

The Mennonite

*Congregations
share peace*

INSIDE

Faith amid suffering

Singing in darkness

Living into new
ways of thinking



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Cultivating energy and synergy for the whole of Anabaptist Christian education, the Mennonite Education Agency of Mennonite Church USA communicates a compelling story, coordinates services and collaborates with partners. MEA connects schools and programs with MC USA congregations and the world, broadening access to education, resources and trainings grounded in Anabaptist values.



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TheMennonite

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ON THE COVER: Pasadena (Calif.) Mennonite Church holds a peace parade on Palm Sunday in 2016. Photo by Jamie Deurmeier

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Letters

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

On creating a church peace tax fund

Is now the time to create a church peace tax fund?

That's the subject of one of the seminars being offered at MennoCon19, the July 2-6 convention in Kansas City, Mo., of Mennonite Church USA.

In response to Jesus' exhortation to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44), the seminar proposes that MC USA support, enable and equip religious freedom rights as outlined by the U.S. Constitution for those who, because of conscience, are unable to pay taxes that underwrite war and militarism.

Bearing witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in a world involved with endless war in the pursuit of imperial control, the creation of a church peace tax fund would channel conscripted income toward meeting human needs and help save the planet while providing a faithful testimony to the world regarding Jesus' way of nonviolence and peace. In the process, a church peace tax fund would enable and equip conscientious objectors who refuse to pay war taxes.

Conscripted daily to pay taxes that underwrite killing and war making, many U.S. Mennonites are seeking ways to refrain from paying for war. This plan provides the spiritual

resources, human solidarity and material support to enable Mennonites and other people of goodwill to follow the prompting of their Spirit-led consciences and publicly object to paying the taxes that are used to support killing, war making and militarism.

Three years ago, MC USA delegates said: "We remain committed as a church to the belief that participation in war is contrary to the will of God.... Therefore, the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA calls affiliated congregations to a renewed emphasis on trusting God and the way of Jesus, not violence, for our security. For this teaching to be effective, it must address our society's commitment to the moral necessity of violence, our government's undisclosed purposes in its so-called 'security efforts' and our often-secret sympathies with so-called security operations."—Faithful Witness Amid Endless War Resolution Passed by the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly at Kansas City, Mo., July 1, 2015.

—**H.A. Penner** and **John Stoner**, *Akron, Pa.*

Context matters

Acronyms abound in our time. They provide helpful shortcuts in our time-conscious society. They may also convey a mixed message, depending on context. TMI is now sometimes referred to in the church media. For many of us this clearly stands for The Mennonite, Inc. For the larger public, TMI means something quite different. Ever since 1979, the world has associated TMI with the near meltdown of the nuclear reactor near Harrisburg, Pa. on Three Mile Island.

Whether in news print or in the interpretation of Scripture, context matters.

—**Charles B. Longenecker**, *Lititz, Pa.*

Editor's note: Not to mention Too Much Information.

READERS' POLL



100%

Yes

0%

No

0%

I don't know.

0%

It depends.

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IN THIS ISSUE

The Renewed Commitments for Mennonite Church USA say, "We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives." We can follow these calls as individuals, and we can also practice shalom as congregations. This month's issue presents six stories of congregations bearing witness to God's holistic peace.

Sheldon C. Good (page 10) tells the story of congregations that raised money for a bond for a woman being held in detention. Menonita Iglesia Monte Horeb (page 13) is a small congregation that is making great efforts to reach out to immigrants fleeing violence in their home countries. Xaris A. Martínez with Rosa Ortez-Cruz (page 16) writes about Rosa's experience of living in sanctuary for a year at the shared meeting site of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship and the Church of Reconciliation (Presbyterian Church USA). Pat Plude (page 19) tells how First Mennonite Church of San Francisco has stood in solidarity with the synagogue the church shares a building with in response to the shooting of Jews last October at a synagogue in Pittsburgh. Kent Davis Sensenig (page 23) describes how Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., helped form a coalition of congregations called Faith in Action. And Gretta Rempel (page 26) reflects on how she and other Mennonite youth learned about conscientious objection. The editorial relates how one congregation approached loss and conflict in a healthy way. —Editor

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News Briefs

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GORDON HOUSER

MennoCon19 starts early with new training opportunities

Mennonite Church USA is offering a new opportunity this year to arrive at convention in Kansas City, Mo., slightly early and choose from several valuable preconvention training opportunities for individuals and leaders throughout the church.

"We added these day-long trainings because this kind of learning takes time," says Shana Peachey Boshart, denominational minister of faith formation.

Opening worship for convention begins at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 2,

and the preconvention trainings start earlier that same day at 9 a.m. or 1:30 p.m.

One training offered in both English and Spanish is "Healthy Boundaries 101 Fundamentals," which provides a broad framework for understanding healthy boundaries in contemporary ministry settings and fulfills the requirement for boundaries training within MC USA.

Another training, "Faithful Presence," will be led by David Fitch, a professor, author and church planter from Westmont, Ill. "We highly recommend David's seminar if you have longed to engage your neighborhood in mission, but keep getting stuck on the how," says Michael Danner, associate executive director for church vitality and engagement.

Jenny Castro, coordinator of MC USA Women in Leadership, is offering "Laboring Toward Wholeness" with Linda Gehman Peachey and Regina Shands Stoltzfus. This is an abbreviated version of MC USA's new, soon-to-

be-launched training on dismantling patriarchy. "This training is a valuable tool for those already on a journey toward undoing oppressions and creating a more just world," says Castro. Antiracism training is a prerequisite.

"Welcoming Immigrants in 2019" will focus on tangible ways to put faith into action by walking with immigrant communities to help meet needs and advocate for greater justice. It is led by Tammy Alexander of Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Another half-day training will introduce participants to cultural competency through the Intercultural Development Inventory, a widely used resource throughout MC USA.

—Mennonite Church USA

Pricing for *Voices Together* hymnal products released

MennoMedia released the pricing for the full suite of *Voices Together* products in the most recent edition of *Leader* magazine as well as in a brochure mailed to all Mennonite churches in the United States and Canada. Releasing all the pricing now allows congregations time to budget for the new hymnal in advance of its fall 2020 release.

Voices Together will be available in the following editions:

Pew edition:
\$23.99 USD / \$32.99 CAD

Large-print edition:
\$43.99 USD / \$59.99 CAD

Accompaniment edition:
\$89.99 USD / \$121.99 CAD

Worship leader edition:
\$19.99 USD / \$26.99 CAD

Projection edition:
\$499.99 USD / \$674.99 CAD

App edition: The pew edition, accompaniment edition and worship leader edition will be available to purchase separately in the Hymnals app offered for iPad and Android devices by GIA Music, at the same price as their respective print editions

Custom imprinting to add a congregation's name to copies of the



Finding direction and faith

Risa Fukaya from Zushi, Japan, takes notes in her Introduction to Biblical Literature course at Hesston (Kan.) College. Fukaya didn't grow up practicing a religion, but her arrival at Hesston and introduction to the Christ-centered faith community piqued her curiosity. On Easter morning, April 21, she was baptized at Journey Mennonite Church, Yoder, Kan. Following her graduation in May, Fukaya plans to spend a year in a service assignment through Mennonite Mission Network. —Hesston College

pew edition is also available when purchasing 60 or more copies of the pew edition (five or more cases) for an additional \$7.99 USD / \$9.99 CAD per copy.

—MennoMedia

Laughter, tears and truth-telling at SENT 2019

More than 80 church leaders from across the country gathered April 26-28 for SENT 2019 at Beloved Community Mennonite Church in Englewood, Colo. Now in its fourth year, SENT is a peace church conference hosted by Mennonite Mission Network that helps connect, inspire and equip church leaders to seed new churches and reinvigorate legacy congregations.

The weekend was marked by blues-influenced worship, small group seminars and an introduction to the SENT Network, a six-month education course for church planters that will be released in the fall.

“It’s good to see that Mennonite Church USA, through Mennonite Mission Network, is taking seriously the call to plant churches,” says Clyde Kratz, executive conference minister for Virginia Mennonite Conference. “[The church’s] future is bright. And that brightness comes from planting these first-generation churches and supporting them.”

—Mennonite Mission Network

MEA announces initial plans for ‘the new MEA’

Mennonite Education Agency has identified its guiding values and strategic goals for a “new MEA” that aims to adapt to the evolving needs of education within the Anabaptist and Mennonite context. At a March meeting, the MEA board described the new MEA as “cultivating energy and synergy for the whole of Anabaptist/Christian education by communicating compelling stories, coordinating services and collaborating with partners.”

—MEA



MCC photo/Sarah Severns

Mother reclaims life after her son’s murder

Corniki Bornds sits on the bed in the room of her late son, Fontaine “BJ” Sanders. For more than six months after his murder, Bornds says, it was too painful after he was shot and killed to enter her son’s room, but now she finds solace inside. BJ died just days before his 20th birthday. His graduation from Robert Morris University was coming up in a few weeks. Bornds found help through Parents for Peace & Justice, a support group for parents who have lost children to gun violence and a Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes partner. —MCC

“The new MEA has a greater focus on partnering and walking with schools at all levels to enable us to accomplish more by working together than any school or MEA could accomplish by working alone,” said Dick Thomas, MEA board chair. This is a shift away from the primary focus on governance MEA has had since it was first created in 2002, at the beginning of Mennonite Church USA, according to Thomas.

Some of the goals for the new MEA include functioning in the role of “community collaborator” and bridge builder between schools, the church and world; developing a network of grassroots initiatives to connect experts in MEA-affiliated schools and educational programs with others seeking best practices; and providing training in diversity and intercultural competence on school campuses, including audits and recommendations for growth.

Celebrating 75 years of formation for young adults in shifting times

Mennonite Voluntary Service, a program of Mennonite Mission Network, is celebrating its 75th year in operation. The program invites young adults into communal living, engagement with a local congregation and work in the community.

Lizzy Diaz, MVS program director, said that for the past seven decades, MVS has solidified life direction and purpose for many participants, including herself. A year after graduating in sociology at Goshen (Ind.) College, she pursued MVS, in which she volunteered in the advocacy office of World Vision in New York City in 2014.

—Mennonite Mission Network



Read longer versions of these and other articles at themennonite.org.

Miscellany

COMPILED BY
GORDON HOUSER

If in order to get a good message you need to make Judaism look bad, then you don't have a good message.

— Amy-Jill Levine in *Christian Century*

Anti-Muslim hate driven by politics, not faith

Americans who personally know a Muslim are more than twice as likely to have a favorable opinion of Muslims than those who do not, according to a new report. But researchers say that anti-Muslim attitudes are influenced by a host of factors, from personal and national politics to how much a person knows about Islam itself — but not one's own religious affiliation. The findings are part of this year's American Muslim Poll, the fourth annual survey of U.S. faith communities conducted by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding in Washington. The poll found that Muslims remain the most likely group to report experiencing religious discrimination. Jews have the lowest levels of Islamophobia, white Evangelicals the highest.

—Religion News Service



\$100

The U.S. Department of Energy has proposed rules to roll back Obama-era efficiency standards for light bulbs, at a cost to consumers of \$100 per household per year.

—Sierra

Christian terrorism

The suspect in the Poway synagogue shooting in San Diego on April 27 belongs to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, one of several smaller, more conservative Presbyterian denominations. "Thanks to the privilege Christianity has in our culture," writes Julie Ingersoll, "Presbyterians (and Christians in general) will have an advantage that Muslim Americans don't get when a shooter is Muslim. Most of us will take seriously the fact that this terrorist is not representative of Christians in general."

—Religion News Service

\$400,000

Every religious congregation would need to raise an additional \$400,000 each year for the next 10 years to make up for the proposed cuts to antihunger and antipoverty programs in the 2020 federal budget.

—Christian Century

Reading for pleasure

A *Society of Readers* report indicates that reading for pleasure is one of the best indicators of whether students will succeed in school. Working-class students who read for pleasure score much better than those who don't.

—*Christian Century*

73,000

Approximately half the water used annually in a typical U.S. household—about 73,000 gallons—can be reused to water lawns and gardens.

—Sierra

23/day

President Trump averaged nearly 5.9 false or misleading claims a day in his first year in office. He hit nearly 16.5 a day in his second year. So far in 2019, he's averaging nearly 23 false or misleading claims a day. In one three-day period in April, he made 171 false or misleading claims.

—*Washington Post*

Percentage of U.S. businesses that say the 2017 tax cuts have had no impact on their hiring or investment plans:

84

—Harper's

LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship

Chapel Hill, N.C.

1. Eric Hochstetler leads the children in singing. *Photo by Bradley King*
2. Ruby Lou King washes Miriam Liu-Ber's feet at the Maundy Thursday service. *Photo by Aspen Yordy*
3. After worship congregants gather outside the sanctuary for fellowship and a lively match of four square. *Photo by Isaac Villegas*
4. Pastor Isaac Villegas offers a blessing during Communion. *Photo by Bradley King*





BY SHELDON C. GOOD

faith amid the suffering

**Churches raise money for a bond
for a woman held in detention**

▲
Imelda | Photo by Erik Rosales

When authorities at a for-profit immigration detention center near Tucson, Ariz., permitted detainees to go outside once each day, Imelda and her fellow migrants gathered for worship. Imelda, a professor and pastor originally from Nicaragua, sometimes preached.

“God wanted to use me in this way,” Imelda said in April. “God comforted me, and I wanted to comfort those around me. The detention center, amid the pain and suffering we feel in there, is a place to grow in faith. I think of all of my sisters still in there, and I remember them.”

The detention center, amid the pain and suffering we feel in there, is a place to grow in faith.

Imelda, whose last name is withheld for her safety, spoke in Spanish through a translator, Tina Schlabach, co-pastor of Shalom Mennonite Fellowship in Tucson.

Like so many others, Imelda fled unsafe conditions in her home country and migrated to the United States in search of asylum. After Imelda reached the U.S.-Mexico border, U.S. authorities apprehended her and transferred her to the detention center in Arizona, where she was given a bond of \$12,500.

“There are really no words to say how difficult it is to be in that place,” Imelda said. “Yet it is a place to see the face of the Lord, a place to learn how to love each other. It is a place that is very hard to be in on a physical level, yet it is a strong experience spiritually.”

Schlabach got to know Imelda through a visiting ministry she helped start in 2013 called Casa Mariposa Detention Visitation Program. The ministry helps organize people to visit the detention center and build relationships with the migrants there. Shalom became the ministry’s fiscal sponsor in 2016.

“Imelda would talk about life in the center and how she and others are supporting each other through prayer,” said Schlabach, reflecting on the three times she visited Imelda from February to March. “Each time she would talk about how much she hoped to be released, how she had not been able to talk with her family in Nicaragua for months because she didn’t have money for phone calls, how she was working on her asylum application inside detention.”

In Nicaragua, the university where Imelda taught was shut down because of a growing student movement protesting the country’s government. There was backlash against students and faculty, including Imelda, who protested the shutdown of the school. She and others were carried out of the university by force, attacked and threatened by the military. In addition to her work as an educator, Imelda is an evangelical pastor. She knows

Mennonite congregations in Nicaragua.

What if a congregation, or a group of congregations, could post bond? That was the question Melissa Florer-Bixler, pastor of Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church, wrestled with after hearing about Imelda. Florer-Bixler had participated in a Christian Peacemaker Teams delegation Shalom Mennonite hosted in October 2018. Upon her return to North Carolina, she worked with the congregation to get involved in writing letters to people in detention.

Early this year, Florer-Bixler and Schlabach organized a group of congregations to contribute to Imelda’s bond. Within several weeks, 10 congregations, eight of them Mennonite, as well as many individuals, had given varying amounts toward Imelda’s bond, and a GoFundMe page had raised several thousand dollars.

The group posted bond for Imelda on April 1. She is now staying with friends in Indiana and attends an evangelical Spanish-speaking congregation and Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis.

“When I was released, I felt like I was starting a new life,” Imelda said. “Yet it is not easy even after being released. Being detained is a trauma. I often feel traumatized. I feel weak. I need to take God’s hand in this process.”

Schlabach said Imelda’s chance of winning her asylum case is much greater if she is not in detention.

“We can’t help everybody with their bonds because there

are so many people in detention,” Schlabach said. “We assess which people have a good chance of going forward with their asylum cases and which bonds are reasonable that we can raise money for.”

Imelda’s \$12,500 bond was relatively low, given that they often climb above \$20,000, Schlabach said.

**CONGREGATIONS
THAT CONTRIBUTED
FINANCIALLY TOWARD
IMELDA’S \$12,500
BOND FOR HER RELEASE
FROM IMMIGRATION
DETENTION:**

Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship

Blossom Hill Mennonite Church
Lancaster, Pa.

Community Mennonite Church
Harrisonburg, Va.

Faith Mennonite Church
Minneapolis

**First Congregational United
Church of Christ**
Rhineland, Wis.

First Mennonite Church
Indianapolis

**Kalamazoo (Mich.)
Mennonite Church**

Pittsburgh Mennonite Church

Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church

Seattle Mennonite Church

Shalom Mennonite Fellowship
Tucson, Ariz.

**St. Michael’s and All Angels
Episcopal Church**
Studio City, Calif.

More than 20 people are registered as visitors through the visitation program. The detention center permits five visitors to be inside at a time, two mornings per week. Most visitors are not from Shalom, though the congregation supports the ministry financially, including two part-time staff.

“We try to visit people who don’t have family support and who are isolated,” Schlabach said. “The people we visit often we visit for months and sometimes years.”

U.S. authorities place people like Imelda, adults not accompanied with children, in immigration detention immediately upon their arrival in the United States, Schlabach said, even if they present themselves at an official U.S. port of entry and request asylum. This may not be the case, as has been in the news, for people who come with children.

For Schlabach and Florer-Bixler, it’s a moral issue to detain people who have come to the United States from experiences such as extreme poverty, domestic abuse or gang violence.

It’s a moral issue to detain people who have come to the United States from experiences such as extreme poverty, domestic abuse or gang violence.

“The whole system of immigration detention is wrong, especially the for-profit model that is so prevalent, businesses

that are making lots of money off an oppressive system,” Schlabach said. “We’d like to dismantle the system and, legislatively, there are groups working on that piece. In the meantime, we want to accompany those people who find themselves in detention.”

Both Schlabach and Florer-Bixler cited Jesus, including the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, as evidence for the biblical call to supporting people who are detained.

“The logic of immigration detention is to set the bail so high and make life so hopeless inside that people give up and return to places of danger and death,” Florer-Bixler said. “The immigration system looks at these people, often the most economically and socially vulnerable, and says, ‘You are nobody. No one is going to waste their money on you to pay this high bond.’ And then we look at Jesus, who comes into the life of backwater peasants and laborers, who tells them their lives are precious to God, that God has come into the world for them.”

Those that posted bond for Imelda “decided to call the bluff of the for-profit detention system,” Florer-Bixler said.

“Imelda is precious because she is made in God’s image, and we want every person who upholds the dehumanization of those seeking refuge to know that as a people living in the reign of God, we are coming for those who are God’s beloved,” Florer-Bixler said.



Sheldon C. Good is executive director of The Mennonite, Inc.

BY GORDON HOUSER



‘These are our brothers and sisters’

**Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb
welcomes new immigrants**

▲
Families at Iglesia Menonita
Monte Horeb enjoy a picnic.
Photo provided by Sandra Luz Montes-Martinez

Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb in Dallas, Texas, is a small congregation, with about 40 members, yet these members make great efforts to reach out to immigrants fleeing violence in their home countries.

Since last October, the church, a member of Western District Conference (WDC) of Mennonite Church USA, has welcomed 12 families (48 people) from Central America. In an April 24 interview Sandra Luz Montes-Martinez, Monte Horeb's pastor in the past four years, noted that "80% of our church people are undocumented."

Many, she said, have been in the country a long time and are working to gain legal status. Helping these new families, she said, "is our daily bread."

The people coming to them are facing great violence in their home countries, she said, and we want to help. "They are our brothers and sisters." They aren't just strangers; "they are like Jesus coming to our house for dinner."

Montes-Martinez referred to Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:31-45, where he says, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," and added, "We serve others like we serve Jesus."

This is not easy. Sometimes it gets uncomfortable. "You may need to give up one of your jackets if someone else doesn't have one," she said. It means sacrificing to help others. "Maybe you give up eating meat a couple days a week in order to share with others. Maybe you use one of your vacation days to drive someone to a job interview."

Given the priorities of the Trump administration, new

immigrants are facing increasing difficulties. In May 2018, the administration announced that it will prosecute parents who cross the border with their children. In October 2018, the administration sent troops to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Meanwhile, thousands of people have been fleeing their homelands to escape violence as well as loss of productive land because of climate change and economic policies.

Dealing with such needs and facing such opposition from U.S. authorities "often feels overwhelming," said Montes-Martinez, yet they keep doing what they can.

Monte Horeb provides many kinds of help: getting kids enrolled in school, finding housing, providing clothing, transportation, food and help with translation. One member bakes bread to sell from their home but also provides some for the families. Doing all this is costly, both in time and finances.

Many of the new immigrants have experienced much trauma, including children being separated from their parents. Montes-Martinez told of one mother who agreed to go back to Guatemala and leave her son in the United States because he had been threatened by gangs. She left him in the care of the boy's grandmother, who was already living in Texas.

One young son from Guatemala was sexually abused in school. When the family got to the border, the parents and children were separated. The church has worked to get therapy

Many of the new immigrants have experienced much trauma, including children being separated from their parents.

in the schools for some of the children.

It's taken time for trust to develop, said Montes-Martinez, but now the families are more involved in the church. They've learned that church is a safe place. She said one of the children, Justin, calls her every morning to have her pray for him, "for this day to be good."

Another barrier the immigrants and those helping them face is the wider society. "Many Americans see immigrants as a burden to the country," said Montes-Martinez, so the church tends to work more privately, helping in their own ways. "People don't realize," she said, "that [these people] will pay taxes and help the larger community." These people are productive, she said. "They're coming here to work, to have a chance."

These immigrants show great faith, in spite of the difficulties they face. Vivi said recently to Montes-Martinez: "We put everything in the hands of God... I feel troubled by the situation of my family, but as you taught us on Sunday, let us trust him."

Andres, another immigrant, said, "We have had many inconveniences to get here, but I



Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb welcomes immigrants.
 Photo provided by Sandra Luz Montes-Martinez

thank God for the church that has shown us a light to get ahead.”

The church hopes to partner with Mennonite Central Committee and other organizations to get legal consultants to help people with asylum requests or visas. Without legal help, these immigrants often are unable to get the status they need to stay.

Although the work can feel overwhelming at times, said Montes-Martinez, “we find small joys. As we help others, they in turn learn to help others.” Also, in Dallas, there are five WDC churches doing similar work, which provides encouragement.

Montes-Martinez said seeing people changing their lives and getting out of miserable situations gives her hope. Seeing people escape living in fear is

encouraging. “This drives us,” she said. “We can live in this country, go to school, eat at our table.” But this is not an option for many children in their countries. “To give families hope for a better life drives me to do this labor of love.”

To give families hope for a better life drives me to do this labor of love.

She realizes most of these families will not stay in their church or even in their area but will move on. “We don’t do this to fill our churches but to love others as we want to be loved,” she said.

In the week before the interview, Monte Horeb reflected

on Jesus’ journey to the cross, said Montes-Martinez, his reaching out to others, even to the other two crucified with him. “Jesus forgave others and asked one of his disciples to take care of his mother. He cared about family, too.”

Montes-Martinez describes Monte Horeb as a church of immigrants, reaching out to others to serve our community. “I can promise that once you do such a ministry, you’re changing lives,” she said. “Don’t be afraid to help others.”



Gordon Houser
 is editor of *The Mennonite*.



A YEAR IN SANCTUARY

▲
Rosa Orteiz-Cruz, pictured in front of her
Chapel Hill, N.C., sanctuary room in April 2018.

Photo by Stef Bernal-Martinez

BY XARIS A. MARTÍNEZ,
WITH ROSA ORTEZ-CRUZ

‘Shalom para ti, shalom para mi’

Parecemos actrices de telenovela.

The text from Rosa Ortez-Cruz accompanied a link to an article published in *The Herald Sun* (Durham, N.C.) a week after Rosa entered sanctuary in North Carolina—an article that featured an unflattering picture of the two of us looking forlorn during her first press conference. “We look like actresses in a soap opera,” she texted in Spanish. “Like we’re fighting over something or somebody.”

In fact, we had spent hours going over what Rosa should share about why she had chosen to seek refuge from deportation at the shared meeting site of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship and the Church of Reconciliation (Presbyterian Church USA). What parts of her story would prove most compelling to the journalists and activists we hoped would draw attention to her case? What parts were too personal to discuss in a public forum? What information could potentially endanger her family and friends in the United States and back in her home country of Honduras?

As one of the few native Spanish speakers in either of the partnering congregations, I was asked to interpret for Rosa when she first arrived in Chapel Hill. I remember feeling woefully unprepared for the task, frantically texting language justice interpreters to ask how to correctly translate a slew of acronyms frequently used by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. Rosa remembers feeling overwhelmed by all the church officials and immigration advocates she was meeting. All of them seemed eager to help her, but none of us fully understood her trepidation at entering sanctuary and her determination to give her four children *un futuro sin miedo*—a future without fear.

Our offer of sanctuary to Rosa was preceded by months of congregational discernment, volunteer recruitment and building a safe and welcoming living space for a future “guest.” Newly formed sanctuary committees collaborated with local advocacy groups that were developing strategies to avoid

deportation by ICE in the state. Once Rosa was identified as someone seeking sanctuary, we hoped that publicizing the story she told during that first press conference would lead to an overwhelming wave of support and public outcry (#RosaShouldStay) that would move lawmakers and other elected officials to take action on behalf of Rosa and the other five people then taking sanctuary in North Carolina.

While calling on Congress and the Trump administration to protect immigrants facing deportation and waiting for word on Rosa’s pending case before the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, the 100-plus volunteers from more than 10 local churches tasked with providing Rosa with 24-hour support began their work in earnest. Congregants signed up to buy groceries and wash laundry, while daytime “hosts” found ways to interact with her across the language barrier that, in the words of one volunteer, “hopefully made the unbearable bearable.” Rosa navigated these well-intentioned attempts to stave

A look of relief breaks out on Rosa's face as she opens the door when I arrive.

off boredom and depression with good humor, inviting volunteers to help her make jewelry and *pupusas* to sell and raise funds to send to her children.

My overnight shifts in sanctuary began then, as they do now, with a midafternoon text to Rosa—“¿Le puedo traer algo?”—as I stuff a sleeping bag into the trunk of my car. Depending on her response to my offer, I stop at one of the local Latinx markets on my way to church for bags of lime-flavored *Tortrix* corn chips, Mexican sweet bread, and the latest issue of *Qué Pasa*. A look of relief breaks out on Rosa's face as she opens the door when I arrive. “*Por fin*,” she says with a laugh or a loud sigh, depending on her mood. “Finally, someone who can understand what I'm saying.” Our ability to communicate in Spanish, as well as the proximity in our ages and upbringings in Central America, has facilitated hours of animated conversation where we take turns saying “*tú sabes de qué hablo*.” But our ability to understand others' experience has its limitations. Rosa fled Honduras in 2002 to escape a violent former partner, while I left Guatemala in 2001 after nine years as a missionary kid to enroll in college in the United States.

This difference in our rights to safely cross both national borders and parish boundaries is most apparent when we hear an unusual noise during the night. “¿Oíste eso?” we text each other

from our separate rooms. If the noise continues, I am the one that makes her way quietly to the door, praying that I won't find a law enforcement official on the other side. Rosa entered sanctuary a week after ICE raids were first reported in Orange County, leading to the arrest of at least 25 immigrants in the area; the deportation of local sanctuary leader Samuel Oliver-Bruno in November 2018 and further ICE raids in February keep our collective anxiety levels elevated as Rosa continues her sanctuary journey with us.

Our attempts to remain vigilant and honor our commitment to be a place of refuge for Rosa can often backfire. Accompaniment can

Our attempts to remain vigilant and honor our commitment to be a place of refuge for Rosa can often backfire.

easily turn into policing, with some volunteers following Rosa wherever she goes and questioning what she does with her time. The increased scrutiny of her movements is further exacerbated by linguistic and cultural differences that make communicating clearly with decision makers difficult. Rosa confessed that she sometimes feels silenced and confined—*encerrada*—to the small parish office that was converted into her living space. Sadly, the monitoring and lack of transparency can reproduce the oppressive practices

that led Rosa to seek sanctuary in the first place—a worrisome yet always timely reminder that authentic solidarity with our immigrant neighbors requires a commitment to antiracist practice and partnership as part of our peace witness.

The initial flurry of media coverage surrounding Rosa's case died down by the time we began our second year in sanctuary in April, as did the original rush of excitement that church leaders and volunteers experienced when the work of accompaniment began. But Rosa and the sanctuary community gathered around her continue to show up for each other—out of love, by necessity and in faith. “*Diles que les doy las gracias por su apoyo*,” she replied when I asked her how she wanted to conclude this reflection on our first year in sanctuary. In response to her words of gratitude, I recited the words of a familiar church chorus: *Shalom para ti, shalom para mi*, Rosi. Peace to you, peace to me. *Shalom, shalom*.

To learn more about the work of the NC Sanctuary Coalition, visit www.ncchurches.org/priorities/congregational-sanctuary-resources. To support Rosa directly, write a check to “Rosa Ortez-Cruz” and send to: Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, Attn: Rosa Ortez-Cruz, P.O. Box 2145, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2145.



Xaris A. Martínez works at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and is a member of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship.



Rosa Ortez-Cruz is a Honduran national, longtime North Carolina resident and mother of four who is taking sanctuary from deportation in Chapel Hill.



BY PAT PLUDE

Singing IN DARKNESS

▲
The synagogue of Congregation
Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco

Photo provided by Pat Plude

Amid grief and pain is the possibility of new life

As I emerge from the underground trolley, I move quickly. I am a few minutes later than I want to be. It is early evening on a Friday night in midwinter. It is already dark; the damp ocean fog chills my body and hastens my pace.

As I round the corner onto Dolores Street, I hear my community singing: “My life flows on in endless song above earth’s lamentation.” By the time they arrive at the chorus, I am with them, singing boldly: “No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock I’m clinging. Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?”

We are about 15 people, members of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, gathered outside the synagogue of Congregation Sha’ar Zahav. Since the shootings at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh last October, we have been holding a singing vigil here on Friday evenings during Sha’ar Zahav’s weekly Shabbos service.

First Mennonite shares space with Congregation Sha’ar Zahav. Our Jewish friends and colleagues own the building and worship here on Friday evenings and

Saturday mornings; we rent office and Sunday school space and worship in our beautiful shared sanctuary on Sunday mornings. In an act of spontaneous solidarity, we began our vigils the first Friday after the Tree of Life massacre. For three weeks we assembled in prayer every Friday evening on the street, as the community gathered for Shabbat services inside. After Thanksgiving, we settled into a monthly routine.

As we sing, we hold the door open and greet worshippers with a warm Shabbat Shalom. Sometimes they join us for a song. More often they simply offer profound gratitude for our presence, a word or a nod if words fail. Throughout the service, the windows of the sanctuary above us are open, and our songs mingle on the street: Hebrew and English, Jewish and Christian.

One week, when the fires were raging just north of San Francisco, the air was poisonous, and we all had to wear face masks. That Friday, instead of gathering outside, we stood vigil in the foyer, at the foot of the stairs up to the sanctuary. When the Sha’ar Zahav community began their service, singing the traditional Jewish song *Hinei mah tov*, we joined right in, singing in Hebrew, our voices blending in embodiment of the song’s text from Psalm 133: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity” (NIV).

On the street we are sometimes joined by passersby, neighbors returning from work or folks walking dogs—people curious about what we are doing, drawn

in by our candles and the warmth of our singing. Sometimes we are graced by dance—pedestrians who cannot resist the impulse to move spontaneously on the sidewalk to the rhythms of our singing. Sometimes people lean out of their cars as they pass, giving us a thumbs up or a honk on their horn in joyous approval.

This act of solidarity with our Jewish family has been changing

This act of solidarity with our Jewish family has been changing those of us who participate.

those of us who participate. In April, I asked some of the regulars why they show up and how the practice has changed them. Beverly said: “The spirit of love and community is palpable....It has reminded me of the value of hope in God and has opened my eyes again to the need for this in the world just outside my front door.”

Russ said his vision of the kingdom of God is that people of all backgrounds, races, religions, abilities and orientations can live together in peace, not just tolerating each other but truly celebrating each other. “Showing up for these vigils,” he said, “is a way for me to honor and celebrate Congregation Sha’ar Zahav. If we are going to build the relationship between Christians and Jews, I need to show up.”

Jeff said the vigils have taught him “not to take even what feel



Members of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco hold a vigil. Photo provided by Pat Plude

AN INTERFAITH POTLUCK

Manhattan, Kan., has a Jewish congregation (not a synagogue, since they do not have a rabbi). Several members from Manhattan Mennonite Church joined the Jewish congregation and others in the Manhattan area in a worship service following the shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh last October. The peace, service and witness committee of Manhattan Mennonite Church is exploring ways to further connect with and support those of other faith traditions.

The committee felt that a gathering around food was a good start. We agreed upon a date, and a representative from the Jewish congregation and our pastors suggested other churches who may want to join us. We sent an invitation to those churches for an interfaith potluck at a pavilion at one of the city's parks. Manhattan Mennonites agreed to provide table service, drinks and any extra tables and seating. The invitation suggested that any food that was not kosher be marked as such to respect the dietary preferences of the Jewish participants.

This interfaith potluck was scheduled for Sunday, May 19. Manhattan Mennonite will continue to seek God's guidance as to how we can further develop relationships with those of other faiths in our area.

—Cathy Coon Bitikofer,
a member of Manhattan
(Kan.) Mennonite Church

like small actions for granted.”

Meg had doubts. She said: “At first, singing in front of the synagogue felt awkward. I was afraid of doing it wrong, of causing more harm. But whenever I listen to discomfort instead of offering love, I always regret it.”

On Easter, Sheri Hostetler, lead pastor at First Mennonite, preached a sermon entitled “When It Was Still Dark.” “On the first day of the week,” she said, “when it was still dark, the women—who were in the dark about what was really happening in the dark—came to the tomb. And when they got there, they didn’t find what they expected, which was death. They found—what? An empty tomb. No body. Two angels telling them Jesus is alive. Unexpected, completely surprising new life. Sometime at night when they were sleeping or when they were waking up with eyes still red from crying or when they were walking to the tomb in the darkness before dawn, new life happened. While it was still dark, something happened the women did not expect, something they did not even know to hope for.”

Hostetler went on to suggest that great social change usually happens in the dark. She compared it to mushrooms, which appear to come from nowhere after a rain. However, most of them are actually part of a vast underground fungus that’s been there the whole time, an organism we can’t see because it’s in the dark. “We don’t notice its existence until the mushrooms ‘magically’ pop up,” she said. “Social and political change happens the same way. People lay the groundwork for decades without most people noticing, then something completely unexpected happens.”¹

Once a month a small group of Mennonites stands in solidarity with our Jewish family. Our songs are hopeful, universal and timeless:

*“The peace of the earth be with you,
the peace of the heavens too.”*

“Over my head, I hear music in the air.”

“There is more love somewhere.”

“Come walk with us, the journey is long.”

“We are building up a new world.”

And the reality is that we sing in the dark. Literally and figuratively.

And the reality is that we sing in the dark. Literally and figuratively. We sing in the dark on the street outside a synagogue on Shabbat. We sing in the darkness of our unknowing.

Just as I am finishing this story, another Jewish community is attacked. On April 27, the last day of Passover and six months to the day after the Tree of Life shooting, a 19-year-old man who self-identifies as a white supremacist, kills a woman and injures three others, including a child, at the Chabad of Poway

synagogue near San Diego.

My hopeful ending to this piece evaporates as the darkness descends anew. “Why?” I cry. A massacre of Muslims in New Zealand. A massacre of Christians in Sri Lanka. And now, another shooting in a synagogue. It is so dark I cannot see my hand, even when I hold it in front of my face.

As I sink deeper into confusion and despair, I finally touch the strength of my resolve: I will again join members of my community in the darkness outside Congregation Sha’ar Zahav. Together we will stand vigil while our Jewish family grieves and prays. In the darkness of our pain, we will sing. In the darkness of our world, we will sing. In the darkness of our unknowing, we will sing.

We will sing because it

reminds us that there is the possibility of new life that we don’t even know to hope for. Maybe we are like mushrooms, part of a rich, vast underground network that will, when the conditions are right, burst forth in profound social and spiritual change. Maybe this is how Love works.

1. This metaphor comes from: Rebecca Solnit, “Hope is an embrace of the unknown: Rebecca Solnit on living in dark times,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2016, www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/15/rebecca-solnit-hope-in-the-dark-new-essay-embrace-unknown



Pat Plude is minister of music, arts and formation at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco.

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BY KENT DAVIS SENSENIG

Faith in action

**Following Jesus the
community organizer**

▲
A boy high fives Keaton Shenk, a member of
Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Photo by Adriana Nateal Hammond

Was Jesus a community organizer? My reading of the feeding of the 5,000 identifies 10 steps in Jesus' community-organizing strategy:

1. Jesus names the need (hungry crowds) and calls his disciples' attention to it.
2. He challenges his followers to find a solution ("You give them something to eat.").
3. The disciples seek resources already present among the people.
4. One (marginal) person shares their gifts (bread and fish).
5. Jesus directs the disciples to organize the crowds into community (clusters of 50 and 100).
6. The disciples bring the resources they've found to Jesus.
7. Jesus thanks the Creator and seeks God's blessing.
8. Jesus returns the (now multiplied) resources to his disciples to distribute equitably.
9. A big fiesta breaks out; everyone gets more than enough.
10. Jesus instructs his followers to gather the leftovers, saving them for future needs.

While Jesus is pivotal, he wants his followers to engage the nitty-gritty of human struggle. This Messiah doesn't do it all; he empowers us to get in the game.

In the book of Acts, Paul repeatedly proclaims the "good news" of an alternative politics before magistrates, governors, kings and, ultimately, the emperor. He uses his Roman

citizenship to urge a pluralistic society toward more just peacemaking practices.

This prophetic tradition inspired my congregation, Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., to jump start a faith-based, community-organizing-for-local-justice coalition of congregations called Faith in Action. It includes 24 faith communities (Protestants, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim), and we are in the home stretch of our second season. Jennifer Davis Sensenig, lead pastor of Community Mennonite (and my spouse), is the founding president of Faith in Action.

We begin each campaign by listening to concerns that bubble up in each congregation, to what people are hearing from co-workers, neighbors, classmates, fellow parents and children about their needs. After months of listening, Faith in Action representatives (two from each congregation) assemble to discern one issue the group feels the Spirit calling them to.

We begin each campaign by listening to concerns that bubble up in each congregation.

In our first season, we focused on immigrant neighbors (including folks within many of our congregations, especially from the local mosque). The issues committee (chaired by Hadley Jenner, a member of Community Mennonite) convened regularly to discern an actionable goal: inviting the local town and county to join a national network called

Welcoming America. We now have an ongoing advisory council of city and county representatives (from the local government, schools, businesses, refugee resettlement and immigrant groups). This helps provide a structure for a more welcoming community for immigrants.

Our listening campaign for Round 2 (18 months ago) led to criminal justice reform. Here are highlights of what we heard along the way:

1. A survey of families visiting loved ones at the local jail identified the daily \$1/day "keep fee" charged to those being held as their biggest burden.
2. Rising rates of incarceration (even as crime rates go down) led our city to purchase hundreds of taxpayer-funded spaces in a regional jail to manage the overcrowding at our city jail.
3. We learned from analysts such as Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, and her exposure of the injustices inherent in the U.S. legal system.
4. The executive committee and many congregational representatives from Faith in Action (in conjunction with the local NAACP) attended seminars in racial equity, which taught us about white privilege, white supremacy and structural racism.
5. We heard from a local woman who did time in our jail and experienced the stripping away of dignity that too often accompanies incarceration. Now, having re-established herself in the civilian world with help from a local Church of the Brethren congregation, she spoke up for many



Trent Pace (left), a graduate student at James Madison University and an intern with Faith in Action, speaks with Cheryl Tharp, Faith in Action secretary and a member of Trinity Lutheran Church. Photo by Adriana Nateal Hammond

of the women who were consigned to cells alongside her but rarely felt the agency advocated for better treatment.

6. Learning from an African-American brother (Steven Thomas) representing Harrisonburg's historically black, northeast neighborhood, about an African-American woman (Charlotte Harris) who was lynched on the steps of the courthouse, the same place local Christian white folk bought and sold local Christian black folk.

We made three requests of our elected officials: (1) hire a community justice planner, funded by the city and county, to collect and analyze data on what is happening in our local justice system, then empower all relevant players to undertake proven strategies to reduce and prevent incarceration and recidivism;

(2) eliminate the daily keep fee charged inmates (and ultimately their families), which is up to the discretion of the local sheriff; and (3) expand restorative justice options for youth in our juvenile system.

Our City Council and County Board of Supervisors have now budgeted for a community justice planner. A turning-point came when our collective congregations (and partner organizations) rallied some 400 folks to parade to a local auditorium, where a neighboring community justice planner elucidated how his community reduced their incarceration rates. A national representative of county governments also highlighted best practices from around the country, especially addressing substance abuse and mental-illness dynamics fueling who gets locked up and separated from their jobs, families, churches and communities.

It was awesome to see 24 Faith

in Action banners (one for each congregation) at the entrance to the auditorium as local city councilors, county supervisors, law enforcement and people from the community walked in. Another key factor was dozens of one-on-one and small-delegation personal meetings with local officials by Faith in Action folk, which was coordinated by Art Stoltzfus, our half-time staff person, who is also a member of Community Mennonite. Another factor was just showing up and being a visible and vocal presence at many City Council meetings.

The sheriff has yet to budge on the keep fee, but the issue has been aired often in local newspaper, TV news and other public forums, so it will be on the table during the upcoming election. We also achieved an incremental gain on the restorative justice front through a small pilot program for juveniles.

We pray that the Spirit keeps leading us in the gospel tradition of the man from Nazareth, who came to bring good news to the poor, release to the prisoners, sight to the blind, bind up the broken, liberate the oppressed and grant Jubilee-forgiveness to those enslaved by debt and sin (Luke 4).

FURTHER RESOURCES

Faith in Action website: www.harrisonburgfaithinaction.org

Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing by Dennis A. Jacobsen

James Fallows, *Atlantic Monthly* (April), "Get Off My Lawn," outlines keys to winning a local organizing campaign: (1) showing up; (2) good facts; (3) right timing; (4) having a champion; (5) luck (or divine providence).



Kent Davis Sensenig is a member of Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.



BY GRETTA REMPEL

On being a conscientious objector

From left are Wilbur Litwiller, Wilbur Yoder, Wilford Yoder, and Joe Krabill (panelists), Dave Heusinkveld (interim pastor at West Union), Brandon Jimenez, Juli Montes de Oca, Gretta Rempel, and Mia Graber. Photo by Keith Slater

Mennonite youth learn about peace

Who is your hero? I thought about it as the sharing made its way around the circle of Mennonite youth. Maybe my great grandparents, who made their way to the Midwest and started a new life, or Marie Curie because she is a pioneer in science. My peers answered with George Washington, Menno Simons, Sojourner Truth, teachers, coaches, parents and grandparents. Society often glorifies veterans, but why didn't anyone name one as their hero? As the discussion grew, more questions followed. What does it mean to be a peacemaker or a peace church? What does Scripture say about being a peacemaker? And finally, What is a conscientious objector?

Karla Stoltzfus Detweiler, pastor of Christian formation at First Mennonite Church (FMC) in Iowa City, Iowa, led our gathering with these questions. Our high school youth group in Iowa City, which included youth from FMC and Torre Fuerte Iglesia Menonita, joined the youth group from West Union Mennonite Church in Parnell to focus on our answers to these challenging questions in a three-part discussion.

During our first session, Karla focused on living a peace-oriented life and the function of a peace church. We broke into small groups and tried to piece together short phrases Karla had given us to form a full passage centered around peace. Some of the passages were familiar, and the groups finished quickly, while others proved more challenging. I had heard these Scripture

passages before, some of them I even thought I knew well, but as the groups read theirs, Karla challenged us to see them differently. She explained the context in more detail, what was happening in biblical times and, sometimes to our surprise, how the words and concepts may have had a different meaning when they were written.

For example, Matthew 5:38-42 (NIV): "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'... If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles." Does this mean we should be a doormat and let people take advantage of us? That's how I interpreted it at first, but it's just the opposite. In its historical

Having this three-part discussion about being a conscientious objector helped me understand why I believe in a life of peacebuilding and servanthood.

context, Jesus was telling people how to peacefully assert power, and the examples in the verse are ways people can transform an unjust situation and avoided the doormat feeling.

Next we discussed how the passages apply to our lives and ways we can promote peace. Karla had a bullseye on a large paper on the wall. She'd labeled each ring with one of the following: earth/world, community, church, school, family, inner peace. We took a few minutes to write our ideas of how we can promote peace in each of these areas. I thought about what I do now to promote peace: getting to know new people in the community; participating in church activities by reading Scripture, teaching Sunday school or Bible school or ushering; doing my part to make my school a caring and supportive environment; first seeing good in people; getting along with my siblings; working on ways to feel renewed instead of stressed. Then we each put our notes in that area of the bullseye. The bullseye filled with notes and ideas. I was impressed to see the many ways even our small group can and does promote peace. We are only high schoolers; imagine what a difference we can make when we

work together. Karla summed up the message, quoting Palmer Becker: "Jesus is the center of our faith; community is the center of our lives; reconciliation is the center of our work."

This idea of peace threading through our whole life carried through into the second session, where we began talking more specifically about what it means to be a conscientious objector (CO). Both our churches invited men to share their experiences of being a CO during World War II and the Vietnam War. Our guests were Wilbur Litwiller, Darvin Yoder, Galen Yoder and Wilbur Yoder from West Union and Joe Krabill and Wilford Yoder from FMC. Several shared influential stories from their youth that sparked a peace mindset beyond what they learned while attending a Mennonite church or school, leading them to claim CO status. Another component many panelists touched on was how they pursued service as a result of being a CO. Many of the men continued to serve after fulfilling their required alternative service term and still live a life of intentional peacebuilding and servanthood.

Our final session focused on building our own CO file. How will we show that we are a peacemaker if there were a draft and we were faced with the possibility of serving in the military? In the past there wasn't a need for females to make a file because we were not included in the draft, but now there is a growing possibility that if there were a draft, women would be included. So we all began the discussion of what to include in our files, females included.

The Central Plains Mennonite Conference website includes resources for youth leaders that

our sponsors consulted. Our sponsors encouraged us to think about papers we've written for school that might support our view on peace. We could include a bulletin from our church that showed we attend a peace church or have a mentor or teacher write a letter explaining our character. I liked the idea of writing a letter to myself that included my view on peace, service opportunities I've had and information about attending and participating at FMC and at Iowa Mennonite School. Then I could mail the letter to myself but not open it. Then this letter and any other items I have could be assembled and given to our church to keep on file. All these options are ways we can show we are a CO because of our faith and not as a spur-of-the-moment excuse to avoid being drafted.

Having this three-part discussion about being a conscientious objector helped me understand why I believe in a life of peacebuilding and servanthood. Hearing stories of those who experienced a draft themselves and explanations of why claiming the status of CO made a difference in their lives solidified in me my nonviolence and peace mindset. I am grateful to be part of a peace church and loving community that encourages me to have heroes like Marie Curie and my grandparents, who spent most of their life volunteering for Mennonite Central Committee.



Gretta Rempel, who attends First Mennonite Church in Iowa City, just graduated from Iowa Mennonite School and will attend Goshen (Ind.) College this fall.

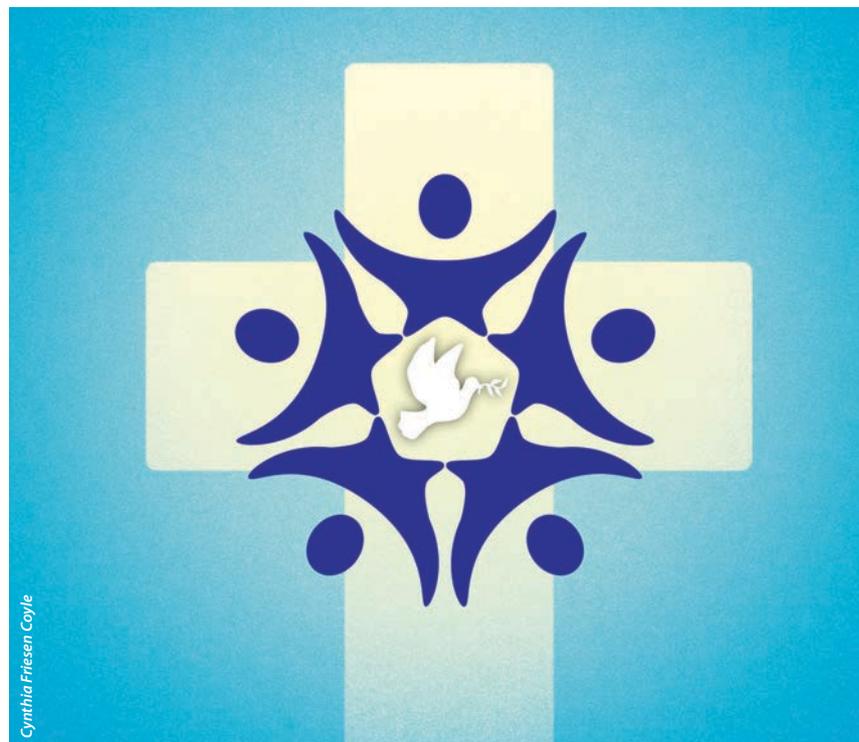
Sustainable peacemaking rooted in God's love

Anabaptist congregations seek to work for justice in the context of communities that take a long view

PEACEMAKING THAT happens in and through church communities is unique. Other faith traditions and secular organizations engage in peacemaking with great reach and effectiveness. And church peace initiatives can fall flat. But peacemaking done in the context of an Anabaptist community focused on Jesus offers me a sustainable approach.

Peacemaking rooted in congregations allows us to recognize and reject the injustice embedded in the systems around us. But it also leads to having dinner with Zacchaeus. Deep injustice can't be painted over with coats of genteel civility. Hard truths must be spoken; hard work must be done in the quest for justice. Yet pursuing peace between people is an equally important ingredient in a reconciled world. Congregations that keep Jesus at their center see that both are required. It takes a big vision to imagine both/and in place of either/or. Jesus opens our eyes to that vision, and our churches help keep them open.

Congregational peacemaking operates from a spirit of love. OK, not all the time, but most of the time. And that is difficult to do



Cynthia Friesen Coyle

these days. Outrage is rewarded in our culture, and anger is believed to be the only reliable motivator for change. There's no denying that anger does make things happen. But it doesn't seem to be part of Jesus' long-term plan for change. Church helps us keep love for God and neighbor in our hearts as we work for peace.

Peacemaking in the context of church reorients our sense of time and purpose. Peacemaking can exhaust us on all levels. We see urgent needs; we see injustice. We take on the responsibility of immediately changing it. Yet change rarely happens as quickly as we would like. What's worse, we often aren't around to see change bear its fruit. The best peacemaking sometimes is just inching things forward while preparing others to take the baton.

It can be frustrating if you think the fate of the world rests on your shoulders. But the church is part of a larger, longer story—

God's story. We take part in God's mission of reconciliation. Often we wonder about the timing of the mission, if it is still actually operating. Ultimately, we can rest in the knowledge of God's faithfulness, displayed in ways and at times we don't always understand. This knowledge is perhaps key to preserving the long game of peacemaking.

Like many of you, I'm also involved in peacemaking organizations and initiatives that aren't faith-based. They are filled with wonderful people and worthy, noble goals. But the peacemaking that renews me happens through the church, keeps my heart and eyes open and affords a joy I haven't found elsewhere.

For congregational peacemaking resources, visit www.pjsn.org.

Jason Boone for Mennonite Mission Network

Stay in MC USA or leave?

Florida congregations explore where to affiliate

THE CONGREGATIONS OF Southeast Mennonite Conference (SMC) are reanalyzing their future after delegates at a March meeting decided to delay action on a decision for where to affiliate.

Following a three-year discernment process, SMC delegates voted last October on a proposal brought by the conference's seven-member Leadership Board to leave Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). Of the 27 delegates present, representing 16 of SMC's 25 congregations, 18 voted yes, eight voted no, and one abstained. The proposal also directed the Leadership Board to bring delegates new affiliation options by March.

Delegates gathered March 2 at Iglesia Menonita Arca de Salvación in Fort Myers, Fla., to consider where to affiliate. Prior to the meeting, SMC leadership circulated a grid with several affiliation options and, at the meeting, presented LMC (formerly Lancaster Mennonite Conference) as their choice for affiliation. LMC representatives attended the meeting.

After much discussion, SMC moderator Michael Zehr made a recommendation, and delegates agreed, to delay taking action on where to collectively affiliate until later this year.

"It became clear to me that we weren't ready to make a decision," said Zehr, who is also a church

planter in Key West, Fla.

Following last October's vote, MC USA Executive Board staff asked SMC to provide a date the conference would leave the denomination. Delegates at the March 2 meeting took action to affirm an exit date of March 16.

"Southeast Conference leadership's mandate was to investigate affiliation options, and they came back with one option, an option of leaving MC USA and joining LMC," says Roy Williams, pastor of College Hill Mennonite Church in Tampa, Fla. "But there were those of us who voted not to leave MC USA, about a third of us who did not agree with leaving. Are we cut out of the picture?"

Williams asked Zehr for permission to invite representatives of congregations that wanted to remain part of MC USA to join him for lunch, and Zehr granted this. Representatives from nine congregations met with Williams, who was moderator of MC USA from 2005 to 2007.

Steve Kriss, executive minister of Franconia Mennonite Conference (FMC), sent a letter March 12, offering support to MC USA's Florida congregations, in response to outreach from Williams, who is now acting moderator of the group seeking to remain part of MC USA.

Michael Danner, associate executive director for church vitality and engagement for MC USA, sent a letter March 13 to MC USA's Florida congregations saying the denomination was earmarking stipend money for staff to work with any congregations seeking to remain part of MC USA.

Effective March 15, Marco Güete is interim leadership minister at FMC, working as

the staff leader of congregations seeking to remain part of MC USA. Güete also works at Mennonite Education Agency with its initiatives with Spanish-speaking leadership development and formation. He is a former conference minister for SMC.

According to Güete, some congregations "didn't like LMC for affiliation because they didn't agree with LMC's structure."

Although SMC left MC USA on March 16, the denomination is allowing all congregations that have been part of SMC one year to determine their affiliation. The denomination will, if requested, hold ministerial credentials for that time period.

Representatives from seven congregations met April 13 at Iglesia Menonita Arca de Salvación in Fort Myers. Additional participants were Kriss; Noel Santiago, FMC leadership minister; Dawn Yoder Graber, MC USA Executive Board member; and Mauricio Chenlo, minister for church planting for Mennonite Mission Network.

The representatives took three actions by consensus: (1) to take several months to engage in dialogue about potentially joining FMC; (2) to affirm Güete and Williams in their roles and name Rick Lee, pastor of Homestead (Fla.) Mennonite Church, as the group's secretary and treasurer; (3) to allow College Hill Mennonite Church to receive financial contributions on behalf of the group.

As of May 1, SMC has 23 congregations, including those seeking to remain part of MC USA.

Sheldon C. Good for *TMail*



WHAT I'M
WATCHING
THIS MONTH



Us

Directed by Jordan Peele

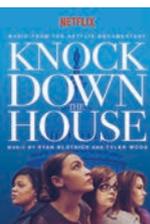
Peele uses the horror genre to explore identity from many angles, including class. A family encounters four menacing strangers who look just like them. When asked who they are, they say, “We’re Americans.” Us also means U.S. Jeremiah 11:11 is a key to what’s happening.



The Mustang

Directed by Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre

A violent convict gets the chance to help train wild mustangs as part of a rehabilitation program. (These actually exist.) While the plot is predictable, it remains a moving film with insights into the relationship of anger and violence.



Knock Down the House

Directed by Rachel Lears

This documentary on Netflix looks at four female candidates who sought to make history in the 2018 midterm elections. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is the only one elected, but they all represent a movement for progressive change.



Books on guns, Jesus, films

IT’S TIME TO CATCH UP on some recent books.

Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence is accessibly written and presented in an appealing format. Bestselling author Shane Claiborne and Mennonite pastor turned blacksmith Michael Martin, founder of RAWtools, which turns guns into garden tools, use statistics and stories to present the problem of gun violence. But they go on to posit a hopeful, biblical and commonsense approach to addressing this critical issue.

Two scholarly books look at Jesus. In *Jesus According to the New Testament*, James D.G. Dunn considers each New Testament writer’s perspective on Jesus. In *Jesus and the Last Supper*, Brant Pitre argues that “Jesus saw his actions at the Last Supper as the culmination of the new exodus, through the establishment of a new covenant sacrifice that would be sealed in his own blood.” Both reward close study.

Two books offer Christian perspectives on film. *Deep Focus: Film and Theology in Dialogue* by Robert K. Johnson, Craig Detweiler and Kutter Callaway not only offers insights into how films are made but explores how they draw viewers into their own search for meaning. *Cinematic Faith: A Christian Perspective on Movies and Meaning* by William D. Romanowski presents “movie musings” on popular films, highlighting the benefits of a

faith-informed approach that centers on art and perspective.

In *Scripture, Ethics and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships*, Karen R. Keen helpfully addresses this topic by “attending to the overarching intent of biblical mandates, engaging in a deliberative process for creation ordinances, discussing honestly the feasibility of celibacy and reflecting on the fall in light of science.” Her evenhanded approach is much needed.

BTW: Getting Serious About Following Jesus by Derek Vreeland proclaims that “Christianity is principally a way of living shaped by the Holy Spirit around the death and resurrection of Jesus,” rather than about how to get saved or have a personal relationship with Jesus.

For those looking to improve their prayer life, *When Poets Pray* by Marilyn McEntyre is a good resource. McEntyre offers meditations on poetry from an array of poets—from Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot to Lucille Clifton and Joy Harjo. This is a book to savor.

In *The Practice of Finding: How Gratitude Leads the Way to Enough*, Holly W. Whitcomb writes: “When we engage in finding, we recognize in a kind of humility and wonder that the universe contains possibilities beyond our power to imagine.” Reading this book can be life changing.

Gordon Houser is editor of *The Mennonite*.



QUOTABLE

“Sometimes the Pharisees, like any good friend, partner or therapist, confuse and annoy me. They do not create simple narratives and, for this reason, they help me grow.”

—Addie Liechty, a psychotherapist, singer-songwriter and writer of poetry and essays living in the Bay Area of California. Addie grew up in Indianapolis and attended Goshen (Ind.) College for their bachelor's degree and Smith College for their master's of social work.



MOST-READ ARTICLES ONLINE

5.1K
An apology for Alcatraz
by Duane Stoltzfus

1.4K
Florida congregations explore where to affiliate
by Sheldon C. Good

1.4K
An overdue letter to Rachel Held Evans
by Ben Wideman

1.2K
Goshen College professor Deb Detwiler dies at age 62
by Goshen College

FROM THE ARCHIVES



Pax workers in Algeria

Mennonite congregations share a long history of promoting relief and service work as an alternative to participation in war. In this photo from 1955, Pax workers (from left to right) Donald Reist, Pierre Nussbaumer, Walter Smeltzer, Wayne Lapp and Robert Weaver pause for a photo at their work camp in Chasserian, Algeria. With support from the Mennonite Relief and Service Committee, the Pax program in Algeria began in 1955. Volunteers built 30 homes for refugees of the Algerian Revolution. In total, hundreds of North American Mennonite conscientious objectors served through the Pax program in the 1950s and '60s in multiple locations around the world.

Citation: Mennonite Board of Missions Photographs, Algeria Pax, 1955-1963, IV-10-7.2, Box 1, Folder 27, Photo 6, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Elkhart, Ind.

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RECIPE OF THE MONTH | Lebanese-inspired tomato and cucumber salad
You can find the recipe on our website at themennonite.org/hungryhounds

PERSPECTIVES FROM READERS

In hope the church can reflect its founder

I AM READY TO OUT MYSELF.

I am one of those Millennial Christians who has found it difficult to attend church regularly in spite of the fact that I do not find it difficult to be publicly and personally known as an Anabaptist-Mennonite Christian. And while I do not feel a need to explain why that is, I want to.

I am uncomfortable speaking on behalf of my generation, so know these words come through a personal lens. At the same time,

I don't want to be part of a community that doesn't risk its privilege, power, wealth and access for those that have none of the above.

I am uncomfortable speaking on behalf of an entire race of people but am often asked to speak about issues related to racism, though I know full well my words are too heavily weighted toward the perspectives of all people of color. This is part of the reality of coming from marginalized and minority communities.

I want the church to be more interested in tangible action than in defending historically dogmatic principles rooted in out-of-context time periods. The biblical narratives (speaking just of Christianity) and church history are helpful in that they show us

how other people wrestled in their own time periods with the changing dynamics of their ever-evolving societies. To attempt to simply lay the end results of those communities' struggles upon the challenges of our own time is a foolish errand whose only real advantage is to protect entrenched positions of power.

What about the churches featured in this issue where peace is on some level part of their community life? I offer a hearty congratulations. I hope we continue to highlight such congregations, not as outliers but as models for the rest of us. A complacent church is a dead church. One that remains on the sidelines of political and social changes in society is a dead church, no matter how big or small it is.

It is hard for me to continue to attend churches whose primary focus is inward. Too many churches continue to want to make people change how God created them in order to be a part of the community. Have we forgotten that "Israel" literally means "one who wrestled with God"? Have we forgotten that Jesus was fully human (also fully divine, but one does not outweigh the other)? Thus we have no excuse not to be *as* Christ instead of just *like* Christ.

The Afghanistan War began in 2001 and continues today. The (second) Iraq War officially ran from 2003 to 2011, but it continues in various capacities. The Trump administration is saber rattling, threatening to go to war with Iran and doing everything it

can not to keep tensions at bay in Yemen, Venezuela and countless other places. Yet visible and vocal opposition to these conflicts in the church (even our Anabaptist churches) is at its quietest.

Too often, I fear I am invited to preach on issues of peace, social justice, and race so that the conversation doesn't have to happen the rest of the year. And even if there are more sermons from the pulpit about current global and local events of injustice, the question has to be raised about whether anything happens beyond the talk (which is mostly from the pulpit, not from the pews).

Yes, I want to be a regular part of a community that cares about me and one that I also care about. But I don't want to be part of a community that doesn't risk its privilege, power, wealth and access for those that have none of the above and actively rejects what I believe in. That's what Jesus did. Ultimately, what I want from church is that it helps me live life the way Jesus would be living if he were walking around as flesh and blood today.

For more, follow these links:

www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/generational-cohort/younger-millennial

www.prii.org/spotlight/millennials-leave-their-churches-over-science-lesbian-gay-issues



Kevin M. Ressler has an M.Div. and is executive director of Meals on Wheels of Lancaster, Pa., and a frequent preacher in churches.

BY AND ABOUT YOUNG ADULTS

Where do I fit?

A FEW MONTHS AGO, an academic counselor at Goshen (Ind.) College and my best friend, Jesse Loewen, shared on stage at a convocation some of his experiences being a black Mennonite. It was a display of emotion and vulnerability I was lucky to see from 500 miles away because someone recorded it and shared it with me.

As I sat back and reflected on it, I was reminded how grateful I was to have someone who could identify and vocalize so many of the things I have felt and struggled with throughout my upbringing, as I'm sure many others have.

I lived in Cleveland for the first seven years of my life and went to a predominantly black Mennonite church where my mother was a pastor. When we moved to northern Indiana, my surroundings changed drastically. Predominantly black switched to predominantly white. By the time middle school came around, I was going to a white majority Christian school.

Growing up Mennonite in the Goshen/Elkhart area, I felt there was a path set out for me to take. After attending Bethany Christian Schools, I went down the street to Goshen College. This planted me in a deeply Mennonite surrounding, which shaped a large part of who I am.

Did this influence my perceived "blackness"? It's complicated. My father is white, and my mother is black. My two brothers stayed in Cleveland, and my sister went to public school. Why is this important? Because I

had to figure out a lot of things on my own. Navigating which spaces where you truly feel like you belong isn't easy, and I still don't think I've figured it out. Rather, I've just gotten over it.

Many times I've been told I "talk white" or have been called an "oreo." I never went to the local barber shop (dreadlocks have their benefits), so I never felt the need for a lineup, though I'm often told I need one.

Struggling to try to understand how I fit into the world around me has greatly increased my own understanding of who I am.

On the other hand, the Mennonite mold is something I've never completely fit either. Sometimes there are spaces where I feel the odd one out because of the color of my skin, while other times I feel tokenized. This isn't always the case, but it's something that is consistently in the back of my mind. I also haven't been able to get the four-part harmony thing down.

I've had these questions in my mind: Do I have too many white friends? Is it OK for me to be interested in this? Or I've thought, I have to do my best to uphold the image of this certain part of my background.

Between these two worlds, other life circumstances have pushed me farther away from the identity I had imagined for myself growing up. Life happens, and it shapes everyone in different ways. The good and the bad mold us in drastic and sometimes subtle ways.

Jesse and I have spent hours discussing such topics, whether it is grieving, empathizing or just laughing about situations we've shared. Some of them we've experienced together, some of them alone. It's an unmistakable feeling when someone can echo your feelings this way.

These identity crises, experiences and conversations have made me who I am. Struggling to try to understand how I fit into the world around me has greatly increased my own understanding of who I am. This allows me the freedom to express myself through aspects of my identity in ways I was hesitant to in the past, rather than be bound to shallow stereotypes of my background.

I'm lucky to have someone who has shared such similar experiences as I have. This is not a luxury everyone has.

I encourage you to explore these areas of yourself; discuss them with people you trust. You never know what someone else has been through themselves.



Joshua Stoltzfus is an aspiring journalist in St. Paul, Minn.



FROM MENNONITE CHURCH USA

Savoring the moment

RECENTLY, A GROUP of young adults gathered in Goshen, Ind., to spend a weekend delving into the topic of identity as Asian Anabaptists. We wanted to have a candid conversation about the struggle of owning the Anabaptist

We were trying to make do with what we had, and what resulted was a holy feast. It was amusing, confusing and inevitably sacred.

faith and the Korean cultural identity that has been passed down to us. How do we receive this unusual mix of identities as a gift?

When it was time for our first dinner together, what was brought to the table was a tentative understanding of our identities. We prepared a Korean dinner with the ingredients that were available—lettuce and radishes harvested from Indiana soil, meat for our Korean barbeque, specially cut from a local Amish butcher. The host took out a small jar of her mother's homemade soybean paste, fermented and sent from Korea. She shared her precious stash to make a pungent tofu soybean soup for the special

guests.

When she took out a jar of *kimchi*, I asked if it was homemade. The host laughed and said it was store bought. We were trying to make do with what we had, and what resulted was a holy feast. It was amusing, confusing and inevitably sacred.

While each person had brought their own idea of identity and self, the community that everyone sought after in their mind was actualized through this smoky and aromatic meal together. As we ate, we went around and shared our favorite comfort food from childhood.

We didn't need to explain what we shared—*d dukpokki*, *sujaebi*, *sulungtang*. Collective sounds of agreement and hunger followed every answer. Many of us had the longing for a motherland, even though some of us were born in the United States, and we seemed to live vicariously through this meal together.

Korean barbeque with Amish meat, served at an interracial couple's house in Indiana, the 13 of us looking for a connection in our identities as it lay right before our eyes. We found ourselves at the table and took in every moment as a gift.

Sue Park-Hur is denominational minister for leadership development for Mennonite Church USA.

UPDATES

MDS CANADA SENDS WORKERS TO BRITISH COLUMBIA TOWN

Almost a year ago, after days of heavy rain on deep snow, the Kettle and Granby rivers overflowed their banks and inundated the southern B.C. city of Grand Forks. Mennonite Disaster Service Canada sent volunteers there in May to build and repair houses damaged by the flood.

MC USA ANNOUNCES EB STAFF TRANSITIONS

Mennonite Church USA announces the following Executive Board staff transitions: Janie Beck Kreider will complete her service as director of communications for MC USA in August. Perry Krehbiel served his last day as finance assistant for MC USA on March 28 and began his retirement. Wil LaVeist will be adding MC USA chief communications officer to his current duties as the senior executive for resourcing and engagement at Mennonite Mission Network, beginning Aug. 1.

BETHEL COLLEGE MAKES ADMINISTRATIVE APPOINTMENTS

Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., has named Bradley Kohlman as vice president for institutional advancement, beginning in February, and Tricia Clark as director of the Office of Institutional Communication and Marketing, beginning in April.

A WORD FROM PASTORS

(Not) reading the Bible

I'M COMMITTING MORE

Scripture to memory. It's not easy, but I have some support from the Shenandoah Valley Biblical Storytellers. If you're looking for a natural adrenaline rush, you might try learning a Scripture passage by heart and sharing it. I'm confident the pastors, worship leaders and teachers of your congregation will welcome an offer of your sharing Scripture from memory sometime this summer. However, if you're a thrill seeker, share your Scripture in a surprising context.

A few years ago, I recited a Psalm of justice (Psalm 146) at a rally and march for local poultry workers. My heart was pounding because the outdoor microphone system wasn't predictable. My timing felt off because every few verses an interpreter was making the Psalm accessible for those in the crowd whose first language was Spanish. Yet ears and hearts were open to hear Scripture in a fresh way because people don't usually recite Scripture at a justice rally. Clergy usually show up and preach a short sermon, pray spontaneously or read a prayer.

Even if you're not interested in learning Scripture by heart, you might try reading the Bible again. But before you take the plunge, here are a few reasons not to read the Bible: (1) Deep engagement with Scripture requires a degree of leisure typical of "simpler times" and is not practical for full-time students, parents or workers. Further, depending on your commitments in later years, such as retirement, you may not have spare time for Bible reading. (2) Biblical stories and Christian

theology are too simplistic, too abstract or too exclusive to address the complexities of our lives, which include global climate change, economic instability, intercultural and multifaith

At least listen to the Scripture that comes your way.

relationships, rapid social change and seismic shifts in traditional church structures. (3) You already know the Bible. You've taken classes and listened to sermons. You're so churchy you read your denominational magazine. You're not a Bible expert, but you're not going to be surprised by the content, context, tone or implications of these words.

These are actually excuses— attractive ones that position us as culturally superior to believers from other times and places. Following Huldah and Josiah (2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34) in their great Bible reading breakthrough, let's exercise some humility, shall we?

If you're not going to continue, refresh or begin a Bible reading habit, then at least listen to the Scripture that comes your way. What if Scripture is one way God is trying to get your attention? Listen to the Scripture in the worship service you attend. See whether you can remember what you heard later in the week. Pay attention to the Scripture posted by those "other" Christians—on their church sign, T-shirt, email signature or canvas bag. Listen for Scripture in the songs or hymns

you sing and hear this week. Recall a passage that was once important for you and listen to it in your current situation.

My husband and I just finished watching the second season of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Even though this dystopian series based on Margaret Atwood's novel is violent and depressing, I kept watching because the show depicts realistic survival tactics employed by people living under oppressive regimes. The show also includes a steady and alarming use of Scripture to justify oppression. But in the last episode of the second season, one of the characters we love to hate has a transformative experience. She reads, shares and later recites Scripture in order to resist oppression and bless a future generation. It's a hopeful breakthrough. Maybe we'll watch season three.

Breakthroughs in mission, peace and justice are traced to ordinary believers who listen for God's Word, pray as if prayer matters, trust the Holy Spirit and respond by offering their lives. At least, that's what Jesus did.

"Blessings come to those who read and proclaim these words aloud; blessings come to those who listen closely and put the prophetic words recorded here into practice" (Revelation 1:3 *The Voice*).



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

For the record

To submit births, marriages or deaths, log on to themennonite.org, use the "About Us" tab and select "Contact Us" from the drop-down menu. You may also use email, editor@themennonite.org, or mail, 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517.

BIRTHS

Welch, Hannah Emily, was born April 1, to Matt and Emily Habschmidt Welch, Goshen, Ind.

DEATHS

Good, Olive Pearl Snider, 99, St. Jacobs, Ontario, died March 25. Spouse: Raymond Good (deceased). Parents: Elias and Sarah Bechtel Snider. Children: Sandra Sittler, Sheri Brubacher, Mary Good; three

grandchildren; six great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 1 at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church.

Greaser, Eva Godshall, 91, Lansdale, Pa., died April 1. Spouse: Robert "Bob" Alderfer Greaser (deceased). Parents: Jonathan B. and Mamie M. Metz Godshall. Children: Jonathan Garth Greaser, David Myron Greaser; one grandson. Funeral: April 6 at Plains Mennonite Church, Hatfield, Pa.

Holaway, Carroll LaMar, 86, Goshen, Ind., died April 14. Spouse: Barbara Thut Holaway (deceased). Parents: Clarence and Ella Mullet Holaway. Children: Brian Holaway, Brent Holaway, Bruce Holaway; five grandchildren; four great-grandchildren. Funeral: April 18 at College Mennonite Church, Goshen.

Swarr, Bertha Wenger, 86, Harrisonburg, Va., died April 9. Spouse: Paul Leaman Swarr. Parents: Jesse Walter and Ella Lehman Wenger.

Children: David Swarr, Evelyn Hostetter, Carolyn Stauffer; seven grandchildren; three great-grandchildren. Memorial service: May 11 at Ridgeway Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

Widmer, Daniel Dean, 93, Albany, Ore., died April 14. Spouse: Edna Mildred Leichthy Widmer (deceased). Parents: Christian and Elizabeth Widmer. Children: Lucy Noftsier, David Widmer, Sarah Mock, Laura Harder, Tim Widmer; 11 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren. Memorial service: June 15, Albany Mennonite Church.

Widmer, Edna Mildred Leichthy, 91, Albany, Ore., died April 10. Spouse: Daniel Dean Widmer (deceased). Parents: Nicholas and Magdalena Mauer Leichthy. Children: Lucy Noftsier, David Widmer, Sarah Mock, Laura Harder, Tim Widmer; 11 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren. Memorial service: June 15, Albany Mennonite Church.

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colossianforum.org/conference

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Dr. Ruth Haley Barton
Founding President/CEO,
Transforming Center



Dr. Bungishabaku Katho
Professor, Shalom University
of Bunia, Democratic
Republic of Congo



Dr. Robert Chao Romero
Professor, Chicano/
Latino Studies, UCLA



Rev. Michael Gulker
President,
The Colossian Forum



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CLASSIFIEDS

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) is seeking a **full-time fleet and logistics manager** that will oversee all functions related to managing the MDS vehicles, equipment and warehouses. This role is based in Lititz, Pa. Applicants must be active in an Anabaptist church and committed to the Anabaptist faith and peace position. See the full job description at mds.mennonite.net/who-we-are/employment. Resumes may be sent to jobs@mds.mennonite.net or MDS, Attn: Human Resources, 583 Airport Rd, Lititz, PA 17543. Review of resumes begins immediately. Recruitment continues until the position is filled.

Madison Mennonite Church, Madison, Wisc., seeks **full-time pastor** to lead progressive, open and affirming, spiritually engaged and community-oriented congregation, member of Central District Conference. We seek someone who is comfortable being the sole pastor (or pastor team) in our vibrant Mennonite congregation that values following Jesus, peace, justice, inclusivity, service, community, spiritual growth. Madison is the capital of Wisconsin and has a world-class university, a great place to live. Contact conference minister Doug Luginbill, 419-296-4758, or confmin@mcusa.org.

Goshen College seeks a **full-time technical director**. For further information and to apply, go to www.goshen.edu/employment.

Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kan., believes God is calling one of God's beloved to be our **lead pastor**, joining two others on our pastoral team. IS IT YOU? This **full-time** position focuses on preaching, teaching, administration and relational ministry. Our congregation of approximately 250 active

members/attendees appreciates its intergenerational Christian community, serving nearby and far away. Email search committee via judydreimer03@gmail.com for more information. www.whitestonemc.com.

Encounter Cuba in an up close and personal people-to-people experience sponsored by the MEDA Sarasota Chapter. Explore this fascinating country that's been off limits to most Americans for more than 50 years. Experience the sights and sounds of Cuba and see life up close through the eyes of Cuban guides and the many Cuban people you'll meet. Dates for this unique and affordable adventure are Nov. 9-16, 2019, March 7-14, 2020, and Nov. 7-14, 2020. Scholarships available for full-time students and recent graduates. For further information contact MEDA. Sarasota.Cuba@gmail.com or 574-849-2751.

Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, Lombard, Ill., is searching to fill the soon to be vacant **LMPC executive director** position to provide overall leadership for its peacemaking ministry. Training and experience in Christian conflict transformation and mediation is required, with an emphasis on equipping church leaders and serving as a mediator in the midst of congregational conflict. Write to searchcommittee@LMPeaceCenter.org for a ministry description and application materials.

Franconia Mennonite Church, a congregation of 450 active members in southeastern Pennsylvania, is seeking to fill **two half-time ministry positions**. The first role is **director of music and worship**, which provides overall leadership for the congregation's various music and corporate worship ministries. The

second role is **director of children's ministry**, which provides overall leadership for all ministries involving children (infant-grade 5). Qualified applicants will be passionate about Jesus Christ, have a heart for ministry as well as administrative capabilities, and affirm the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. A full job description for each position can be found at franconiamennonite.org. To express interest in either/both roles, or to request further information, please contact FranconiaSearchTeam@gmail.com.

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



Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth allows young people (grades 10 to 12) to engage their faith questions and test their leadership gifts.

The program includes:

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Visit ams.edu/explore

STORIES FROM THE GLOBAL MENNONITE CHURCH

Mennonites' reluctance to share the gospel

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) sponsored a mission workshop in Bourbon, Ind., not far from my home in Goshen, to train lay evangelists for witness to a newly targeted “unreached people group.” My interest was piqued. I was aware Pentecostal churches were among the fastest-growing Christian groups in the world, and that many of the growing Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America were influenced in one way or another by Pentecostal theology and worship practices. So I probed a bit more.

To my astonishment, I discovered that the primary focus of the UPCI workshop was to train attendees in “strategies for reaching the Amish-Mennonite people” with the message of the gospel so that Mennonites, too, might “become part of the family of God.” We were the “unreached people group” who were the target of the seminar.

Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the sessions. But a telephone conversation with the then-director of the church’s Multicultural Ministries program, himself a former Mennonite, led to an extended conversation in my office several months later. The picture of Mennonites that emerged was a caricature, to be sure—revealing no awareness of the ethnic diversity of Mennonites today or the fact that most Mennonites in the world do not live in North America. But the image is one that many of us would likely have recognized nonetheless.

Mennonites, the UPCI

spokesperson said, are good people, but they have been badly misled. They are burdened by tradition, they think good deeds will save them, and they are generally uninterested in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Even worse, he continued, Mennonites don’t have a sense of Christian joy and are embarrassed to talk about their faith. “They just don’t seem to have a sense of urgency about their witness,” he concluded.

We have been entrusted with a wonderful treasure, one meant to be shared.

I am convinced that the UPCI was wrong to target Amish-Mennonites as “an unreached people group.” But as I travel throughout our global church, I am often struck by the joyful confidence I see among other Mennonite brothers and sisters as they openly share their faith.

As North Americans, we are rarely hesitant to express our personal convictions—sometimes with great fervor—about political matters, dietary revelations, cell phone companies or environmental concerns. Why then should we assume it to be inappropriate, or somehow inherently coercive, to talk openly with others about our faith?

The gospel is as simple as it is profound. We are loved fully and unconditionally by God; indeed,

God loved us while we were still “enemies of God” (Romans 5:8, 10). As recipients of that gracious act of love—the gift of “preemptive forgiveness”—we are called to reflect that same kind of love to others, including our enemies. Having received healing through Christ, we are invited to participate in the healing of the broken world around us.

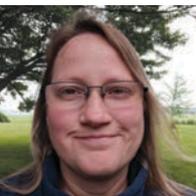
This simple message—at the core of Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice for nearly five centuries—is good news. Such good news, in fact, that we should not be silent.

This does not mean we reduce our faith to a sales pitch, a clever argument or a simplistic series of verbal agreements. But we have been entrusted with a wonderful treasure, one meant to be shared that is the source of great joy, even in the midst of the world’s pain.

What would happen if you decided to be bolder in speech, witnessing to others in word as well as in deeds? What would happen if you would embrace the good news with a new sense of urgency? What would happen if it were said of North American Mennonites, as with Peter in the days following Pentecost (Acts 4:20): “They cannot help but speak about what they have seen and heard”?



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FROM THE EDITOR

Living into new ways of thinking

THE LETTER IN OUR mailbox was unremarkable, and it was out of the ordinary to receive mail from our local congregation. But nothing prepared me for how its contents would shake my comfortable church life.

In the letter, our pastor described his vision for the congregation as being at odds with the current leadership and their vision for the church. To avoid becoming the cause of a divided church, he chose to resign as lead pastor.

It wasn't long before small groups of us met in homes and coffee shops and Sunday school classrooms to figure out what we could do to change his mind. In our panic, we believed we could keep from losing a gifted leader and friend. We were angry. We were in pain. We were grieving. Our beloved pastor was resigning and there was nothing we could do to stop it.

Richard Rohr, a Catholic author on spirituality, writes: "We

do not think ourselves into new ways of living; we live ourselves into new ways of thinking." This is exactly where our church is right now. We are working with a transitional pastor who is helping us identify patterns within our congregational history and question where it has gone right and where it has gone wrong and what we can do to spot unhealthy patterns early on.

We are working to rebuild our community and understand how to be a church again.

Congregations experience conflict. They just do. When you bring together different people with different backgrounds, different ideas and different life experiences, they are going to see the world and the church differently.

But what if conflict isn't the end of the world?

For my congregation, losing our pastor has created opportunities for creativity, growth and transformation. We are learning to come together as a collection of unique and extraordinary followers of Jesus to restore our church to wholeness. Through monthly meetings, we are working to rebuild our community and understand how to be a church again.

For too long our congregation tried to think ourselves into new ways of living, and it brought us loss and grief and pain. As we move forward toward wholeness with one another, I hope we continue to live ourselves into new ways of thinking, appreciate our uniqueness and move toward fullness in Christ.

Rebecca Helmuth,
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