

# TheMennonite

## Engaging politics



October 2016

[www.TheMennonite.org](http://www.TheMennonite.org)

- INSIDE:
- Running for Anti-Christ
  - Responding to sexual abuse
  - God is in control
  - Religion on TV: the good and the bad
  - A 'kairos' moment for the church

# BEYOND BURIED TREASURE

Matthew 13:44



Turning hidden  
resources into assets

**March 9-12, 2017**  
Jacksonville, FL

## FEATURING 3 KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS



**Let me tell you a story: The hidden resources of parables, poetics, and proverbs to advance healthy faith-based organizations, with Dr. Susan Schultz Huxman**, who recently accepted the position of president of Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. She has spent over a quarter century as an ambassador for Mennonite education – as an alum, Sunday School teacher, motivational speaker, board member, professor, and college president. She has been called "our institution's communicator-in-chief." Previously she served as president of Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.



**Leading Fearlessly, with Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson**, executive director of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches, USA. An engaging speaker and preacher, Dr. Jackson has distinguished herself in both corporate and non-profit roles, most recently serving as Senior Pastor and Chief Information and Operations officer. She is additionally the author of the Judson Press book *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors*.



**Hidden in Plain Sight: Seeing Human Strength and Weakness Beyond the Racial Gaze, with Dr. Drew Hart**, professor in theology at Messiah College, author, and activist with ten years of pastoral experience. He is regularly in dialogue with both Black and/or Anabaptist communities on matters of faith, community, and ethics. His recent book, *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*, utilizes compelling everyday stories, Jesus-shaped theological ethics, and anti-racism frameworks to transform the church's witness in society. Drew's blog 'Taking Jesus Seriously' is hosted at *The Christian Century* and he speaks regularly in churches, colleges, and conferences.

A joint Mennonite Health Assembly and Education Leaders Gathering conference designed to strengthen institution and agency leadership starting at the board level. For more information and to register, visit [mhaelgconference.wordpress.com](http://mhaelgconference.wordpress.com)



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*The Mennonite* is the publication of Mennonite Church USA, which established three purposes for the magazine: to provide a forum for the voices within the denomination, to promote the ministries of Mennonite Church USA and to offer an editorial voice distinct from but collaborative with other leadership voices. *The Mennonite* (ISSN 1522-7766) is published on the first Tuesday of each month by the board for The Mennonite, Inc. Periodicals postage paid at Elkhart, IN 46517 and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates for one year: \$46 to U.S. addresses and \$54 USD to Canadian addresses. Group rates available. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the official positions of Mennonite Church USA, *The Mennonite*, or the board for The Mennonite, Inc. Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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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](mailto: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*

### Do not promote alcohol

I could hardly believe that our church magazine would publish an article (“A Pastoral Brewpub,” September) promoting the use of alcohol drinking. Alcohol is a drug that alters the brain function and should not be used as suggested in that article. A father of a close friend was an abusive alcoholic and feels drunken jokes and articles promoting this are uncalled for in our church magazine, and I second it. Why you would advertise drinking alcohol is beyond me.—*John Leaman, Lancaster, Pa.*

I was disappointed to read “A Pastoral Brewpub.” I have always considered *The Mennonite* the periodical representing Mennonite Church USA.

It seems the article was an attempt to justify the use of alcohol by describing delightful examples of families consuming beer with food while their children are playing nearby. This minimizes the harmful dangers of alcohol consumption.

The owner’s description of his behavior as “pastoral” with his employees as a way of connecting with his grandfathers—who were pastors—seems ironic.

There are many alternative ways to make connections and have relationships with each other than to use alcohol as a lubricant to dull the senses.—*Harry Neufeld, North Newton, Kan.*

An observation of “A Pastoral Brewpub” by Marshall V. King: If fellowship is the goal, then Menno Tea would be a better choice of a beverage—non-alcoholic. Surely *The Mennonite* could find something better to publish and promote than an alcoholic beverage.

Goshen College would have two more alumni, class of 1991, had a Kansas driver chosen to drink tea rather than beer. Read the account in *Gospel Herald* (April 1989).

We are the parents of Jon Nussbaum.—*Curt and Gloria Nussbaum, Kidron, Ohio*

**Editor’s note:** *In our September story “A Pastoral Brewpub,” we did not mean to promote the misuse of alcohol or alcoholism by any means. We tried to be careful in the article to address some of the many concerns that overuse of alcohol can cause while also still telling the story of the way one Mennonite man is trying to live out his faith commitments in an unorthodox way. For more on Mennonites and alcohol, see Editor Emeritus Everett Thomas’ editorial, “Mennonites and Alcohol” and the Canadian Mennonite’s article, “Communion and Cabernet.”*

### Sexual abuse, not ideology

Sexual abuse in the church is a serious problem. It is so serious that we need to do a fundamental reappraisal of our institutions, theology and practices from the ground up.

What does that look like? First, we need to utilize the collective moral discernment gifted us by the Holy Spirit as the body of Christ to engage in a critique of the ideology of the victim—an ideology that is as passionate, hurtful and uncritical as the abuse itself. What is desperately needed in morally questionable situations is clarity of focus, ethical discernment based on facts and loving judgment. What is not helpful are impassioned condemnations, anger and scapegoating. This is not to let anyone off easy, but there must be an established certainty that abuse has occurred, as well as a spirit of compassion for the accused. Lashing out at those perceived to be perpetrators—espe-

cially before the facts are in—not only further obscures but actually reinforces the reality of sexual abuse.

If we are to take sexual abuse in the church seriously, the best thing we can do is stop hyping situations that at first glance appear to fit our presupposed moral value judgments.—*Evan Knappenberger, Harrisonburg, Va.*

### Remembering Fannie Longenecker

What a window to the past! “Making Love Edible” (September), featured Fannie Longenecker. She was my primary department Sunday school teacher at Bossler Mennonite Church. I remember her large smile, which she wore whenever I saw her.

I was 13 when our family moved 25 miles away from that area. I recall Fannie advising my father, “Remember, Clarence, if you want to have friends, you must prove yourself friendly.” Yes, be a friend to have friends.

I am 93, and this plan still works. Thank you for featuring my old-time friend Fannie Longenecker. It was so good to see her picture.—*Ruth Garber Rohrer, Lititz, Pa.*

### Making church a safer space

A Mennonite conference took action this summer to make the church a safer

space by enhancing the accountability of its credentialed leaders.

On June 5, Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) of Mennonite Church USA, which includes 33 congregations in Pennsylvania and several others states, sent a letter to all its credentialed leaders informing them that each needed to renew their ministry credential. The letter stated, “Because the Credentialed Leaders Covenant and the Child Safety Affirmation Statement help ACC fulfill its legal obligation under Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law, those out of compliance with this policy will have their credentials suspended effective July 9.”

The required forms included Sexual Misconduct Policy, MC USA-ACC Code of Ethics and either the Credentialed Leaders Covenant (Pennsylvania residents) or the Child Safety Affirmation Statement (non-Pennsylvania residents). Ministers were reminded that “when suspended, the pastor’s credential is laid aside (see page 44 of *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership*) and will not be valid for performing ministerial functions.”

In the end, all except four of the 75 credentialed ACC leaders met the July 8 deadline. Of those whose credential was suspended, two have since

completed the forms and reinstated their credential. Of the remaining two, one has not been active in ACC, and the other has left the conference and would face the credentialing contractual requirements of any new network or conference.

Because I am aware that sexual abuse by church leaders deeply wounds the church, I applaud this initiative of the ACC’s ministerial leadership committee. Credentialed leaders must be warned regularly of the serious consequences of our misbehavior and held accountable for our actions.

Anyone who has been targeted for abuse by church leaders can reach out for support as they seek restoration and healing. Both Our Stories Untold, an independent network of survivors of sexualized violence and their supporters, and an organization called Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, SNAP, each have specially trained Anabaptist-Mennonite advocates available via Our Stories Untold’s Director Hilary Scarsella (hjs.osu@gmail.com) or Barbra Graber (540-214-8874, mennonite@snapnetwork.org).—*Sylvia E. Shirk, pastor at Manhattan (N.Y.) Mennonite Fellowship and conference minister in New York City for Atlantic Coast Conference*

## IN THIS ISSUE

**W**e’re told it’s impolite to talk about religion or politics. And here we are talking about both in this issue.

We sent out a call for people’s reflections on politics and how that interacts with their faith. We already had on hand J. Denny Weaver’s “Running for Anti-Christ” (page 12), which he actually wrote when the presidential primaries were in full swing. He relates Revelation 13 to today’s political climate.

David Brubaker (page 16) presents three ethical principles to guide our politics.

Lawrence J. Jennings (page 18) writes about environmental justice and how the “value gap” in America

hurts nonwhites and the poor.

Cheri Baer (page 21) calls us to move beyond political division and seek to be theologically good, not just theologically right.

Nathaniel Grimes (page 24) writes out of his North Lawndale neighborhood in West Chicago about the role of community in politics that recognizes neighbors.

You’ll also notice boxes throughout the features titled “Faith and Election Day.” These are short reflections on how the writers’ faith will affect them on election day.

Our writers seem to agree that Jesus is our Lord and should hold our allegiance above any earthly leader.

Hannah Heinzekehr (page 26), our executive director, recounts stories of sexual abuse survivors and the ways

church organizations responded to them. We use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the survivors and the organizations they encountered.

Hannah and I reflect on this article in our co-written editorial, which says we may be in a “kairos” moment in the church, a time that calls for “churchwide introspection, repentance and change in the ways we talk about and respond to abuse.”

**Our November issue** will focus on the theme “Fidelity of Place,” and we invite original submissions of feature articles, poems, original artwork and photos on that theme. However, those need to be to us **by Oct. 3.**

In this season of political division, may we find ways to share and exemplify the good news of Jesus Christ, our supreme political leader.—*Editor*

## Mennonite agency agrees that #BlackLivesMatter

Joining other Christian denominations that have voiced support of Black Lives Matter’s antiracism goals, Mennonite Mission Network has announced it will give \$10,000 to partner with The Voices Project to offer nonviolent direct action training and organizing strategies to the movement.

The Voices Project, an Oregon-based organization led by the Rev. Leroy Barber and Donna, his wife, trains black leaders who work in predominantly white evangelical organizations. Through the Breaking Our Silence fund, Mission Network will also call for all Mennonite churches to more actively promote racial justice in their communities.

White Mennonites are urged to get to know African-American leaders in their communities, offer support and learn how they can be helpful. The agency will produce a series of stories and resources to help congregations learn more about how racism impacts everyone in society, and to activate this part of their Christian witness. The partnership was announced Aug. 7 at Corvallis (Ore.) Mennonite Fellowship, which invited Barber to speak.—*Mennonite Mission Network*

## MDS seeking volunteers for Louisiana flooding

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) volunteers have begun the arduous process of mucking out and cleaning up homes in the town of Central, La., resulting from the worst United States disaster since Superstorm Sandy in 2012. There is a need for more volunteers.

An “unnamed” storm, though just as devastating as any named storm of its magnitude, dropped up to 34 inches of rain in the span of 15 hours across south central Louisiana in mid-August, causing massive flooding in and around Baton Rouge and forcing tens of thousands from their homes.

Volunteers from MDS and other



## A welcome sign to neighbors

Immanuel Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., put up this sign a year ago when the presidential primaries got underway. The sign says, “No matter where you are from, we are glad you’re our neighbor” in English, Spanish and Arabic. There are many Spanish-speaking and Arabic-speaking neighbors of the church. The Harrisonburg District of Virginia Mennonite Conference liked the sign and has had a more professional version printed.—*Steve Carpenter*

agencies are now spreading out across the flood area, which stretches from New Iberia west of Baton Rouge, through Lafayette to Baton Rouge and then north and east to Central, Zachary and other towns.

Some 128,000 people have applied for assistance from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). Thousands of businesses have been flooded.

MDS is focusing its work on Central and the surrounding communities.

There is an immediate need for more volunteers to muck out and clean up, as well as project leaders to assist the homeowners in gaining access to volunteers and assistance.—*MDS*

## Culture Shock conference equips Mennonite youth of color

Neon flashing lights. Christian Hip Hop playing in the background. The house band getting setup in the band pit. Excited chatter filling the room. The mood was set. A vibrant countdown ran down to 0:00 on the big screens, letting

the 350 people who had gathered to worship, dance and laugh at Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Va., on Aug. 26 know it was time to kick off Culture Shock 2016.

Culture Shock, a conference aimed at equipping young leaders of color, was sponsored by Mennonite Church USA and Calvary Community Church. Additional support and programming was provided by other sponsors, including Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., Everence, Goshen (Ind.) College, Hesston (Kan.) College and Mennonite Mission Network.

Events included a concert and comedy show featuring Alex Holt and Free Worship, KevOnStage, an entertainer known for his comedic YouTube videos, and various speakers, including Rachel Gerber, denominational youth minister for Mennonite Church USA, and Calvary pastor Lesley F. McClendon.

Major Kenneth Ferguson, Officer David Johnson and Corporal Shaun Stalnaker of the Hampton Police Department and Commonwealth Attorney Anton Bell each spoke about their up-

bringing and who they are today. They wanted participants to understand that officers are people too, when often others just see a uniform.

The conference concluded on Sunday with Calvary's morning worship service and a sermon by Pastor Caleb McClendon.—*Shé Langley for The Mennonite*

## Sing Me High Festival celebrates faith and music in the Shenandoah Valley

The Sing Me High music festival in Harrisonburg, Va., brought a diverse crowd together on Aug. 27. Dreadlocks bounced past head coverings; children, 20-something parents, 30-something singles and septuagenarians intermingled; and classic country followed global folk on stage. Drawn together by Anabaptist roots, the festival's cultural and religious basis invited a range of demographics and musical genres.

Nicolas Melas of the Ears to the Ground Family band defined the day's atmosphere, explaining that while their band members are not ethnically Mennonite, they "feel really thankful

to be a part of the greater Anabaptist community."

The festival was a collaboration of The Walking Roots Band, made up primarily of alumni of Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, and the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center. The event was held on the Heritage Center's Crossroads campus.—*Randi B. Hagi for The Mennonite*

## Martin helps launch the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions

Holding his 19-month-old grandson, Ray Martin told the audience gathered at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), Harrisonburg, Va., why he had made a generous donation to study and combat the issues of climate change.

"We're playing fast and loose with God's creation," Martin said. "I feel as if I owe it to him," nodding toward his grandson, "to leave our planet, our earthly home, in good shape."

The Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions, launched Aug. 11 with a \$1 million donation from Martin, will aid that goal. Led by EMU, the center will also include Goshen (Ind.) College and Mennonite Central Committee as founding institutions, with additional partners expected to join later.

"The Center will stimulate and motivate our commitment at all levels," Martin said. "It will be a visible statement to the larger world that Mennonites are serious about climate change."—*EMU*

## In spite of conflict, MCC supports education in South Sudan

When South Sudan became an independent country in 2011, hopes were high and the future looked bright. But conflict broke out in 2013, and violence has ebbed and flowed since then.

Education levels remain consistently low; only half of primary school teachers have more than a primary school education. The national literacy rate is only 27 percent, and for women it's only 16 percent. According to the

United Nations, a 15-year-old girl in South Sudan is more likely to die in childbirth than finish secondary school.

Yet in the middle of the country, three miles outside the town of Rumbek, sit two schools, Loreto Primary School and Loreto Girls Secondary Boarding School, where Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is supporting education and teaching peacebuilding skills.

MCC supports a meal program, provides teacher training and supports a peace club to reduce conflict. In addition, MCC provided 14,000 school kits to Loreto schools and other schools in South Sudan.—*MCC*

## An EMM presence at the largest Muslim gathering in North America

At the largest annual Muslim gathering in North America, thousands of Muslims browsed a bustling bazaar showcasing products, businesses and opportunities by and for Muslims. Of over 500 booths, only one represented a commitment to dialogue and friendship from the perspective of committed followers of Jesus the Messiah.

That booth was manned by Jonathan Bornman and Amos Stoltzfus of Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), who promoted Christian-Muslim relations from a Christ-centered peacemaking perspective at the 53rd Annual Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) Convention, held Sept. 2–5 in Chicago.

ISNA is the largest and oldest Islamic umbrella organization in North America. This year's convention, "Turning Points: Navigating Challenges, Seizing Opportunities," centered on the challenges Muslims are facing in the current political climate. An estimated 15,000 were in attendance.

Bornman is a member of EMM's Christian/Muslim Relations Team, which works to build bridges of loving and respectful connection between Christians and Muslims while faithfully confessing Christ. Stoltzfus serves as EMM's partnership coach.—*EMM*

photo provided



## Sports and sanity

Margot Starbuck and Dave King, co-authors of *Overplayed: A Parent's Guide to Sanity in the World of Youth Sports* were featured Sept. 15 and 16 on the *Focus on the Family* radio program with Jim Daly and John Fuller.—*MennoMedia*

## Leading the way to Jesus



**Jennifer Davis Sensenig** is pastor of Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

These two theological-ly engaged women are extraordinarily successful in leading the way to Jesus.

I have always loved Martha when she declares: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). This is the great confession of faithful discipleship in the Gospel of John. While the Synoptic Gospels each record Peter’s confession, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), and follow up with an episode in which Peter gets it wrong and is rebuked by the Lord, in John we hear from Martha, and what follows is her example of missional faithfulness. Martha taps Mary, who makes her own inquiry with Jesus and is followed by a crowd of fellow mourners. After experiencing Jesus’ literally life-giving ministry for themselves, many come to faith.

**There is another woman** in the Gospel of John with convictions about the Messiah. She says: “I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us” (John 4:25). After her conversation with Jesus, this woman becomes an evangelist to Samaritans in her city of Sychar. Both the woman of Sychar and Martha of Bethany have personal experiences with Jesus, but their stories are also included in the Gospel to communicate their influence beyond themselves, their missional engagement with their communities. These women sponsor the faith of many Samaritans (4:39) and many Jews (11:45).

Comparing the Samaritan woman to Martha of Bethany, I see two models for leading the way to Jesus. In addition to their distinct cultural identification, these women differ in other ways. The Samaritan woman is estranged from her community, going to the well when it’s likely to be abandoned in the noonday heat. Martha, by contrast, is surrounded by her community. She lives with family members, and their fellow Jews support the household as the sisters mourn. While the Samaritan woman meets Jesus in a first-time encounter, Martha and Jesus are familiar friends.

These women are also similar. Both have substantive theological conversations with Jesus. Their contemporary descendants might be those drawn to the Scriptures, engaged in the arts or driven to study, all in order to explore pressing spiritual concerns for themselves and their communities. The Samaritan woman recognizes Jesus as a prophet and also expects a future Messiah. Likewise, Martha is theologically sophisticated. She believes her brother will be raised in the

resurrection of the dead and when Jesus reveals himself as the Resurrection and the Life, she makes her inspiring confession.

**Like Jesus himself**, the missional success of these women is disputed. This is clearest in the Samaritan’s story. Even when she leads the way to Jesus for people in her city, her faithfulness is dismissed by those who clarify that “it is no longer because of what you said that we believe” (4:42). And Martha, who moved many toward faith in Jesus by first tapping her sister, initiating a ripple effect in the community, is left in the background: “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done... so from that day on they planned to put him to death” (11:45-46,53). Sometimes faithful contributions are unrecognized or dismissed.

Nevertheless, these women are examples of missional leaders. Which dimensions of their leadership circumstances and styles match your own? Do you, like Martha, have close personal relationships in which you can speak directly to a sister or brother about their calling? Even if you are not charismatic in the sense of drawing a crowd around you, do you have connections with charismatic people you can direct into a deeper relationship with Christ and a richer engagement with all dimensions of resurrection life? Martha says: “The teacher is here and is calling for you” (11:28).

**Do you, like the Samaritan woman**, influence larger groups? Do you provoke the kinds of questions and inquiry that move people to engage the message and person of Jesus? Sharing her testimony with the city dwellers of Sychar, the Samaritan prompts them with a question: “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” (4:29).

These two theologically engaged women are extraordinarily successful in leading the way to Jesus. So, sisters in ministry, take heart. And brothers, Nicodemus was similarly engaged with Jesus. Unlike these women, Nicodemus already had an established leadership role. The Gospel indicates that this “leader” was slowly coming around (7:50; 19:39). Yet, perhaps to preserve and protect his role, Nicodemus delayed in leading the way to Jesus. Brothers and sisters, Jesus says: “I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (John 4:35). “Are there not 12 hours of daylight?” (John 11:9). 

## Mennonite Church South Korea is born

According to a long-standing tradition in South Korea, all babies are considered 1-year old at the time of their birth. Although this system for calculating age may seem odd to Westerners, it actually makes some sense. After all, babies don't enter the world as blank slates; they bring with them a whole history of genetic information along with other qualities conditioned by their mother's health during pregnancy. We never start life at zero.

On Feb. 20, four congregations from various regions in South Korea gathered on JeJu Island to officially adopt an identity as Mennonite Church South Korea. Four other congregations are considering membership in the new group. Sometime in the future, as this new conference begins to tell its story to another generation of members, Feb. 20, 2016, will likely be the date historians associate with the beginnings of the Mennonite church in South Korea. Yet the Korean tradition of calculating birthdays is a healthy reminder that our celebrations of beginnings can easily obscure the fact that every group has a history before its birth—that naming a “beginning” can conceal a host of genetic and environmental influences that profoundly shape the group's trajectory.

I thought about all this when I had the good fortune of hosting Hyun Jin Kim—a pastor, professor of missions and founder of a small intentional community in South Korea—in my home for several days. Hyun Jin was the son of a successful Presbyterian evangelist at the time the South Korean Protestant church was growing rapidly. As a young man, he was a dedicated and earnest Christian, and his father expected him to become a missionary. But Hyun Jin was troubled by the numerous conflicts he witnessed in the church. Those divisions inspired a desire to think more deeply about the communal nature of Christian witness—how the church through its life together might be an expression of mission. While in seminary, Hyun Jin focused intently on biblical and theological themes of community, organizing a network of study groups with students in other seminaries. After his studies, he joined Jesus Abbey, a well-known intentional community in South Korea, and began a global exploration that led to visits in some 15 Christian communities around the world.

Hyun Jin's reports on these visits, which he published in a popular Korean church newspaper, met with great interest, particularly at a moment

when the large Korean churches were beset by a series of leadership scandals and divisions. In the mid-1990s, he published a major work on the theology of community, *Community and Mission: A Systematic and Historical Study on Protestant Communities as Missional Communities*. “Community is the essence of church and the essence of mission,” Hyun Jin argued in the text. “True Christian mission should demonstrate radical discipleship...a whole, all-inclusive gospel that is expressed through Christian witness and proclamation.”

Not surprisingly, in his quest for a community-centered form of mission, Hyun Jin discovered the Anabaptist tradition. In 1998, he developed a friendship with Tim Froese, a newly-appointed mission worker, sent by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Mennonite churches in North America to walk alongside various Korean groups who were interested in integrating the themes of community, spirituality and peacemaking. The Korea Anabaptist Center emerged out of that work and played a significant role in connecting Hyun Jin's publications with a rapidly growing network of congregations and communities in South Korea who were seeking an alternative to the traditional Protestant options.

### And there were other currents as well.

MCC's work, starting in 1952, had left a positive legacy; a Mennonite-supported vocational school was formative for several key leaders. And, in the late 1980s, a group of young Korean Christians joined together for systematic reading and theological reflection on Anabaptist-related themes. Some of these young people went on to become lay pastors and to play active roles in the formation of publishing enterprises, a language school, a peace-building institute, an Anabaptist journal, and the Korean Anabaptist Fellowship.

Some of the individuals and groups who have participated in this movement, including Hyun Jin Kim himself, are not ready to identify themselves as Mennonites—the question of Christian pacifism poses a significant hurdle for them in this highly militarized society.

But 50 or 100 years from now, when Mennonite Church South Korea pauses to celebrate its birthday, the historians among them will need to pay close attention to all of the many individuals and groups who contributed to its genetic identity and who helped shape its trajectory long before it was actually born. **TIM**



**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*.

In the late 1980s, a group of young Korean Christians joined together for systematic reading and theological reflection on Anabaptist-related themes.

# MISCELLANY

Items of interest from the broader church and world

“Economic inequality is already a concern, but it could become a nightmare in the decades ahead, and I fear that we are not well equipped to deal with it.—Robert J. Shiller in the New York Times

## Native American council offers amnesty

A council of Native American leaders has offered partial amnesty to the estimated 220 million illegal white immigrants living in the United States. The “white” problem has been a topic of much debate in the

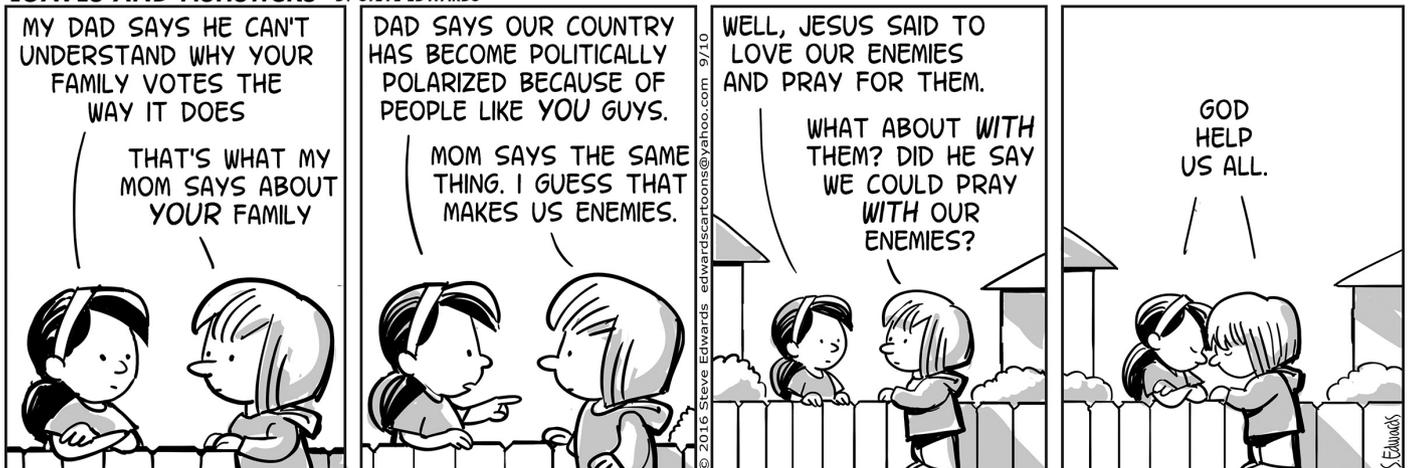
Native American community for centuries, and community leaders have decided the time has come to properly address it. Daily Current reports, “At a meeting of the Native Peoples Council (NPC) in Albuquerque, N.M., [in March], Native American leaders considered several proposals on the future of this continent’s large, unauthorized European popula-

tion. The elders ultimately decided to extend a pathway to citizenship for those without criminal backgrounds.”—minds.com

## Telling the truth

PolitiFact is an independent fact-checking website. Since 2007, it has fact-checked major national politicians at least 50 times, reports Mormon Press. By its measurement, the least truthful politicians are (in order): Donald Trump, Michelle Bachman and Ted Cruz. The most truthful are (in order): President Obama, Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush. However, Clinton remains in many people’s minds one of the most

## LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



3.5%

One study found that users spend only 3.5% of their time on social media interacting with others by commenting or chatting; the rest is spent browsing.—Time

dishonest political figures. One explanation for this disparity is the prevalence of a misogynistic notion that women aren’t to be believed, even in cases of rape.—Christian Century

## Working less, more productive

An analysis of worldwide gross domestic products from consulting firm Expert Market reveals that seven of the countries with the highest GDP per capita—including Norway, Switzerland and Germany—are also among the 10 countries with the fewest hours worked.—Time

- Percentage of U.S. college grades that were A's in 1960: **16**
  - In 2015: **45**
  - Average change in annual earnings for students who attend a vocational program at a public community college: **+\$1,544**
  - For students who attend a vocational program at a for-profit college: **-\$920**
- Harper's



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## Quotable

“But while progressive Christians tie the arm called Savior behind Jesus’ back, conservative Christians have a tendency to tie up the arm called Lord behind his back....It’s not easy. It’s not simple. It’s demanding. But the only way the church can fully be who God has called us to be is if we untie the arms of Christ so that the world may recognize the fullness of his being in our midst. Because right now neither the left nor the right is looking much like him.”—*Jessica Schrock Ringenberg, “If Love Is a Verb.” Read the whole article online.*



## Most-read online-only posts



- 5. If Love Is a Verb by Jessica Schrock Ringenberg **800**
- 4. A justice That Heals Fills Goshen Auditorium by Jordan Waidelich **850**
- 3. Our Missional Story: Ridgeway Mennonite Church by Ben Risser **900**
- 2. Seven Questions with... Caitlin Tice by Hannah Heinzekehr **900**
- 1. Seven Questions with... Rose Bender by Hannah Heinzekehr **1K**



## From the archives

**To vote or not to vote:** In a 1966 survey, Mennonite pastor John David Zehr posed this question to congregants from 25 Mennonite churches in northern Indiana. The survey included space for individuals to offer personal reflections. Predictably, Zehr received a variety of responses. While some felt voting was incompatible with their faith, others viewed it as their Christian duty. As one respondent put it, “If we believe in a Christian society, then let’s create the atmosphere of one by electing the right people to the right offices.” The accompanying photograph is a candidate card for Jonathan S. Yoder, an attorney from Goshen who served as an Indiana state representative in the 1910s.



## Recipe of the month

French Vegetable Soup (Ratatouille)



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# Running for **Anti-Christ**

by J. Denny Weaver

The clerk who rang up my wife's purchase was visibly disturbed and apologized profusely when the sale registered \$6.66 but was greatly relieved when she discovered an error that changed the final bill. Meanwhile, we are currently in the midst of a seemingly neverending presidential election campaign.

**On presidential  
candidates and  
Revelation 13**

The question for this article is, What do these two things have in common? And my immediate answer is, They both involve religion in public life. That answer may seem like a reach, but let me explain.

An election year raises questions of identity. Democrat or Republican or something else? And most of us, including me, care a lot about the outcome of the election. After all, we live here, and one way or another, the outcome of the election will have an impact on our lives and the lives of other people in our community.

But apart from these political loyalties, we need to remember that our calling as Christians supersedes our national citizenship. And as much as we may believe that one policy or another is closer to the way of Jesus, the advancement of the reign of God on earth does not depend on actions by the government of the United States.

**Religion enters the presidential campaign** because some candidates make a prominent statement about their “Christian,” that is, Evangelical credentials. Other candidates claim faith but without making as much public display. But no one is running as an avowed atheist. Some version of Christian faith seems to be an unofficial requirement for the highest office in the United States.

I am dragging the second presence of religion in by its horns, so to speak. I am thinking of the so-called Anti-Christ, the figure whose “mark” was feared by the upset clerk.

The figure of the Anti-Christ comes from the images in Revelation 13. First appears the dragon in verse 1. This is the big red dragon from the previous chapter, which was defeated and thrown down to earth after attempting to grab the baby that was taken up to heaven. This defeated dragon had seven heads with seven crowns and 10 horns. The seven heads with their crowns refer to the seven crowned emperors between the time Jesus was crucified and the writing of Revelation. There was also a short time when three more men claimed the imperial throne without actually being crowned. Those three plus the seven would be the 10 horns on the dragon. The dragon is a parody of the Roman empire and is also called Satan and the Devil. The dragon that represents the Roman empire is also presented as a symbol that signifies universal evil.

In 13:2, a beast appears out of the sea. Like the dragon, it also has seven heads and 10 horns and 10 crowns. Their similarity is emphasized when the dragon confers its power and authority on the beast.

One of the beast’s heads appears to have recovered from a mortal wound, which amazes the

people of the earth. They worship the dragon and the beast that seem invincible.

**A second beast appears in verse 11.** This beast had two horns like a lamb but a voice like the dragon. This second beast exercises all the authority of the first beast. Beast II leads all the earth to worship the first beast and miraculously brings to life a statue of the first beast, and it has people killed who refuse to worship this image. At the end of the chapter, we learn that Beast II’s number is 666. Like the anxious clerk, many Christians see this beast as the prediction of a coming, evil ruler called the Anti-Christ.

Actually, representatives of this beast have appeared many times, but not in the way described in popular imagination or on Internet prophesy websites.

These images in Revelation are not predictions. It is ludicrous to think that a writer 2,000 years ago could envision a prediction comprehensible to readers in late first-century Asia Minor

## The advancement of the reign of God on earth does not depend on actions by the government of the United States.

concerning items still two millennia from being invented—a world linked by computers powered by electricity running software analyzing data stored in the cloud.

It is obvious that to understand these symbols, we should look to the first century. Earlier, I wrote that the seven heads represented seven crowned emperors between the time of Jesus’ crucifixion and the writing of Revelation. The head with the mortal wound recalls the legend about Nero. He was so evil that a rumor circulated that he would return from the underworld to do more damage.

Think about the second beast—two horns like a lamb but speaking like the dragon. This second beast is a satirical representation of an imitation Christ, an anti-Christ, a figure that is the opposite of Christ. Demystify the figure and call it a not-Christ. The story of Jesus reveals a nonviolent Jesus. This not-Christ figure makes people worship the death-dealing, sword-wielding beast



that exercises all the authority of the death-dealing, sword-wielding dragon. These images are not predictions. The not-Christ is a comparison of Jesus the nonviolent lamb with the sword-wielding emperors who exercised power in the world of that time.

elation was written, there was little harassment of Christians in the Roman empire. Christians were starting to be comfortable with empire and emperor and perhaps to participate in the yearly ceremonies that pledged ultimate loyalty to the emperor as divine. With this parody of dragon and beasts, Revelation was warning readers to remember the true character of the emperor and empire.

Revelation delivers its message in apocalyptic language, but once we recognize its real-world application, we find that message other places in the Bible as well. The well-known story in 1 Samuel 8 describes the harmful impact of a king. When the people clamored for a king “like all the other nations,” Samuel gave them a warning. The king will conscript their children into his army and he will take their best fields and tax their grain and wine for his officers. Micah 3:9-12 has a description of corrupt government. Here rulers are chastised who take bribes but claim the Lord is with them.

In light of this warning from Samuel and the description of corrupt rulers in Micah, the warning about the not-Christ in Revelation 13 is not surprising. It is another genre of literature that makes the same general point, namely, not to put too much trust in the world’s rulers.

It seems not much has changed from the biblical era until now. Rulers still conscript young people into their armies and take a lot of tax money to pay for military pursuits. Political leaders still do things for bribes, although the Supreme Court and recent campaign laws now allow big bribes to be redefined as campaign donations.

The United States claims to stand “under God.” The presidential candidates publicly identify as Christian or Judeo-Christian. Notice that these candidates “under God” are willing to wage war. Even the candidates—and the president—most identified as peace candidates are willing to wage war and send American young people to foreign countries to kill and be killed. To me, these actions reflect the warning from Samuel and the condemnation from Micah. And in the language of Revelation 13, proclaiming Christian faith and

## The not-Christ is a comparison of Jesus the nonviolent lamb with the sword-wielding emperors who exercised power in the world of that time.

Further comparisons are possible. In the New Testament, Jesus reveals God, and the Spirit testifies to Jesus and to God. Notice the parody parallel as Beast II witnesses about Beast I, who reflects the Dragon/Empire.

**There is a reason for making this parody** of dragon and beasts over against God, Jesus Christ and the Spirit. In the late first century, when Rev-



### Faith and Election Day

Elections have consequences, and our country faces considerable policy challenges in education, trade, health care and immigration.

This election has consequences for another reason. For the first time in U.S. history, a woman is on the front of the ticket for a major party. Not too long ago I bought my 6-year-old daughter a picture book of all the American presidents. One evening before bedtime, she paged through the book and asked with a disturbed tone, “Daddy, why are there only boy presidents?” My wife and I try to teach our daughter that she is wonderfully made in the image of God and that she has been given enormous strength to love God and others with her heart, soul and mind. But even at age 6, almost daily we witness the discouraging messages girls receive about the limits of their strength. On Election Day, I’ll be standing in line with my daughter, eager to vote my faith-informed convictions and even more eager to create a future in which there truly are no limits for our daughter’s strength.

—Joe Hackman



waging war resonates with “had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.” In the image of Revelation 13, all these candidates are running for “not-Christ.”

**Wars have been fought in the name of Jesus** ever since the fourth century, when Emperor Constantine declared himself a Christian and put Christian symbols on the shields of his army. In that sense, there have been so-called anti-Christes ever since. But these not-Christes are not the fulfillment of a prediction. It is merely picturesque language that distinguishes the way of the nonviolent Jesus from the way political rulers act. In the midst of claims on our identity in an election year, the images of the dragon and two beasts become a colorful reminder of where our ultimate loyalties lie—with the resurrected Jesus, even if our nation claims to be “under God.”

Having our loyalty with Jesus does not eliminate caring about the coming presidential election. But even as we care about the direction our “dragon” takes, we should remember that the ultimate outcome of history has already been decided in the resurrection of Jesus. When I am most worried about where our nation is headed, I read Revelation 13 again and remind myself that even though the presidential candidates are running for “not-Christ,” the ultimate outcome



## Faith and Election Day

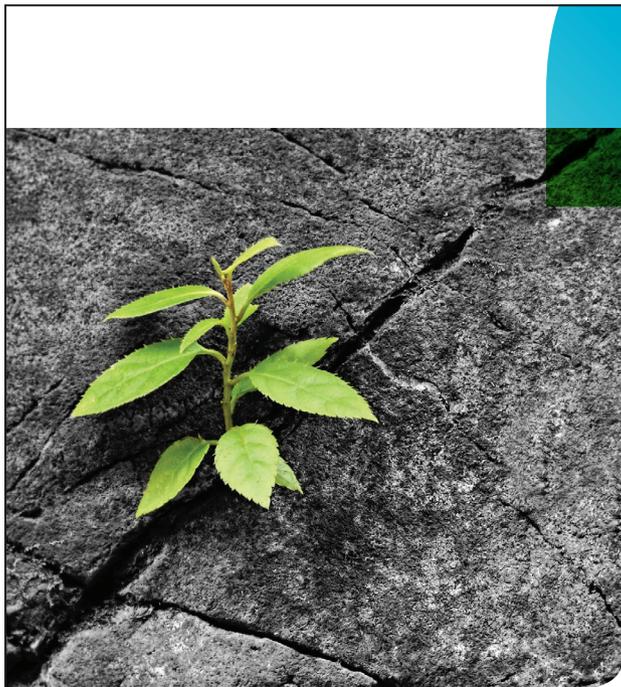
I have decided to vote on Election Day because it seems the right thing to do. I would love to bury my head in the sand and pretend the election wasn't happening, especially since I don't get excited about politics. However, people's lives will be affected by the votes cast on Election Day. And after my experience of living in another country, I think differently about how our actions and laws affect other countries, immigrants and visitors. I've heard candidates say how our country is the greatest, but isn't the U.S. population a lot of people from other countries? Aren't most of us immigrants in some way? If that is the case, shouldn't we want what is best for both our country and the world? My faith comes first, and God's people are my people. So if my vote means we are closer to treating others with love and dignity, working at conflict through relationship vs. violence, and working with other countries instead of bullying them, then yes, I will cast my ballot.—*Marisa Smucker*



of history is with the reign of God. The reign of God endures, even as presidents and nations and empires pass away.



*J. Denny Weaver is a member of Madison (Wis.) Mennonite Church and emeritus professor of religion at Bluffton (Ohio) University.*



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# Preaching our principles (not our politics)

## Three ethical principles to guide our politics

by David Brubaker

In what is certainly the strangest U.S. presidential election since I first voted in 1976, the polarized national political environment is now seeping into our local congregations. Pastors have reported pressure from some congregants to “speak to the issues” and from others to “stay away from politics.” Many congregational leaders are also concerned about the nasty tone from presidential candidates and feel compelled to call for civility. What should a congregational leader say in the midst of a toxic and omnipresent political season?

Pastors may feel they have only two options. Either they wade into the fray or they avoid political issues altogether. But there is a third path: preaching our principles but not our politics. Effectively preaching our principles requires two traits: clarity and humility. First, we must be clear about what we believe and why we believe it. Second, we are most effective if we share our principles confessionally rather than prescriptively. (“This is what I believe” instead of, “this is what you should believe.”)

Our principles have political implications, just as they have ethical implications in our daily living. Beliefs matter. But the goal in preaching our principles is to model transparency and begin a conversation, not to convince anyone else to believe or vote a certain way.

### Three ethical principles

In an effort to model such transparency I decided to share the three principles that most guide my voting choices (and my daily behavior as well, I hope). I share them as examples of one person’s convictions, as each of us has developed our ethical principles from a unique combination of family and religious traditions, life experiences and cumulative choices. I also share them to encourage you to reflect on your own ethical principles and how they will shape your political engagement in the coming months.

**1. The sacred texts of my tradition reveal that God has a special concern for the most vulnerable and marginalized in a society and that God expects those who revere these texts to act on that concern.**

This is reflected in Jesus’ clear words in “the sheep and the goats” passage in Matthew 25 as well as in the frequent calls of the Hebrew prophets to care for the widows, orphans and “strangers” (immigrants) in the land. In a patriarchal culture predicated on a shared ethno-religious identity, these were the three groups of human beings who were most vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment. In the United States today, such vulnerable groups would include the LGBTQ community, Muslims and recent immigrants and refugees. How do the clear commands of the Hebraic and Christian Scriptures shape my own principles and practices in response to these communities as well as my voting choices?

Our principles have political implications, just as they have ethical implications in our daily living.



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**2. "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction" (Martin Luther King Jr.).**

I agree with Dr. King that the vicious cycle of hate and violence is only accelerated when we respond with hate and violence. I therefore embrace an ethic of nonviolence in my personal life, and I pray and work for a society and a world that do the same. Questions remain, however. What does it look like to practice active nonviolence in both word and deed in my own relationships? How should a society respond to gun violence at home and religiously justified violence against civilians abroad? What role does a local congregation have in working to reduce violence in its own community and society?

**3. "The earth is the LORD's, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).**

Along with concern for the marginalized and a commitment to nonviolence, I hold this concept of "stewardship" (rather than "ownership") of the earth as a core principle. I choose to believe in a higher power that created and sustains the universe and who also set in motion evolutionary processes that allow for continual adaptation to changing environments. Regardless, I see human beings as stewards of this magnificent planet. We are not to exercise "dominion" over the earth in terms of "dominating" it; rather, we are to care for and sustain it.

These are the three major ethical principles I strive to embrace—concern for the marginalized, a commitment to nonviolence, and care for the earth. While the practical implications of these principles are challenging enough at the personal and relational level, sorting out the political implications are even more complicated. I have yet to encounter a presidential candidate with the commitment to nonviolence of a Martin Luther King Jr. or a Mahatma Gandhi, for example. (And I do not imagine one will ever be nominated by a major political party.)

**Living our principles**

But precisely because these principles are so difficult to embody (at both the personal and political level), I also believe we can only embrace the practical implications of such principles in the context of a community of shared values. This is why I am dedicated to my local congregation and particularly to one religious education class in my congregation that discusses the implications of the sermon on a weekly basis. It is one thing to articulate our principles; it is something

else to embody them. A healthy faith community provides regular opportunities both to name our deepest principles and to reflect on the daily challenges of living them out.

**A healthy faith community provides regular opportunities both to name our deepest principles and to reflect on the daily challenges of living them out.**

What about you? What are your core principles? How are you living them out, or at least striving to, every day? How might these principles influence your political choices in the coming months? Who comprise the community that assists and challenges you in articulating and embodying your principles?



*David Brubaker teaches organizational studies as an associate professor at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. This piece originally appeared at [www.congregationalconsulting.org](http://www.congregationalconsulting.org).*

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no matter what we vote.**



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# Environmental justice

**The 'value gap' in America hurts nonwhites and the poor**

by Lawrence J. Jennings

**T**his summer, I was part of an interfaith team leading a convergence of young religious environmental leaders in New Orleans. We spent an enlightening, infuriating, heartbreaking day in the Bayou, visiting tribal and community leaders on the Isle de Jean Charles (this was enlightening), which became home to the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw band of Native Americans in the 1830s as the result of the Indian Removal Act (which is infuriating).

The state of Louisiana's current flood mitigation efforts literally leave the island behind: A planned 72-mile floodwall, called the Morganza-to-the-Gulf-of-Mexico Hurricane Protection Project, does not include the Isle de Jean Charles. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' cost-benefit analysis concluded that the expense was not justified. So now displacement is ongoing (which is heartbreaking). After each big storm, fewer residents remain because of the effects of coastal erosion, exacerbated by oil and gas exploration, and climate change, reflected in the rising sea level and increased storm surges. This has resulted in a loss of 98 percent of its land mass since 1955.

There is only one road—essentially a bridge frequently impassable due to flooding—that provides access to the island. Once the size of Manhattan, Isle de Jean Charles is now about a third of the size of Central Park. (A 1963 survey recorded the island as being 11 miles long and five miles wide. Today it is about two miles long and a quarter of a mile wide.)

**Scientists estimate that the island will be completely submerged** by 2050, and although some residents insist that they will not leave their beloved ancestral homeland, the tribe has voted to relocate to higher ground elsewhere in Terrebonne Parish. They are developing a plan to relocate the remaining islanders and reunite the dispersed tribal family in a single location. It is a huge undertaking. This spring, they were awarded a first-of-its-kind federal grant to help support the move. Everyone involved anticipates that their planning process will be adopted as a best-practices model that will be relevant for other coastal communities confronting the need to relocate because of the effects of climate change.

We have a responsibility to participate fully in civic life—to share our perspective that every person is a precious treasure and that all God's creation requires loving care.

Perhaps I am particularly affected by the plight of the people of Isle de Jean Charles because of my family’s Creole roots. But it is deeper than that. Their story is emblematic of America’s sordid history and, sadly, our present-day political environment: dismissing, displacing, disregarding and even demonizing nonwhites, non-Christians, the poor and the powerless. That reality, combined with my Christianity, led me into faith-based environmental justice work. Similarly, a call to follow the radical, ever-loving and compassionate Jesus of the Gospels led me to find a home in the Mennonite church. And the importance of speaking truth to power convinces me we have a responsibility to participate fully in civic life—to share our perspective that every person is a precious treasure and that all God’s creation requires loving care.

Two years ago, I was part of the organizing committee for the faith contingent of the People’s Climate March in New York City. Over and over, I met people who expressed high regard for Mennonites. Some knew about Mennonite Central Committee; some were vaguely aware of Mennonite “peace and justice” work. They were uniformly delighted that a Mennonite was part of their team—and somewhat dismayed (as was I) that there was no official “sign-on” from Mennonite Church USA in support of the March.

**When asked about the Mennonite position** on climate and environmental issues, I sometimes reference the centrality of creation care in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* or talk about our denomination having created resources for study and teaching, such as the “Every Creature Singing” curriculum. I mention the work of Mennonite Creation Care Network and that Mennonites have an unusually long history of creation care resolutions, with the most recent one adopted in 2013. But I’m disturbed by the reticence to publicly identify with environmental/climate advocacy and awareness efforts—even when those efforts bear no cost and are in keeping with the ideals espoused in our confession of faith, our study guides and our resolutions.

I know Mennonites have a longstanding commitment to stewardship of the earth and caring for its inhabitants. I also know that our individual and congregational commitments—to live simply or reduce our carbon footprint or to eat less meat—are not sufficient to address, let alone avert, environmental problems that must be addressed via public policy. And I am deeply concerned that our denomination is not sufficiently visible or vocal regarding climate and environmental issues.

Our commitment to creation care needs to be

expressed in ways that connect with the broader public and in particular with the work of other faith communities. “Sign-on” campaigns, public actions, social media and endorsements are among the tools of 21st-century activism that we must employ in order to make our convictions known and to help leverage the influence of

**Our commitment to creation care needs to be expressed in ways that connect with the broader public and in particular with the work of other faith communities.**

likeminded folks. We do not need to agree with everything that an organization (or an individual) believes in or represents in order to participate in and collaborate on efforts to address climate change. In fact, we don’t even need to agree on whether or not or how much human activity contributes to our changing climate.

LE RELIABLE AFFORDABLE FRIENDLY LOCAL  
 ACCOUNTABLE GOODVILLE DEPENDABLE  
 LE FRIENDLY LOCAL STRONG HONEST A  
 LE DEPENDABLE RELIABLE AFFORDABLE  
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We must recognize what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the fierce urgency of now” and engage—individually and collectively—with the political processes that ultimately determine how resources are appropriated. That is the only way to ignite systemic change.

## To this day, three out of every five African Americans and Latinos live in areas near toxic waste sites.

In his recent book, *Democracy in Black*, Dr. Eddie Glaude Jr., professor of religion and African-American studies at Princeton University, identifies the “value gap” prevalent in America. Not values, but value—specifically, the value placed on white Americans versus the disregard shown toward nonwhites (historically and currently). From police violence and mass incarceration to inadequate schools and healthcare, the value gap has been apparent and persistent. (Hence, the need to assert that Black lives do indeed matter.)

In the 1980s, Dr. Robert Bullard, now a dean at Texas Southern University and known as the “father of environmental justice,” identified the

correlation between race and exposure to environmental toxins. To this day, three out of every five African Americans and Latinos live in areas near toxic waste sites. The impact on our food, water and air affects every area of our lives.

**Our environmental issues are far-reaching** and multilayered. Black, brown and poor communities are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and the least equipped to deal with its financial and physical ramifications. We are more likely to live in low-lying areas and less likely to have good medical care. One in nine black Americans suffers from asthma (only one in 20 whites do), and we are twice as likely to die from an asthma attack. Eric Garner, an asthma sufferer, protested “I can’t breathe” when an NYPD officer put him in a chokehold. Garner died, the medical examiner pronounced asthma to be the cause of death, and then the local prosecutor refused to bring charges against the officer—the “value gap” in full view.

As a follower of Jesus, I know that I am called to love, and that love is more than a feeling—it requires action. Sometimes love requires taking risks. Faith can be the catalyst for taking action, but just as important, it also provides assurance that whatever the challenges or consequences, we are surrounded by God’s love and care.

Congressman John Lewis frequently talks about love and faith and the importance of getting into “good trouble”—challenging the status quo, regardless of potential consequences. In June, he said: “We have been too quiet for too long. There comes a time when you have to say something, when you have to make a little noise, when you have to move your feet. This is the time. Now is the time to get in the way. The time to act is now. We will be silent no more. The time for silence is over.”

Those remarks were about the need to reduce gun violence, but they are equally relevant as we consider our responsibility to care for the earth and all its inhabitants. Lewis’ words are an expansive echo of the exhortation in 1 John 3:18: “Little children, let us not love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” So let’s say something. And move our feet. The time for silence is over.

*Lawrence J. Jennings has been involved in community/economic development, primarily in Harlem, N.Y., working with Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement and The Groundswell Group for three decades. He is a member of Infinity Mennonite Church.*



### Faith and Election Day

As Election Day 2016 draws near, my faith compels me to study the records and positions of local, state and federal candidates and vote for those who will advance social justice and especially diversity, inclusion and equity. I won’t sit on the sidelines and let others decide the future of my community and my country, as I did for much of my adult life. I was a journalist for 26 years and wanted to be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest, so I didn’t express personal opinions about candidates. That meant no bumper stickers, no yard signs, no campaign work and no contributions to candidates or causes. Since arriving at Goshen (Ind.) College nearly 10 years ago, I’ve had the freedom to support candidates and express my opinions. And I’ll continue to do so now that I’ve joined a denomination and a congregation dedicated to dismantling racism, healing divisions and valuing the gifts of God’s diverse people. To me that also translates into backing candidates who support affordable health care, adequately funded public education, decent housing, fair wages, an equitable tax system, non-discrimination laws, an end to police brutality, justice for undocumented immigrants, and inclusion and equity. And I encourage others to do the same.—Richard R. Aguirre



# Beyond political division



creativecommons.org / San

## It is time for the church to be theologically good instead of simply theologically right

by Cheri Baer

On Aug. 29, Pastor Mark Burns, a supporter of Donald Trump, tweeted, “Black Americans, Thank you for your vote and letting me use you again....See you again in 4 years.” As many of us Christians have done in the past, Burns put a political stake in the ground. We see political division everywhere, and recently we have seen it in the church. Issues like gay marriage, transgender bathrooms, the refugee crisis, abortion and gun control often blind us to the real issue of loving our neighbors. In our heated political environment, it is important for the church to ask how we can best follow Christ authentically.

Let me begin by stating my biases and foundation for writing this article. First, we have no ultimate standard that says Democrats or Republicans are right. Second, we are human. Each of us involved in U.S. politics, whether Christian or not, is human. We all make political mistakes. Third, when I refer to the church, I am referring to whoever follows Jesus, believing that he took away our sins and that we will be with him someday. I am not writing just to Evangelicals, Mennonites, Catholics, conservatives or liberals. I am writing to Christ followers. Lastly, we are all here for the same reason: trying to follow Jesus more truly. I do not pretend I can outline godly politics—I’m writing to those seeking Christ with me.

**Our country is divided.** In a 2014 article, Pew Research stated that “Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines—and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive—than at any point in the last two decades.” The article goes on to showcase liberal vs. conservative lives. Our attitudes about each other are more biased than they were before: as of 2014, 22 percent more Democrats felt very unfavorable toward Republicans compared with 1994. The opposite is also true: 26 percent more Republicans felt very unfavorable toward Democrats compared to 1994. Furthermore, 27 percent of Democrats believe the GOP may actually threaten the United States’ well-being. To be fair, 36 percent of Republicans think Democrats are ruining everything. It is apparent we are beginning to think of each other as enemies.

I have been affected personally by political division. My first job involved cleaning the corner office of a woman who posted stickers about the Democratic party on her bulletin board. Every night, I dusted and vacuumed her office, and every night I thought, This woman must be a terrible person. You see, my family

In our heated political environment, it is important for the church to ask how we can best follow Christ authentically.





## Faith and Election Day

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like yeast (Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:18-21). Christian faith is like yeast is to bread. If Christian values and morality are yeast, so politics is the bread. Politics deals with distribution of power—the making, slicing and distributing of bread. As a Christian, I feel God called me to be in the yeast-making business rather than in the business of making, slicing and distributing power. God called me to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) and to clean the old and bad yeast (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) with sincerity and purity of heart. In politics, my role is in training and equipping all people, including politicians, to grow in Christ’s values and morality. The kingdom of God is about how to represent God’s values and morality in this world. In politics, Christians should pursue values that strive for human dignity, peace, justice and welfare for all people, especially for the least and the poor. I encourage all Christians to abandon any policy that degrades human dignity, that disintegrates the unity of the family and culture. I encourage people to support policies that allow human dignity to thrive, that allow immigrants the freedom to choose, live and work peacefully in the United States, express their cultural and religious values and be united with their families.—*Virgo Handojo*



Even when I want to understand others, I catch myself judging them.

I remember my confusion. How could anyone be a Democrat and good? How could anyone be a Democrat and a Christian? Years have passed, and my views have mellowed. Yet I caught myself judging someone else’s political views again as Mark Burns’ tweet broke the news. I judged him for standing for Donald Trump, even though I want my life to be inclusive. Even when I want to understand others, I catch myself judging them.

In Mark 3, when the rulers come against Jesus for working as Satan’s agent, Jesus asks, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (23b-26). In the same way, we cannot expect to have a strong church or community if we constantly pick at one another. President Obama brings the same principle into the political scene when he talks about the sharp ideological lines that exist between parties in Congress: “I’m convinced that whenever we exaggerate or demonize, oversimplify or overstate our case, we lose” (*The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, Three Rivers Press, 2006). What the United States needs, Obama says, is a majority of people who are as committed to others as we are to ourselves. This is also true for us, the church. When we make each other the enemy, the only people we hurt are ourselves.

**The best reason I can see** that we get so confused about how to love each other is that we get carried away with being right. We forget that Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). We think he must have come to remind us of the rules. In short, we forget to be good as God is good. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul admonishes Christians to care for each other. At that time, Christians were beginning to understand that meat, even offered to idols, was still edible. Because eating meat sacrificed to false gods did not affect their relationship with God, believers were eating meat. Yet Paul told church members to stop. He reminds the church that some believers “still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.... Take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.... But when you thus

was staunchly Republican. Then I met the woman. Her name was Donna Martell, and she was sweet, kind and caring. She went to church every Sunday.

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sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” (7, 9, 12). This warning to the Corinthians can be easily applied today: When we insist we are right about our beliefs at the expense of others’ hearts, we are not following Christ’s example.

If U.S. Christians want to follow Jesus, we must stop attaching salvation to the party we vote for and the issues we stand behind. We must not think someone is not a Christ-follower simply because he or she is on the “wrong” political team. Instead, we might think they are misguided and not spend time with them. That is precisely what we need to change. Just as Jesus ate lunch with tax collectors, we need to spend time with one another. Maybe we Republicans should eat a few more meals with Democrats. Or perhaps we liberals could grab coffee with a few conservatives.

*R and Я: A Story About Two Alphabets* (Brethren Press, 1990) by Christopher Raschka, a poignant children’s book, beautifully illustrates the power of getting to know one another. In this story, two alphabets were fighting with each other. They fought because they “looked a little bit alike and a little bit different.” One day, two spies met under a tree. They shared pictures of their mothers, who looked surprisingly similar. They talked about the kingdoms and how different and alike they looked. Then they went home and showed their friends. The whole nation rejoiced and stopped fighting when they realized how much they had in common. That is the power of learning to know each other.

**A great example of this living** with one another and encouraging each other is that of two Bible scholars, N.T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg. Borg, a leading liberal Jesus scholar, wrote a book with Wright, a leading conservative Jesus scholar. After they met in 1984, Borg and Wright wrestled with each other’s viewpoints and grew in friendship for five years. Then they wrote *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (HarperOne, 1989). Although they differ on key points throughout the book, Borg and Wright say “it might be that one of us is closer to the truth in some areas, and the other in others; and that in our dialogue we may see more clearly things the other has grasped more accurately.” Perhaps by spending time and working with one another we will see things more clearly than if we only spend time with our groups and our friends. Perhaps that is the fellowship Jesus means for us to have.

While Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton battle on television, and social media debates go viral, I plan to sit with friends on both sides and talk. You see, the political divide is simply political. Behind

Behind all the policies, new legislation, tradition and hype there are people, scared and broken, just as we are.

all the policies, new legislation, tradition and hype there are people, scared and broken, just as we are. It is time for the church to be theologically good instead of simply theologically right. Let’s talk with our neighbors and care for them, too.



*Cheri Baer, Kidron, Ohio, is a student at Hesston (Kan.) College.*



## Faith and Election Day

The Christian faith can help us avoid two mistakes about politics. One is to imagine that any political party or leader will bring us near the kingdom of God. Both the Republican and the Democratic parties, with overwhelming support from the U.S. public, believe military violence is a proper and necessary response to our enemies and support a giant military establishment. In the face of our nation’s militarism, we should remember God is the Lord of history. We are called to be nonconformed to the world. A second mistake is to disrespect government and withdraw from the political process. We live in and benefit from a welfare state democracy. Our government offers opportunities to promote justice, peace and equality. In Kansas, Mennonites have made a significant witness against the death penalty. This year, three Mennonites who oppose capital punishment are running for the state legislature. Our votes can make a difference. We should beware of politicians who exploit racial fears, anti-immigrant hostility and religious stereotypes. It is important to examine critically the claims of politicians. Do they have specific proposals to address the needs of the poor, the sick and the unemployed? Are they people of compassion and sober judgment?—*Jim Juhnke*



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# FreedomSquare

The role of community in politics that recognizes neighbors

by Nathaniel Grimes

The North Lawndale neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago is the place author Ta-Nehisi Coates singled out as ground zero for our nation's history of housing discrimination in his 2014 *Atlantic* article "The Case for Reparations." It's the site of Homan Square, a Chicago Police Department building that last year the *Guardian* uncovered as a place where police have "disappeared" over 7,000 (primarily black) Chicagoans since 2004. It's also the place where Anabaptists might turn to recover our sense of what it means to be a political witness in the midst of state violence.

Our Anabaptist heritage tells us that we live out our politics, that our life together in community is an alternative to the order prescribed by the forces of state and market. Yet, like many traditions, when we talk about how the church engages politically as part of a broader society, we often reduce it to a practical or ideological discussion of which candidate or issue to support. The role of church community is diminished, except insofar as it shapes us individuals. We take the values that we learn in church and do our best to apply them, but our political engagement primarily takes place on the terms of liberal democratic society. In this system, our political engagement is effective to the degree which we achieve influence as just another special interest group.

**As a historic peace church**, we too often treat peace as an ideal against which we judge the political options presented to us. We may assess the two major presidential candidates according to a "lesser of two evils" framework and consider our vote for these evils our primary political action. The problem with this is not simply an ideological obsession with purity—as if we could ever be free from violence—but the difference between disembodied judgment and embodied witness.

When our political engagement fits the mold of the system we find ourselves in, the question

becomes, why do we gather as communities of worship at all and not reduce our community to the form of a social club or social service agency? What does it mean to be church together?

In the shadow of Homan Square, in the midst of the continuing plun-

When we talk about how the church engages politically as part of a broader society, we often reduce it to a practical or ideological discussion of which candidate or issue to support.

Photo provided



A tent at Freedom Square in Chicago.

der of Chicago's underclass, young black organizers are trying to live out the kind of politics they want to see. The Let Us Breathe Collective and other organizing groups collaborated to create "a community block party and occupation," a small tent city they called Freedom Square. Throughout July and August, this was a site of both resistance to the violence of police (and to legislation in Chicago that would make police less accountable) and a space of witness, imagination and the kind of deep relational practices of community and peacemaking that might make possible a world without police.

Organizer Kristiana Rae Colón described it this way: "Freedom Square is not only a protest occupation, a pop-up neighborhood engagement center and a laboratory for nation-building; it's where abolitionist politics are tested and applied every moment of every day. We stumble and sometimes hurt each other on our journey toward braver relationships and visions of liberation. We stay committed to healing together. We don't call the police."

**The peacemaking they embodied** was not the result of the absence of conflict. Conflicts at Freedom Square were a regular occurrence, and it took the participation of the entire community to negotiate these difficulties. The politics of liberal democracy don't require this much of us. Following Jesus, however, requires that we love not just the idea of our neighbor but that we actually know our neighbors. Our society is organized in such a way that we think we can outsource the work of peacemaking, whether to the police and governing authorities or perhaps (if we are serious Mennonites) to pastors or church leaders or groups like Mennonite Central Committee or Christian Peacemaker Teams. Freedom Square has been a witness to the church of what peacemaking might look like when it is practiced as if the community's survival depends on it.

For over 40 days, around the clock, Freedom Square was a place for the community to eat together, make art together, learn together. In the shadow of police violence, of Chicago's own Guantanamo Bay, residents planted a garden and shared its gifts with everyone. The space they tried to create reminds me of what theologian J. Kameron Carter refers to as "black churchicality": intimacy in a world that would regulate intimacies, improvisation in the midst of such regulation, deregulation not as a space of black uplift into good citizenship status before the state but as an alternate sociality, refuge(e) congregationality, something on the far side of state interest and its regulation of intimacies, another modality of breathing.

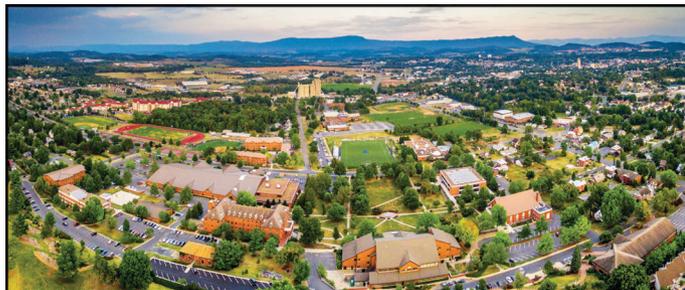
## In this election season, following Jesus might just mean following the lead of young black Chicago organizers.

This is not a modality that comes naturally. It is one for which the folks at Freedom Square have continually struggled. That struggle will continue beyond the temporary occupation of Freedom Square and through the community building to which they are devoting their lives.

As Anabaptists, we know we cannot follow Jesus as individuals but only in community. We also know that following Jesus means we don't follow the lead of the political power-brokers trying to implement their brand of empire. In this election season, following Jesus might just mean following the lead of young black Chicago organizers.



*Nathaniel Grimes is a seminarian in West Chicagoland studying political theology and attends Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church.*



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# Responding to sexual abuse

by Hannah Heinzekehr, The Mennonite, Inc.

**Editor's note:** *Over the past six months, we have published—in the magazine and online—a series of articles focused on sexual abuse in Mennonite contexts, support for survivors of abuse and safe church practices and policies. These posts grow out of our desire to take the Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse, passed unanimously by delegates at Kansas City, Mo., seriously. The statement calls on the church to “tell the truth about sexual abuse; hold abusers accountable; acknowledge the seriousness of their sin, listen with care to those who have been wounded, protect vulnerable persons from injury, work restoratively for justice and hold out hope that wounds will be healed, forgiveness offered and relationships established or reestablished in healthy ways.” This story grows out of our commitment at The Mennonite to hearing the counsel of survivors of abuse for Mennonite contexts.*

Amanda Conrad\* does not take the label “survivor” for granted. Before she was 22, Conrad had survived abuse in Mennonite contexts on two occasions. First at the hands of a trusted family member, and later, while away at college, through rape by a former church youth group member and peer.<sup>1</sup>

These two incidents alone held enough trauma to last a lifetime, but what surprised Conrad most was the church’s response after the reports of abuse came to light.

After the rape, Conrad called her parents to report what had happened. She also went to the rape crisis center on campus to be examined. Later, she went through the college’s judicial process, which ended without the college pressing charges. In response, Conrad filed a Title IX complaint. As a result, the college was found to have a standard of evidence that did not adequately represent students’ rights under Title IX standards.

The name Amanda Conrad is a pseudonym. In this article, pseud-

**Stories from survivors show that the church has a long way to go in addressing sexual abuse**

The pastor emphasized the ways Conrad’s public conversation about the rape was harming her rapist.

onyms (\*) are used for several survivors, and we do not name the congregations and organizations they reference. Although *The Mennonite* typically does not allow anonymous sourcing, our policies make an exception for survivors of sexual abuse and violence.

Although Conrad spoke publicly about her experience and the identity of her rapist, she never contacted her church directly. On the one-year anniversary of the assault, Conrad recounts receiving a phone call from the associate pastor at her home church. The pastor emphasized the ways Conrad's public conversation about the rape was harming her rapist.

"She said that my publicly speaking about the rape was ruining his life," says Conrad. "She asked me if I would be part of a restorative justice process with the church, where they would have an accountability group for him and a healing group for me."

Conrad agreed to participate in the process, although she was living three hours from home at the time. The church formed a group of women, and on several occasions, Conrad drove to meet with them. At one of the meetings, Conrad recalls, the group asked her to write down all the ways she had contributed to the rape, and they encouraged Conrad to move quickly toward forgiveness. Later, Conrad also learned that her attacker had refused to participate in the accountability process the church had designed.

"Ultimately, for me, I think it did more harm than good," says Conrad. "I was really only doing it to try [to] get some form of accountability. It wasn't until I was completely through my process that I found out he hadn't agreed to participate at all."

As churches wrestle with how to respond ethically and compassionately to sexual violence in Mennonite contexts, heeding the wisdom and stories of survivors like Conrad will be imperative for the church's health and survival.

### **How churches respond to reports of abuse**

Conrad's story is not unusual. According to the 2006 Mennonite Church USA Church Member Profile survey, 21 percent of Mennonite women report experiencing sexual abuse. This number is on par with the U.S. rate of one in five women, or 20 percent, who report experiencing sexual assault or rape.

However, sexual abuse statistics are "notoriously fraught" according to Hilary Scarsella, PhD student at Vanderbilt University studying sexual abuse and executive director of the Our Stories Untold, a network dedicated to supporting survivors of abuse in Mennonite contexts. Scarsella

says when you take into account the fact that many instances of sexualized violence go unreported and that sexualized violence includes other behaviors like harassment and grooming, "the scope of this violence is staggering."

Given these numbers, pastors and church leaders should not be surprised when reports of abuse arise in their congregation. According to Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, restorative justice coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee U.S., church groups may be tempted to deal with reports of abuse internally, but they should resist this desire.

"Part of this is a self-protection that churches have to move away from. There's a sense of not wanting other people to know or airing our dirty laundry," she says. "I think that probably one of the ways we can further harm people is when we say we can handle this internally."

Stutzman Amstutz is clear that congregations should never pressure survivors of abuse into forgiveness. She also cautions churches against trying to support all the involved parties through the same process.

**Given these numbers, pastors and church leaders should not be surprised when reports of abuse arise in their congregation.**

"We shouldn't assume that the same person should be paying attention to [both] the person who is harmed and the one who was doing harm," she says.

Scarsella notes that part of the Mennonite affinity for internal accountability groups may grow out of a discomfort with the secular legal system.

"One thing Mennonites have sometimes done well is think through and carry out an important critique of...the ways the legal system falls short of carrying out actual justice," says Scarsella.

Concerns about the legal system have often led congregations to try to manage processes they are not equipped to handle. Scarsella says perpetrators of sexual violence have a high rate of recidivism (recent studies suggest that 24 percent of sexual abuse offenders will have a repeat offense within 15 years) and are often skilled manipulators. She emphasizes that it takes specialized skill sets to hold a perpetrator accountable.

"Accountability groups in the Mennonite



church have a history of not prioritizing the needs of the survivor and trying to hold the needs of the survivor and the supposed needs of the perpetrator equal in the process,” says Scarsella. “That is not a situation in which accountability will ever happen. The needs of the survivor must be absolutely prioritized as necessary for both the perpetrator’s well-being and the survivor’s.”

Amy Hammer, a licensed clinical social worker

The therapist emphasized that the health and wellness of a survivor should be the family’s number one priority, not preserving community without conflict.

at Prairie View Mental Health Center, Newton, Kan., echoes Scarsella’s caution that internal accountability groups have a very low rate of success.

“Just because there’s an accountability group does not mean the group will be able to correct a perpetrator’s thinking patterns and their behaviors,” says Hammer. “Even if people are questioning [whether] these [are] false accusations, it’s appropriate to remove individuals from their duties for an interim period of time, just so there’s no confusion to the congregation or the victim.”

Carolyn Heggen is a psychotherapist with a doctorate in counseling from the University of New Mexico and the author of the book *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and + Churches*. She emphasizes that the Mennonite church has a long way to go in balancing “grace and mercy for perpetrators and care and concern for victims.” Both Heggen and Scarsella noted that a focus on forgiveness has often been used to undermine the severity of sexual abuse. “Forgiveness has often been used as a way to keep survivors of sexual violence in dangerous circumstances,” says Scarsella. “Survivors tend to hear church folks talking about forgiveness as assurance that no one’s listening. [Survivors] need justice, care, understanding, and their communities to listen.”

Heggen also reflects on counsel she received from sex offenders during voluntary therapy sessions she led at the Bernalillo County (N.M.) Detention Center, cautioning all Christian churches to avoid moving too quickly to forgiveness without accountability. “One of the things I used to say to those in prison was, What would you like me to say to people in my church? One man said, ‘Care for our souls enough that you don’t make it too easy,’” says Heggen. “We’re going to have to keep struggling with withholding forgiveness and understanding sexual addiction as part of our deep care for perpetrators.”

Holding perpetrators accountable and publicly exposing instances of abuse in church contexts also has a legal imperative. In the Catholic Church and, closer to home, among the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, denomination, survivors have filed lawsuits against leaders who have failed to address reports of sexual abuse.

#### Ongoing conversations about sexual abuse in the church

Many victims of sexual abuse cite the church’s discomfort with talking about sex and sexuality as a key factor making it hard to have a good process to address sexual abuse in church contexts.

“Whatever I knew [about addressing sexual abuse] would have been from reading,” says Suzie Conrad\*, Amanda’s mother. “I don’t consider the church a place where I heard anything about sexuality.” Conrad’s parents found help and a way forward through conversations with a therapist.

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According to Suzie, while the local congregation and extended family wanted to continue family gatherings with both Amanda and the perpetrator present, the therapist taught the Conrads that no survivor should be forced to spend time with their abuser. The therapist emphasized that the health and wellness of a survivor should be the family's number one priority.

"Church is a very shaming place to talk about sexual activity of any kind," says Lindsay Peters\*, another Mennonite abuse survivor and member of the LGBTQ community who attended the 2015 Mennonite Church USA convention, where delegates affirmed a statement about sexual abuse prevention. "That sexual shame does not make church a safe place for survivors."<sup>2</sup>

At Kansas City, Peters observed the church's discomfort with conversations about healthy relationships for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people that involve sex between two consenting adults. "I went to convention and discovered that the church was having a big conversation about bodies like mine, and I had limited say in the conversation. As a sexual abuse survivor, you're looking at these conversations going, Wow, the church can't handle conversations around consensual sex very well. How can I trust the church with sensitive conversations about sexualized violence?"

This discomfort with talking about sex can leave Mennonite and Christian young adults ill-equipped to respond to abusive advances when they occur.

Adrienne Brown\* characterizes herself as a "naïve and innocent Mennonite girl" who didn't have any framework for understanding sexual abuse or grooming behaviors prior to a summer as a staff person at a Mennonite camp at age 15.

Soon after she arrived at camp, one of her supervisors, a 24-year-old camp program director, began to pay her careful attention.

"He was just this really extroverted, charming kind of guy," Brown says. "He was really friendly and flirtatious and knew how to make people feel like they belonged and mattered. As someone who had been bullied as a kid, I found that really special."

Brown developed what she considered a "major crush" on him and fantasized about a dating relationship. After camp ended for the summer, the director continued to initiate contact with Brown. He called her at home talked to her on the phone for hours. Although Brown perceived this as a relationship taking off, she kept the conversations secret, sensing that something wasn't right about the interactions.



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According to Amy Hammer, these types of targeting behaviors by a person in a position of power are known as grooming. Oftentimes, she says, a perpetrator will target an individual who is already vulnerable in some way. “Grooming is a way that a perpetrator can coerce or prepare someone for an abusive relationship,” says Hammer. “Often with grooming there’s a given

## Survivors and advocates are clear to say the Mennonite church has a long way to go with addressing sexual abuse in congregations and church organizations.

relationship where there’s already trust or a power differential. In a situation like this, we just generally give or expect trust.”

After months of this grooming, the director invited Brown to meet him in secret to attend a drive-in movie. Brown planned to use a sleepover at a friend’s house as a cover from her parents. However, as the outing grew closer, Brown noticed some red flags. The director talked about his excitement and the fact that he had been able to borrow a truck and a mattress from his brother.

“There was something about it that just did not feel right at all. I started freaking out,” says Brown. “I realized this was not a good idea. I have no exit strategy if something goes wrong.”

A few hours before they were supposed to meet, Brown called the meetup off. And the director? “He was livid,” she says. He sent Brown hate-filled messages and phone calls, calling her a “tease [who] was all talk and no walk.”

Later, Brown found out that other camp staff had had similar experiences with this director, but because he was a gregarious, well-loved, longtime staff person, no one at camp apparently wanted to report the behaviors or take action to remove him from his post.

### **A different conversation about abuse**

Over the course of the past five years, several new initiatives have emerged to support Mennonite victims of abuse and educate Mennonite church members about appropriate ways to prevent abuse and respond when reports of abuse surface. Among these organizations and resources are these:

- Anabaptist chapter of the Survivors Network

of Those Abused by Priests, which produces the Mennonite Abuse Prevention list, which names Mennonite leaders who have been credibly accused of abuse;

- The 2015 Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse Prevention and the Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure;
- Dove’s Nest, an organization committed to child-abuse prevention;
- Mennonite Central Committee’s We Will Speak Out initiative;
- Our Stories Untold;
- A recently appointed Panel on Sexual Abuse Prevention.

Survivors and advocates are clear to say the Mennonite church has a long way to go with addressing sexual abuse in congregations and church organizations.

As high-profile reports of abuse in Mennonite contexts have gained traction in both church and public media, some members of MC USA are concerned that naming perpetrators and hosting these conversations publicly undermine the church’s call to reconciliation and forgiveness.<sup>3</sup>

In a March 15, 1994, editorial, J. Lorne Peachey, then editor of the *Gospel Herald* magazine, addressed similar concerns when he wrote out his rationale for publishing accounts of abuse by church leaders. In response to the question, Why can’t we just forgive?, Peachey wrote: “Yes, we must have an attitude of forgiveness, but it must go more than one way. Healing and hope must also be offered to victims. Too many have told me stories of more abuse, hurt and alienation from the church because they dared to whisper their truth.”

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> According to a Bureau of Justice statistics report, 63 percent of women who suffer abuse by a family member also report a rape or attempted rape after age 14 and are 13.7 times more likely to experience rape or attempted rape in their first year of college.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics show that women, particularly African-American, Native American and transgender women, experience abuse at higher rates than men. See the report from RAINN (the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) on statistics for victims of sexual abuse: <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>. For more statistics on race and sexual violence, see the Department of Justice Report on Sexual Violence in Communities of Color.

<sup>3</sup> For another perspective on why public conversations are important, read Barbra Graber and Stephanie Krehbiel’s recent pieces at [OurStoriesUntold.com](http://OurStoriesUntold.com).

## God is in control

At the peak of primary election madness, I became mildly obsessed with researching different candidates and examining every angle to prove that mine was the best. I registered to vote, voted for my candidate and told everyone I knew that they should vote for him, too. When he dropped out of the race, I watched his concession speech alone in my dorm room and cried. Seeing my candidate crash and burn caused me to fear for the future of the United States.

Talking to a friend later that week, I expressed my disappointment about the way the political race was shaping up and was surprised at how unbothered she seemed. She was well-informed, politically minded and had taken great interest in the primaries. She said she was refraining from too much involvement because she wanted to put her hope in God rather than humans.

**This stuck with me.** I was raised Mennonite, and our Anabaptist beliefs affected the political stances in my home. My parents had different political positions but discussed them peacefully in front of my siblings and me. They voted in presidential elections, but I knew people who never did and had attended churches that believed voting was wrong. This confused me because they'd complain about the current president, even though they hadn't voted. Was it possible to vote in elections while understanding that our only hope for positive change is through God?

In the Old Testament, God's ultimate will for his people did not include a governing human. In 1 Samuel 8, God's people chose to move from being ruled by God through a judge to living under the rule of a human king. Although God accepted this, he said that by requesting a king the people had rejected him. God even compared this to unfaithfulness toward God (1 Samuel 8:7-8). Does our obsession with politics and governing leaders take us away from full trust in God?

Escaping politics altogether would be difficult at best. Christians would have to create their own nation-state, which would likely exclude the people Jesus wants us to minister to. As much as many of us Mennonites might want to flee from political systems riddled with war, infighting and saying mean things, this would make it much more difficult for us to engage in other things we love: mission work and sharing the love of Christ.

Jesus lived under an oppressive government. He taught methods of quiet statements against such rulers, such as offering to carry a soldier's

pack two miles when asked to carry it one. Jesus also taught his disciples to pay taxes, telling them to "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:25). In doing this, Jesus didn't give his disciples an excuse to avoid paying taxes or some exciting way to protest the government but commanded them to follow the rules, except when they conflicted with God's rules.

In Romans 13, Paul instructs the church to submit to God's servants, the authorities. He claimed God put in place the people in governments as "agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4). This can be a problem for today's Anabaptists as we look at the injustices our governments commit. Many of us find torture, abortion, capital punishment and warfare immoral, but our government legalizes these things, and even celebrates some. Shouldn't we try to elect leaders who will represent our beliefs and stand against these things we see as wrong?

**The church at that time** was not facing an easier government than ours. In fact, Romans 13 comes right after a passage about persecution. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Paul knew the church would face hard times and instructs them to "bless those who persecute you" (v. 14), "not repay anyone evil for evil" (v. 17), and "not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (v. 21). Perhaps his call to obey the authorities was simply adding to these teachings of living in peace and harmony with those around us. But maybe he's trying to remind us that the governing powers really aren't something we need to worry about because, ultimately, God is in charge. We Mennonites and any other Christian can learn a lot from this teaching.

I plan to vote in this year's election. I like to believe my vote may make a difference, even though I know it won't be much. I want to respect whatever leader gets elected, no matter how much chagrin it may cause me. Yet I also want to hold lightly to my vote. I want to be well-informed and vote for a candidate I think will be the most competent in leading our country, but I want to recognize that all our leaders will be flawed and that at the end of the day, God is in control. We can all sleep a little better at night knowing we have a trustworthy leader in heaven—one we can hope in much more than we ever could a president. **TM**



**Elena Buckwalter** is a student at Hesston (Kan.) College from Fulks Run, Va.

Does our obsession with politics and governing leaders take us away from full trust in God?

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

## Random thoughts on entering a new decade



**Russ Eanes**  
of Harrisonburg, Va.,  
is executive director  
of MennoMedia.

*Teach us to count up the days that are ours,  
and we shall come to the heart of wisdom.—Psalm  
89:12, New Jerusalem Bible*

I am starting to count my days. I don't mean literally count them, but I'm more thoughtful of the days I have left, and I don't know how many they will be. In an era in which those in their 50s are considered the "old-young" and those in their 60s the "young-old," I find myself on the cusp between the two. You can figure out my age.

I am confronted more by mortality now than I was when much younger. While I fear neither death nor aging, I spend more time thinking about them than I used to. Once it was my forebears who stood between me and eternity, but of my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, all but one are gone. While I hope and pray to have many days—several decades, really—I am aware they are not unlimited. I have already outlived my brother-in-law, as close to me as my own brothers, who died unexpectedly at 56. I'm mindful that I'm already beyond the average lifespan of my maternal grandparents, who died at ages 53 and 64.

Entering a new decade, here are a few of my random thoughts:

**I am glad for aging.** I am thankful and fortunate to be healthy and fit; in my mind, I still feel 17. When I was a child, my paternal grandfather, then in his 60s, seemed old. Funny, I don't feel that way, but then again, maybe I look that way to my grandson, who is now 9. While some of our capacities decrease over time, I also know that the older we get, the wiser we can get. Accumulated experience counts for something.

**I value stability.** Having lived in 15 zip codes (starting in the era before zip codes existed), I am glad to stay put, both in my neighborhood and in my faith community. I have no thoughts, plans or wishes to live anywhere else, and that contentment is a gift. My life has felt like a potted plant that was carted around from place to place. It's now in the garden, putting down some deep roots.

**I love exploring the world.** Having recently become an empty-nester, I am exercising my love of travel at a pretty brisk pace and know some of my friends wonder about it. "Maybe you need to save money and do it later, you know, after retirement." They are well-meaning, but my reply is that I have known too many people who said they would wait until they retired to fulfill their dreams but never made it that far. I have come to value experiences over things.

I used to value knowing people who shared my interests; now **I also value knowing interesting people.** One unexpected outcome of Facebook for me is that I have reconnected with

people from my scattered past. Some classmates from high school and college—many of whom I had not seen or heard of in as much as 40 years—have turned out to be fascinating people.

I'm an idealist and always like to be optimistic, yet **I've been tempered by a life of realism.** Some of the ideas, people and faith communities I placed the most trust in have let me down. My experience in the church has sometimes been disappointing, and I could

make a case for abandoning it and faith altogether. On the other hand, I am aware of my own failures and inability to live up to my ideals. Forgiveness and grace are big experiences in my life and I am not afraid to recognize that I'm a sinner. Jesus said, "He who is forgiven much loves much."

Finally, **I want to finish well.** Some of my German friends say, "End ist gut, all ist gut" or, "If it ends well, it was all good." In the next decade, I hope to finish some things, including my work and current leadership roles, and I want to end them well and not too late. I also anticipate some new beginnings, new roles, new relationships and new experiences. I am ever mindful, though, that it is God who gives us these days, summed up well in the New Testament letter of James: "You never know what will happen tomorrow; you are no more than a mist that appears for a little while and disappears....you should say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we shall still be alive to do this or that'" (4:14-15, NJB). May I live to do as God wills. **TM**

I have known too many  
people who said they  
would wait until they  
retired to fulfill their  
dreams but never made it  
that far.

# Walking with the ghosts of El Camino

## An MVS worker reflects on her privilege and the suffering of immigrants



Neal Brubaker (left) and Elsa Goosen walk the El Camino.

On Aug. 20, nearly 170 walkers began a 10-day, 150-mile trek from Tijuana, Mexico, to Los Angeles. The journey is called *El Camino del Inmigrante (The Path of the Immigrant)*, and among the walkers were two Mennonite Voluntary Service participants, Elsa Goosen and Neal Brubaker. The following is a reflection from Goosen.

What does it mean to practice solidarity, to become a neighbor, to exchange hospitality? As a white, U.S. citizen engaged in immigrant justice work, my reflections on these questions are evolving. When I consider walking from Tijuana to Los Angeles as an ally in the movement, I think of the consciousness-raising that must occur in my privileged circles. I work at the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center in rural southern Colorado, where challenges include the inaccessibility of driver's licenses, health-care barriers, language access, domestic violence and the inadequacy of legal options for undocumented people and their families.

**These injustices push me forward** as we march for humane immigration policy. But what most energizes me about El Camino is the relational aspect of walking and its potential for our healing as an international community. By walking alongside one another, we can learn to locate ourselves in relationship to each other's lived experiences.

Several years ago, I spent a semester in Tucson, Ariz., through Earlham College's Border Studies program. I worked with No More Deaths, an organization that offers water, food and medical assistance to people who traverse the remote Sonoran desert as a means of survival. Before I joined other folks placing water jugs along those parched, cactus-studded mountains, I read *The Death of Josseline*, which honors Josseline Quinteros, a 14-year-old Salvadoran girl who died in the Arizona desert in 2008 while en route to reunite with her mother in Los Angeles. She is one of thousands of migrants who have perished there since the escalation of U.S. border militarization in the mid-1990s.

This collective loss filled the ravines and open spaces as I walked. One day, while visiting a migrant shrine in a rocky alcove, I stumbled across the fact that Josseline and I were born on the same day, just a few countries apart, vulnerable like all babies, waiting for someone to nourish us with food, warmth and love. But our lives were shaped in disparate

ways by the history of U.S.-sponsored violence in the Americas and the ugliness of white supremacy.

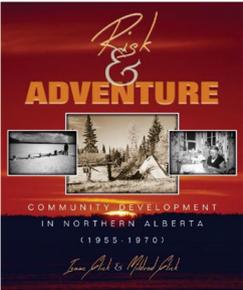
The white, English-speaking body I inhabit has never felt the ache of forced separation, never been targeted as a foreign object when seeking welcome, never been compelled to walk or run long distances for any reason besides personal whim. When I was 14, a ninth grader, I already awaited college with great anticipation. Higher education was a given, and I knew my future would open up accordingly.

What kind of future did Josseline imagine for herself at age 14? What was her truth? We know she walked because she imagined something better, a family that could be whole. Movement was integral to her reality, her dreams, her story. While I advanced through school in a system designed for my success, the same sociopolitical forces pushed Josseline into the precarious position of crossing the desert.

But her memory, along with other spirits on El Camino, can move us into action if we pay attention to their presence in our communities. I often return to the unsettling ideas in *Ghostly Matters*, a book by sociologist Avery Gordon. She suggests we are continually haunted by shadowy figures who linger from injustices either systematically denied or supposed to be "over and done with." Unexpected signs from the realm of the ghostly call out for attention, challenging our complacency and disturbing us into action.

**Josseline's ghost startled me** with our bound fates. As I continued dropping water in the desert that spring, more ghosts ventured into view. A child's backpack, a stray sock, a hidden campfire ring still warm with coals. I replaced empty water jugs and wondered who had tasted that water. Where did they come from and where were they going? What did they envision for themselves and for our world?

El Camino del Inmigrante embodies a millennia-old tradition. When I walk in solidarity, I feel the energy of those who walked before me and who continue the journey today. If we honor those stories, perhaps we can find roots in each other and fuse our collective energy into that enduring movement.—Elsa Goosen for Mennonite Mission Network

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## OBITUARIES

**Alderfer, Frances Keller**, 93, Hatfield, Pa., died July 13. Parents: Horace A. and Bertha Keller Alderfer. Funeral: July 16 at Salford Mennonite Church, Harleysville, Pa.

**Bergey, Susie H. Derstine**, 100, Souderton, Pa., died Aug. 24. Spouse: Roy D. Bergey (deceased). Parents: Milton and Sallie Halteman Derstine. Children: Thelma D. Spitzkopf, Donald D. Bergey, Evelyn B. Landis, Carolyn B. Brand; nine grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; six great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: Aug. 27 at Franconia Mennonite Church, Telford, Pa.

**Claassen, Gladys L. Moyer**, 92, Lititz, Pa., died April 21. Spouse: Alfred H. Claassen. Spouse: Stewart Moyer (deceased). Parents: Abram and Sophia Lewis Moyer. Children: Janelle Zigon, Sharon Claassen Still, Carol Friesen, David Claassen; eight grandchildren, four great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 28 at Akron Mennonite Church, Akron, Pa.

**Eicher Beckler, Lillian Stutzman**, 88, Seward, Neb., died Aug. 7. Spouse: Ben Eicher (deceased). Spouse: Lawrence Beckler (deceased). Parents: Fred and Agnes Bender Stutzman. Children: Warren Eicher, James Eicher, Becky Kremer, Tami Wergin, Richard Beckler, Larry Beckler; 14 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Aug. 11 at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Neb.

**Erb, Merlin L.**, 93, Shickley, Neb., died July 5. Spouse: Bernetta Zehr. Parents: Mose and Ida Schweitzer Erb. Memorial service: Aug. 6 at Salem Mennonite Church, Shickley.

**Gerber, Edna Buller**, 96, Mountain Lake, Minn., died Aug. 25. Spouse: Ellis Jay Gerber (deceased). Parents: Peter J. Buller and Anna Wiens Buller Dirks. Children: Dan Gerber, Becky Ruddy, Joanna Pinkerton; six grandchildren. Funeral: Aug. 28 at Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake.

**Gering, Glenn A.**, 94, Freeman, S.D., died June 4. Spouse: Vivian Brockmueller Gering. Parents: John C. and Maria Miller Gering. Children: John Gering, Peggy Li; two grandchildren. Funeral: June 11 at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman.

**Gingerich, Vesta Louise Troyer**, 97, Kalona, Iowa, died Sept. 13. Spouse: Paul E. Gingerich (deceased). Parents: Roy S. and Nora Miller Troyer. Children: Keith L. Gingerich, Kenneth A. Gingerich, Linda Hughes (deceased), Roger P. Gingerich; six grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren. Memorial service: Sept. 16 at Yoder Powell Funeral Home, Kalona.

**Hostetter, Christian Nelson**, 92, Lititz, Pa., died May 18. Spouse: Esther Miller Hostetter. Parents: C.N. Hostetter, Jr. and Anna Lane Hostetter. Children: Kaye Book, Chris Hostetter; one grandchild; two great-grandchildren. Funeral: May 24 at Akron Mennonite Church, Akron, Pa.



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**Mathew, John**, 75, Goshen, Ind., died June 14. Spouse: Annie Joseph Mathew. Parents: Annamma and T.J. John. Children: Johncey Mathew, Josh Mathew; six grandchildren. Funeral: June 17 at Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind.

**Miller, Edna M. Guth**, 87, North Las Vegas, Nev., died June 3, of brain cancer. Spouse: Paul R. Miller. Parents: Peter and Lena Zehr Guth. Children: Cheryl Ramer, Terry Miller, Julie Cressman, Patti Wilson, Karen Wiegand; 10 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren. Celebration of life service: June 20 at Discovery Church, North Las Vegas.



**Snider, Marie Gingerich**, 89, died at home in North Newton, Kan., on Aug. 30.

A writer throughout her life, Marie inspired and empowered thousands of readers with

her syndicated column "This Side of 60" for the past 26 years.

She was born to Nicholas and Dorothy (Moser) Gingerich on Aug. 9, 1927, in New Bremen, N.Y. Brother Jim was born five years later.

After graduating from Lowville Free Academy at the age of 14, Marie attended Eastern Mennonite and Goshen colleges. She taught for several years at Rockway Mennonite School in Kitchener, Ontario. Returning to Goshen Seminary to earn a master's degree in religious education,

she met Howard Snider from Guernsey, Saskatchewan. They were married in New Bremen Mennonite Church in Lowville, N.Y., on Nov. 27, 1954. Howard died on Aug. 2, 2015.

The first year of their marriage, Howard and Marie worked at the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Pa. They were part of the team writing the first joint GC/MC Sunday school materials.

In 1957, the Sniders moved to Edmonton, Alberta, where Howard was pastor of the new Holyrood Mennonite Church. In the mid-1960s, Howard accepted a faculty position at Bethel College, and the family moved to North Newton.

Marie began working at Prairie View Mental Health Center in 1967. Throughout the years, her role expanded and, when she retired in 1991, she was director of communications and had a staff of five in her department.

In her 50s, Marie returned to school again, this time earning a master's degree in communications from Kansas State University. Her master's thesis, titled "Sex Roles in the Comic Strips—a Historical Perspective, 1896-1979," led to dozens of speaking engagements. And, in 1980, she was invited to appear as "the real Marie Snider" on the television show *To Tell the Truth*.

A member of Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton, she served for several years on the communications advisory board for the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America.

Marie is survived by daughter Vada, son

Conrad (Diane Sorensen) and four-legged George of North Newton; brother Jim (Roberta) Gingerich, Moundridge, Kan.

A Celebration of Life service was held on Sept. 15 at Bethel College Mennonite Church.

**Sommers, Mary Magdalena**, 80, Hartville, Ohio, died May 3. Parents: Benjamin and Lena Wittmer Sommers. Funeral: May 7 at Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Hartville.

**Umble, Ethel Anne Korn Kambs**, 95, Goshen, Ind., died Aug. 7. Spouse: William C. Kambs, Jr. (deceased). Spouse: Roy H. Umble (deceased). Parents: August and Anna Haack Korn. Children: Judith Flora, Kathy Fackelman, William Kambs, Janet Reedy, Alice Klaasen; 12 grandchildren; 22 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Aug. 19 at College Mennonite Church, Goshen.

**Unruh, Robert E.**, 86, North Newton, Kan., died March 31. Spouse: Helen Ruth Jantzen Unruh. Parents: Jacob S. and Sara (Friesen) Unruh. Child: Jon R. Unruh. Memorial service: April 11 at Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton.

**Yoder, Allen Jr.**, 88, Middlebury, Ind., died April 19. Spouse: Marie Yoder. Parents: Allen and Sophie Ummel Yoder. Children: Mike Yoder, Kent Yoder, Dru Gentle, Scott Yoder; 13 grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 24 at Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

## The past, present and future impact of Mennonite publications

Join us for a conversation featuring:

**Dr. Malinda Berry**, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary,

**Dr. Gerald Mast**, Bluffton University,

and **Hannah Heinzekehr** of *The Mennonite*

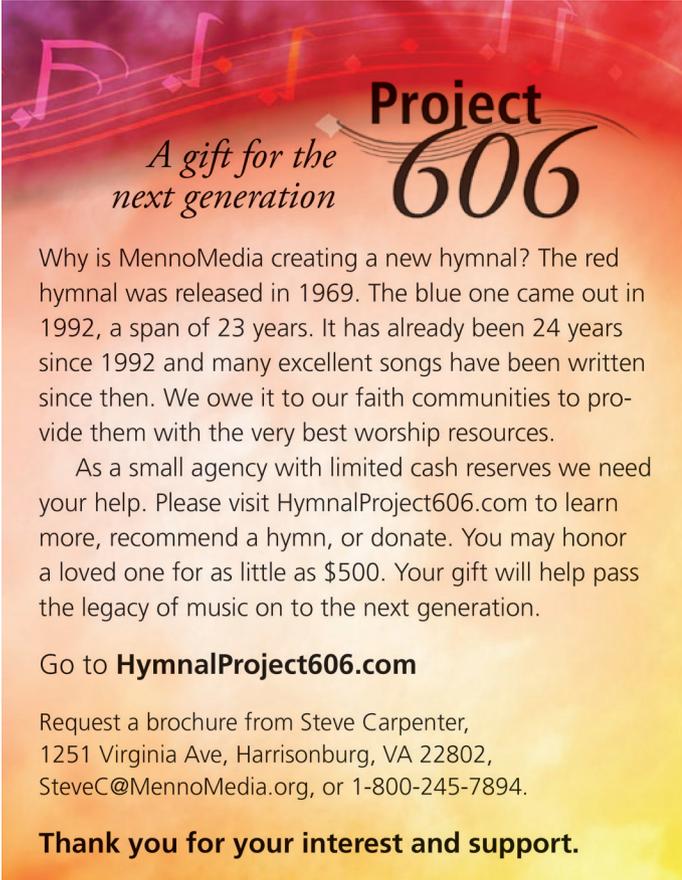
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**Eastern Mennonite University** is seeking a **full-time assistant or associate professor in tenure-track faculty position in psychology** beginning mid-August 2017. Ph.D. in psychology with teaching experience in psychology and scholarly research. Teaching responsibilities include all levels of undergraduate courses and the possibility of teaching at the graduate level in the Biomedicine Program. Preference will be given to those with teaching expertise in abnormal psychology, testing and assessment, and neuropsychology. Applicants must have strong commitment to high-quality undergraduate teaching, mentoring and supervising internships, directing undergraduate research projects and advising undergraduates. To see a full job description, visit <http://www.emu.edu/hr/openings>. Submit letter of application, curriculum vitae, transcripts (unofficial acceptable) and three letters of reference to Dr. Deirdre Smeltzer, Vice President & Undergraduate Academic Dean, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, [ugdean@emu.edu](mailto:ugdean@emu.edu). Review begins immediately. EMU reserves the right to fill the position at any time. AAEO employer.

FILM REVIEWS

**Kubo and the Two Strings** (PG) uses stop-action animation to tell the story of Kubo, a young boy in ancient Japan who lives in a cave with his mother, who is ill. A complex story unfolds as Kubo is sent away magically by his mother in order to escape the clutches of her sisters, who want to take Kubo’s remaining eye (and his humanity). *Kubo* references Japanese mythology rather than Christian mythology. Nevertheless, it raises important questions that all humans ponder and need to explore.—*Gordon Houser*

**Hell or High Water** (R) portrays two brothers, one a divorced dad, the other an ex-con, who rob banks to save the family ranch in West Texas. Two Texas rangers try to find them before they rob another. The film is more than a chase plot, as it explores its characters and saves its ire for the banks that take advantage of people trying to survive in a poor economy.—*gh*

BOOK REVIEWS

**Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters** by Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman and Christian B. Scharen (Eerdmans, 2016, \$30) explores how Christian wisdom may be embodied in daily life. The authors, all practical theologians, draw from their own experiences to help “rebalance practical with theoretical wisdom.”—*gh*

**The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics and the Rise of a New Justice Movement** by William J. Barber II with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (Beacon Press, 2016, \$24.95) is a first-person account of Barber’s rise to leadership of a movement in North Carolina that has brought together people from various peace and justice causes, what Barber calls “fusion politics.” The book combines Christian faith with savvy, practical politics.—*gh*

# Religion on TV: the good and the bad

Rarely do TV shows treat religion fairly or seriously. And when they do, it’s often peripheral to the show’s main story. One of this past summer’s success stories is *Greenleaf*, shown on OWN, the cable network begun by Oprah Winfrey. It follows the African-American Greenleaf family and their megachurch in Memphis. While some family members are at times unscrupulous, and the soap opera plots include sexual abuse, infidelity, embezzlement and even murder, the show nevertheless offers authentic glimpses of religious people who, despite their foibles, have a genuine faith. And the show deals with theological issues in a way that is at times clichéd but more often nuanced and engaging.

**This is one example** of the growing number of TV shows that take religion seriously. In the article “Where Is God on the Small Screen?” *New York Times* critics Margaret Lyons and James Poniewozik look at this trend.

TV viewers today are no longer limited to the major networks or even to cable shows. Now there is a plethora of avenues for watching on demand: Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and more.

Lyons says she keeps her eye on examples of people praying on TV. She found instances in the Netflix documentary *Last Chance U.*, which showcases the 2015 season for the East Mississippi Community College football team. The players say the Our Father together, and in one scene a coach leads the players in a Bible study.

Poniewozik raises the question, “What does it even mean to incorporate faith into a TV story?” And while prayer is certainly one marker of a religious practice, he says, Why does this kind of representation matter? He answers, “Because religion tries to answer some of the same questions that art does, about human frailties and emotion and dealing with the knowledge that you will die someday.”

The artfulness of how religion tries to answer these questions involves

how authentically the show addresses them. One inauthentic approach is a “sunshiny picture” of religion like *7th Heaven* (in the early 2000s); another is mocking religion as simply hypocritical.

Lyons notes that depicting common religious expression in unsurprising ways does not make for dramatic TV. More interesting are expressions of extreme religious practice, such as *The Leftovers*, after 140 million people disappear inexplicably.

Many shows aren’t about religion but include a character who is Christian, e.g., April Kepner on *Grey’s Anatomy*, or Grace, the teenage daughter on *The Good Wife*. Better, says Lyons, is *The Americans*, where the daughter Paige’s conversion winds up affecting the stability of her entire family.

**Lyons makes an important point** when she says that while religion is often used as a symbol or metaphor, “most of us don’t experience our religious...identities as metaphor. We experience it the way the characters on *Greenleaf* experience it, which is as a matter of course.”

Poniewozik discusses examples of religion in comedy shows, such as *The Jim Gaffigan Show*, *The Carmichael Show* and *South Park*, while Lyons notes that TV tends to do a better job treating fictional religions, such as on *Game of Thrones* or *Battlestar Galactica*.

Poniewozik’s example of one of the better series about religion is *Rectify*, about a death-row inmate released after his murder-rape conviction is overturned. “At heart,” he says, “with characters of various degrees of faith, it’s about Christian ideals in living practice—redemption, forgiveness, grace.”

For those looking for religion on TV that feels authentic and moving, there

are treasures to be found and junk to be avoided. **TM**

*Gordon Houser is editor of The Mennonite.*



## Seeker-friendly God?



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Sometimes, folks on both the left and the right seem motivated by insider concerns rather than God’s heart of love for sinners of any and every kind.

*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?—Jesus (Luke 15:4, NIV)*

I recently visited a half dozen church plants in the heart of the Bible Belt. They ranged from startups with a few dozen people to mature congregations of over 1,000 meeting at multiple sites. Some attracted urban hipsters, others the African-American working class; still others were intentionally multiethnic. But they all had one thing in common. They were trying to reach people no one else was reaching with the gospel.

Perhaps not all of these churches would like the label “seeker-friendly,” but they certainly fit that description to an extent. They oriented everything they did around their desire to connect with outsiders. Most met in unconventional spaces, like school auditoriums, shopping malls, refurbished car dealerships or art studios. They worked hard to welcome newcomers and make them feel at home, offering anything from free Bibles to free coffee and doughnuts. And almost all used high-tech sound and video to enhance the worship experience.

**It’s become popular to criticize** seeker-friendly churches like these. We may see their attempts to be relevant to our increasingly unchurched culture as a shallow marketing ploy. Perhaps their worship strikes us as watered-down and their loyalty to the historic church seems questionable. At worst, seeker-friendly churches can turn worship into a form of entertainment, undermining costly discipleship and bolstering rather than challenging our narcissistic culture.

I share these concerns to a degree. Yet I also resonate with the heart these churches have for people estranged from God.

Jesus got flack for breaking with tradition to connect with people far from God. When questioned about this, he responded to his critics with the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7). In it, the shepherd leaves his flock of 99 in search of the one sheep that has strayed. When he finds it, he throws a party with his friends and neighbors to celebrate its return.

Jesus’ point is clear. God is eager to seek out people who for one reason or another have let sin get the best of them. You might even say God is seeker-friendly. God puts outsiders ahead of insiders.

What would it look like for our churches to follow God’s example?

A Canadian pastor named Carey Nieuwhof speaks to this question in a blog post on how to tell if you’re an insider-focused church. In a nutshell, insider-focused churches do all they can to keep those who already belong happy. Outsider-focused churches, however, are willing to make changes and sacrifices in order to reach unchurched people. If you want to be an outsider-focused church, Nieuwhof writes, “focus on who you want to reach, not who you want to keep.”

How would our current church debates change if we were focused on how to reach people far from God with the life-changing good news of the gospel? Sometimes, folks on both the left and the right seem motivated by insider concerns—keeping people from leaving—rather than God’s heart of love for sinners of any and every kind.

What would it look like in Mennonite Church USA for our hearts to beat in tune with God’s heart for outsiders? What would change about our gathered life, our times of worship and fellowship? Would we be more intentional about acknowledging and welcoming newcomers? Would we work harder to make our music accessible to those who haven’t had years of choir practice? Would we be more careful about using institutional acronyms and playing the Mennonite game?

**What about our scattered life**, our life beyond Sunday? If we had more of God’s heart for outsiders, would we pray regularly and fervently for our neighbors, coworkers, family members and friends who don’t yet follow Jesus? Would we give up eating out once in a while in order to support more mission workers and plant more churches? Would we take our potlucks on the road and hold community meals in the neighborhoods we actually live in? And when the opportunity arose, would we courageously share with others the reason for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15)?

We don’t have to sacrifice our counter-cultural Anabaptist DNA in order to reach out. Church is inherently strange because we serve a king whose kingdom is not of this world. Yet we make it unnecessarily strange when we cling to forms and practices that are unintelligible to our surrounding culture. Learning our neighbors’ culture is part of loving our neighbors.

God loved us enough to become one of us in Jesus Christ. What are we willing to do to help lost people find their way back to God? **TM**

## Peering into an unknown future

*This present moment used to be the unimaginable future.*—Stewart Brand

One morning in early September, our local newspaper carried a front-page news story and photos depicting leaders of the Chamber of Commerce burying a time capsule. The square box contained contemporary items of local interest to be brought back to the surface in 2066, 50 years from now. The same capsule had been buried in 1966 and then disinterred a few months ago.

Stewart Brand's words (quoted above) come to mind as I ponder the world I knew in 1966. If you as a reader were born by that time, take a few moments to muse about the way our society and the church have changed in the last 50 years. If you're like me, you couldn't have predicted the immense technological and sociological changes that would reshape our everyday lives.

**In 1966, I had difficulty imagining** marriage or parenthood for myself, much less sending text and videos to my grandchildren from different parts of the world via smart phone. I couldn't have imagined having a son-in-law who makes his living by working with DNA. I couldn't have visualized using a GPS to wind my way confidently through crowded streets in unfamiliar cities without the use of a printed map. I couldn't have dreamed of writing articles and books that would be published and read without the use of paper. And I couldn't have foreseen the immense changes in our church, such as the vital contribution of women's gifts at all levels of church leadership.

In 1966, a neighbor of mine complained that his congregation was making unwelcome changes, moving away from faithfulness to God. His children, who were my peers, reminded him that some years earlier, he'd left a traditional congregation to help start the more progressive church to which they now belonged. Since he had been eager to see the church change, why wouldn't they be keen on making changes as well? His response: "But we already made all the changes that

needed to be made." Later, he left that congregation for one with a more traditional approach.

Although I fondly remember many aspects of my life as it was in 1966, I'd prefer to inhabit the world as it is today. And I anticipate that my grandchildren will prefer the world of 2066 to the world we live in now. Each new generation hopes to improve the world that was handed to them.

In that vein, I am encouraged to see dedicated young leaders taking interest in Mennonite Church USA and its affairs. Although many youth criticize the church, particularly in its institutional form, we must not allow their denigration of church institutions to keep us from affirming a sincere desire to follow Jesus into a future they want to help create.

**Many rising young leaders** want Mennonite Church USA to become a more fully engaged missional church, bringing healing and hope to the many who never step through the doors of a church building. They want to extend a welcome for all, regardless of race or other barriers we erect to protect our church communities from those different from us.

I lament that some members of Mennonite Church USA, like the neighbor from my youth, are leaving the church because of recent changes that seem to them as unfaithfulness to God. And I lament that others are leaving the church because they wish for even greater change, believing the church is irrelevant to a changing world.

As I strain to catch a glimpse of God's preferred future for our church, I sense God's ongoing call to follow Jesus and God's urging to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope can flow through us to the world. Although I can't claim to imagine just what that will look like, I'm confident we'll need to embrace some changes along the way. **TM**



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Each new generation hopes to improve the world that was handed to them.



## FROM THE EDITOR

# A 'kairos' moment for the church



Gordon Houser



Hannah Heinzekehr

For too long these concerns have led to the cover-up and silencing of stories of abuse.

It seems that issues arise in the Mennonite church at times that feel like “kairos” moments, moments of opportunity for change and for focus by the broader church. I felt that happened in the early 1990s, when we were confronted by a growing number of cases of sexual abuse by Mennonite leaders.

At the time, I was editor of *The Mennonite* when it was the magazine of the General Conference Mennonite Church. I was part of a group of Mennonite leaders who attended a conference in February 1992 called “Men Working to End Violence Against Women.” For most of us who participated, this was a life-changing experience, a time of repentance from ignoring the violence against women that was endemic to our society—even our church.

**Around this time**, stories emerged of sexual abuse by several prominent Mennonite church leaders, including Urie Bender, Jan Gleysteen, John Howard Yoder and others. At that time, Meetinghouse, a group of Mennonite editors, worked on developing guidelines for reporting these abuses. And we reported those we learned about.

Now it seems we’re in another kairos moment. Again, courageous women are helping us all be aware of naming the prevalence of sexual abuse in our community. Like before, there is still resistance to focusing on this sin. And like then, we need wisdom and perseverance to confront it.

This sin of treating people—women and men—in abusive ways seems to be part of “the cosmic powers of this present darkness” (Ephesians 6:12) against which we struggle. A part of that struggle is naming it and listening to the stories of those who have been abused and then silenced by the church.

Let us seize this opportune moment to bring healing and hope to those in our church.—*gh*

As Gordon notes, we are in a powerful moment for churchwide introspection, repentance and change in the ways we talk about and respond to abuse. On page 26 are accounts from three survivors sounding an urgent call for the church to take sexual abuse seriously and to change our patterns of response. As these survivors point out, addressing sexual abuse is not only an ethical imperative but a matter of survival: Many denominations are beginning to go through public reckonings as legal charges and lawsuits are becoming more common when abuse is ignored.

This year, as we have sought to cover breaking news stories about abuse and emerging details about processes, we have heard from many people across the church who long to support survivors of abuse and appreciate public coverage.

We have also heard from many who express concern that we are reporting allegations that may prove false, that we are reporting matters that should be private and that we are not tending the Christian call to forgiveness.

**At their best, these concerns come** from a place of care: for our church, for church leaders and for everyone wounded by the sin of abuse. But for too long these concerns have led to the cover-up and silencing of stories of abuse. They have prevented us from naming and seeing the full scope of the problem we are facing.

In July, Church of the Brethren pastor Alan Stucky explored the infrequency of false reports of abuse (the National Sexual Violence Resource Center found a false reporting rate between 2.0 and 7.1 percent) and wrote, “What should be abundantly clear from the rate of underreporting of abuse is that we still live in a culture where victims of abuse of all sorts do not feel safe coming forward with their stories. Our task as pastors and church leaders is to work to change this culture.”

May we take up this work with courage.—*hh*