Yoder Miller. Children: Rick Miller, Wes Miller, Candy Cirricione; 11 grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 16 at Hesston Mennonite Church.

Miller, Mildred Elizabeth, 83, Harrisonburg, Va., died Oct. 29, 2015. Parents: Marvin Elias and Katie Elizabeth Wenger Miller. Funeral: Nov. 28 at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

Miller, Paul, 92, Leo, Ind., died Feb. 16. Spouse: Ilene Miller. Parents: Joseph and Amelia Miller. Children: Darrell Miller, Debbie Bojrab; three grandchildren; one great-grandson. Funeral: Feb. 22 at North Leo Mennonite Church.

Oyer, Joyce A. Cender, 85, Goshen, Ind., died Nov. 12, 2015. Spouse: Franklin D. Oyer (deceased). Parents: Roy and Mamie Park Cender. Children: Stephen Oyer, Stanley Oyer, Kent Oyer; 11 grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 15 at Yoder-Culp Funeral Home, Goshen.

Regehr, Gail Diane Schroeder, 57, Inman, Kan., died Nov. 13, 2015, of cancer. Spouse: Royce David Regehr. Parents: Milo H. and Leatrice Peters Schroeder. Children: Justin Regehr, Troy Regehr. Funeral: Nov. 17 at Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman.

Reschly, Marion C. "Tink," 93, Crawfordsville, Iowa, died Nov. 15, 2015. Spouse: Opal M. Burkholder Reschly. Parents: Harry and Fanny Conrad Reschly. Children: Rodney Reschly, Cynthia Butcher; nine grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 21 at Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa.

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

Roth, Vernon Henry, 89, Archbold, Ohio, died Jan. 31. Spouse: Ruth Hall Roth. Parents: John N. and Eliza Reichhardt Roth. Children: Barbara Tanner, Karen Nafziger, Laura Nafziger, Ron Roth, Donna King, Connie Nofziger, Rick Roth, Sandy Short, Joanne Nafziger; 22 grandchildren; 36 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 6 at Central Mennonite Church, Archbold.

Rychener, Evelyn M. Kauffman, 75, Wauseon, Ohio, died Nov. 19, 2015. Spouse: Larry Rychener. Parents: Orval and Cora Short Kauffman. Children: Jeffrey Rychener, Kimberly Turczyn, Jon Rychener, Jason Rychener; eight grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 25 at Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio.

Scholl, Maurice C., 96, Sterling, Ill., died Nov. 29, 2015. Spouse: Marcella Liechty Scholl (deceased). Parents: Clark and Ethel Palmer Scholl. Children: Beth Ann Oujiri, Harvey Scholl, Duane Scholl, David Scholl; 13 grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Funeral: Dec. 2 at Harvest Time Bible Church, Rock Falls, Ill.

Schwartz, Ervin J., 99, Wakarusa, Ind., died Feb. 23. Spouse: Maxine Hoffer Schwartz (deceased). Parents: Joseph and Emma Miller Schwartz. Children: Jerry Schwartz, Darrell Schwartz; four grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 25 at Thompson Lengacher and Yoder Funeral Home, Wakarusa.

Shenk, Calvin Earl, 79, Harrisonburg, Va., died Sept. 18, 2015, of dementia. Spouse: Marie Hershey Leaman Shenk (deceased). Parents: C. Mylin and Stella Harnish Shenk. Children: Douglas L. Shenk, Duane L. Shenk, Donna Shenk Sensenig; nine grandchildren. Funeral: Sept. 21 at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

Sprunger, Ella Mae Lehman, 88, Berne, Ind., died Jan. 22. Spouse: Forrest Walter Sprunger (deceased). Parents: John M. and Ida Garber Lehman. Children: JW Sprunger, Norman JD Sprunger, Barbara Jayne Sprunger, James Edward Sprunger; four grandchildren. Funeral: Jan. 29 at Swiss Village Chapel, Berne.

Steffen, Esther Marie Nussbaum, 105, Dalton, Ohio, died Feb. 15. Spouse: Amos Steffen (deceased). Parents: Samuel E. and Lina Amstutz Nussbaum. Children: Harlan Steffen, Virgene Steffen, Eunice Paul, Corrine Helmuth, Darlene Rhodes, Kenis Steffen, Sandra Gerber; 34 grandchildren; 49 great-grandchildren; three great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: Feb. 20 at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church, Kidron, Ohio.

Wagler, Myrtie Marie Lugbill, 92, Archbold, Ohio, died Aug. 25, 2015. Spouse: Earles Wagler (deceased). Parents: Eli and Jennie Burkholder Lugbill. Children: Richard Wagler, Gloria Johnson, Bob Wagler, John Wagler, Tom Wagler, Curtis Wagler, Tim Wagler, Christ Wagler, Daniel Wagler, Mary Beth Schumm; 16 grandchildren; 30 great-grandchildren; one great-great-grandchild. Funeral: Sept. 5 at Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold.

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Hesston (Kan.) Mennonite Church (adjacent to the campus of Hesston College) is currently accepting applications for an individual to come on board as **office manager** to work with our incredible staff and congregation. This ¾- to full-time position is responsible for administrative duties that promote the teamwork and efficiency of the pastoral staff, the church council, the church commissions and other church ministries. In addition, this position serves as the church receptionist and coordinates the overall functions of the church office. For a complete job description please send letter of interest and resume including two references to phil.diller@hesstonmc.org or Phil Diller, 309 S. Main, Hesston KS 67062.

Upper Peninsula Mennonite congregations seek joint pastor. Cedar Grove Mennonite Church and Wildwood Mennonite Church are seeking a dynamic leader to pastor two small churches. Combined duties would not be considered full-time, but it is a unique opportunity to lead two congregations in spiritual guidance, teaching and community outreach in Michigan's beautiful Upper Peninsula. Email suetta@lighthouse.net for more information on this opportunity to minister in our scenic northern environment.

Bluffton University invites applications for a full-time tenure-track faculty position in **early childhood and special education** to begin fall 2016. Master's required, doctorate preferred. For position description and Equal Opportunity Employer statement visit www.bluffton.edu/employment. Review of applications begins immediately and continues until an appointment is made. Compensation is commensurate with education and experience within the university pay scale. EOE.

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First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, Ind., seeks a **full-time co-pastor** with a focus on worship, congregational care and church life activities. Candidate should have a genuine personal faith and beliefs with an Anabaptist perspective. Please contact IN-MI conference (preferred) or send cover letter and resumé to First Mennonite Church, Attn: Search Committee, 4601 Knollton Rd., Indianapolis IN 46228.

Portland (Ore.) Mennonite Church is seeking a **full-time associate pastor of community life** to help us "seek the peace of the city." The associate pastor will work to strengthen the life and ministry of the church, focusing particularly on congregational life and community outreach. For more information, contact Katherine Jameson Pitts, Executive Conference Minister of Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference, at kjpitts@pnmc.org.

North Newton guest housing: Serenity Silo, Barnview Cottage, Woodland Hideaway. Email or call for brochures: vadasnider@cox.net, 316-283-5231.

Visit Europe the Mennonite Way! Faith-based hotel tours to Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Ukraine, focussing on the Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage. www.mennonite-heritagetours.eu

Eastern Mennonite University. The **front-end web developer and analyst** collaborates with the team that creates the best possible user experience on EMU's website, supports other digital marketing efforts and gives oversight to analysis of all digital efforts. This position attends to web optimization and usability concerns and is a key connector to people in EMU's Information Systems department who manage technical aspects of the website. Four-year undergraduate degree or equivalent experience in related field. Expertise in website usability and accessibility, responsive web design, information architecture, common web applications, emerging digital trends and tools, and web integration of design elements provided by EMU designers. Expertise in interpretation of web analytics. Submit letter of application, resumé and the contact information for three references to: Human Resources, 1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, hr@emu.edu. For more information visit our website at www.emu.edu/humanresources. Eastern Mennonite University is an equal opportunity employer, committed to enhancing diversity across the institution. EMU conducts criminal background investigations as part of the hiring process.

Director of spiritual care (full-time): Menno Haven Retirement Communities, 2075 Scotland Ave., Chambersburg, PA 17201, is currently recruiting a full-time director of spiritual care. The director will coordinate and manage the work of staff chaplains in providing spiritual, religious and personal counseling or guidance to residents, employees and their family members to assure the highest degree of quality resident care. Candidates will have successfully graduated from a seminary with a major in pastoral ministry, preferably with ordination in an Anabaptist denomination, have a minimum of five years ministry experience and one or more units of Clinical Pastoral Education for the July 1, 2016, opening. Please submit resume to Rev. Bob Keener, 2075 Scotland Ave., Chambersburg, PA 17201, or apply online at mennohaven.org EOE M/F

FILM REVIEW

Race (PG-13) tells the story of Jesse Owens' journey to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, despite many odds. The film's title captures its double focus on sport and racism. It shows the dispute over whether the United States should send a team to Nazi Germany and Avery Brundage's cutting deals with Nazi leader Goebbels to make that happen. It also shows the racism Owens faced at home. It's a fairly straightforward account, and Stephan James as Owens helps overcome a weak script.—*Gordon Houser*

BOOK REVIEWS

Human Being and Becoming: Living the Adventure of Life and Love by David G. Benner (Brazos Press, 2016, \$17.99) explores three themes: the wholeness of reality, the importance of the human heart, and love as the foundation of all being and becoming. Benner, a depth psychologist and spiritual guide, writes accessibly and calls us to experience more fully the ones God has made us to be.—*gh*

Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love by Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Eerdmans, 2015, \$25) is part of a series called Prophetic Christianity, which, Kim writes, "must critically engage the problem of Euro-American racism and sexism." Theologian Kim writes as an Asian American woman and offers important insights into such topics as foreign women in the Bible, racism, sexism, postcolonialism and gendered division. This is one more of many examples of helpful theology from those on the margins.—*gh*

Teachers of the Soul: The Heart of God Revealed Through People with Disabilities by David J. Gullman (WestBow Press, 2015, \$11.95) uses personal stories and biblical insights to highlight the gifts that people with disabilities offer us. Gullman is the father of a child with Down syndrome.—*gh*

The Bible and *Downton Abbey*

Many, I hope most, of us read the Bible. After all, we're supposed to, right? And many of us, I imagine, have watched *Downton Abbey*, the popular TV series that ended its sixth and final season last month.

Why do I dare compare the two? I do so in order to make a point about how we view the world and make a case, if it's needed, for reading Scripture.

Downton is set in a fictional Yorkshire country estate in England and depicts the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants in the post-Edwardian era.

In our March 2013 issue, I explore why this series is so popular. One might offer many reasons—its many characters, with their comedic and tragic tendencies, or the dramatic narrative that leaves viewers wanting to know what happens next.

By the end, and I don't mean to spoil anyone's viewing, the series ties up its loose ends neatly and happily for all but the characters we've grown not to like.

The Bible, on the other hand, is not so neat and tidy. Sure, it ends tidily, with the promise of a new Jerusalem and the end of death and tears. Yet that book, Revelation, is addressed to people facing severe persecution.

What we call the Bible is really a collection of 66 books (or more, if you're Catholic or Orthodox). And that plethora of books presents a realistic view of the world. It has its joyful times, like the resurrection of Jesus. But it also includes many sad events, and its characters, for the most part, are full of foibles.

Like good fiction, the Bible confronts us with human emotion, which makes it easier to identify with its perspective.

For example, about one-third of the Psalms, often called the Bible's prayer book, are laments. These laments, or cries to God, express anguish and anger, despair and depression.

Such passages give us permission to express our own anguish, our own anger, even toward God. This can then allow us to move, with the Psalmist, toward a renewal of praise to God.

I call the Bible realistic. It doesn't present a romantic notion about humanity, even its heroes. King David is one of the most complex characters you'll find in literature.

It also doesn't present a simplistic view of our world. It's not a magic book that we can consult for easy solutions to our problems. The people in its pages encounter difficult, unanswerable questions (Job, for example).

And its main protagonist, God, has to keep responding in new ways to failure after failure of the people God chose to follow God's instructions.

In *Downton*, we encounter a fairly homogenous set of people, even with their differences. This may feel comforting or, to people of color, strange.

The Bible, on the other hand, includes people from many different backgrounds and perspectives, culminating in a worshiping crowd "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Revelation 7:9).

I recognize the pleasure of sitting down on a Sunday evening (or whenever) to watch a show set in 1920s England and getting absorbed in its story. In my earlier piece, I called this "an enjoyable diversion."

But I also recognize that this does not reflect the world I live in or even the point of view I need to live in this world as a disciple of Jesus.

The Bible, despite the difficult or even boring nature of some of its books, does offer a perspective that jives with the world we live in. And its words help equip us for living as disciples of Jesus. **TM**



Gordon Houser is editor of The Mennonite.

Macro and micro churches



Matthew Shedden

is pastor of Glenwood Mennonite Church in Glenwood Springs, Colo. He blogs at mshedden.com.

The cost of going to a micro church means not only serving but having a voice in direction of a local body of believers.

Last month, Andy Stanley, a megachurch pastor in Georgia, pointed out that people who attend churches with around 200 people are selfish and don't care about the next generation. It was only two days before he tweeted an apology, but his words reminded me of a conversation I used to have with a wonderful priest in Seattle, Karen Ward.

Karen led an emerging church, Church of the Apostles (COTA), that experimented with crossing the ancient faith with postmodern faith and a deep connection to the arts. A service at COTA might feature Gregorian chant followed by meditation led with the modern music of Sigur Ros playing in the background. Often an artist in the community was invited to paint what they heard during the sermon, while the preacher spoke from lectionary reading. While the church was small, people from all over the country came to learn from the experiments and crosscurrents of COTA. This ancient/future church thrived at producing young clergy at a higher rate than many other congregations. However, COTA existed in the shadow of several mega churches in the area, and Karen often used an analogy of macrobrewed beer and microbrewed beer to discuss the relationship between the mega church and smaller communities of faith. Andy Stanley's comments led me to think about how Karen described the benefits of micro and macro churches.

In Andy's comments, one of the biggest benefits of macro was having youth groups of a size conducive to separating into junior and senior high, as well as building friends that can last into adulthood. Macro churches can certainly do more activities for youth and hire and recruit more youth leaders. While this has many benefits, some recent research and work on the state of youth group culture suggests that instead of having a 5:1 youth to adult ratio, for the faith to stick it would be helpful to think about flipping the ratio. This means having five adults who care for the faith and formation of each youth. This obviously doesn't look like bringing 20 adults for five kids on a high school service trip, but it does mean having a convergence of people sharing the same hopes, message and prayers for each youth outside their family.

In my experience of youth ministry at macro churches it seems much more likely that this connection would be built in small congregations. In fact, on one youth service trip I led, a pastor from

a macro church didn't even know some of the kids by name, let alone each child's story.

One the biggest benefits of being macro is consistency. Both Budweiser and Starbucks can serve drinks of great consistency throughout the country. For a macro church like Andy Stanley's it means it can broadcast his popular sermons to people everywhere. But in the process of delivering consistency everywhere you lose a couple of things. For one, it's not important to use local flavors and ingredients. For a sermon this means not being able to spend time on issues that reflect your local community as well as your individual church. Macro churches are also able to deliver music at a level that is often impossible for micro churches to replicate. That said, recent visitors to our micro church have remarked how nice it is to be able to hear themselves singing and even more so their children singing.

Microbrews often cost more. It's easy to go to a macro church and never serve in the nursery, pick up seniors and the disabled for the service or be asked to read Scripture in front of the congregation. For some this is a positive, not a negative, but for those of us in smaller communities of faith, being a part of the process is a benefit. The cost of going to a micro church means not only serving but having a voice in direction of a local body of believers.

Micro experiences also mean you get to meet the maker, shake hands with those who form the product and offer your feedback. As you visit local establishments you get to know and be known by those involved in the process and receive personal recommendations and sometimes even develop a friendship. For micro churches that means sharing this relationship with the pastor. This goes beyond the casual and can go deeper into seeing firsthand how somebody's faith informs their daily life. In the macro church, the pastor is often swept away as soon as the sermon is over and often doesn't have the time to know the people who make up the congregation.

However, I don't want to make the mistake Andy Stanley did. There are many gifts and reasons to be a part of varying types and sizes of congregations, each coming with their own shortfalls and gifts. We each need to find a church to share a common life with, to read Scripture, to baptize and to break bread with. May we accept the grace God has given us in his church regardless of its macro or micro size. 

What is the loving thing to do?

Do everything in love.—1 Corinthians 16:14 TNIV

I've been thinking a lot about the need for love these days, partly because of the bruising presidential nomination rhetoric, but mostly because our church is proclaiming, "Love is a verb." The saying is a truism, I'm sure, but we need the reminders as much as ever. The Scriptures make no apology for repetition on this front; the brief verse above is but one small sample of the many exhortations to show love in action.

I've been surrounded by loving people through much of my life, so I have often experienced love's positive effects. I think first of my mother, who courageously reared our family as a young widow. She demonstrated love in a quotidian manner, demonstrating love in ways too numerous to count or chronicle. Although she spoke sparingly of love for us children, her actions spoke as eloquently as anything she might have said.

And while I'm speaking about parents, I must mention my father-in-law, Daniel Haldeman. I observed with admiration the way he cared for Ruth, his wife, during her waning years. Ruth suffered from dementia for well over a decade, and Daniel was often at her side. Even during the seven years she required total care in a nursing home—without the ability to recognize him—he drove from their family home to sit at her bedside every day. Daniel shrugged off the legal advice to divide their estate, insisting he would never forsake the covenant he made to Ruth in marriage. I viewed it as a portrait of God's persistent love for people who often don't recognize God's presence or care.

I've not only seen love in action, I've been taught how to put it into action. Years ago, when Bonnie, my wife, and I were rearing young children, we reveled in teaching sessions conducted by John and Naomi Lederach. At the time, they were employed as counselors at Philhaven, a mental health facility. As a couple, they helped restore troubled marriages through intense intervention. They brought insights from that experience into workshops on marriage and family relationships. Could we ever be like them? Bon-

nie and I wondered in admiration. Could we be so forthright, honest and publically vulnerable about our relationship with each other? Could we—like they—come to understand and admit the ways our unconscious behaviors affected others?

The Lederachs taught us wise sayings, such as, "What we don't talk out, we act out." Yes, that had proven to be true in our own lives. Resentments stuffed down into our unconscious selves sometimes busted out the seams of our conscious restraints. Talking things out is itself an action that can forestall hurtful behaviors bred from resentment.

The Lederachs also taught us to ask, What is the loving thing to do? This simple yet profound question displays wisdom. Countless times since we first heard it, this question has guided our response to tough situations. It doesn't mean we have always acted in loving ways or even that our attempts to love were experienced that way by others. Far from it.

Even so, this is one of the best questions to shape our discernment during difficult times, whether in the family or in the church. In our divided and fragmented world, only a renewed sense of God's love can unite us in mission. So when you're faced with people with whom you disagree, ask yourself that simple question: What is the loving thing to do? It doesn't mean you'll need to agree with your opponent or even be "nice." But as a follower of Jesus, it does mean you'll need to keep that neighbor's best interests at heart and learn to love him or her as yourself. Doing everything in love can sometimes keep narrow but divisive fissures from morphing into unbridgeable chasms. 



Ervin Stutzman
is executive
director of
Mennonite Church
USA.

In our
divided and
fragmented
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in mission.



FROM THE EDITOR

Lessons from New Zealand



Gordon Houser

Every experience carries with it the opportunity to learn new ways—or reinforce old ways—of living our lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

In late February and early March, Jeanne and I took part in our “trip of a lifetime” to New Zealand, which included a 13-day walking tour on the south island.

1. One step at a time, together: We did lots of hiking (what Kiwis, or New Zealanders, call tramping). Some of this involved covering what Kiwis call “gentle slopes” but feel pretty steep to a Kansas native. We walked every day, some treks longer than others. Over one two-day stretch, we walked about 22 miles over fairly rough terrain, with some steep switchbacks.

Our group consisted of 10 people, plus our guide, and another guide joined us at each location. The hikes were not hurried but were steady.

Walking together provided an innate encouragement.

We stopped to learn about plant and bird life. We conversed or simply walked in silence. We made it by putting one foot in front of another, not dwelling on how far we had to go but walking in the present moment.

Walking together provided an innate encouragement. We walked at different paces, but no one was left behind, and there was no judgment expressed toward those of us who walked slower.

2. Learning new perspectives: Although nine of our group members were from the United

States and one from Britain, we brought different perspectives and experiences. We grew very close and were saddened to part company at the end of our tour.

Meeting new people is a reminder of the richness of human experience. We grow as we see the world with new eyes.

Being in a different country and culture brought its own learnings. New Zealand is a small country (only 4.5 million people) and has a different take on things from the U.S. empire’s perspective of dominance. We shared with the group the news about the shootings in Newton and Hesston, Kan. Our New Zealand guide and the British man simply said they did not understand the obsession with guns. Both their countries have strict gun laws and almost no gun deaths.

3. God’s beautiful, hurting world: We saw beautiful sights (ocean shores, rainforests, mountains, valleys) and were awestruck by God’s handiwork and the diversity in nature. We also learned about the effects of climate change. We saw glaciers that our guides told us were twice as large only 10 years ago.

Kiwis treasure their environment and are committed to caring for it as much as possible. If only we could do as well here.

Unlike my life here, we spent much of our time outdoors. We often forget that Jesus did as well. Yielding to the weather, rainy or dry, cold or warm, is an exercise in faith, living in reality.

4. Healthy habits: In our cover story, Gerald Mast writes about “habits of truth and excellence.” This trip reminded me of the importance of such healthy habits as walking regularly, being in nature, meeting new friends and gaining new perspectives.

As we walk our Christian life, we seek to do so fully aware of God’s presence with us. Walking under God’s sky among forests, mountains and shores was a helpful reminder of that.—gh

Let us hear from you

We want to hear from you. Please take five minutes to complete the 2016 TM survey online today: www.themennonite.org/survey. Your feedback will help us continue to improve *The Mennonite* magazine.—Editor