

The Mennonite

The unexpected

INSIDE

A bend in the road

How we imagine faith

Look for the
Syro-Phoenician woman

How you can give with faith

Four thoughts on using an Everence® donor advised fund for generosity



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TheMennonite

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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.

Medicare for all

Although the stories in the September issue were touching and indicative of part of the problem with health care in the United States, it skirted around a major solution.

We spend almost \$11,000 per person yearly on health care, yet we still have 30-40 million uninsured and nearly twice that many who are underinsured. People are not going to the doctor for fear of affordability or simply because the doctor will not see them. Health-care costs are the number one cause of bankruptcy, and an estimated 30,000 deaths per year are due to lack of insurance.

Fortunately, there is an answer for this problem that is being noticed and supported by those who understand it—Medicare for all. This means only one insurance company. Everyone would have health insurance from birth to death. No more bills for doctor visits, hospitalizations, nursing-home care, eye care or prescription medications.

Administrative costs of health care now approach 20%. Hospitals employ one insurance clerk for every patient bed. Medicare covers about 65% of health-care costs with an administrative fee around 3%. CEOs of large insurance companies take home millions of dollars. The savings from eliminating

private insurance companies would be astronomical.

To pay for this would require around 6-7% of payroll tax. Figure the money you spent for insurance, deductibles, extra charges, medications and eye care, then add what your employer paid for your insurance. See if that approaches 7% of your pay.

Making health care available to everyone is the Christian thing to do. If Everence wants to help all people lacking health care due to availability, they should support Medicare for all.

For more information about Medicare for all, look at the Physicians for a National Health Plan (PNHP) website. Or write me at markkrehbiel@sbcglobal.net.

—Mark Krehbiel, M.D., *Salina, Kan.*

Franconia, Eastern District conferences reconcile

Thanks for this good news. A unity story? Practicing reconciliation. Maybe we can learn to shorten the timeline for other disputes and struggles.

—Gerald Shenk, *Facebook*

Bethel College adds food pantry for students

Good idea, yet...is Bethel College not affordable for some students? Maybe have cards that are swiped in the cafeteria and no one knows who is getting free meals or paying for them. It's done that way in public schools. Think about it.

—Carla Nafziger Graydus, *Facebook*

The cafeteria closes over breaks (winter break, spring break) when a majority of students return home. This is a way for students who remain on campus for breaks to eat, especially students who don't have access to cars for off-campus restaurants or money for meals when the cafeteria isn't serving.

—Nate Kroeker, *Facebook*

IN THIS ISSUE

When Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to “the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32), it was unexpected. This month we look at stories of the unexpected in people’s lives.

Poet Jean Janzen (page 10) describes the unexpected in writing poems. Laurie Oswald Robinson (page 12) writes about bends in the road that require shifts. Benjamin J. Tapper (page 16) testifies about moving deeper into mystery. Elizabeth Reimer (page 19) offers her faith journey of coming out as queer and being accepted by her church. Doug Hostetter (page 22) tells about his efforts to bring North Koreans and others together to talk. I write about a learning trip in October to immigration ministries in Tucson, Ariz. (page 25). The editorial argues that interruptions may signal something better yet to come.—*Editor*

READERS’ POLL



20.7%
personal devotions

0%
fasting

58.6%
waiting and preparing

20.7%
not focused on Advent

Total number of responses: 29

Look for the next poll question on *The Mennonite’s* Facebook and Twitter pages.



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News Briefs

COMPILED BY
GORDON HOUSER

The Mennonite, Inc., board looks at ongoing operations, merger

At its Nov. 2 meeting in Elkhart, Ind., the board of directors of The Mennonite, Inc. (TMI), reviewed the organization's ongoing operations and looked with excitement at the continued work with Mennonite World Review, Inc. (MWR), to form a new, independent Anabaptist communications nonprofit that will release new print and digital products in 2020.

Sheldon C. Good, executive director of TMI, noted that alongside an ongoing decline in print circulation, there is

steady digital growth as new readers continue to subscribe to the weekly newsletter *TMail*, follow The Mennonite on Facebook and Instagram, and consume and share content online.

Good said some print readers—both groups and individuals—have asked how their subscriptions will be impacted by the transition next year. Anyone with time left on their subscription will have it added on to their subscription of the new magazine that will begin publishing in September 2020. For those who subscribe to *The Mennonite* and *Mennonite World Review*, their remaining time will be combined and added to their new subscription.

The TMI board gave input on possible names for the new magazine, and they provided counsel on digital strategy and objectives such as content and audience growth. The TMI board also discussed the forming of the new organization's board of directors, which will be comprised of a combination of

individuals selected by the TMI board and the MWR board.

Prior to the TMI board meeting, a task force of members from the TMI and MWR boards and staff, including Good and MWR editor Paul Schrag, met in Goshen, Ind. They discussed the new organization's identity, purpose and core values.

The task force looked at commitments for the new organization related to intercultural inclusion in areas such as governance and staffing. The group also discussed inclusion of content and readers from the Anabaptist movement beyond Mennonite Church USA such as Mennonite Brethren, LMC and the growing number of people interested in Anabaptism outside of traditional denominations.

Like MWR, the new organization will not be affiliated with any denomination or conference. And like TMI, it will give priority to serving the members of MC USA, who are also MWR's largest constituency.

—*The Mennonite, Inc.*



Jodi H. Beyeler

Goshen College workshop appears on PBS *Frontline*

South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg (left) looks on as a PBS *Frontline* crew films a workshop held at Goshen (Ind.) College and hosted by New America's ShiftLabs on Dec. 11, 2018. Scenes from the workshop appeared on a recent episode of PBS' *Frontline* that aired Nov. 5. The workshop focused on how artificial intelligence and automation might change work and opportunity in cities like South Bend, Elkhart and Goshen, Ind.—*Goshen College*

Franconia, Eastern District conferences reconcile after 172 years apart

A history of division became a future of unity when Franconia Mennonite and Eastern District conferences held reconciliation votes Nov. 2 during joint assemblies at Souderton (Pa.) Mennonite Church.

The vote created one of Mennonite Church USA's biggest conferences—still without a name—and mends a split that took place in 1847.

The union is not being called a merger but a reconciliation, reversing a division that arose from disagreements over disciplinary practices and authority.

Seeking a more congregational structure, churches that left Franconia formed what became Eastern District, laying some of the groundwork for the 1860 founding of the General Conference Mennonite Church, one of the denominations that became MC USA.

In one pointed example of the division, Franconia's Deep Run East Mennonite Church sits across the street from Eastern District's Deep Run West Mennonite Church in Perkasio, Pa.

While differences about matters such as the confessing of sin and military participation kept the two conferences divided for 172 years, shared geography and ministries kept them connected.

Franconia and Eastern District each held a vote Nov. 2 made up of three components: to officially reconcile into one organization, to adopt bylaws suggested by the task force and to name individuals to a new board.

The combined conference conservatively counts 7,587 people in 57 congregations, not counting at least seven Southeast Mennonite Conference churches that plan to join next year in order to stay connected to MC USA after their conference voted to leave the denomination. Their addition will move the conference past 7,617-member Western District Conference as MC USA's largest member.

—Tim Huber, *Mennonite World Review*

MC USA announces Membership Guidelines Advisory Group

The Executive Board (EB) of Mennonite Church USA has formed a Membership Guidelines Advisory Group to recommend a process for continuing the church's conversation on its Membership Guidelines. Iris de León-Hartshorn, associate executive director of operations, and Michael Danner, associate executive director for church vitality, will co-lead the 21-person Membership Guidelines Advisory Group, which will meet for a one-time working session Nov. 15-17 in Chicago.

The advisory group will engage in structured dialogue to review the history of the guidelines and how they are functioning in the church, develop insight needed to frame issues arising from these guidelines and consider options for how the church might address them, de León-Hartshorn



Photo provided

Life and death in the era of drones

The Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario, launched its latest Grebel Gallery exhibit, "The Cultural Life of Drones: KW Drone Dialogues," with a reception on Nov. 14. Created by Sara Matthews, associate professor in global studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, the exhibit explores the myriad of ways drones are embedded in our everyday lives as well as our ideas about the kinds of life and death drones make.—*Conrad Grebel University College*

says. The group also will consider feedback from the Delegate Assembly at MennoCon19, the denomination's national convention, held July 2-6 in Kansas City, Mo. Catherine Barnes of Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Harrisonburg, Va., will facilitate.

"The primary goal of this gathering is to generate options for how best to discern the future of the Membership Guidelines in a way that strengthens the church and embodies the Renewed Commitments of MC USA, including our shared values of diversity and inclusion," says de León-Hartshorn, noting that this is not a decision-making group.

The advisory group is expected to deliver its written recommendations to the EB within 15 days following its meeting. These will be formally presented for discussion at the EB meeting Jan. 17-19, 2020. Moving forward, the EB will decide how best

to lead the denomination through the discernment.

"I pray the process will be led by the Spirit and that it would honor both our history and our desired future as a denomination," says Glen Guyton, executive director of MC USA. "We cannot ignore the symbolism of the document in our system or its impact on LGBTQ members of our congregations."

The advisory group members represent all regions of the country and have been selected to ensure balance of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity and theological breadth. Participants are members in good standing of MC USA, with two non-MC USA participants who bring particular expertise.

—*Mennonite Church USA*



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

Miscellany

COMPILED BY
GORDON HOUSER

At a time when civilization is accelerating toward disaster, climate silence continues to reign across the bulk of the U.S. news media.

— Mark Hertsgaard and Kyle Pope at *cjr.org*

Local newspapers

Researchers at Duke University found that local newspapers “significantly outperform” local TV and radio stations and online-only outlets when it comes to producing original news stories that address a critical informational need. “As much as newspapers may represent a dwindling presence in the local news ecosystem of many communities, they still provide nearly half of the original reporting to be found in our sample.”

—*cjr.org*

94

journalists and media workers died in targeted killings, bomb attacks and conflict crossfire in 2018, 12 more than in 2017, according to the International Federation of Journalists.

—Associated Press

20,500

The number of sexual assaults in the U.S. military in 2018.

—The Atlantic

Eco spirituality

Munsterschwarzach, a 1,200-year-old Benedictine monastery in Bavaria, for nearly 20 years has used more carbon dioxide than it produces. The monastery has its own solar panels and wind turbines and a biogas plant that uses corn and agricultural waste from its farms. An electric car for local trips is fueled by solar panels. The monastery produces more than enough electricity for the 100 brothers who live there and about 300 employees.

—Christian Century

300,000 jobs

President Trump’s trade war with China has cost the U.S. economy 300,000 jobs, reports Moody’s Analytics. The figure is expected to rise to 450,000 by the end of this year and to 900,000 by the end of 2020.

—The Week

280 years

How long researchers warn that closing the gender gap in computer science at current rates will take.

—Harper’s



3 billion

There are about 3 billion fewer birds in North America than in 1970. Experts say habitat loss is the No. 1 reason for bird loss. A 2015 study said cats kill 2.6 billion birds each year in the United States and Canada, while window collisions kill another 624 million, and cars another 214 million.

—Associated Press

\$66 billion

The mortgage-interest deduction cost the U.S. government \$66 billion in 2017. Letting every family of a Medicaid recipient keep their property would cost \$500 million.

—The Atlantic

Number of individuals ICE has detained since 2012 whom the agency admits may have been U.S. citizens:

1,488

Number of days for which one person was detained:

1,273

—Harper’s

LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS

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Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship

Fort Collins, Colo.

1. From left: Mathew, Michael and Scott enjoy a home-cooked meal, hot showers and a warm church on a Saturday night.
2. A worship in the park with Abyssinian Christian Church.
3. Last year's Thanksgiving dinner at church, originally planned for 30 members, grew to nearly 90 when folks from the community showed up unexpectedly.
4. Sunday school rooms turn into bedrooms for a week when hosting families through Faith Family Housing.
5. A seder meal with Abyssinian Christian Church.

Photos by Steve Ramer



1



2



3



4



5

The unexpected in writing poems

BY JEAN JANZEN

Love and loss at the writing desk

On my desk where I write stands a small clock with a hand ticking out the seconds. Above it I have placed a photo album, its silver cover framing a portrait of my late husband and me “in our prime,” I might say, the album holding photos of our children and grandchildren. Above that, on the wall, a small oil painting by my son, a night view of a barely lit tree trunk and its shadows against a garden wall. To the left hangs a print of Vladimir’s “Madonna and Child” and to the right a Japanese print of a temple entrance.



Photo provided by author

My desk is small, maybe because poems are usually quite small—"language condensed." I think back to childhood and remember with gratitude the poetry of hymns, the King James Version of the Bible and the required recitations. I also distinctly remember being sent as a small child to the pantry to refill the sugar bowl and on returning stopping to announce to my six siblings and parents sitting around the table, spoon in the air, "Into the snow the shovels go." And in fourth or fifth grade I created a small book of five poems with a brown construction paper cover and red yarn tying them together, a book my mother saved in their many moves.

For years I have filled my soul with the daily reading of Psalms from The Book of Common Prayer, these songs continuing to comfort, confound and challenge me with their unexpected outcries of both praise and sorrow. While I have hinted to my children that Psalm 139 could be the center of my funeral service, do I ask them to omit verses 20-22: "Oh, how I hate my enemies"? And then there is the Gospel of John with its rich metaphors and the unsurpassed beauty and challenge of the Beatitudes in Matthew, the poem by which we are called to live.

In my first graduate classes at Fresno (Calif.) State University with the poets Peter Everwine and Philip Levine, I was taught that writing a poem was to enter the world of the unexpected. If you know what the poem is going to say or you have an agenda, it will not be a true poem. If you try to manipulate the language to impress the reader, it will not be

If you know what the poem is going to say or you have an agenda, it will not be a true poem.

a lasting poem. Writing a poem is about letting go, about trusting what is true to rise and find words, with the hope that it will appeal and sometimes surprise the reader or listener, even the poet. No poem, my teachers said, will be purely free of intention but should always be held loosely as we write.

So when I sit at my desk and wait for the unexpected, I acknowledge that poems are essentially about love and loss—

the clock's ticking, my husband's death after 60 years of marriage, my beloved family with the aching hole of a grandson's passing, the illuminated tree trunk with its shadows, and on my desk a small piece of paper with a quote from William Blake: "We are put on earth a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love." And then there is Mary, the way she looks at me, her infant's cheek nestled against her sigh.



Jean Janzen lives in Fresno, Calif., and is the author of many books of poetry, including *What the Body Knows*, *Paper House* and *Piano in the Vineyard*.

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BY LAURIE OSWALD ROBINSON

Photo provided by author

A *bend* IN THE ROAD

**Shifts in life
require making
turns**

On July 7, I awoke to an eerie scene. My husband, Al, lay face down on the living room floor as our two cats slinked around him, meowing in distress.

“Al, what happened?” I cried. “I fell last night, and I haven’t been able to get up,” he moaned. “The pain in my leg. The pain.”

After a frantic 911 call, two ambulance personnel rushed to our home, injected him with

meds and whisked him into the ambulance. I shakily followed behind sirens to Newton (Kan.) Medical Center across town.

Within several hours, the emergency room medical staff diagnosed my diabetic husband with a urinary tract infection and blood poisoning (sepsis). Further testing revealed these conditions were contributing to kidney malfunction. For three weeks, doctors strove to better his lab numbers, transfuse his blood

and solve the mystery of why Al's stomach continued to distend dangerously.

In attempts to crack the code of why his colon functions were collapsing, they transferred him to Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, a half hour away. A new round of MRIs revealed he had Olgivie Syndrome, a rare kind of obstruction of the bowels. For another four weeks there, Al's life hung in the balance. He underwent two colon surgeries that gave him two holes in his stomach—an ileostomy and colostomy. These stomas, with bags to collect waste, would give his colon several months to heal.

For two more weeks, Al returned to Newton Medical for rehab before he was discharged to home with a walker, a mountain of medications and dietary restrictions that starved our sugar fixes. During a follow-up appointment with his colon surgeon in October, we learned that the plan—if he continued to recover—was to remove his stomas and rehook his tubing during two more surgeries in January.

Shift in health, shift in marriage, shift in life

After nine continuous weeks in the hospital, Al came home a changed husband to a changed wife. While going through a tunnel and coming out on the other end, our plans had crashed to the roadside. Shift happened, and we were left picking up the pieces in the ditch.

For the first time in a long time in our marriage, we finally both had full-time jobs with great benefits. We anticipated sharing greater security with added creature comforts. Instead, we were thrown into an unexpected

After nine continuous weeks in the hospital, Al came home a changed husband to a changed wife.

labyrinth of unknowns: Should Al, who resigned from his job as a school para working with children, seek disability benefits? Or should he, at 64, take early retirement? Should he join my insurance plan from work, or should he continue to pay for COBRA benefits? What had the most integrity? What could carry us across the river that divided the old land from the new?

Slowly these issues are ironing out, as God and our community have been faithful to pave a new pathway for tenuous steps forward. Though I didn't know it at the time, by having to slog through summer's vertigo, I shaped new priorities that could help me navigate shift and change.

Honoring the capable Creator of an ever-changing creation

Helen Keller once penned, "A bend in the road is not the end of the road...unless you fail to make the turn." I am learning that my Creator is more than capable of creating roads to be traveled and giving humans the resilience, grace and courage to make the turns at its unexpected twists.

On one hand, the shifts evoked by Al's medical crisis brought us to the end of a road, our idea of the road's direction. We had projected a comfortable stroll, not a careening cliff hanger. We had envisioned fiscal security, not the penniless though priceless riches of faith. We had dreamt of travel

together, not the "staycation" that logged more meaning in our marriage than ever before. We had hoped for one thing and received another. But as we received reality as it was rather than what we wished it to be, we arrived at a strangely delightful destination, a deeper peace with God and with each other.

Honing our prayer practices that can steady us in times of flux

I will never forget the waiting room vigils held with family and friends during Al's two surgeries: They were an elixir of harrowing fears and hopes for healing. As I walked the tightrope of that tension, the safety net of the silent and articulated prayers of loved ones caught me in God's waiting arms.

Psalms 139 has always reminded me that God's presence never leaves me alone in my pain, and it became a prayer during times of anxious spiritual reading, especially verses 7-10: "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."

Another favorite prayer of mine during the heat of the battle was an excerpt from "St. Patrick's Breastplate":

*I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me.*

And when all else failed, Saint Faustina's prayer, "Jesus, I trust in you," spoke to me in just five words.

Prayers—communal or silent, informally offered or liturgically followed, chortled in fear or cradled in faith—were for me a stabilizing lifeline between divinity and humanity. The most bittersweet times happened during marital prayers whispered at Al's bedside. That's when, in the cacophony of beeping machines, our gaze embraced in naked dependence. Whether we got out of this alive or not, we knew we must continue to pray to the One who sustained us "in sickness and in health, 'til death do us part."

Throughout the ordeal and to this day, Al and I have been faithfully showered with prayers, care, kindness and grace—in a

Throughout the ordeal and to this day, Al and I have been faithfully showered with prayers, care, kindness and grace

phrase, people have been "Jesus with skin on."

For example, my fellow marketing-communication team at Mennonite Mission Network have buffeted my unraveled work life with bountiful flexibility; family and other co-workers and friends have showered us with around-the-clock prayer and food, gift cards and help with the yard, house and cats; members of my Catholic community in Wichita held vigil with me

at the hospital and still offer intentions for healing in many prayer settings. Several friends pressed \$100 bills into my hand, and countless readers logged onto my CaringBridge entries. Therapists and spiritual directors offered maps and compasses in the psychic wilderness.

We have felt unworthy of all this lavish love. Yet as we gratefully receive it, we join fellow pilgrims on the bending, shifting road, helping each other make the turns that lead to ongoing healing and hope.



Laurie Oswald Robinson is an editor for Mennonite Mission Network in Newton, Kan.

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BY BENJAMIN J. TAPPER

THERE IS MORE
THAT IS TRUE
THAN WHAT I
CAN SEE

**Moving deeper
into mystery**



Photo by Gabriel Barletta on Unsplash

God found me sitting on a metal chair in a dark gymnasium. I was 9, homeless and on pace to become another statistic. Yet as I prayed a simple prayer and asked God into my heart, she responded. I can't explain how or why, but I felt a warm, gentle sensation permeate my chest as if God heard my request and said "OK. Here I am. I've been waiting." It felt like something magical had happened to me. It was my first noticeable experience with God. Though my life has changed drastically since that Sunday morning in 1997, my search to know God has remained.

In my adolescence, I was a full-blown Jesus Freak whose mission was to save as many souls as possible. In early adulthood, I was an interrogator of Christianity, and my search for the truth led me to agnosticism. In seminary I was a proponent of process and liberation theology, in which God cares deeply for those on the margins. During each of these phases, I thought I had arrived. I thought I had learned the truth and would hold onto it until I died.

Time and again, I was proven wrong. Whenever I laid claim to the truth, God invited me to let go and beckoned me deeper into myself and into mystery. One August evening in 2018, I found myself in the birthplace of all mysteries, a Crown Plaza Hotel bar. (I have high-end tastes.)

I was there to spend time with friends I rarely got to see. We came together, ordered drinks and talked in the leisurely way friends do. We spoke of school, careers and families. We spoke

of past, present and all that lies between. We fell into a rhythm of connection and conversation that felt familiar as we discussed all that life was throwing our way. As our conversation continued, my relaxation gave way to a different sensation. My mind slowed, and time felt like it unraveled. I was filled with a deep knowing and an intense feeling of love that filled my chest.

I felt as though I was in the presence of someone or something I knew before I was born and would know long after I died. This timeless presence was coupled with a feeling of maternal love. This confused me.

As I sat in that Crown Plaza bar, sensing eternity and love in ways I'd never imagined, I wondered what was happening to

Whenever I laid claim to the truth, God invited me to let go and beckoned me deeper into myself and into mystery.

me. At first, I kept my thoughts and feelings to myself, but it wasn't long before I shared my experience with my friends. After I described what had happened, they were quiet for a moment before one of them said, "I wasn't going to say anything, but since you brought it up, there are beings here with us, and some of them are angels."

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I said, “Interesting.”

Internally an entirely different dialogue was taking place.

“Angels? Ha! It’s fine if you believe in them, but I definitely do not.”

Despite my skepticism, I couldn’t discount that I’d experienced something strange, transformative or even mystical. My body and emotions were activated in a way they’d never been, and I had to know why. So on the off chance my friend was onto something, I continued asking questions and began reading about mysticism. I looked up meditations to do and even went on a personal retreat with the intention of connecting more deeply with myself and with Spirit. Over time I experienced Spirit more frequently and soon knew God interrupted my certainty and disrupted my knowing in that Crown Plaza bar so that I would recognize one simple truth: “There is more that is true than what I can see.”

I found solace and security in my tight-knit theologies, and while they helped me embrace the faith tradition I once cast off, the ideologies themselves weren’t the goal. They were an invitation into relationship, but relationships never stop evolving. As a result of this most recent evolution, I was able to experience my dad after he died last year. I’ve also become more intuitive, which serves me both personally and professionally, and I’ve engaged in the most intense period of personal transformation in my life. Everything changed the night God interrupted my conversation, and I’m incredibly thankful for that disruption.

I’ve spent so much of my life relying on logic and distrusting my emotion, yet some of my most profound spiritual experiences haven’t been logical at all. While

Everything changed the night God interrupted my conversation, and I’m incredibly thankful for that disruption.

liberation theology reminds me that God is actively working to end oppression, and process theology teaches me that God is constantly inviting all creation toward wholeness, neither gives me the full picture and experience of God. They point toward something indescribable that must be grappled with, questioned and experienced. Something deep within us and wholly separate from us. They point toward mystery.

Whether in a dark gymnasium or a hotel bar, God continues to grab my attention in unexpected places. Though I’m tempted to believe I now have the truth, my life has taught me there is always more. Others may not engage spirituality in the same ways I have, and that is perfectly fine. But I hope my experience offers the friendly reminder that truth exists beyond our perception.

Embrace mystery. Engage discomfort. Invite God to burst in and surprise you. She definitely will.



Benjamin J. Tapper is a chaplain at Indiana University Health in Indianapolis, co-founder of the *Hear Me Project* and blogs at *Invisible Truths*.

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GOSHEN COLLEGE

BY ELIZABETH REIMER

HOW WE *imagine* FAITH

Every story is different

Photo by author at the Pulse Memorial in Orlando, Fla.

I don't really understand my faith journey. I've tried to describe it many times, but I always end up rambling. I usually start with my birth, because that's where my faith journey begins, then wind through my life until, inexplicably, I arrive in the present. The problem with that is that there are too many contradictions in my story. It is more like two different stories woven into one because any story about my faith is incomplete without my coming-out story and vice versa. They're inseparable.

I don't remember the first time I considered my sexual orientation. I don't remember a moment where it hit me that I was queer. I do remember the first time I came out, at the lunch table in my freshman year of high school. Saying out loud something I had kept hidden away was terrifying and exhilarating. In the same way, I don't remember the first time I questioned the concept of God. But I remember a part of Sunday school called Question Sunday when I was in junior high. On this day we could ask all the God-related questions we wanted. To my frustration, I always came out of class with more questions than answers. These moments mark a concrete beginning to my story, a memory that I can go back to when I wonder how everything started.

By the middle of my freshman year of high school, I came out to one of my pastors. I did this via email, but she insisted on going to lunch to talk in person.



Elizabeth Reimer's baptism. Photo provided by the author

I have no idea where we went or what I ate. I don't even remember most of what was said. It was the first major collision of my sexuality and my faith, and I remember trying desperately to describe how I felt. I had been questioning God and the church for a while. Coming out was "like the last straw, in a way," my pastor interpreted, and I agreed.

By the middle of my freshman year of high school, I came out to one of my pastors.

That conversation was the first of many about my sexuality and my faith. As time went on, those conversations got bigger. By the beginning of my senior year, I decided to get baptized. At our church retreat, on a brisk Sunday morning, two of my pastors and my mentor dunked me into the freezing waters of a muddy lake. Before wading into the water, I

read the baptismal vows I had edited and compiled for myself. My church sang as I stumbled out of the water, wet hair in my eyes. Shivering, wrapped in

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Our stories are all different because we are all different, and that is as it should be.

towels, I went around the large circle of people and helped serve Communion. I had never felt so at home.

In between coming out to my pastor and getting baptized were almost four years of transformative experiences. I attended two Mennonite Church USA conventions, came out more times than I can count, got treated for depression, met people who have changed my life, went on a lot of service trips and work weekends, discovered that my little brother is better than most and read too many books on just about everything I could think of. It was a long, confusing road, and I never expected to end up where I am now.

I understand many faith stories are long and confusing. We call them stories for a reason; it's not a one-sentence explanation. There is an inherent beauty to that. We are allowed to express complexity and nuance because no one's faith is exactly the same. Our stories are all different because we are all different, and that is as it should be.

Still, we get trapped by a narrow view of the world. We cannot see beyond what we already know. A few stories come to dominate our perspective, until we have limited ourselves to a one-sided portrait of faith and God. I thought my faith was impossible because I had never seen another queer Christian. I heard plenty of stories about queer

people being driven away from God, and I heard plenty from those who were driving them away. Those stories became what I expected.

I'm not the only person who expects that story. Some people think queer Christians don't or can't exist. And even when we get the chance to tell our stories, few listen. Some even shout over us and try to drown us out, or they insist on telling our stories for us. Queer Christians have been so effectively silenced that we treat them as mythical. I didn't expect to believe in God because I had never seen someone like me believe in God. For too long, that story was missing from my life. When I first came out to my pastor, I couldn't have predicted I would wind up as a Bible and religion major at a Mennonite college. It seemed impossible.

We need to start challenging anything we think is impossible in our lives. We've limited the stories we listen to and thus limit our imaginations. We know God does the unexpected all the time. Faith is inexplicable, confusing, complicated, messy. I'm not confident in my faith—try being a Bible and religion major and be certain about anything. All I know for sure is that God is, and when we try to put God into a box, we limit our imaginations until we no longer see God at all. It's time to start expanding our horizons.



Elizabeth Reimer is a student at Goshen (Ind.) College. Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church is her home congregation.

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BY DOUG HOSTETTER

From left: Ri Ki Ho, Counselor, North Korean Mission to the United Nations; Kim Won-wung, South Korean, President, Heritage of Korean Independence; Lee Jae-jung, South Korean National Assembly Member. Photo by author

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Looking for peace in difficult places

People often seem surprised when they learn I have spent a significant time in recent years working on peace with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, commonly known as North Korea. Perhaps it is the combination of who I am and where I work that has given me the passion for peacebuilding in one of the most difficult regions of the world.

I am a peace pastor in the Mennonite church and work as part of the advocacy team of Pax Christi International, the international Catholic peace movement, at the United Nations. Mennonites and Catholic peace people take seriously the Sermon on the Mount.

Although North Korea and the United States do not have diplomatic relations, North Korea is a member of the United Nations and has diplomatic staff that live in New York and work out of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Mission to the United Nations. Some of my most important peacebuilding efforts in recent years have been reaching out and befriending North Korean diplomats and their families. North Koreans in the United States are restricted to a radius of 25 miles from Columbus Circle in New York City. My home, fortunately, is just within the permitted zone for North Korean diplomats.

Some years ago, I invited the diplomats from the North Korean Mission to the U.N. for a picnic at my home, along with a South Korean Mennonite International Voluntary Exchange Program (IVEP) intern, a Korean-American Mennonite pastor friend and a few Korean-

American friends active in the peace movement. It was an amazing day, 20 North Korean diplomats, wives, children and grandchildren, fishing in the stream behind my home, eating, drinking, laughing and playing. There was no political talk or strategizing on that day (although those kinds of conversations did happen later, after trust had been established), just meeting the diplomats, their wives, children and grandchildren and enjoying each other's company. It was through friendship and conversation that I learned that the North Koreans want the same things we do: safe communities for our families, health care and education for our children and grandchildren and meaningful and productive work for ourselves. At the end of the day, the senior North Korean Ambassador came over to the young IVEP intern from South Korea and said, "This war has gone on too long. We really need to end the conflict and reunify our country." The intern readily agreed.

Human relationships are the foundation of peacebuilding. The challenge in building relationships between Americans and Koreans from both the North and the South is formidable. North and South Korea do not have diplomatic relations with each other. Even phone, mail or email connections between the two Koreas is prohibited. The United States also does not have diplomatic relations with North Korea. North Korea is one of the countries whose citizens are prohibited from traveling to the United States, and a U.S. travel ban makes it illegal for any American to travel to North Korea without

Human relationships are the foundation of peacebuilding.

a Special Validation Passport. The travel ban has eliminated all tourism, academic and cultural travel by Americans to North Korea, although Mennonite Central Committee, American Friends Service Committee and a few other nongovernment organizations have received Special Validation Passports to travel to North Korea for small-scale humanitarian efforts.

I have learned that personal encounter and face-to-face dialogue enhance understanding, dispels some of the stereotypes of the "other" and can even result



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in friendships that can lay the foundation for solving larger political problems. But with sanctions and travel restrictions, few Americans, South Koreans or others ever have an opportunity to meet a North Korean in person.

For the past two years, I have been working with religious leaders to organize a forum to bring together diplomats, scholars and peace activists from South Korea, the United States, Russia, China and Japan to meet with North Koreans. Our first challenge was to find a location where guests from around the world could meet personally with North Koreans. After considerable discussion we decided to organize our forum in New York at Columbia University, so North Korean diplomats at the U.N. could come to a location where others could meet them. We decided to organize the Global Peace Forum on Korea at the end of the week of the opening of the General Assembly of the U.N. with the hope that several scholars from Kim Il Sung University in North Korea would be able to come for the opening of the GA and participate in the peace forum. Unfortunately, both years we have organized this conference, none of our invited scholars from North Korea was able to get U.S. visas. But due to trust built through personal friendships, we did have full cooperation from North Korean U.N. diplomats.

We invited more than 100 scholars, religious leaders, peace activists and a few government officials from South Korea, Russia, China, Japan and the United States. I have been impressed by the fact that the participants of this forum paid their own way, often flying from

Asia, for an opportunity to meet face-to-face and share ideas with North Koreans. U.N. officials who had also been invited commented that the Global Peace Forum on Korea was unique; it was the only meeting those officials had ever attended where the North Korean participants mingled and spoke freely with participants from the United States, South Korea and other nations.

Out of that amazing mix of scholars, religious leaders, peace activists and government officials, we reached a consensus that we all hoped would be a roadmap for government negotiations to follow.

Out of that amazing mix of scholars, religious leaders, peace activists and government officials, we reached a consensus that we all hoped would be a roadmap for government negotiations to follow: (1) ending the Korean War; (2) calling the United States and North Korea to take reciprocal steps to de-escalate tensions and normalize relations; (3) requesting that North Korean actions in disarmament be responded to with reciprocal U.S. lifting of economic sanctions; (4) calling for the creation of a nuclear-free zone on the Korean Peninsula as relations are normalized and sanctions against

North Korea are lifted.

With the failure of the Hanoi Summit and the United States blocking inter-Korean efforts to connect roads and railroads between their countries, we reaffirmed our roadmap for negotiations and chose the theme for this year, “Making Connections: Global Challenges, Korea and Peaceful Coexistence.” The organizers continue to believe relationships between people across the national and ideological boundaries are the building blocks for the political consensus needed for building peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Religious leaders gave strong support for this effort. Jim Winkler, president of the National Council of Churches, gave a keynote speech with warm greetings and encouragement from Cardinal Joseph Tobin, and Peter Prove, director of the International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, offered closing remarks. We also heard messages of support and encouragement from former President Jimmy Carter and Rosemary DiCarlo, the U.N. Undersecretary General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. The unique strength of the peace forum, however, was the personal involvement of the North Korean diplomats, who made themselves available to speak, listen and build relationships with the other participants. These relationships have the power to turn enemies into friends.



Doug Hostetter
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Mennonite Church.

BY GORDON HOUSER



STRANGERS NO MORE

Photo by author

Learning trip visits immigrant ministries in Tucson, Ariz.

On the way from Phoenix to Tucson, Ariz., our car stopped on a small highway, far from any town. Before us, a multitude of lights shone like a small city in the desert darkness, its concrete buildings surrounded by fencing. Inside this complex of prisons is an immigration detention center, housing some 1,500 immigrants. The next two days, we would encounter real people and hear stories that brought some reality to those distant numbers.

Twenty-two of us traveled to Tucson on Oct. 18, following the Constituency Leaders Council, a semiannual meeting of Mennonite

Church USA conference leaders, constituency group members and agency personnel, to visit Tucson organizations working to support immigrants. The trip was organized collaboratively by MC USA, Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Central Committee West Coast.

Casa Alitas

First stop on Oct. 19 was Casa Alitas (“house of little wings”), a program run by Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona. This shelter, which had been housed in a former monastery but now is repurposing what was designed

as a detention center in Tucson, offers refuge and hospitality to recent migrant families who are seeking asylum. The families there have been processed by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and gained humanitarian parole, which allows them to stay in the country legally until their asylum request is processed.

Delle McCormick, a retired United Church of Christ minister, met our group and related some of the program's history. She told us she has been involved in immigration ministries for 21 years, including time spent in Mexico. In 1989, she said, she went on a mission trip that "blew my theology out of the water." She realized, she said, that "we need to get our people to take steps closer to what's happening."

McCormick sees shelters such as Casa Alitas, which opened in 2014, as 'a powerful antidote to the fear we see today.'

McCormick sees shelters such as Casa Alitas, which opened in 2014, as "a powerful antidote to the fear we see today." People of all persuasions, including some who voted for Trump, religious and nonreligious, volunteer there.

Occupancy at the shelter used to be as many as 500 people per day, and in the last year they've seen 18,000 people, she said. But now people are being detained in large detention centers, and the numbers are about 30 per day.

Most of the families are from Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil and Romania and usually stay between one and three days.

As McCormick showed us the shelter's store of free clothing, we met Carlos, Carlita, his wife, and their son Carlos, 14, who were from Nicaragua. Carlos said he fled with his family out of fear of the government. "There are no gangs there," he said. "The government is the gang." They were on their way to Michigan. Ulises Arenas of Iglesia Menonita Hispana, a member of our group, prayed for the family as we all surrounded them, many of us in tears.

Later, we met another family of three—Orlando, Bethsaida, his wife, and their 3-year-old daughter—who were from Guatemala. Orlando had been shot five times, and some people called him to say he could not return home. After a week in the hospital, he left with his family. It took them 13 days to reach the shelter.

"The important thing is to give yourself to God," he said. "We didn't come here to do any damage," he added. "We want to work." They were on their way to Nebraska. Again, Arenas prayed for them while we gathered around.

McCormick told us that when people come to the shelter, she talks with them and invites them to breathe. They pray aloud and weep, she said. Many have experienced great trauma—including rape, kidnapping, seeing others killed—and are starving. At the border, they're given burritos, which they don't eat because they're rotten. Casa Alitas gives them water, soup and sandwiches.

Florence Project

After lunch, we stopped at Shalom Mennonite Fellowship, where we heard from Alvaro Gonzalez, who works with the Florence Immigration and Refugee Rights Project (FIRRP), which provides free legal services to men, women and unaccompanied children in immigration custody in Arizona.

He told us the story of Elbia. She tried to escape an abusive relationship. After several years, she fled, sought asylum and was transferred to an immigration detention center in southern Arizona. She finally won her case in 2017.

Gonzalez said 86% of the detainees come to their court cases unrepresented due to poverty, and they have no right to a public defender. FIRRP has more than 100 people on staff, working in multiple areas. He noted the impact of the current U.S. policy on immigration: family separations, increased numbers of people in detention, weeks-long waits at the port of entry, no periodic bond hearing, rapid and sweeping changes to immigration law, and rhetoric aimed at creating xenophobia.

Gonzalez, who is part of the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, said migrants under 18 are taken to shelters, but as soon as they turn 18, they are placed in handcuffs and their ankles shackled and taken to a detention center. In 2018, he said, 21% of those seeking asylum got it.

Samaritans

Next we heard from Brian Best, who volunteers with Tucson Samaritans, whose mission is to save lives in the southern Arizona

desert. He said U.S. policy since the Clinton administration is “prevention through deterrence,” trying to make the journey across the border so difficult that people won’t try it.

He showed photos of the border wall being built but also enhanced with concertina wire. He said the border patrol uses cars, ATVs, towers, drones, helicopters and ground sensors to deter people. Samaritans and the organization No More Deaths leave bottles of water along the border, and they’re always eventually used.

Drug cartels charge people to cross. This used to be \$4,000–\$5,000; now it’s \$10,000–\$20,000.

“The border patrol is a huge danger to migrants,” Best said. In order to get enough workers to meet the new demands, they’ve lowered their standards for employment. “Its culture diminishes people’s humanity,” he said, both the migrants and the border patrol agents. These agents have killed migrants over 70 times, Best said.

Joining the border patrol agents are vigilantes who act on their own.

Other deterrents include thorny and poisonous plants that can cause excruciating pain and animals such as rattlesnakes and scorpions.

A Samaritans volunteer has placed more than 600 crosses where migrants have died. And the Colibri Center for Human Rights, where Best works, has collected more than 4,500 missing person reports in one county alone and is seeking to match names with remains that have been found.

Death is the ultimate deterrence, Best said. “This is our government’s intention.”

Rocio

On Oct. 20, we joined Shalom Mennonite’s worship service, then heard Rocio’s story. She said she came to the United States from Bolivia in 2014 on a tourist visa. She had a job offer in California but learned she had been lied to. She worked for a man but wasn’t paid. When she tried to leave for Bolivia, a friend lied to her about the date of her flight, and she missed it. At the border, she told the official what had happened, but he didn’t believe her. She was arrested for staying beyond the limit of her visa and put her in a cold cell block for five days.

She said being in a place where people were crying and she had no contact with a lawyer was hard. In Bolivia, they hadn’t heard about the situation here. Eventually someone believed her story, but she had unwittingly signed a deportation order. She and others were handcuffed and shackled and put on a plane.

They arrived at a prison with barbed wire on the walls. They gave her a number and a uniform. She met people from all over the world—old, young, mothers, sisters, grandmothers. Some had been living in extreme poverty.

She learned she needed a sponsor, but she didn’t know anyone in this country. Later, she learned about FIRRP and met with a lawyer, who told her to apply for a human trafficking violation.

She heard about Shalom’s visitation program and wrote to Tina Schlabach, co-pastor of the church. Schlabach visited and wrote her. Others visited and accompanied her to court. Some gave her money.

She grew spiritually, she said. “I was in the hands of God.” For

a detainee, there are no rules, she said. A criminal usually knows how long they have to serve, but those in detention have no idea.

In court, the judge told her she could only leave under bond, which was set at \$20,000. The visitation program doesn’t have money, but two people each donated \$10,000 for her bond, and after two years in detention, she was free.

Two months later, she won her case and returned the bond money to help others. She got a job and lives in Tucson.

Now she works with the visitation program and every Friday goes to the detention center where she was held for two years. Now that she knows what’s happening, she wants to help others.

She said she believes God touches hearts. “We can share that this is happening,” she said. We can form groups and write cards to detainees. “It’s a blessing to receive a card,” she said, since it means a person has not been forgotten.

Following these visits, immigration was not just an issue to discuss or a matter of statistics. It had a human face. Human faces, names: Carlos, Carlita, Orlando, Bethsaida, Rocio.

“Welcome the stranger” is a command in Scripture. But these are not strangers. All the ones we met—and many more—are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Loving our neighbor demands that we take action.



Gordon Houser
is editor of *The Mennonite*.

A tale of two cities

A gathering in France proclaims the message of reconciliation

A TALE OF TWO CITIES runs through human history: the city of Babel, resulting in the scattering of peoples, and the New Jerusalem, a joining of all peoples, cultures and languages. This parable came to life in France on Aug. 24, the first day of the G7 Summit, which convened leaders of the world's richest nations in Biarritz, on the Atlantic coast in southwestern France. (According to Research Institute–Global Wealth Databook 2018, these seven countries hold 58%—\$317 trillion—of the global net wealth.)

The same weekend, I, Janie Blough, concluded a week-long worship seminar sponsored by an organization called Psalt. As I have done for several years, I taught the biblical and theological foundations of worship and the role of music in worship. Attendees were primarily young adults from multicultural churches in Paris, with many immigrant members from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. Most urban churches in Paris fit this profile.

“Praise of All Nations,” the theme of this year’s Psalt conference, emphasized worship as the context for a gathering of cultures that leads to peace and reconciliation among nations. The seminar ended with a concert prepared by the participants.

The juxtaposition of these two events—one that was heavily covered by global media and the



Psalt choir members prepare to go on stage for their Aug. 24 concert. *Photo provided.*

other a simple concert in a small Baptist church in Paris—was a stark contrast.

The worship seminar concert was also an international event with songs from many parts of the world. Many of the songs made us think of the G7. One came from Brazil, sung in Portuguese, as the rainforest is burning. Songs from China and South Korea reminded us of the major tensions there. Another one, sung with an Israeli melody, contrasted with the tensions in the Middle East. Lingala lyrics reminded us of the church’s vitality in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Songs from the United States, sung in English, were prefaced with remarks about difficulties of reconciliation among the races in that country. The closing hymn, from South Africa, was led by a woman originally from Brazil and sung by people of many origins.

Scripture readings throughout

the concert referred to the promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all families of the earth, the church as the community of “neither Jew nor Greek” and the vision of the new city in Revelation to which all nations will bring their glory and where the tree of life will produce fruit for the “healing of the nations.”

When events are discouraging, we don’t always know where to look. But Mark 4:26-27 tells us that God works as one who plants seeds that grow mysteriously while we sleep. The signs and growth are there. May we learn to see them and speak of them amid the loud voices of the rich and the powerful. The kingdom of God is here among us in unexpected ways, and we are to witness to God’s glory.

Janie and Neal Blough for Mennonite Mission Network



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**WHAT I'M
WATCHING
THIS MONTH**



Parasite

Directed by Joon-Ho Bong

In this amazing film, a comedy/drama/thriller/social satire from South Korea, a poor family finagles its way into the home of a wealthy family, then things go crazy. A feat on many levels, it is one of the year's best films.



The Souvenir

Directed by Joanna Hogg

This understated film examines a young film student's toxic relationship with an older man. She wants to tell stories "outside her privilege" yet fails to see her own suffering. The acting, cinematography and direction make this a superb film.



The Great Hack

Directed by Karim Amer and Jahane Noujaim

This documentary explores how Cambridge Analytica, a data company, collected data on swing voters in the 2016 election and helped sway their votes. It explains the technology and communicates the drama of confronting the alarming acts.



Books for winter reading

WINTER IS A PERFECT time to settle in with a good book. Here are some to consider:

Ever wonder what Augustine has to do with your spirituality? Read *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts* by James K.A. Smith. While it leans toward the academic, drawing on philosophy and pop culture, there is much wisdom here.

Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community by Dana L. Robert argues that "faithful friendship is like the mustard seed of Jesus' parable." Robert looks at friendship in the Bible and through Christian history, telling many stories of cross-cultural relations. "Friendship," she writes, "is both ordinary and revolutionary."

Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World by Gerald L. Sittser looks at the early church and how it was able to not only survive but thrive amid opposition. "Now, as then," he writes, "the church needs disciples who trust in and confess that Jesus is Lord and try to live accordingly."

Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse: Reading the Bible with Survivors by Elaine A. Heath is a helpful and timely book. Heath, who is a survivor of sexual abuse and a theologian with experience as a pastor, surveys the Bible's message of healing and liberation and applies that to survivors of sexual abuse. She also notes that

"survivors who are healing have essential theological wisdom that the whole church needs."

Speaking of God: An Essential Guide to Christian Thought by Anthony G. Siegrist draws on Scripture to present an accessible introduction to theology. While "essential" may be a stretch, this is a useful book for those who may flinch at studying theology.

Collateral Damage: Changing the Conversation About Firearms and Faith by James E. Atwood examines "the byproduct of living in the presence of 393 million guns" in the United States. Atwood addresses myths about guns, "gundamentalism" and the epidemic of despair, then offers some proposals for change, all from a Christian perspective.

Come Out from among Them and Be Ye Separate, Saith the Lord: Separationism and the Believers' Church Tradition, edited by William H. Brackney with Evan L. Colford, collects the 11 papers presented at the 17th Believers' Church Conference in 2016. Scholars from Mennonite, Baptist and other groups explore the theme of separation.

If Jesus Is Lord: Loving Our Enemies in an Age of Violence by Ronald J. Sider is a helpful defense of Christian pacifism from a biblical, Christological perspective by a longtime, articulate advocate of nonviolence.

Gordon Houser is editor of *The Mennonite*.



QUOTABLE

“When we read about the early church, such as in Acts 2:42-46, we tend to focus on the ideal church and forget that it was made up of ordinary people who had their struggles.”

—**Jamie Cazares Jr.**,
pastor at Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto
in Wichita, Kan.



MOST-READ ARTICLES ONLINE

2.0K
Congregations in Southeast Conference decide affiliation
by Sheldon C. Good

1.6K
Details emerge from AMBS presidential search
by Sheldon C. Good

1.1K
CLC hears update on membership guidelines, reports from conferences and constituency groups
by Gordon Houser

FROM THE ARCHIVES



The martyrdom of a singer in the church

One of the less-frequently seen *Martyrs Mirror* images. A young man named Joost Joosten in Veere, Netherlands, was a singer in a church and knew Latin. King Philip of Spain happened to visit the region, heard Joost singing and wanted to take him back to Spain for his choirs there. Joost went into hiding for six weeks to avoid this. During this time, he joined the Anabaptists and later was captured. “He disputed with four inquisitors concerning many articles of faith,” was tortured and burned at the stake in 1560 at age 18. Did he expect the inquisition?



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PERSPECTIVES FROM READERS

The challenge of preaching while pregnant

I LIKED PREACHING while pregnant. I enjoyed the natural camaraderie I felt with Mary during Advent as we wondered who the person growing inside us would become (though I had fewer angelic clues). I found new meaning in “You are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20)—discipleship and pregnancy—these strange and beautiful collaborations between two separate entities existing together. Pregnancy was for me a sacred time, ripe with preaching analogies.

Why doesn't MC USA recommend a more humane family leave policy?

But when it came to discussing maternity leave, the pregnancy glow faded a bit.

Mennonite Church USA's recommended policy for parental leave is this: “Unpaid, job-protected leave of up to 12 weeks.”¹ When my church's leaders offered this to me, I pictured what unpaid leave would mean for my family, especially since we had used up most of our savings to fund graduate school and move across the country. How long could we go without my paycheck? Would the financial strain of going unpaid for months outweigh the physical strain of going back to work before my body was ready? What if I had a C-section and was unable to

return to work in four or six weeks if I needed to financially?

My concerns were well-founded, since paid parental leave can literally save lives. A 2011 study showed that paid parental leave can reduce infant mortality by as much as 10%. Paid maternity leave can also reduce the chance of postpartum depression and has been linked to a longer duration of breastfeeding, which leads to better health outcomes for babies.²

I appealed the decision to other leaders, and we eventually came to an agreement that included some paid leave and was a better fit for my family. But the process of advocating for myself and my new little life was stressful. I wondered why I needed to make a case for this in the first place.

As a denomination concerned with peace and justice, why doesn't MC USA recommend a more humane family leave policy to their churches? Why do we take our cues from a government that adheres to some of the most unjust family leave policies worldwide³ instead of from denominations like the United Church of Christ or the Methodists, who guarantee paid parental leave? Can we say to young families considering ministry that they won't have to choose between paying bills and caring for their and their child's mental and physical health? Can we embrace policies that can increase infant survival rates?

So two years ago, and again at the Constituency Leaders Council in October, I proposed a new policy to MC USA leaders.

It reads in part: “We recommend that the congregation grant paid job-protected maternity or paternity leave of eight weeks to care for the employee's child after birth or placement for adoption or foster care with an option of four additional weeks of job-protected unpaid leave.”

This proposal seemed to be welcomed by MC USA staff members and other leaders at the CLC gathering. I'm told it will be officially addressed by MC USA in the first quarter of next year.

In the meantime, since changes often start at the grassroots level and churches always have the final say on pay and benefits for themselves and their pastors—can we do better than unpaid parental leave?

Starting with each church and conference, we can review and adapt our policies to be ones that are fair and just for congregations and pastor-parents.

FOOTNOTES

1. <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/pastor-salary-guidelines/> click “Interpretive Comments.” Churches “may grant a paid leave for a portion of these 12 weeks,” but unpaid job-protected leave is the minimum standard recommendation.
2. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/health/paid-leave-benefits-to-children-research/index.html>
3. The United States is the only industrialized country in the world that does not guarantee paid parental leave. <https://gcsr.org/Portals/13/LinksToOldSite/WBN%20may%202014.pdf>



Amy S. Zimelman serves on the leadership board of Mountain States Mennonite Conference.

BY AND ABOUT YOUNG ADULTS

The ways of 'means'

DEFINITION:

means

noun

an action or system by which a result is brought about

a method

a way

a fashion

a process

a procedure

means

noun

money

financial resources

"a woman of modest but independent means"

income

funds

the wherewithal

wealth

means test

verb

make conditional on a means test

"means-tested benefits"

a determination of whether an individual or family is eligible for assistance, based upon whether the individual or family possesses the means to do without that help

use in a sentence:

why are the means by which we test people only dependent on means?

how do you test the means of a single mother?

of a father who lost his job?

struggling to put food on the table?

maybe they are not a person of means.

why does it matter

why are the means

by which we allot our means

dependent on the means of an individual?

the means of a meal to a family in need is worth more than the dollars exchanged

the means of a meal to a family in need is the means of the parent

with their carefully organized folder

with every family members social security card

their birth certificate

proof of their house

proof of their work

proof of their existence

proof of their means

all up to date

nothing late

the means of a meal to a family in need is

judging eyes

told lies

sharing rides

squeaking by

hidden cries

long nights

short days

restless sleep

never paid

missed work

loss of jobs

appointment

after appointment

after app...

why are the means by which we test and provide for children only dependent on means?

how do you test the means of a hungry child?

a child who goes to bed scared?

a teen who works into the morning hours to provide for his family?

maybe they are not from a family of means.

why does it matter

why are the means

by which we distribute our means

dependent on the means of an individual?

the means of a meal to a hungry child

is worth more than the dollars exchanged

a meal to a hungry child means

rest

love

knowledge

warmth

strength

hope

fear

peace

the means of a scholarship to a struggling teen

is worth more than the bill assigned

a scholarship to a struggling teen means

a future

hope

struggle

fear

balance

rest

stability

knowledge

respect

pressure

honor

yet we test by dollars

we judge by timeliness

we give by calculation

our calculation

of the outside view

we assign a worth

we assign a worth

we reject

we repeat



Erin Bradley

is pursuing a graduate degree in social work at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.



FROM MENNONITE CHURCH USA

Like a flock of chickens

THIS PAST SUMMER, my husband rebuilt the outdoor pen for our chickens. During that time they were free range—everywhere. They dug up new plantings, made trenches around established plants and discovered the cats' milk

My hope for the church is that we become a gathering and sheltering body.

dishes. While we didn't like them being in the yard, they were fascinating to watch. The myriad colorings of the various types of chickens were pleasing to the eye.

Each morning, two hens left the coop, eager to get outside. The rest of the flock followed along at a leisurely pace, with one or two remaining on nest boxes as though afraid to face the outdoors. They were curious and intent when I worked in the flower beds, waiting for bugs and worms.

While they seemed eager to roam and be away from each other or pecked on the injured, when the heat came out, they gathered together, sheltering each other in the shade of tall grasses.

My little flock of chickens has become a metaphor of Mennonite Church USA for me. We have people eagerly moving

outdoors to experience what God has awaiting them. Others are more content to watch the early birds, waiting to see if they find God moving in new spaces, while others prefer to stay in the nest boxes, waiting for God's goodness to come to them.

Just as my chickens gathered around, sheltering others during the heat of day, I would like to observe these characteristics in the broader church when issues or boundaries made by our histories confront us.

Melissa Florer-Bixler writes in *Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament* (Herald Press), that "the ancient rabbis have a saying: 'We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.'"

Do I see those facing pain, or do I look only at my pain? How does God want us to gather around each other? Ephesians 4:4-6 (*The Message*) says: "You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together... Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness."

My hope for the church is that we become a gathering and sheltering body regardless of ideology, race or color, gender or theology—that we #bringthepeace to each person we work with, speak with or observe.

Linda Dibble is moderator-elect of Mennonite Church USA.

UPDATES

MDS GIVES MONEY TO BAHAMAS FOR HURRICANE RELIEF

Mennonite Disaster Service has decided to contribute \$60,000 received for Hurricane Dorian to two church-related groups working in the Bahamas: the Bahamas Methodist Habitat and the Salvation Army. The funds will be used for materials, training, generators and other ways to assist with their recovery and reconstruction efforts. Additional funds could be made available in the future.

BETHEL COLLEGE ADDS FOOD PANTRY FOR STUDENTS

On Nov. 4, Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., opened a food pantry for its students, faculty and staff, joining more than 640 other colleges and universities across the country. The pantry will have daily hours and operate on the honor system. Four student volunteers will oversee stocking and other maintenance.

MENNONITE MISSION NETWORK SEEKS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Following the retirement announcement this summer of Stanley W. Green as longtime leader of Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA is seeking applicants for its executive director position. A six-person search committee began its work in July.

A WORD FROM PASTORS

The labor of incarnation

IN NAZARETH, week after week, month after month, Mary feels the incarnation happening within her.

The shock of the story has to do with God's dependence on Mary—that Mary's life provides for God's life, all while she bears the weight of the Scriptures pressing down on her, biblical laws that hold her in low esteem. She knows how the holy texts write her identity.

A passage in Galatians shows the significance of the birth of Jesus—"born of a woman, born under the law" (4:4). She lives under the weight of generations of stories and legislation, of Scriptures that determine the worth of her life, laws that determine her value, her place in society.

From the beginning, we read about male supremacy—as God says to Eve in Genesis, in the opening scenes of the Bible: "To the woman God said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'" (3:16). He shall rule over you.

In Exodus, when God gives Moses the 10 commandments, we read about men owning women: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (20:17). Women are possessions, like donkeys and oxen.

The law in Deuteronomy explains what to do when an Israelite man desires a foreign woman taken captive during warfare: "Suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman

whom you desire and want to marry, and so you bring her home to your house...If you are not satisfied with her, you shall let her go free and not sell her for money" (21:11,14). Her status depends on the satisfaction of male desire.

Jesus learned his prophetic ministry from his mother.

These laws coalesce into folk wisdom passed from generation to generation, instructing men to consider women as objects. "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense" (Proverbs 11:22).

Not only does Mary have to navigate her lowly status as a woman, she panics at the reality of her unwed pregnancy. Her sexuality is under the constant gaze of male vigilantes, mobs of righteous men entrusted by the law to enforce purity codes. "If the young woman's virginity was not found, then they shall bring her out to her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death" (Deuteronomy 22:20-21).

The law presses into her body. Mary knows the commandments spoken to Moses, the words addressed to men, not her, yet about her, categorizing her life, determining her place in a society out of her control.

She has every reason to let the world fill her with dread, yet she sings her magnificat: "Truly, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). She doesn't accept her lowly place in

society. Instead she rejoices in what God will soon reveal: that salvation has arrived, the advent of liberation through her life. Her song celebrates a world where the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly are lifted up (Luke 1:52-53).

I like to imagine Mary holding Jesus in her arms, whispering this freedom song, comforting him with dreams of revolution—the magnificat as her lullaby. Jesus learned his prophetic ministry from his mother.

Mary prophesies the goodness of creation renewed for all, a world without rich or poor because no one will have too much, which means everyone will have enough. Her voice echoes at every protest, in the calls for societies liberated from those who have amassed power and wealth off the labor of our people, our neighbors.

Mary lies in the background as the Gospel narrative continues. But she shows up at the end, when Jesus' life becomes a sacrifice in God's revolution, as he bears witness to the prophetic vision Mary sang to him. And she's there after his resurrection. She's always there, giving her life for God's redeemed world. Her travail doesn't end on Christmas Day. All her life is labor.



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

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

Long, Allison Jo, was born Sept. 24 to Derrik and Jessie Long, Elida, Ohio.

Troyer, Jayce Leonard, was born Oct. 7 to Shane and Jasmine Troyer, Elida, Ohio.

MARRIAGES

Andres, Lydia, Archbold, Ohio, and **Josiah Dahl**, Archbold, were married Oct. 26 at Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold.

Groff, Austin, Murfreesboro, Tenn., and **Hilary Short**, Archbold, Ohio, were married Oct. 20 Lockport Mennonite Church, Stryker, Ohio.

Klein, Katie, Nappanee, Ind., and **Antonio Lopez**, Wakarusa, Ind., were married Sept. 1 at Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa.

Long, Carly, Elida, Ohio, and **Trent Long**, Elida, were married June 22 at Immanuel Methodist Church, Elida.

DEATHS

Conrad, Mary Alice Schantz, 81, Telford, Pa., died Aug. 3 of lymphoma. Spouse: James Leroy Conrad. Parents: Erwin and Esther Longacre Schantz. Children: Dave Conrad, Ann Schloneger, Sue Howes, Beth Rupp; seven grandchildren. Funeral: Aug. 11 at Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Blooming Glen, Pa.

Kurtz, Hilda Ruth Stoltzfus, 83, Goshen, Ind., died Oct. 26. Spouse: Maynard Kurtz. Parents: Moses and Malinda Stoltzfus. Children: Roger Kurtz, Robert Kurtz, Eric Kurtz; six grandchildren. Memorial service: Oct. 29 at Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind.

Kreider, Roy Herr, 94, Broadway, Va., died Oct. 29. Spouse: Florence Cressman (deceased). Parents: Irvin K. and Fannie Herr Kreider. Children: David Kreider, Jonathan Kreider, Rosemary Hess; 11 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren. Memorial service: Nov. 9 at Lindale Mennonite church, Linville, Va.

Liechty, Paul "Richard," 87, Fort Wayne, Ind., died Oct. 31. Spouse: Ruth Marie Brace Liechty. Parents: Silas and Sarah Frey Liechty. Children: Carma Reincke, Connie Norris, Marla Huffman, Sarah Whittle; 11 grandchildren; 18 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 4 at North Leo Mennonite Church, Leo, Ind.

Mast, Dorothy Irene Miller, 88, Millersburg, Ohio, died Sept. 18. Spouse: Albert Mast Jr. (deceased). Parents: Howard E. and Nettie V. Miller. Children: Brenda Clark, Randy Mast, Kathy Hewit, James Mast; 12 grandchildren; 21 great-grandchildren. No funeral listed.

Myers, Clayton, 93, Pipersville, Pa., died Oct. 9. Spouse: Margaret Leatherman Myers (deceased). Parents: Samuel C. and Rosa Myers Myers. Children: Wayne Myers, Glen Myers; four grandchildren; two great-grandsons. Funeral: Oct. 12 at Deep Run East Mennonite Church, Perkasia, Pa.

Rohrer, Earl W., 91, Smoketown, Pa., died Oct. 9. Spouse: Marian Buckwalter Rohrer. Parents: Peter and Bertha Wenger Rohrer. Children: Marilyn S. Barnett, Keith N. Rohrer, Coleen B. Steindel; 10 grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Oct. 13 at Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, Pa.

Roth, Paul Edward, 91, Millersburg, Ohio, died March 11. Spouse: Carol June Hostetler Roth. Parents: Joseph and Barbara Roth. Children: Linda Yoder, Tim Roth, John Roth, Stan Roth, Steven Roth, Jennifer Wenger; 15 grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren. Funeral: March 16 at Martins Creek Mennonite Church, Millersburg.

Schilling, Robert Gilbert, 87, Perkasia, Pa., died Jan. 3. Spouse: Gail G. Tice Schilling. Parents: John L. and Esther Weidner Schilling. Children: Robin E. Schilling Franke. Funeral: Jan. 19 at Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Blooming Glen, Pa.

Schrock, Eldon James, 93, Albany, Ore., died Oct. 21, at the Mennonite Village. Spouse: Mildred M. Kuhns (deceased). Parents: Elmer and Bertha Heyerly Schrock. Children: Diane Kabanuk, Valerie Sutter, Jon Schrock; one granddaughter. Memorial service: Oct. 26 at Albany Mennonite Church.

Shantz, Robert Laverne, 80, Kitchener, Ontario, died Sept. 23. Spouse: Janice Kay Shantz. Parents: Mahlon Weber Shantz and Mary Cressman Shantz. Children: Ryan Shantz, Landon Shantz, Erin Brophy, Lauren Shantz; seven grandchildren. Funeral: Oct. 5 at Mannheim Mennonite Church, Mannheim, Ontario.

Shriner, Russell Devon, 95, Elkhart, Ind., died Oct. 10. Spouse: Mabel Yoder Shriner. Parents: Boyd and Alice Loucks Shriner. Children: Dianne Hartman, Sally Drudge, Debbie Mercer, Cindy Miller; five grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Funeral: Oct. 14 at Olive Mennonite Church, Elkhart.

Spicher, Doris Arlene Yoder, 90, Glendale, Ariz., died Sept. 11. Spouse: Samuel Aaron Spicher (deceased). Parents: John M. and Nancy J. Guengerich Yoder. Children: Jeff Spicher, Julie Hedine, Jeannine Janzen; four grandchildren. Funeral: Sept. 21 at Trinity Mennonite Church, Glendale.

Thornburg, Marlyn "Molly" Ilene Nichols, 89, West Liberty, Ohio, died Sept. 12. Spouse: Paul Russell Thornburg (deceased). Parents: Arthur E. and Bertha G. Hart Nichols. Children: Michael Thornburg, Larry Thornburg, Chuck Thornburg, John Thornburg, Dave Thornburg, Tim Thornburg; 21 grandchildren; 46 great-grandchildren. Funeral: Sept. 19 at Eicholtz Daring and Sanford Funeral Home, West Liberty.

Wingard, Carl, 92, New Holland, Pa., died Oct. 27. Spouse: Wilma Jean Mishler Naugle Wingard (deceased). Spouse: Elsie Smoker Wingard (deceased). Parents: Robert and Katie Blough Wingard. Children: Donald Wingard, Thomas Wingard; Step-children: Pam Britt, Bonnie Beam, Kimberly J. Moore; nine grandchildren; five great-grandchildren. Funeral: Nov. 10 at Garden Spot Village, New Holland.



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CLASSIFIEDS

Bethesda Mennonite Church, located in Henderson, Neb., is seeking a **pastor of pastoral care and worship**. The full-time minister is part of a multipastoral team and through a shared ministry approach will play an active role with Bethesda's congregation. The candidate should have a strong commitment to Anabaptist values and theology, a strong passion for congregational care, strong communication skills and the ability to connect with multiple generations. An M.Div. degree with pastoral experience is desired but not required. The Bethesda congregation, located in south central Nebraska, is a member of the Central Plains Conference and Mennonite Church USA. Interested persons should contact Susan Janzen at 319-610-1007 or sejanzen@msn.com.

Hesston College seeks applicants for a new full-time, 12-month administrative position with faculty status as **director of engineering education**. Desired candidate has a master's degree or higher in mechanical, electrical or computer engineering or related field, as well as professional experience in both engineering and higher education settings. Responsibilities include: visioning and administering the college's degree programs in engineering, including an experientially based bachelor's degree program under development; managing program faculty and staff; building key industry partnerships in south-central Kansas and communities

throughout the United States to include practicum opportunities; advancement for the program, including grant-writing and fund-raising; establishing and maintaining program accreditation through ABET; and teaching a minimal number of courses, as time allows. Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to Christian higher education and the mission and values of Hesston College. Position is available immediately, but start date is negotiable. Review of applications begins Jan. 21, 2020. To apply, send letter of interest and curriculum vitae to joinus@hesston.edu. EOE

Hesston College seeks applicants for a full-time faculty position as **disaster management professor and program director**. Responsibilities include teaching courses in the disaster management program, including remote evaluation of learning for the summer field experience at a Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) project location; advising students studying disaster and/or emergency management; meeting with prospective students and program alumni; maintaining partnerships with MDS and Hesston Fire/EMS and growing additional partnerships with other disaster/emergency-focused organizations; managing a budget; and visioning and strategic planning for the program. Desired qualifications include a master's degree in disaster management

continued on page 38...

CLASSIFIEDS

continued from page 37

or a related field, teaching experience, strong student rapport, innovative spirit and history of volunteer or paid work with MDS or another disaster response organization. Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to Christian higher education and the mission and values of Hesston College. Position is available August 2020. Review of applications begins Dec. 2, 2019. To apply, send letter of interest, application, curriculum vitae or resume to joinus@hesston.edu. EOE

Pigeon River Mennonite Church, Pigeon, Mich., is seeking to fill a full-time position, with the primary role being the **director of youth ministry**. The person hired will lead youth gatherings, studies and outreach opportunities and provide vision and oversight for our youth programming. Other ministry duties will be assigned based on the skill set of the person hired. If a couple would take this position, there is a possibility of adding associate pastor duties and increasing the time of this position to time and a half. Pigeon River is a member of CMC, has an average weekly attendance of 180 and places a high priority on discipling and mentoring our youth. Please submit a resume or request information to Pastor Dave Maurer at pastormaurer@gmail.com

Hesston College seeks applicants for a new full-time, 12-month administrative position with faculty status as **director of health science education**. Desired candidate has a master's degree or higher

in a health-related field as well as professional experience in both health-care and higher education settings. Responsibilities include: visioning and administering the college's degree programs in health science, including an experientially based bachelor's degree program under development; managing program faculty and staff; building key industry partnerships in south-central Kansas and communities throughout the United States to include practicum opportunities; and teaching a minimal number of courses, as time allows. Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to Christian higher education and the mission and values of Hesston College. Position is available immediately, but start date is negotiable. Review of applications began Jan. 21, 2020. To apply, send letter of interest and curriculum vitae to joinus@hesston.edu. EOE

North Leo Mennonite Church, Leo, Ind., a member of LMC, is seeking a **2/3- to full-time lead pastor**. Contact Paul Payne at paynep@hicksvilleschools.org or 419-487-0422.

Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., is seeking to fill a **full-time pastoral position**. The person hired will be a visionary leader who excels at preaching, teaching and relating to all ages. They will be firmly rooted in Anabaptist-Mennonite belief and practice, preferably holding an M.Div. or equivalent and have training in two of the following areas: mission, faith formation, worship or community life. BMC is a vibrant, multiage congregation with an average attendance of 150. We are serious about worship, yet we welcome new

ideas. We are engaged in our community, but we wonder if there is more we could be doing. We are passionate about caring for each other, and we are always looking for new ways to create community. We are a member of Indiana-Michigan Conference. Contact Sharon Witmer Yoder, 574-304-9418/cplt@im.mennonite.net with inquiries.

Pleasant View Mennonite Church, a congregation of 70 active members in Chambersburg, Pa., is seeking a pastor to provide effective preaching, a heart for evangelism, and administrative capabilities. Qualified applicants must affirm the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. To express interest or to request further information please contact darylhorst@hotmail.com or visit our website at www.pv-mc.com.

Professor of pastoral care and director of contextual education open. **Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary**, Elkhart, Ind., is hiring a full-time professor to start July 1, 2020. Preferred qualifications: Ph.D. or equivalent; expertise in pastoral care, strong organizational, interpersonal, intercultural and communication skills; preparedness to oversee ministry placements and chaplaincy requirements, and the ability to inspire students in face-to-face and online learning environments. See a full job description at www.amb.edu/jobs.

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

STORIES FROM THE GLOBAL MENNONITE CHURCH

Mennonites and deforestation

ON OCT. 18, the Amazon Conservation Association, a highly regarded group devoted to the preservation of the Amazon rainforest, published a report titled “Mennonite Colonies: New Deforestation Driver in the Amazon.” The report included time-lapse satellite photographs from 2017-2019 that revealed with graphic clarity the steady encroachment on the western Amazon rainforest by three Old Order Mennonite colonies in Peru and Bolivia. According to the analysis, two relatively new colonies in Peru—Tierra Blanca and Masisea—were responsible for the deforestation of 6,200 acres since 2017. An older colony—Río Negro—in the department of Beni, Bolivia, has clearcut 12,350 acres since 2017.

To be sure, these three colonies represent a small fraction of a much larger problem. In 2018, an estimated 300,000 acres were deforested, with most of the problem focused on illegal gold mining or logging operations. But the rapid expansion of Old Order Mennonite colonies in Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru is having an environmental impact.

Over the past several years, thanks in part to my work with Mennonite World Conference, I have received nearly a dozen emails from people who have become aware of Mennonite complicity in environmental degradation in Central and South America. For more than a decade, for example, Mennonite settlements in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, have faced public criticism for the rapid

decline in the water table due to their irrigation practices. The British newspaper *The Guardian* has featured several articles sharply critical of the rapid expansion of Mennonite-owned cattle ranches into the Paraguayan Chaco. In 2014, several Old Colony Mennonite leaders in Campeche, Mexico, spent time in jail for unauthorized clearing of land. And environment groups elsewhere in the Yucatan have raised additional concerns about

Most of us are also living on land that at one time was ‘wilderness.’

Old Colony Mennonite charcoal production and use of pesticides.

Nearly always, the messages are accompanied with a sense of outrage. Someone, the argument goes, should put a stop to this.

These concerns are not misplaced, especially given our global environmental crisis. But before we speak too loudly in accusatory tones to our Mennonite cousins, we should spend a long moment in reflection and confession. After all, most of us are also living on land that at one time was “wilderness.” In our national mythology, Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox are regarded as heroes for their logging prowess. For Mennonites who trace their ancestry in North America to 18th- or 19th-century immigrants, our great-grandparents staked claims in the westward expansion.

At family reunions, we often honor their backbreaking work of removing stumps, draining swamps, plowing the prairies and converting vast acres of wilderness into land suitable for farming. Many of us are the heirs and economic beneficiaries of those practices; we simply have the good fortune of being a century removed from the circumstances of the Mennonites who are now doing the same thing in Tierra Blanca, Masisea and Río Negro.

Without a doubt, the loss of the Amazonian rainforest is a profound tragedy. But even as we speak out against further deforestation, we should do so with a certain humility. The various groups of Mennonites who have been in the news recently are not uniquely complicit in the environmental crises of our time. Like people around the world, they are trying to feed their families. In many regards, their efforts to do so by wresting resources from the natural world are no different from the Iowa farmer or the Kansas wheat producer; or, if we are honest, from the rest of us whose standard of living has a profound environmental impact, albeit one that does not show up with the same stark clarity of a satellite image.



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FROM THE MENNONITE

Look for the Syrophenician woman

LAST SPRING, I visited England with my husband and oldest daughter to celebrate her college graduation. On a guided tour of London's Borough Market area we stopped at a sleepy little shop for food and drink. I'm an introvert who does not get my energy from being around people.

I was enjoying time to recharge before our next activity when a large, bearded face popped up at our table and asked if he and his wife could squeeze in next to us since the place was full. We welcomed them to sit down.

It turned out Cody was an extrovert and had a lot to say. He was a marketing, web designer from Dallas, Texas, and he and Kathrin were spending a few days in London. Initially I was annoyed that our privacy had been invaded, but the more we talked, the more fun we had.

We talked about our fledgling business, and Cody shared his marketing ideas for an increasingly Millennial world. We

talked nearly two hours, traded Instagram handles and email addresses and said our goodbyes.

Within a week of returning home, our web designer bailed, and our marketing plans went up in smoke. Then we remembered Cody. After an email exchange and phone calls, we had a new web designer and moved forward with renewed enthusiasm.

Interruptions are annoying but may signal something better yet to come.

In Mark 7, Jesus is the one being interrupted. He enters a house in Tyre and doesn't want anyone to know it. This is his moment to turn off his cell phone and snuggle up on the couch with a snack and a good book. Jesus needs to recharge.

But the moment he gets a minute to himself, a Gentile, a

Syrophenician woman, shows up, begging him to heal her daughter. Before this, Jesus fed 5,000 people with bread and a few fish. This event took place in Jewish territory, but after he meets this woman, Jesus feeds another 4,000 people—in what was likely Gentile country. It seems the woman's persistence motivates Jesus to include not just his own people but the "dogs" under the table.

Interruptions are annoying but may signal something bigger and better yet to come, an opportunity to branch out and learn.

Look for the Syrophenician woman in the back of the church this week. Lean into her interruption and listen for her truth, for it may end up being the very voice of God.

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