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

Racism continues
Thank you for the wonderful reflection Everett Thomas did in “It’s a Privilege” (November 2012). Thomas did a fine job explaining the Damascus Road program and white privilege. As Thomas mentioned, the Damascus Road training took off in the late 1990s, and those involved did a good job for about 15 years. Now that has slowed down very much for many reasons, and the issues of racism continue.

In my opinion, the issue of racism and white privilege came even more alive with this national election we just had. The issue of privilege continues and, of course, there are a lot of very good privileged people at Mennonite Central Committee. I am happy that someone like Thomas is speaking about it and educating people about issues that the church must deal with. —Zenebe Abebe, executive director, MCC Great Lakes

Compares prolife and Pro-life
B.J. Miller’s letter in the November 2012 issue, “Pro-life is More than Pro-birth,” is so relevant that I need to add an amen. Since the election is over, few politicians will ever speak about it again until the next election. Even then it will depend who they think is their base.

I would also like to add that even the dictionary (at least the good ones) give you a different definition if you capitalize a word like prolife and prochoice. One theologian, who I respect very much, asked a politician why—if he was Pro-life—as soon as a child became 18 he could give him/her a gun and say, “Go kill.” A reply was never received. In the same way I also am prolife, prochoice and other pros, when it comes to political thought and action. Few Pro-lifers that I know seem to care that over 100,000 children and others die each year in the United States just from lack of good medical care or malnutrition.—Luke M. Drescher, Harrisonburg, Va.

Why different state abbreviations?
Is there something wrong with listing the correct postal abbreviation for Indiana in your articles, headings and news items? It is IN, not Ind.—Carl Smeltzer, Harrisonburg, Va.

Editor’s note: Like other magazines, we use the Associated Press Stylebook in our editing and use postal abbreviations only in full addresses.

Drone attacks a war crime
The people of the entire region of Waziristan in northern Pakistan are being terrorized by U.S. drone attacks. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism concludes that drones have killed between 2,562 and 3,325 people, many of whom were civilians, including 176 children. “High-level” targets represent less than 2 percent of total casualties.

Many villages have as many as six drones buzzing around 24/7. Villagers can see them in the daytime and hear their eerie buzzing at night. A report by the Stanford and New York universities says, “The U.S. drone war traumatizes the population and has led people to keep their children home from school and to avoid any large grouping of people, however innocent. … The inhabitants worry that a strike might be directed at them at any moment.”

In addition, follow-up drone attacks have targeted rescue workers at the site of a previous attack. This can be nothing less than a war crime. A civi-
lized society would not condone such actions. Shame on all of us.—Marie Riehl, Lititz, Pa.

**Communion or complicity?**

On Nov. 6, 2012, many Mennonite churches celebrated Communion in an attempt to bring people of differing political persuasions together into unity in Christ. However, there did not seem to be any serious conversation about the issues of justice, economic disparity, peace, nonviolence and welcoming strangers into our country in that service.

Should we not have first discussed how we can speak out against the injustices of our empire and how to repent of our complicity with the forces of evil and what that repentance should look like? It seemed as though we were reenacting the conduct of the German churches who probably celebrated Communion the Sunday after Kristallnacht and throughout the entire reign of Hitler—without repenting of their complicity.

Hitler slaughtered the Jews. We are slaughtering the Muslims. Would not a better choice for a church-wide service on election night have been a service of repentance in sackcloth and ashes?—Daniel Riehl, Lititz, Pa.

**Pastors and social media**

**Editor’s note:** In November 2012, we placed the following message on our Facebook page. It generated many responses. Some excerpts are published here. We invite others to respond as well.

Associate editor Anna Groff is writing an article on pastors and technology. What do cell phones, email, Facebook, Twitter, etc., mean for pastoral care? What are the advantages? Drawbacks? How does one create boundaries? If you are a church leader or pastor and are open to an interview, please … send an email to annag@themennonite.org. Thanks.—The Mennonite Facebook page

I think people using these forms of communication have created cultures. We have to all become social scientists if we want to remain grounded in personal identity that is contributive in our daily relationships.

I think pastors have a new challenge to care for people who have not differentiated from their medium’s or digital identities. I think we will see a psychological diagnosis for people who find their primary way of communicating socially through digital media.—Scott Hackman

Last week, a church member included me in a group text, indicating that her father had died. She said it was the easiest way for her to get the word out.

One small example. I use Powerpoint in several ways, and I administer the church’s Facebook page. FB has been valuable in reaching out to folks who don’t attend our church. Many advantages to technology.—John Cordes

As a pastor, technology has changed the way I meet and interact with people. I am a big fan of it and think sometimes the church is behind the eight ball when it comes to this.—Caleb Kaye

On Sunday, for the first time, I introduced myself to my congregation as “your first social media pastor.” Blogging, twitter, Facebook, email—these are staples of the trade for me now. And it effects drastically what and how I do ministry.

We’re in need of more dialogue—much more dialogue—on this exact topic. Here in Houston, I know of no pastor who uses it as much as I do, and I’m increasingly asked for tips. We Mennonites are doing it well, thoughtfully, critically—and thanks to our understanding congregations—slowly.

—Marty Troyer

**Letters**

Robert Kreider (page 12) has been the Mennonite Church USA’s national and executive director for the past nine decades, and we are delighted to feature him and his life with our cover story.

As in our January issues in the past, we again publish several articles featuring Mennonite schools and educational leaders (beginning on page 18).

Finally, we again share the names of those who contributed financially to The Mennonite during the previous year, and we are grateful for their generous support (page 44). Readers from 911 households, churches and organizations contributed $83,497, a 2.7 percent increase over the prior year.—Editor

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**IN THIS ISSUE**

As happens occasionally—and more often than we expect—a theme probably in this issue that we did not plan. This time: dealing with conflict.

First, in her article on the need to reimagine seminary training (page 42), Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary president Sara Wenger Shenk says, “The splits our community has often experienced are a tragic fracturing of Christ’s body. It is no wonder many people’s immediate association with religion—Christian and otherwise—is of conflict.”

Second, Many leaders in Mennonite Church USA are attempting to take seriously a resolution passed by delegates at the Columbus 2009 convention asking leaders to address controversies in “creative ways that strengthen relationships,” as Hilary Scarsella reports (page 32).

Third, as a result of our board’s discussion at its October 2012 meeting, we are also changing our moratorium policy to allow for respectful and edifying discussion of controversial issues (page 56).

The goal is to build bridges between members of Mennonite Church USA who have strong disagreements. Bridge-building is what Robert Kreider (page 12) has been about for the past nine decades, and we are delighted to feature him and his life with our cover story.

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**Eastern District cuts ties with Germantown Church**

Souderton, Pa.—Eastern District Conference (EDC) of Mennonite Church USA has discontinued its liaison relationship with Germantown (Pa.) Mennonite Church.

The decision came by delegate vote at the conference assembly’s Nov. 10, 2012, business session in Souderton. EDC executive conference minister Warren Tyson said delegates voted by a one-vote majority to discontinue the relationship.

The liaison relationship was established 10 years ago, when Germantown was removed from EDC over issues of homosexuality.

As part of the transition, an agreement was reached in which the church would continue with more informal ties and the matter would be reviewed by delegate vote every five years.

“We deeply grieve that Germantown Mennonite Church is no longer in dialogue with Eastern District Conference, and we pray for a day when the body will be one,” said Germantown pastor Amy Yoder McGloughlin. “We continue to focus on the things we hold in common with the conference and denomination, even as we do what we feel God has called us to—welcoming all people, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability.”

Other aspects of the assembly, including workshops and worship, were held jointly with Franconia Mennonite Conference.—

**Underpass opens on Goshen campus**

Goshen, Ind.—Just as the Goshen College campus and city prepared to celebrate the official completion of the Winona Trail Bike and Pedestrian Underpass on Nov. 9, 2012, a train arrived, giving those attending their first reason to put the underpass to use: to get to the ribbon cutting ceremony on the other side of the tracks.

The 10-foot, lit tunnel will allow people on foot or on bike to cross campus even when a train is passing through (or stopped). Steps go down from the walkway between the Good Library and Umble Center to a tunnel and then up on the other side to the Kratz-Miller residence halls and connector, with a “runnel” for bikes to use and a chair lift for disabled people that is activated if a train is present.

The $1.8-million project was financed by a grant to the City of Goshen through the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program, and the college funded the architectural, engineering and planning costs. As much as campus members will benefit from the improvement, it will also serve wider community members who travel through campus on the Winona Bike Trail.—

**MCC addresses domestic abuse in Cambodia**

Akron, Pa.—“Men are gold, women are cloth”—this common Khmer proverb reflects the lowly status women bear in Cambodia, where Women Peacemakers, a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner, is working to reduce violence against women.

Women’s subservient standing is buttressed by Cambodia’s “women’s law,” chhab srei, which instructs women to quietly serve and obey husbands as masters, said Amanda Talstra, who is MCC Cambodia peace and justice advisor. Although the “law,” which is a collection of 125 proverbial maxims, was removed from school curriculum in 2008, it is still a “widely shared cultural value” for women’s behavior, especially in rural areas, she says.

In this societal framework, domestic violence is an issue, says Chea Muoy Kry, executive director of Women Peacemakers, an MCC partner. Studies indicate that one in four Cambodian women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, she says. This is similar to the U.S. rate.

Several of MCC’s partners address issues of violence in society and strengthen women’s ability to support their families, but it is Women Peacemakers that addresses domestic violence directly. The group offers trainings on the rights of women and children in rural areas of Kampong

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**Doing the Howard Hustle at Hesston College**

Participants in the 21st annual Howard Hustle Two-Mile Run/Walk start the day-after-Thanksgiving race led by an enthusiastic group of costumed Hesston (Kan.) College students. More than 320 college students, Thanksgiving Weekend guests and local community members completed the route.—Hesston College
Cham province in central Cambodia, the province with the second highest rate of violence against women.

Both men and women learn about gender roles, domestic violence, sexual violence, marriage relationships, substance abuse and its effects on women and children. Follow-up training includes instruction on resolving conflicts and communicating without violence.—MCC

**Bethel signs nursing agreement with Hesston**

NORTH NEWTON, Kan.—As Bethel College’s online RN-BSN program moves closer to going live, a new agreement will ease the transition for graduates of nearby Hesston College.

On Dec. 6, 2012, Bonnie Sowers, director of Hesston’s associate degree in nursing (ADN) program, and Sandra Zerger, Hesston vice president of academics, came to the Bethel campus to sign the agreement along with their counterparts Phyllis Miller, Bethel director of nursing, and Brad Born, vice president for academic affairs.

The agreement “streamlines the process for Hesston ADN graduates entering into Bethel’s RN-BSN program,” says Rhonda Williams, Bethel RN-BSN coordinator.

She says Hesston nursing graduates are guaranteed admission to Bethel’s program as long as they meet the criteria of graduating with an associate degree and a GPA of 2.5 or higher as well as passing the RN licensure exam.

Bethel and Hesston, sister schools within Mennonite Education Agency of Mennonite Church USA, have long had a general articulation agreement to facilitate students transferring from Hesston, a two-year college, to Bethel to complete a four-year degree.

This is the first agreement Bethel has signed with another school that specifically relates to the nursing program.—**Bethel College**

**Mennonite radio spots on addictions sent to 13,000 stations across U.S.**

HARRISONBURG, Va., and WATERLOO, Ont.—New public service announcements produced by Menno Media are being mailed by CD or email to 13,000 radio stations across the United States. A grant from Schowalter Foundation helped with funding.

*Never Too Late: Hope for Addictions* is a series of 16, 30-second and two 60-second radio spots that offer encouragement for individuals and families battling drug and alcohol addictions. The spots feature real people telling their stories of pain, addiction, stigma and loss of family and friends.

The spots also address community problems of binge drinking and teenage drinking and driving with Brian Kelley, a psychology professor and researcher at Bridgewater (Va.) College. The spots end with a variety of tags including, “This message from the Mennonite churches,” or with available resources from MennoMedia such as websites, and a Close to Home pamphlet, “Dealing with Drug Addiction.”

The spots are available at thirdway.com/rad. Churches or community groups interested in the spots aired on a local station can request a free CD of the spots.—MennoMedia

**Fund for Peoplehood Education awards grants**

GOSHEN, Ind.—Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) has announced the recipients of the Fund for Peoplehood Education grants for the 2012–2013 academic year.

• Goshen College received $4,000 for the “strengthening Mennonite colleges as faith mentoring environments” project directed by campus pastor Bob Yoder.

• The Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education office of MEA received $3,000 for the Instituto Bíblico Anabautista tutor retreat.

• The Lancaster, Pa., campus of Eastern Mennonite University received $2,500 for the comprehensive review and revision of the STEP Curriculum, a project led by Mark Wenger, director of pastoral ministries.

• MEA received $2,000 toward online Anabaptist Learning Institute courses, a cooperative project of Mennonite Schools Council and MEA.

The Fund for Peoplehood Education is a donor-restricted term endowment. The fund supports initiatives that promote the distinctive features of church-sponsored education and encourage strong ties between Mennonite Church USA and its schools. Since 1995, its grants have gone to interpretive projects that advocate church-sponsored schools; innovative ways of calling and orienting gifted members to the teaching ministry; orientation programs for teachers, administrators and trustees; and research that enhances church-school relationships.—**MEA**
Save my son

Save My Son is a new TV show on the cable network TVOne. Dr. Steve Perry, founder and principal of the Capital Preparatory Magnet School, created the program. Dr. Perry is asked by mothers to come into their family and do whatever it takes to save their sons, because the mothers feel they have lost all control and hope. Within three days, Dr. Perry and his “friends,” men from all walks of life, come together to wrap themselves around a troubled youth.

The program is special in the fact that it shows men of color supporting one another, their communities and expressing genuine love to our sons. Whether it is a local barber or restaurant owner—or celebrity actors and athletes—we are invited into the stories of young men and can observe their struggles over the last 30 years or more. As the men reach out to help a desolate young man who is lost find his way back home, their own stories open up. The men reveal their past choices and how those choices have affected their lives. Tales of homelessness, poverty, drug abuse, theft, grief and loss, even physical and emotional abuses are revealed.

One by one, the troubled youth are offered a game plan to turn from the current path of destruction and reunite with family and a new community that is willing to support their new life styles.

The program reminds me of the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. A young man by choice ventures out into the world unprepared for what the world offers. He is young, immature and without proper guidance. The young man begins experimenting with things that seem good in the moment—only to realize he is far from anything familiar or the comforts of his life. The young man finds himself in strange and dark places, willing to do anything to survive.

15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

Dr. Perry’s program reveals to the community that the road back is paved mostly with shame but also grief, loss, confusion and fear. These young men believe they are no longer loved or question if they were ever loved. Unlike the Prodigal Son, who realized his mistake and went back humbly to his father, many of our sons will need someone to guide them back.

The best part of the biblical story about the Prodigal Son is the response of the father. The young man thought there would be anger, resentment and maybe even punishment for his actions, yet he was met with an overabundance of love. The father was so excited that his son was no longer lost—nothing else mattered. The show Save My Son aims at providing an inclusive atmosphere where all returning sons are welcomed and valued.

Unlike the Prodigal Son, who realized his mistake and went back humbly to his father, many of our sons will need someone to guide them back.

21 Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

This is the way our Father in heaven is with us. No matter how far we stray, God is right there waiting for us to turn around, humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness. And when we do, God provides us with the best he has to offer, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our past no longer matters. The ugliness of our behaviors has been covered by the redemptive powers of our God.

For every young man and woman lost in their own sense of darkness, I pray the power of Christ’s community to intervene in their lives so they will experience the love and celebration God has for each of us.
Japanese Mennonites address nuclear power

On Friday, March 11, 2011, an earthquake so powerful that it altered the axis of the earth struck in the Pacific Ocean 40 miles from the coast of Japan. The earthquake, with a magnitude of 9.03, triggered massive tsunami waves of ocean water that struck the Oshika Peninsula with devastating force. When it was over, at least 16,000 people had lost their lives, millions were forced to leave their homes, and property damages were estimated to reach $235 billion.

But the aftershocks of the earthquake and tsunami were felt in other ways as well. Damage from the flooding, combined with human errors, led to level seven meltdowns at three nuclear reactors in the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, which led to still more deaths, the forced evacuation of thousands of additional residents and great uncertainty about the long-term impact of radioactive exposure to humans and the environment.

The catastrophic events at Fukushima have prompted an intense conversation among Mennonites in Japan about the future use of nuclear power—and deeper ethical questions about energy consumption, standard of living and environmental responsibility.

The Mennonite presence in Japan has never been larger. The majority of the 75 congregations, mostly affiliated with the Mennonite Brethren, Brethren in Christ and Mennonite churches, are concentrated in Kyushu, Yamaguchi, Osaka, Tokyo and Hokkaido. Although some Japanese Mennonites—especially the nationally known poet Yorifumi Yaguchi (see his poem at right)—have been actively engaged in various forms of peace witness, most have traditionally not expressed themselves vocally in the public arena.

But the 2011 tsunami and subsequent nuclear catastrophe have prompted some Japanese Mennonites to new forms of action. Already in the spring of 2011, the “tsunami response committee” of the Japanese Mennonite Fellowship was linking Mennonite congregations with individual victims of the Fukushima disaster who needed financial, emotional and spiritual support. More recently, Japanese Mennonites have begun to broaden their witness. For example, in February 2012, Tojo Takanobu, Oshikiri Keisuke and Ishido Mitsuru, all members of the Tokyo Anabaptist Fellowship of Churches, formed the Japan Anabaptist Peace Research Institute—Fukushima Focus (JAPRI FF) to foster theological conversations about the ethics of nuclear power from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. With painful memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still very much alive in Japan, the human and ecological devastation at Fukushima has brought new urgency to such questions. According to Ishido Mitsuru, JAPRI FF is committed to “sharing the tragic experiences in Japan with the global church in order to develop a new form of peace building”—one that can envision a society “that does not depend on nuclear power.” The conversations promoted by JAPRI FF are spreading. Last September, the Mennonite congregation in Hiroshima hosted a seminar on nuclear power. Last November, 30 people representing nine Mennonite congregations attended a similar gathering at the Obihiro church in Hokkaido that brought together scientific research and theological insights with a call for greater political engagement to work for a nuclear-free society. In these and other settings Japanese Mennonites are consciously wrestling with theological understandings of technology and the related questions of corporate profits, personal energy consumption and the Christian’s relationship to the natural world.

These conversations are taking place within a much broader, sometimes divisive, national debate in Japanese society: Is it thinkable that a country with limited natural resources could wean itself from a dependence on nuclear energy? What changes in lifestyle would such a decision entail? The deeper issues extend far beyond Japan. Throughout the ages, Christians have wrestled with the mystery of God’s role in earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters. But in questions regarding energy production and consumption, we all are making choices every day, with consequences that are truly global in scope. In a recent email, Mitsuko Yaguchi, wife of the poet Yorifumi, spoke on behalf of other Japanese Mennonites when she wrote: “We would like to know what the Mennonites in North America think about nuclear power or alternative sources of energy.”

How would you or your congregation respond to that question? Do we know the source of the electrical power that supplies our homes and churches? What responsibility do we bear for the long-term energy policies of our country? Could we imagine a future without nuclear power?
Invest in infrastructure now or pay much more later

After every natural disaster, it seems, there is talk about being better prepared for the next one. Yet little usually happens. People often move back to dangerous settings, and U.S. infrastructure continues to deteriorate.

True to form, ideas and promises emerged after Hurricane Sandy devastated much of the East Coast. In his *Newsweek* article “Everyday Armageddon” (Nov. 26/Dec. 3, 2012), David Cay Johnston writes: “If we are to avoid the next major catastrophe—and it will come—then we have to start paying the bill now.”

Johnston notes that “America spends just 2.4 percent of its economy on infrastructure, compared with 5 percent in Europe.”

As New York and New Jersey (among other states) look at rebuilding, their governors and others are calling for a clear strategy. New York mayor Michael Bloomberg says, “You cannot build a skyscraper economy on a foundation designed for a farmhouse; it will collapse under its own weight.”

He goes on to suggest 12 projects “where investing corporate and tax dollars would not only pay off now by creating jobs and making the economy more efficient but would save lives while reducing future costs.”

Here is a summary of his 12 projects:

1. **Accelerate replacement of natural gas pipelines.** During Sandy, leaking gas fueled hundreds of fires.

2. **Stop AT&T and Verizon from shutting down** the old copper-wire telephone system, the only telecommunications that work when the electric grid goes down and cellphone-tower batteries run out of juice.

3. **Demand that electric utilities replace power poles** as they wear out and maintain equipment, especially changing oils in large transformers before they congeal and stick, to reduce long-term costs.

4. **Increase tree trimming** to prevent downed electrical lines during storms and move more lines underground to make the electric grid more reliable.

5. **Promote smaller grids** instead of the vast multistate grids now being developed that can throw millions of people into darkness because of one mistake or even one fallen limb.

6. **Develop a 10-year plan** to tear down, rebuild or strengthen every dam rated risky by the civil-engineering society.

7. **Replace within a decade** every large water and sewer main past its predicted life, with an emphasis on the largest pipes.

8. **Place big warning signs** on every highway bridge, advising motorists of when the structure should have been rebuilt or replaced and when, if ever, work is scheduled to begin.

9. **Invest in riprap seawalls** that extend perpendicular from the shoreline into the sea. These structures capture drifting sand and build up and maintain sand dunes and the vegetation that holds them in place.

10. **Replace rail lines** running through marshlands with elevated structures. This would limit commuter service disruptions after future storms.

11. **Rebuild marshes** and other natural barriers, like oyster reefs, that absorb the shock of storms.

12. **Require detailed emergency plans** by natural-gas, electric, water and telecommunications utilities as a condition of keeping their licenses.

Prevention is cost-effective.—Gordon Houser
It is interesting to me that writing about what one doesn’t believe attracts more attention than what one does.—Diana Butler Bass, author of Christianity After Religion

Shrug off insults
Some Muslim leaders are saying that the Islamic world needs to learn to shrug off insults made against their religion and Muhammad. One group points to an anecdote in the tradition in which a woman put thorns in Muhammad’s path and threw manure at him when in prayer. Muhammad not only tolerated this tormented woman, he went to visit her when she fell ill. A popular Egyptian blogger has stated that violent protests “were more damaging to Islam’s reputation than a thousand so-called ‘Islam-attacking films.’” —Christian Century

The true cost of high school dropouts
Only 70 percent of ninth graders today will get high school diplomas, write Henry M. Levin and Cecilia E. Rouse. “A decade after the No Child Left Behind law mandated efforts to reduce the racial gap, about 80 percent of white and Asian students graduate from high school, compared with only 55 percent of blacks and Hispanics.”

Reducing the current number of dropouts by just half would yield almost 700,000 new graduates a year, they write, and it would more than pay for itself. “Studies show that the typical high school graduate will obtain higher employment and earnings—an astonishing 50 percent to 100 percent increase in lifetime income—and will be less likely to draw on public money for health care and welfare and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. Further, because of the increased income, the typical graduate will contribute more in tax revenues over his lifetime than if he’d dropped out.

“When the costs of investment to produce a new graduate are taken into account, there is a return of $1.45 to $3.55 for every dollar of investment, depending upon the educational intervention strategy. Under this estimate, each new graduate confers a net benefit to taxpayers of about $127,000 over the graduate’s lifetime.” —New York Times

Less cheating among American students
Are American students making the grade when it comes to ethics? A new survey from the Josephson Institute of Ethics finds that the portion of high school students who admit to cheating, lying or stealing dropped in 2012 for the first time in a decade.—Religion News Service

Numbers to ponder
- Jobs created for every $1 million in sales at a grocery co-op: **9.3**
- Jobs created for every $1 million in sales at a conventional grocery store: **5.8**
- Megawatts of wind energy on the U.S. grid in 2012: **50,000**
- American homes that 50,000 megawatts can power: **13 million**
- Years it took for America’s wind power to double from 25,000 megawatts: **4**
- Rank of U.S. 10th graders in alcohol and tobacco use, compared with peers in 36 European countries: **36**
- Rank of U.S. 10th graders in marijuana use, compared with peers in 36 European countries: **3**
- Rank of U.S. 10th graders in use of illegal drugs other than marijuana: **1**

Kenyan church leaders oppose bills
Kenyan church leaders are lining up in opposition to proposed new marriage bills, which they say will weaken marriage by allowing cohabitating couples to register as married. One bill would bring Christian, Hindu, Muslim, civil and customary marriages under one law, and another would give spouses and children more rights to property.—Religion News Service

Islamic Relief USA named top nonprofit
Islamic Relief USA has received a 2012 Top-Rated Award by Great Nonprofits, the leading provider of user reviews about nonprofit organizations. The 2012 Top-Rated Nonprofit List was based on the large number of positive reviews that IRUSA received—reviews written by volunteers, donors and clients.—IRUSA

Average tax rate paid by all households in 2009: **17.4 percent**
Average tax rate paid by all households in 2007: **19.9 percent**
30-year average tax rate paid by all households before 2009: **21 percent**
—Congressional Budget Office
Robert Kreider helped shape the 20th-century Mennonite church.

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

Even though the Old Testament patriarch Abraham lived to be 175, it is not his longevity that most impresses Robert Kreider, 94, a longtime leader in the Mennonite church. What resonates with him is Abraham’s trust on a faith journey woven with God’s call to leave certainty and embrace change.

Robert Kreider at his computer at home. Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson
The New Testament journey motif of walking in the footsteps of Jesus—marked by exploring questions more than expounding answers—is one that Kreider, who lives with Lois (Sommer), his wife of 67 years, in North Newton, Kan., has always valued. This spirit sustained him on a pilgrimage that led through the heart of the Mennonite story of the 20th century, when he served the church in education, administration and church leadership in the 1940s through the 1990s. In those decades, he and his peers grappled with the creep of urban influence into their largely-rural-based church, practiced nonresistance in a world gone to war and sought to navigate modernity while holding fast to their values of community, simplicity and discipleship.

One of few peers still alive in the 21st century to share stories of those times, Kreider, a teacher invited to share wisdom, is also a student, eager to learn more. God’s vast universe, which has evoked responses of resilient humility through 10 decades, is still presenting Kreider with new mysteries and questions.

A central motif for Kreider is seeking to live with the mind and spirit of Christ. “My responses about faith have been less on the side of the theological than they have been on the side of theological motifs,” he said during an interview at their apartment connected to the multigenerational home of son David, daughter-in-law Heidi Regier Kreider and grandsons Ben and Mark.

“One of those motifs is the story of walking in the footsteps of someone like Abraham, who when God called him, left the safety of the known for the risk of the unknown. A favored story in this motif is the one about the disciples walking with the stranger on the road to Emmaus.

“These stories tell us something about living in the faith, rather than needing to have it all figured out. … There is always an outer edge beyond us. And in my latter days, my journey is still filled with wonder. I live in awe and appreciation.”

His verve for joyful wonder in his twilight years witnesses to how his decades of fruitful service seeded his spirit for today’s reflections. His ministries included directing education programs and mental health units in Civilian Public Service (alternative service in World War II) as well as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) relief work in postwar Germany and Europe. He earned master’s and doctoral degrees in history and taught history at Bluffton (Ohio) College (now University) (1952-1974), where he also served as dean and president. He later taught at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., (1974-1985).

He served as recording secretary for Mennonite World Conference and traveled overseas on its behalf, and he served on the Executive Committee of MCC. In 1961-62 he helped establish in Africa the MCC Teacher’s Abroad Program, a program leading to 1,000 volunteers, and assisted Atlee Beechy in the beginnings of China Educational Exchange. He curated the Mirror of the Martyrs exhibit, which has itinerated to more than 70 venues in the United States and Canada, led scores of Mennonite history tours throughout south central Kansas, and authored many books and articles.

**Building a bridge to common ground**

Awe and appreciation by younger generations surround the story of Kreider and his generation,
who helped to build a bridge from the past to today, says John A. Lapp, executive secretary emeritus of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Kreider’s life is a stone in the bridge that has led to the pathway on which Mennonite Church USA now walks.

Robert was a bridge builder and made sure we heard each other properly when discussing our differences.—John A. Lapp

This stone was shaped by several inter-Mennonite elements, Lapp says. Kreider’s ancestors have origins in the former Old Mennonite Church (later called Mennonite Church). His grandfather, J.S. Shoemaker, was a key player in that church through the 1920s, and his father, Amos, was a notable pastor and educator. Robert’s childhood and formative years are a bridge between his Old Mennonite roots and the former General Conference Mennonite Church. He has served in roles that criss-crossed the MC-GC worlds that in 2003 merged to create Mennonite Church USA.

“Robert was a bridge builder and made sure we heard each other properly when discussing our differences,” Lapp says. “He was a reconciling personality and clearly understood that there are multiple Mennonite traditions. He appreciates the multiplicity and diversity and strives to help all of us find common ground.

“Robert was as close to the center of things as you could get in the 1940s through the 1990s—and he is still with us. If anyone represents Mennonites in the 20th century, it is Robert.”

Leaving old lands for new territories

Kreider was born Jan. 2, 1919, to the farm and pastorate family of the late Amos (Ebersole) and Stella (Shoemaker) Kreider in Sterling, Ill. It was within the safe cocoon of a loving family and congregation—Science Ridge Mennonite Church—that he was nurtured as the eldest child of the family that 19 months later welcomed Gerald into its fold. The family moved to Goshen, Ind., in 1921 so his father could teach at Goshen College. Buffeted by church tensions, the college closed in 1923-1924.

“It was a daunting task for a separatist, top-down Mennonite establishment, most of whose leaders were limited in formal education, to redefine patterns of church life threatened by bewildering changes,” Kreider writes in his first autobiography, My Early Years (Pandora Press with Herald Press, 2003, $12.95). His father commuted to teach at Witmarsum Theological Seminary at Bluffton and during the year of Goshen’s closing served as pastor at College Mennonite Church in Goshen. The family, remaining Old Mennonite, moved to Bluffton in 1926. With the closing of the seminary in 1931, his father was invited to become pastor at First Mennonite Church. Robert’s parents then became General Conference. In 1935, when Robert graduated from high school, the family moved to North Newton, where his father accepted a professorship at Bethel College and where Robert enrolled as a freshman.

“These were all warm and stimulating church experiences in three or four different stages,” Kreider says. “Though the Goshen years were full of stress and strain for my father, I still have good memories of our neighborhood on South Eighth Street and our church home at the college.

“When we came to Bluffton, I experienced a fascinating world of Mennonite diversity, a community of Swiss Mennonites sprinkled with families of Russian, Old Mennonite and other ethnic backgrounds. At First Mennonite, there were

The second half of Kreider’s autobiography is available from Amazon. He documented the first part of his life (1919-1952) in My Early Years (Pandora Press, 2003). Coming Home spans 60 years, from 1952-2011.
stained-glass windows, an organ, a bell, German services once a month, a Sunday school orchestra, all kinds of modernity I had not known before.”

**Venturing from the Mennonite web into the wider world**

It was this formational web of varied Anabaptist groups that prepared Kreider, who graduated in 1939 from Bethel at 20 with a history degree, to launch into the wider world and church. In 1941, he graduated with a master’s degree in history from the University of Chicago. He then was conscripted as a conscientious objector to serve at the Colorado Springs (Colo.) CPS camp, where he was appointed assistant director and educational director, the first such appointments of draftees. In 1942, he began coordinating educational programs for MCC-CPS camps and in 1944 was appointed director of the 26 CPS mental hospital units of MCC.

At war’s end in 1945, he and Lois Sommer, a Bluffton graduate in home economics, were married after an eight-month courtship. They served in postwar Europe from 1946 through 1949, where he was director of MCC relief work, first in Germany, then throughout Europe. Lois planned child feeding programs for 5,000 children at Kiel, Germany. Later she served as hostess of the MCC center in Basel, Germany. In that era, the church called young adults like the Kreiders and other couples they worked with in Europe—Atlee and Winifred Beechy and Peter and Elfreda Dyck—into responsible roles.

“It had been expected that the church could get enough pastors and church leaders to staff CPS camps,” Robert says, “but the demands were so great … it became necessary to risk with younger, more inexperienced men.

“I remember some reticence on my part, but I never forgot what the late Orie Miller told me when, as a deliberating 22-year-old, I was asked to take a staff appointment. He said, ‘When the church asks you to serve, let your answer be yes unless there is a good reason to say no.’

“The Europe years were some of the most intense and shaping of my whole life.—Robert Kreider

With many others, the Kreiders etched a lasting mark on the Mennonite timeline. But the couple’s work was far from done. They began raising a family of five children (their first baby, Ruth Marie, died) as Robert began as history professor at Bluffton in 1952 and completed his doctoral work in history in 1953 at the University of Chicago. During the Bluffton years, the couple forged a strong family life in the midst of Robert’s intense responsibilities. Lois kept a steady hand on the rudder of the home life in the house they built on the banks of Riley Creek while maintaining an active role in church and community life.

In the 1960s, she gave leadership to a Girl Scout troop and annual sales for MCC Self Help. In 1974, she and colleagues launched the Bluffton MCC thrift-Self Help (Ten Thousand Villages) shop—the first in the United States, and when they moved to Kansas, she helped establish a similar shop in Newton. Soon she was traveling for MCC to help establish 100 such shops in the United States and Canada, which in 2011 generated $13 million for MCC.

“Lois’ special contribution to our family was her ability to live simply, her tidy sense of economy, her generosity,” Robert says. “She worked with limited financial resources to take care of

From left: Amos, Gerald, Robert and Stella Kreider in 1924 Photo provided
the children and to host a flow of college guests.”

The family experienced a reprieve from the daily grind when in 1970-1971 they traveled as campers for six months around the Mediterranean on Kreider’s sabbatical leave. They visited MCC units, lived for a month in Jerusalem, visited Cappadocia, where Lois’ mother had been a missionary educator on the eve of World War I, penetrated the Sahara and set foot in 11 countries. The entourage that traveled in a VW bus included the couple and their five children, ranging in age from 9 to 19. It was an adventure of great impact, said son David during the family interview in North Newton last fall. The fourth of five children, his other siblings are, in birth order, Esther, Joan, Karen and Ruth Elinor, his younger sister.

“I’ll never forget as a sixth grader seeing the wall in the MCC house in east Jerusalem and the shell marks left in it from the Six-Day War, or standing next to no-man’s land, cleared of rubble, on the division between Israel and Jordan,” he said.

Robert and Lois moved to North Newton, with their two youngest in 1975, when Robert was invited by Bethel to teach peace studies and direct the Mennonite Library and Archives. In 1978, he became interim dean, then vice president of Bethel in 1984, after he retired from the faculty.

Reaping riches of community, family in twilight years

In their retirement decades, their schedules have overflowed. Robert has written books, traveled for Mennonite World Conference and MCC, curated museum exhibits, critiqued manuscripts submitted by scholars, taught Sunday school class and engaged in diverse causes. Lois, involved in the MCC gift-shop movement, has volunteered in a variety of church programs.

They took each of their adult children on a major overseas trip with an eye for remote places: the Arctic tundra of Alaska, the southern tip of New Zealand, the Orkney Islands in the North Sea. Even with all the wealth of their experiences, it is the riches of loving relationships they enjoy with their family that they count as most precious, they say. In 1978, they moved to a farmstead with a barn, garden and chickens in North Newton; in 2003, it became a multigenerational household when their son’s family moved into the main house and built an apartment for them on the north end.

“We’ve been incredibly blessed with our children,” Robert says. “And now with all the grandchildren, and two great-grandsons, those institutional years dwarf in comparison.”

Lois says: “There has been so much that has been providential on our journey. ... There has always been a sense of leading and naturalness in the context of community.”

Today this community is filled with people much younger than they who have much to gain from the riches of their lives, says John Sharp, professor of history at Hesston (Kan.) College.

“The Kreiders and their contemporaries are keepers of our corporate memory, and their memory enriches us, informs us, guides us and corrects us—if we pay attention,” Sharp says. “Their stories become ours and become useful when we become stewards of that memory. ... A people and a church without a memory is rootless and rudderless, and for that reason, Robert and Lois are such gifts to us.”

There has always been a sense of leading and naturalness in the context of community.—Lois Kreider

Laurie Oswald Robinson is a free-lance writer in Newton, Kan., and the author of Forever Family.
Elaine Moyer has led in both public and private school classrooms, on the athletic field, as department chair and associate athletic director at Bluffton (Ohio) University, as principal of Christopher Dock Mennonite High School, Lansdale, Pa., and now as senior director of the Mennonite Education Agency.

Do/did you have a woman leader as mentor? If so, how does/did she help you?

Growing up in the 1960s and entering professional life in the 1970s was a privilege. Full leadership for a young woman was possible in Girls Missionary and Service Auxiliary and leadership as a vice president or secretary was possible in Mennonite Youth Fellowship. Women led as Sunday school teachers and head of Women’s Missionary and Service Auxiliary. The leadership from within taught me valuable lessons. Both women and men have served as models of servant leadership for me.

Are you mentoring a young woman who may be a potential church leader?

Just as I have been blessed to have mentors, I seek to encourage others to step into leadership. I recommend Thriving in Leadership, a collection of essays from various Christian perspectives, including those who lead from the base of Mennonite/Anabaptist faith. Each chapter is written by senior-level administrative leaders at Christian colleges. See a review at www.mennoniteeducation.org/MEAPortal/Portals/57ad7180-c5e7-49f5-b282-c6475c3db7ee7/Stepping%20Up%20newsletter/2012%2011%20Stepping%20Up.pdf.

If so, how is her experience the same/different from yours?

I see hopeful signs that women are being actively invited to serve on boards, church counsel, in ministry and as administrators. The voice and leadership style that women bring to leadership positions strengthen vision and decision-making. I am encouraged that many boards are noticing that it is essential to have balance of gender and ethnicity at the table.

What impediments have you faced in becoming a leader?

I grew up on a farm with parents who encouraged me to step up and do, learn and lead. I was surprised to enter organized settings where, as a young woman, I was expected to “know my place.” We still have too many church and related ministries where Jesus might frown at the system and turn in support of those that systems ignore.

When you face challenges as leader, what encourages you?

I face many challenges that require prayer, direct communication and collective, honest discernment. I am most encouraged when people of faith come prepared to stay at the table engage difficult issues and questions. “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.” My hope is that we will all faithfully seek to live this vision.
The first two sentences, set in large font, on the Financial Aid page of Hesston (Kan.) College’s website cut right to the chase: “Let’s be clear, college is expensive. There’s really no way to dance around it.”

by Andrew Jenner
Concern over college affordability in the United States is nothing new. The inflation-adjusted average annual cost of tuition, room and board for the country’s colleges and universities has more than doubled over the past 30 years, according to the U.S. Department of Education. While the cost of attendance has actually been increasing faster at public universities over the past decade, private institutions are in general still more expensive. The National Center for Education Statistics puts the average annual cost of tuition, room and board at private, not-for-profit American universities at $36,300 for the 2010-2011 academic year.

While the Mennonite Church USA-affiliated colleges and universities aren’t quite that pricey, they’re not cheap either. According to online “sticker price” figures, the average full cost of attendance this year at the five colleges/universities is $33,714. (The full cost of a 90-credit hour M.Div. degree from the two Mennonite Church USA-affiliated seminaries is currently just over $41,000.)

“Higher education as a whole has had to defend its worth and value in today’s society,” says Jason Good, director of retention at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), Harrisonburg, Va. “We see more and more students making their choice based on price instead of what’s a best fit for them.”

When it comes to paying for an education, however, officials at Mennonite educational institutions note that scholarships and financial aid almost always mean that the actual cost of a student’s education will be less than the sticker price.

Dan Koop Liechty, director of admissions at Goshen (Ind.) College, notes that cost and affordability decisions are best made after prospective students have applied, been admitted and received financial assistance packages. At this point, students can make decisions based on the bottom-line cost of their educations, which are often much more comparable to attending a public institution than it first appears.

Directly related to the price of higher education is the issue of student debt, which has also been increasing. According to the Institute for College Access and Success, 2011 graduates who borrowed to finance their educations finished with an average debt load of $26,600. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, some consider this an unreasonable burden to place on graduates entering an uncertain job market. Others characterize it as a reasonable investment—about the cost of a new Toyota Prius—that sets college graduates on the path to a much larger payoff.

“It’s not debt that you’re using to buy consumables and putting on a credit card with a 21-percent interest rate,” says Ron Headings, vice president for enrollment management and marketing at Bluffton (Ohio) University. “It’s buying you a college degree.”

Headings adds that with prior planning and hard work during college—to maintain academic scholarships as well as earn income—students and their families can find it “fairly easy to get out of Bluffton University debt-free.”

Cost and debt aside, getting a college degree clearly remains a smart financial investment for young adults. While estimates vary, many sources now place the average increase in earnings over a 40-year career at near $1 million compared to workers without a college degree.

Engaged faculty invested in students’ well-being and emphases on critical thinking and cross-cultural skills prepare them particularly well for the future.

Furthermore, faculty, staff and alumni of the five colleges and universities say a degree from one isn’t just any garden-variety bachelor’s degree. “At a larger school, many of the foundational classes are taught by teaching assistants,” says Matthew Schmidt, a 1994 graduate of Bethel College, North Newton, Kan. “At Bethel you have full professors teaching these same classes.”

Schmidt, who lives in Newton, Kan., and is interim director of a clinic providing health services to medically underserved populations, says the small class sizes at Bethel created an interactive environment ideal for collaborative learning.

Additionally, engaged faculty invested in students’ well-being and emphases on critical thinking and cross-cultural skills prepare them particularly well for the future. Two of many indications are these:

- From 2006 to 2010, 91 percent of EMU graduates who applied to medical school were accepted, more than double the national acceptance rate of 46 percent.
- At Bethel, 95 percent of social work graduates pass their licensing exams on the first attempt, compared with a national pass rate of 78 percent.

“In a rapidly changing and highly specialized job market, a liberal arts college degree provides an essential foundation for the basic skills that are
needed in a dynamic economic environment,” says John D. Roth, the author of *Teaching that Transforms: Why Anabaptist-Mennonite Education Matters* and a professor of history at Goshen College. “So education at Goshen College is ‘worth it’ for straightforward economic reasons alone.”

But the financial case for the value of a Mennonite college, university or seminary education only tells part of the story.

Back on the Hesston College financial aid page: “The key is to think of [education] in terms of value. While the cost of college may initially be a bit of a shock, step back, take a deep breath and think about the experiences and lifelong advantages a Hesston education provides.” This appeal to the value of a Mennonite education is an extremely important part of the argument.

Close, caring relationships between students and faculty often are another important aspect of an education at a Mennonite institution.

“As Anabaptists, we are part of a tradition that measures worth in more than monetary terms,” says Rachel Swartzendruber Miller, vice president of admissions and financial aid at Hesston. “Mennonite colleges and universities not only offer course credits and degrees, we provide transformational opportunities for our students to fully discover themselves and their place in God’s mission in the world.”

**Gradsuates of these schools** frequently point to impossible-to-quantify personal growth as one of the most important parts of their educations there. “Attending Goshen College was a seminal time in my development,” says Peter Eash-Scott, a 1999 graduate, now a stay-at-home dad in Newton. “It probably is one of the most influential things that has informed who I am, what I value and who I strive to be.”

Spending four years in a learning environment surrounded by people who held similar values, Eash-Scott adds, provided “a safe place to explore my faith and challenge my understanding of God, myself and the faith community,” both in and out of the classroom.

Close, caring relationships between students and faculty often are another important aspect of an education at a Mennonite institution.

“The faculty and staff here are part of our community,” says Clark Oswald, associate director of admissions at Bethel. “We care for our neighbors. That’s something as Mennonites that we learn in church growing up, and at Bethel we do that. … There’s just kind of this underlying sense of ‘we’re in this together.’”

Michelle Roth-Cline, a 2000 graduate of EMU, called the mentoring role of faculty “absolutely invaluable.” Now a pediatric ethicist for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Roth-Cline says her education at EMU prepared her for medical school as well as her classmates coming from Ivy League and other prestigious schools. At the same time, what she learned about building relationships has served her equally well.

“I learned more about how to care for other people at EMU than I did in medical school. Simply knowing how to care for other people in this way has opened all kinds of doors both personally and professionally that I never would have imagined possible when I was choosing a college,” Roth-Cline says.

Leah Roeschley, a 2011 graduate of Bluffton, says her education there set the stage for her own spiritual growth. The opportunity to explore Mennonite faith and spirituality, combined with “space to ask questions [and] space to access and receive counsel” allows students to “claim a faith that is truly their own,” she says.
“My Mennonite education was worth it because my college experience was bracketed with values that resonated with me,” says Roeschley, a registered dietitian in Bloomington, Ill. “Those values were in the background of everything I did at Bluffton. … I left not only fully equipped for the field of dietetics, but I also left with … a deeper understanding of who I was.”

A related role played by Mennonite higher education is the development of future church leaders and members.

“There is strong and long-standing research that shows that students who graduate from a Mennonite college are far more likely to participate after college in a Mennonite congregation, our denominational service agencies and leadership positions in the denominational structures. Mennonite higher education is not only a great value for students, we are of great value to our denomination,” says Koop Liechty, the admissions director at Goshen.

Laura Amstutz, director of admissions at Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS), says that study at a Mennonite seminary puts Anabaptist “theology, history, polity and biblical understandings” at the center of the curriculum. At a non-Mennonite school, she adds, these topics—key in the development of church leaders—would often be relegated to electives.

Ron Guengerich, a 1974 graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), says his education gave him a lifelong love of scholarship and the church while bringing the Bible alive as “a challenging and transforming ‘word.’ ” Now the pastor of Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, he says he left well prepared for work within the church and eager to continue advanced study of the Old Testament.

Given the relatively low pay offered to people entering church leadership and ministry positions, Amstutz says EMS is concerned with the growing cost of attendance and believes all levels of the denomination need to “find ways to help support students financially.”

There is also a converse question of worth to consider: What would be the price of not having strong educational institutions?

“It’s impossible to put a money value on effective and visionary leadership for the church,” says Sara Wenger Shenk, president of AMBS. “Most of us don’t get it that healthy communities thrive … because they have compassionate, competent and confident leaders.”

“Thank God for those who remember that the cost of ignorance and immaturity given full sway in local congregations is far greater than an investment in those who are ready to become masters of the craft,” she says.

The sum of an educational experience at a Mennonite educational institution is greater than its individual parts.
Profiles of three women presidents of Mennonite higher education institutions

Shirley Showalter at the Goshen College Music Center dedication, Fall 2002. Photo by Ryan Miller, GC Public Relations Office

Lee Snyder with John Kampen, dean and vice president of academic affairs at Bluffton University at the time. Photo by Burton Andrews, Bluffton University

Sara Wenger Shenk with AMBS student Tony Froese
Photo by Peter Ringenberg
Despite encountering the “concrete wall” (impenetrable barriers), “glass ceiling” (invisible barriers) and “labyrinth” (unclear paths), women have made progress in higher education. A 2012 report from the American Council on Education notes that the number of women presidents has increased from 10 percent in 1986 to 26 percent in 2011. The following profiles recount the circuitous paths taken by the women presidents of Mennonite Church USA-affiliated higher education institutions.

**Paths to leadership**

by Kerry Strayer

**Shirley Hershey Showalter: building on maternal models**

*Goshen College president, 1996-2004*

Shirley Showalter is grateful for the women in her family and the legacies they have given her—a tradition of aspiration, a knack for socializing, a love of reading and a “tremendous maternal love energy.” These gifts nurtured and empowered her. She was also blessed with teachers and mentors outside the family. “My high school teachers [saw] in me someone who could succeed as a leader, a professional and a teacher.”

She attended Eastern Mennonite College (now University) in Harrisonburg, Va., to pursue a teaching degree in English because she “wanted to be a teacher, … just about the highest pinnacle of career aspiration as far as I was concerned.”

After teaching for two years, she and Stuart, her husband, attended graduate school. Once she completed her master’s degree, she continued her education. For her dissertation she wrote about the Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow, who struggled to balance the competing desires of love and work. While still writing her dissertation, Goshen (Ind.) College dean John Lapp recruited both Showalters.

At Goshen, she took on new challenges—first as head of continuing studies, then partnering with colleague Judith Davis to write a $1 million Title III grant, and finally shepherding a change in general education. “My only criteria for saying yes or no was: Does it seem interesting? Would I enjoy it? Would I grow as a result of it?”

Showalter credits Goshen for cultivating her unique path to the presidency. The small college context gave her flexibility to mix administrative and teaching tasks. As a pioneering member of the women’s studies faculty, the feminist consciousness on campus reinforced her leadership potential.

My high school teachers [saw] in me someone who could succeed as a leader, a professional and a teacher.—Shirley Showalter

In 1980, early in her college career, President Lawrence Burkholder chose her to attend a workshop to meet and be mentored by other college presidents. This fed her inclination to think institutionally and planted the idea of being a college president.

During sabbatical years, she acquired more knowledge and experience—first as a senior fellow for the Association for the Advancement of Higher Education, then as a senior fellow at Valparaiso University. So when she was nominated, she felt prepared.
Showalter has continued to lead and mentor—first as a vice president at the Fetzer Institute and more recently through her writing and home congregation. She hopes for a future where women are given the freedom and encouragement to develop their gifts—much as she did throughout her life.

Lee Snyder: unexpected opportunities
Bluffton College (now University) president, 1996-2006

In the beginning, Lee Snyder didn’t think of herself as a leader. She grew up in an Amish-Mennonite community in Oregon, where women not only were not leaders but were expected to be silent. But Snyder’s father had an interest in education and encouraged in her a love of reading and science. Although an A student, Snyder was still surprised when, after she took an aptitude test at Western Mennonite High School in Salem, Ore., her teacher Bernard Showalter told her she could be a surgeon if she wanted. “It seemed so far-fetched,” she says.

After a year of college, she married and pursued the traditional route of home and family. With both daughters in school, she returned to finish her degree at the University of Oregon. When Del, her husband, was offered a teaching position at Eastern Mennonite College, they moved to Virginia. She attended James Madison University, also in Harrisonburg, and earned a master’s degree in literature. Open to new options, she applied for clerical jobs in the registrar’s and dean’s offices at EMC. “I hadn’t yet discovered I was a good administrator,” she says.

Her gifts were soon recognized, though, and she became the assistant to the dean, then assistant dean, which she discovered she loved. She knew intuitively that she needed a doctorate to move on, although her goal wasn’t clear.

During her second year of graduate work, EMC President Richard Detweiler contacted her about applying for the dean position. Knowing that a dean could excel and still not satisfy everyone, she was hesitant. When the president called again to tell her that faculty members were advocating for her, she applied.

Completing a term as interim dean and her doctorate after one year, she worked happily as the dean for 12 years, cultivating good working relationships with faculty. When she felt ready for a change, she received inquiries from other institutions. While the timing wasn’t right, she says those calls “prepared me to be ready for something else.” When Bluffton (Ohio) College (now University) called, she was ready to accept the presidency.

Snyder also served as moderator of the new Mennonite Church USA denomination. During this time, she saw an opportunity to cultivate an up-and-coming leader. She observed James Harder, a member of the Executive Committee, “with growing admiration for his abilities.” She persuaded him to come to Bluffton and serve as executive assistant to the president. He was named the next president after Snyder stepped down.

In the epilogue to her memoir, At Powerline & Diamond Hill: Unexpected Intersections of Life and Work, Snyder shares a significant email from a friend who prayed “that God will give you the gift of discernment as you are constantly faced with more than you can do.”

Snyder hopes that women in the church get equal opportunity and respect, that they feel empowered to explore their leadership gifts and that they don’t feel they have to do it all.

Although an A student, Snyder was still surprised when, after she took an aptitude test at Western Mennonite High School in Salem, Ore., her teacher Bernard Showalter told her she could be a surgeon if she wanted. “It seemed so far-fetched,” she says.

After a year of college, she married and pursued the traditional route of home and family. With both daughters in school, she returned to finish her degree at the University of Oregon. When Del, her husband, was offered a teaching position at Eastern Mennonite College, they moved to Virginia. She attended James Madison University, also in Harrisonburg, and earned a master’s degree in literature. Open to new options, she applied for clerical jobs in the registrar’s and dean’s offices at EMC. “I hadn’t yet discovered I was a good administrator,” she says.

Her gifts were soon recognized, though, and she became the assistant to the dean, then assistant dean, which she discovered she loved. She knew intuitively that she needed a doctorate to move on, although her goal wasn’t clear.

During her second year of graduate work, EMC President Richard Detweiler contacted her about applying for the dean position. Knowing that a dean could excel and still not satisfy everyone, she was hesitant. When the president called again to tell her that faculty members were advocating for her, she applied.

Completing a term as interim dean and her doctorate after one year, she worked happily as the dean for 12 years, cultivating good working relationships with faculty. When she felt ready for a change, she received inquiries from other institutions. While the timing wasn’t right, she says those calls “prepared me to be ready for something else.” When Bluffton (Ohio) College (now University) called, she was ready to accept the presidency.

Snyder also served as moderator of the new Mennonite Church USA denomination. During this time, she saw an opportunity to cultivate an up-and-coming leader. She observed James Harder, a member of the Executive Committee, “with growing admiration for his abilities.” She persuaded him to come to Bluffton and serve as executive assistant to the president. He was named the next president after Snyder stepped down.

In the epilogue to her memoir, At Powerline & Diamond Hill: Unexpected Intersections of Life and Work, Snyder shares a significant email from a friend who prayed “that God will give you the gift of discernment as you are constantly faced with more than you can do.”

Snyder has the same hopes for future women leaders: that women in the church get equal opportunity and respect, that they feel empowered to explore their leadership gifts and that they don’t feel they have to do it all.

Sara Wenger Shenk: clear path, surprising destination
Associated (now Anabaptist) Mennonite Biblical Seminary president, 2010-

In the Summer 2011 issue of AMBS’ Window, Sara Wenger Shenk wrote that she was surprised by how much she loved her work as president. Knowing her educational pedigree, others aren’t surprised. Her grandfather, A.D. Wenger, was the
second president of EMU (1922-1935) and took a progressive stance of advocating for women’s education. Parents Chester and Sara Wenger were missionaries in Ethiopia and started several schools. Wenger Shenk herself earned an undergraduate degree in English education. She never taught high school, though; instead, she followed Gerald, her husband, to Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., to pursue further education.

As the second wave of the women’s movement peaked, Wenger Shenk found plenty to reflect on regarding what it meant to be a woman. One professor at Fuller—who taught a course that assessed what the Bible had to say about women’s roles—especially helped shape her thoughts. Such theological reflections and her experience contrasted with the women’s movement, which frequently denigrated homemaking. She wrote her first book, *And Then There Were Three*, about wrestling with the implications of a woman called to be a leader and a mother.

Yet Wenger Shenk didn’t perceive herself as a leader until after they moved to Virginia in order for Gerald to teach at EMS. She clearly remembers a comment by EMS Dean George Brunk III: “Sara, you must be a good manager; you’re caring for three children, overseeing an addition to your house and teaching part time.” He saw something in her that she hadn’t seen, named it and encouraged it.

When a half-administrative and half-teaching position opened up, she took it. As part of her training, she worked toward a doctorate in education from Union Theological Seminary. At the same time, Brunk mentored her administrative skills. When Brunk prepared to retire, she was encouraged to apply for the position. She enjoyed her tasks as associate dean, and the dean’s role as the public face of the seminary didn’t interest her. Instead, she continued as associate dean, working with dean Ervin Stutzman for the next eight years.

When the call from the AMBS Presidential Search Committee came in 2009, Wenger Shenk says it was “out-of-the-blue,” since she hadn’t pursued the position. While honored to be identified as a candidate, Wenger Shenk was conflicted. She liked her current job and did not want to move or make her husband switch jobs. She informed the committee that she was unlikely to take the job if offered, but they encouraged her to continue the process. After a discussion with Lee Snyder (then interim provost at EMU) and with her husband’s support, she interviewed and was offered the job. After extensive prayer, soul-searching and tough conversations, she decided to take it.

Suddenly I realized that, yes, this is what I’m called to do.—Sara Wenger Shenk

She felt a growing realization that it would be tough to build her own style and priorities at EMS, following two strong leaders for whom she had been seen as a second-in-command. She realized that AMBS would be a new chapter in her life, moving from the internal work of policy and pedagogy, to building the public case for theological education.

“Suddenly I realized that, yes, this is what I’m called to do.” At AMBS, Wenger Shenk is practicing her vision of good leadership—“shared mutual regard and collaboration.”

Kerry Strayer is an associate professor of communication at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, and a Bluffton (Ohio) University alumna. She taught at Goshen (Ind.) College, took classes at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and attends Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church.
This article is about how I experience biblical hospitality expressed by God and fleshed out by Jesus. Our church, Roanoke (Ill.) Mennonite, now emphasizes “recognizing, affirming and utilizing gifts of the Spirit” regardless of gender, but it wasn’t always this way. I’ve been surprised by how much of a difference this has made to me. Now I feel little disconnect between my spiritual home and my church home, and for this I am thankful.

I had what I’d always thought of as a “Martha” week, and later I asked for discussion and feedback from people at my church, wondering who they felt more drawn toward, Martha or Mary. We had a lively discussion, and I was surprised to learn that some yearned to be Mary but felt obligated to be Martha. (See Luke:10:38-42.)

Later, when the pastoral team sat down to brainstorm a list of people whose characters fit the theme of “finding our spiritual home,” Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, immediately came to my mind. I’d always thought of this story as a contrast between the doers and the be-ers, or between the task-structured and the contemplative sorts. We can all relate to Martha in that there are times when duties overwhelm, and helping hands are scarce. However, my father always said that behind every action was a good reason, and then there was the real reason. Martha had good reason to complain to Jesus about Mary not helping her. But I question whether it was the real reason.

I thought of this story differently after taking a class on biblical interpretation. In the class, we were told how important it was to understand the culture of the people in the time the Bible was written. As this is a story of two women having a spiritual conversation with Jesus, we’ll take a look at how the Jewish culture viewed women.

**In the Jewish patriarchal culture, women**

- were restricted to roles of little or no authority,
- were not allowed to talk to strangers,
- were not allowed to hold property,
- were seen as property—first of their
father’s, then their husband’s (Exodus 20 and 21); as such, a man could sell his daughter as a slave (Exodus 21:7).

**The society determined their value:**
- A child up to 5 years of age was worth five shekels if a boy and three shekels if a girl (Leviticus 27:6).
- Numbers 30 describes that a vow taken by a man is binding, but a vow taken by a woman can be nullified by her father, or later by her husband.
- Women’s value had much to do with their sexuality; they were valued for bearing children but blamed for being temptresses and held responsible for male temptation.
- The Hillel party of Pharisees allowed three grounds for a man to divorce his wife: if she burned his food, talked too loud or he found a more attractive woman. A woman could not divorce her husband.
- And last of my list but significant for our story today: Women were not encouraged to learn the Torah, and in many ways were discouraged because it was thought they could only learn it superficially.

This was the culture for women when Jesus entered the picture. There were cases where women were valued for who they were, but structures are important and say a lot about who we mean to be as a people.

I find it interesting that Jesus didn’t seek to modify the feminine role in Jewish culture but seemed to ignore it altogether and modeled a new way for men and women to relate to each other.

**Jesus didn’t seek to modify the feminine role in Jewish culture but seemed to ignore it altogether and modeled a new way for men and women to relate to each other.**

Here are a few examples of Jesus’ interaction with women:
- In Luke 7, Jesus is invited to the Pharisee Simon’s house because he thinks Jesus might just be the Messiah. During the meal, a woman, most likely a prostitute, washes Jesus’ feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, kisses his feet and massages his feet with ointment. This scenario would make us uncomfortable. In that culture, it was scandalous. Jesus treats her with respect and forgives her sins.
- In Luke 8, Jesus interacts with and heals a woman who has been “unclean” from bleeding for 12 years. By Jewish law, Jesus was made unclean because she had simply touched his robe. Jesus treats her with respect and blesses her.
- In John 4, Jesus engages in a significant spiritual discussion with an adulterous Samaritan woman. In that culture, there was only one reason a man would be talking to this woman—to arrange a sexual encounter. Jesus’ disciples were so shocked, they couldn’t even think how to ask the question. And then this woman tells the good news of her encounter with Jesus and thus becomes an evangelist to her community.
- In the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8, Jesus focuses the attention on the men, which was a radical statement about equality.

In each case, Jesus treats women as people of equal value. He does not view them in terms of sexual temptation or gratification. He does not create new categories or rules specifically for them. He approaches them without flattery and does not patronize them. He sees responsible people who are in need of and fully capable of finding their own spiritual homes.

With this background in mind, the culture’s valuation of women vs. Jesus’ valuation, let’s go back to Luke’s account. Jesus was welcomed into the home by Martha. We know he loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and it seems he felt comfortable there. I assume he had other disciples with him, perhaps even some of the 72 that had returned in the beginning of chapter 10. Martha started to think about how she was going to feed everyone, but Mary, caught up in the wonderful teachings of Jesus, sat at his feet and listened, in the posture of a disciple.

Rather than think about what you would do in that situation, think of this story in a different way. Think of the culture of women at this time—Martha in the accepted role and Mary choosing a different one.

Isn’t it interesting that Martha went to Jesus and asked her Lord to restore Mary to the defined role of a woman in that culture? I wonder if she resented or was uncomfortable with Mary seeking this bold new territory even more than she wanted someone to help with the many tasks needed to feed a crowd?
The way Martha interrupted Jesus and talked to him tells me she felt comfortable, safe and sure of his friendship. You don’t complain to someone you are afraid of or in awe of. She said honestly and transparently, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve all alone?” Family systems theory tells us it is human nature that when someone within a system changes, even for the good, and starts to act out of a well-thought-out position and changes course, it has repercussions within that system. There will be pushback because the act of one person “becoming a self” brings those in close contact up short, makes them uncomfortable. It calls for growth, and they try to get the changing person to come back. I think Martha was trying to enlist Jesus’ help in getting Mary to go back.

Jesus’ response was caring but not the one she was expecting and hoping for. Instead of sending Mary back to her familiar role, he invites Martha to realize what exactly it is that Mary has chosen and affirms it as a good and healthy choice. He said, “Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things. But only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Jesus does his Jesus thing of turning things inside out and upside down. I think he is saying to Martha: “You are trying to be a good hostess and show me hospitality with food and care, but in the larger picture, Martha, I am the host and offer a different kind of feast, one of spiritual wholeness. Mary has chosen it; it is here for you to take part of also.” His radical hospitality is offered with respect and no coercion. It overrides all social, political or religious structures and is grounded in mercy and compassion.

Mary had boldly taken what was offered. She was soaking in this hospitality that serves up wholeness, and it would not be taken away from her. The offer is there for Martha also.

This story ends up being relevant to all—male and female, young and old—because we all face systems that seek to define us, seek to put us in categories and make up special rules for us. Voices telling us we’re too old, too young, too shy, too bold, make too many mistakes, are not smart enough, are the wrong color, are from the wrong country and so on. Perhaps we have feelings of helplessness when caught in a system we feel we cannot change, whether it’s family, work or community.

Let’s imitate Jesus, do what he did and turn it inside out and upside down. First, we need to find what is essential, the main course. Just a few verses preceding our story, we have an expert of the law asking Jesus what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus answers, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

The essential is the first part. Everything else flows from that. You cannot be mature spiritually until you are mature emotionally. Learn to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Spend time at the feet of Jesus and let his way of dealing bring us wholeness. Let Jesus define who we are. From this essential relationship we can love our neighbors with the same radical hospitality that Jesus models over and over.

I wonder if this is a way to bring the Martha and Mary in us together instead of seeing them separate, as we tend to. First is the essential sitting at the feet of Jesus (the Mary), then the going out and serving (the Martha).

We are free to relate to people—all kinds of people—without trying either to fix them or be wary of them. Relationships are a lot more fun when we remember who is hosting the party.

This story was pivotal for me accepting new roles in church life. I have and will continue to let Jesus define me, and the only category I accept is that I am a beloved daughter of God, and the only special rule for me is the rule of love for God and neighbor. It is my “spiritual home.” Other voices compete, but it’s amazing how they become silent when I sit at the feet of Jesus. I am positive that promise is there for all God’s children.

Mary Kennell is on the pastoral team at Roanoke (Ill.) Mennonite Church.

You cannot be mature spiritually until you are mature emotionally.

These two articles were resourced:
“Jesus and Women in the Gospel of John” by Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen (1990)
I don’t know how many Mennonite churches have allowed a relative newcomer to stand at Sunday morning worship and proclaim the delights of baptizing babies. I do know that Seattle Mennonite Church is an uncommonly gracious collection of people. When my wife and I moved to this drizzly city, knowing no one, they welcomed us warmly. When our son Samuel came screaming and wiggling into the world last summer, they welcomed him, too—and let his beaming, sleep-deprived father say a few words at his dedication.

I told them I was raised in a church that takes infant baptism seriously. The Christian Reformed Church, a Protestant denomination, has just two official sacraments: Communion and baptism.

I like that. I like what it says about the Creator’s openhearted affection for his people. Before we can speak a word or take a step, we are wrapped in covenant love symbolized by sprinkled water. (As the parent of a baby boy, I’d be glad for him not to be doing the sprinkling for a change. But that’s another matter.)

I picture the father of the Prodigal Son leaping off the front porch and running down the steps to meet his child, embracing the boy before he can even get a word out. A friend of mine says the Bible is often characterized as humanity’s long search for God, but it’s better understood as God’s long search for humanity. God goes looking for Adam and Eve, visits Abraham, picks Moses, chooses David, intrudes on Mary, appears as a baby, calls a band of disciples, goes to the darkest darkness, surprises Mary Magdalene in the garden. And on and on.

In an American culture that idolizes our freedom as consumers—choosing personal values, personal spirituality—I like the reminder that boundless mercy, as expressed in Jesus, comes seeking us. We are but to respond in gratitude.

So when we prepared for our son’s arrival, I wondered if we should look outside our church home for someone to baptize him. That raised a problem right away, because baptism isn’t a service you shop around for and compare prices. They don’t have baptism reviews online (actually they may; I’m not sure).

This helped me see one common trait of infant baptism and the infant blessing our church practices: They both derive their meaning not just from God but from the community. Without the congregation, each ritual loses its meaning. The church promises to “share in [the] child’s nurture and well-being,” as our hymnal puts it. We’ve already seen that promise kept in the form of dinners, hand-me-downs, kind words and a brilliant hand-made quilt given to Sam at his dedication.

Then I realized another thing the two rituals hold in common: They’re not magical acts. They don’t change God’s attitude toward the child or shift the baby’s soul from eternal danger to eternal safety. Rather, they’re signs of what we know to be already true about God’s enthusiasm for his children.

It became clear that dedication matters because of the people watching attentively as our pastor held our wide-eyed, apple-cheeked son and asked if they would help us raise him through sunshine and storm alike. They responded with a resounding, We will, and I knew our family was where we belong.

The fact that Sam is one of many babies, babies-to-come, kids, grownups and seniors only makes it clearer we are called to navigate life together.

Like many in our peculiar congregation in Seattle, my religious roots were planted in different soil. I’m still getting my bearings in the Mennonite church. Adult baptism is a concept I’m only beginning to understand, and I trust its meaning will unfold over time.

Creating a home for a new person—the most bewildering, exhilarating job I’ve ever found—has made me profoundly grateful for the home this church has offered.

Jonathan Hiskes attends Seattle Mennonite Church.
A time of thanksgiving

Recently I participated in a discussion on leadership with other CEOs of nonprofit organizations. Those at my table group talked about the challenges leaders face. They mentioned the recent economic crisis and the shortage of resources; the social, economic and political challenges facing institutions; the loneliness experienced by leaders; and the need to make difficult decisions while not being able to provide all the reasons because of confidentiality and/or appropriateness.

I could relate. In my 25-plus years in denominational leadership, I’ve experienced many such challenges. But there is a flip side to this discussion. Despite the challenges, leaders can be grateful to be part of an organization committed to making a difference—and for church-related organizations, to be part of an institution created in response to God’s call.

While serving at Mennonite Education Agency for the last decade, I’ve worked closely with many of our educational institutions and have experienced firsthand the critical issues they face. A current trend of college students staying closer to home has ramifications for our Mennonite colleges in regard to where Mennonite population centers are located now and where growth may happen in the future.

Other significant challenges are the cost of education vs. what students actually pay, the need to keep up with new technology, and responding to the impact of technology on how education is done. In addition, our educational institutions today are working in a culture of decreased denominational loyalty, decreased trust of institutions, and great uncertainty about the long-term impact of these challenges.

Still, I remain hopeful and thankful for our schools, colleges/universities and seminaries and for their impact on the church and the world in the past and in the present.

I am thankful for Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., and their commitment to help train pastors and theological leaders. They are responding to the church’s need for new ways of education with innovative programs such as webinars, conferences, short courses, summer institutes and partnerships with area conferences to offer gateway courses.

I am thankful for Bethel College, North Newton, Kan.; Bluffton (Ohio) University, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.; Goshen (Ind.) College and Hesston (Ind.) College, which are committed to academic excellence and to providing a setting for students’ individual transformation. The education at these colleges has Jesus as its foundation while engaging students’ minds and hearts from an Anabaptist perspective.

I am thankful for the member schools of the Mennonite Schools Council and for the five distinctives that make up their mission and focus: challenging youth to educational excellence, nurturing a Christ-centered vision within them, building a community, promoting opportunities and calling students to a life of peace and service. May I suggest that we claim these values for ourselves as we respond to God’s missional call?

I am thankful for the Mennonite Early Childhood Network, which was created to provide information and support for parents and educators of children from birth through kindergarten. MECN maintains an interactive website; offers information and support to parents, caregivers, teachers and church leaders; sends email alerts that highlight available resources and relevant news items and encourages networking among its members.

I am thankful for the office of Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education. Its programs include Instituto Bíblico Anabautista and Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano, which promote theological and biblical training of Spanish-speaking leaders who will serve Mennonite Church USA. I am also thankful for the Lark Leadership Scholarship, a program of the African-American Mennonite Association that provides financial assistance to students in AAMA-related churches, and the Native Education and Training program, which is associated with Native Mennonite Ministries and offers scholarships to Native Americans relating to Mennonite Church USA congregations.

Some people are naturally inclined to focus on challenges. I encourage us to focus on the things for which to be thankful. Our educational institutions and programs are making a difference and should have our support. As I have said many times, Mennonite education is such a valuable gift; why would we not want to share it with the world?
The confession of faith and marriage

Many in Mennonite Church USA understand the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* to provide a clear basis for a negative view of intimate same-sex relationships. This is not surprising, since denominational statements cite it as doing so. However, a careful reading of the CoF itself raises questions of such an assumption.

The term “teaching position” came into prominence with the publication of the “Membership Guidelines for the Formation of the Mennonite Church USA” in 2001. Section III focused on “issues related to homosexuality and membership” and affirmed the CoF, quoting its statement: “We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life” (Article 19).

**The Confession of Faith on marriage**

This citation, quoted without explanation, gives the impression that the CoF provides clear teaching against homosexuality. However, the actual CoF does not in fact mention homosexuality. Article 19 addresses “Family, Singleness and Marriage.” At the end of the sentence quoted above, a footnote refers to two biblical texts.

The first text is Mark 10:9: “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” This verse is part of Jesus’ teaching on divorce (in Mark, Jesus rejects divorce without qualification) and remarriage (which Jesus names as adultery, i.e., “sin” [Mark 10:11-12]). The CoF cites Mark’s version of Jesus’ teaching; it does not cite the slightly more relaxed account in Matthew 19:9 that does allow for divorce in the case of the infidelity of the partner.

The second text is 1 Corinthians 7:10-11: “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” The CoF ends the citation at verse 11 and does not include the “exception” of an unbeliever leaving a believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15).

As this footnote shows, Article 19 focuses on the permanence of marriage and the sinfulness of divorce and remarriage. Not only does it not speak directly of homosexuality, the one place that may allude to homosexuality (the definition of marriage as “one man, one woman, for life”) has in mind a different issue—divorce and remarriage.

In addition, the commentary on this article speaks to divorce and says nothing about homosexuality. “Today’s church needs to uphold the permanency of marriage and help couples in conflict move toward reconciliation. At the same time, the church, as a reconciling and forgiving community, offers healing and new beginnings. The church is to bring strength and healing to individuals and families” (emphasis added).

**Pastoral concern in the CoF**

The commentary and Scripture citations make it clear that the quoted sentence from Article 19 of the CoF is being misused when it is construed as a basis for an official “teaching position” concerning homosexuality. As well, notice another point the CoF makes.

The commentary softens the strictness of the CoF article and the two New Testament texts cited. “At the same time” the church is a place of welcome and forgiveness. This comment does not spell out a more nuanced approach to divorce and remarriage, but it does open the door for such. One could draw from this commentary a basis for accepting divorced and remarried people as full members of Mennonite congregations (as Mennonite churches increasingly do).

The CoF makes a strong statement about the importance of Christian marriage, but implicitly allows for exceptions in the case of divorce and remarriage—exceptions that need not negate the theological affirmation of the marriage covenant as a lifelong commitment. More important than absolute fidelity to the ideal is that churches “bring strength and healing to individuals and families”—including welcoming people who are divorced and remarried.

Could such an approach also be applied to people in same-sex covenanted partnerships? The CoF may be read to imply a “yes” to this question—if indeed the churches’ highest priorities would be on bringing “strength and healing.” It is true, such a reading and application would stand in tension with the Membership Guidelines’ use of the CoF. However, there is no reason, based on what the CoF itself actually says, to read it as expressing rejection of same-sex marriage—certainly less reason than reading it as expressing rejection of remarriage after divorce.

Ted Grimsrud is a member of Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg, Va.
Leaders address controversies

Politics, immigration and sexuality issues create polarities in the church.

In a time of heightened polarity around issues such as politics, immigration and human sexuality, area conferences across Mennonite Church USA have been making efforts to address controversy in creative ways that strengthen relationships.

At the delegate assembly in Columbus, Ohio, in July 2009, delegates passed a resolution “on following Christ and growing together as communities even in conflict” that called on the Executive Board to work with area conferences to provide and encourage the use of resources that assist conferences and congregations to engage in healthy discernment.

Various conferences have followed through on this resolution, focusing on relationships and creating safe spaces for respectful dialogue. This last summer, three conferences—Central District Conference, Western District Conference and Allegheny Mennonite Conference—were in the news as they worked with discernment on issues related to sexuality and sought to remain in relationship.

How have other conferences addressed polarities among their constituents?

While Mountain States Mennonite Conference (MSMC) has not addressed any one particular issue, leaders have attempted to be proactive by emphasizing the importance of strong and healthy relationships among individuals and churches.

“When MSMC was formed in 2006, relational accountability was adopted as one of the key points of conference culture,” says moderator Rhoda Blough. She notes that MSMC regularly provides opportunities to focus on strengthening intraconference relationships, “realizing the importance of communication in both speaking and listening, especially in times of disagreement.”

The theme of the 2012 Faith and Life Forum—an annual MSMC gathering intended to keep the focus on healthy relationships front and center—was “Listening and Speaking with Care.” It provided participants with techniques for discussing controversial issues in ways that would enhance relationships rather than incite polarization.

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference also has developed a format that allows groups within the conference to have intentional and safe conversations about difficult issues. So far, the advisory council, missional leadership team, regional ministers and delegates have used this format to discuss racism and same-sex relationships.

Moderator-elect Jane Stoltzfus Buller says that the hope in creating this discussion format was that these conversations would move participants who believe differently “to have greater love for one another, to really listen and hear each other and to find a way forward on difficult issues.”

While there are more conversations to be had, she says, “we are becoming more aware of how our own stories and experiences make a difference in our belief systems and thinking, and these difficult discussions have deepened our connections and, hopefully, our love for one another.”

Southeast Mennonite Conference has been working with differences related to its constituents having diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. At least five racial/ethnic identities are significantly represented in SMC—including Gari-funa, Hispanic, African-American, Haitian and Anglo-Saxon—and 60 percent of SMC churches are churches of color.

Seven years ago, the conference decided to restructure to ensure that each racial/ethnic group is represented in leadership. Today, SMC bylaws stipulate that the board and all committees include members from each racial/ethnic group and be balanced in gender.

Conference minister Marco Güete says, “In this new structure, the relationships among our churches have grown to be excellent. Churches with different racial/ethnic identities often get together for meals, fellowship and music, because it is important to us to spend time together. We know that everything we do must be multilingual, and we love it.”

Other conferences have worked with challenges related to polity. In response to leftover tensions from a previous attempt to resolve how Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC) deals with issues of variance among member congregations, conference leaders organized a gathering in March 2011—called “Becoming a United Church in a Culture of Division”—to address the issue of congregational autonomy. Those who gathered for the conference affirmed eight commitments that now shape a foundational understanding of what it means to be a united church.

Executive conference minister David Boshart says that CPMC has come to approach hard issues with the understanding that “our goal is not to strain to create unity but to understand that unity is something that comes to us as a gift of God’s grace.”

In response to a call from a pastor-peer group looking to explore healthy ways of addressing congregational conflict, Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA sponsored a Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Peace Center workshop in October 2010 called “Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches.”

The workshop offered opportunities for self-assessment, insight into understanding conflict, communication skills and training for managing group conflict.—Hilary J. Scarsella of Mennonite Church USA
Herald Press books converted to e-readers

Schowalter Foundation provides grant for conversion of current and new titles.

Mennonite Mission Network

MennoMedia is converting key theological Herald Press books and Bible commentaries into digital formats to reach a wider audience with Anabaptist themes. The Schowalter Foundation of Newton, Kan., has given a grant to help in that process.

In addition, Herald Press is launching all new and forthcoming titles as e-books, such as the recently released Making Friends Among the Taliban by Jonathan Larson and Laughter Is Sacred Space by Ted Swartz.

In 2009, Ruth Stoltzfus Jost of Harrisonburg, Va., first approached Herald Press about getting into e-books. With only one arm almost her whole life, she finds it easiest to read e-books. She is only one of millions now making the choice to access books on a variety of e-readers.

Stephen King is credited with launching the e-book phenomenon with a publicity stunt to offer his novella Riding the Bullet only electronically in March 2000. By December 2011, 17 percent of adults had reported they read an e-book in the previous year. By February 2012, the share increased to 21 percent, according to Pew Internet and American Life Research. E-books are generally much less expensive.

In summer 2012, Herald Press began to convert a few titles for e-readers. Many have already been converted to Kindle formats by amazon.com. But with Herald Press converting and submitting its own e-books to stores such as Amazon, MennoMedia gains a higher percentage from the sale of each book, helping long-range financial stability.

“We want to make our books available digitally as a way to reach a wider audience,” says executive director Russ Eanes. The books chosen for the grant project include the Believers Church Commentary series, books by John Howard Yoder, Anabaptist and Mennonite faith and worship books, Classics of the Radical Reformation series, the Polycot glossia series featuring younger scholars, and the Christians Meeting Muslims series on interfaith dialogue.

Eanes says this will also preserve and extend the historical endowment of books on the history of Anabaptism.

“There is a lot of current, expanded interest in Anabaptism,” he says.

E-books formats such as Kindle, Mobi and ePUB can be downloaded directly to Kindle, Nook, iPad and other compatible readers and tablets.—MennoMedia

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N E W S
Palmer Becker’s short-term mission trips abroad have been like conducting a traveling mini-seminary. The author of Mennonite Mission Network’s What Is an Anabaptist Christian? (Missio Dei Number 18) last year held workshops in India based on the booklet, which has been translated into Hindi and a dozen other languages.

Becker was asked by the Rev. Jai Prakash Masih, a Mennonite pastor and translator, to offer a series of pastoral and leadership training seminars in India Sept. 12-21, 2012. Masih, a graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., who pastors an Asian church in Lombard, Ill., did the Hindi translation and published about 1,000 copies in India. It was the most recent of the workshops he has held on different topics in at least seven countries since 2007.

Masih accompanied Becker and they both spoke at three synods in the central part of the country: Bihar Mennonite Mandli in Jharkhand state, Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church, and the Mennonite Church in India in Chattisgarh state.

The trip was organized by Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India. About 30 church leaders—men and some women—attended each workshop, in which Becker emphasized the three core principles of Anabaptism as described in the booklet:

- Jesus is the center of our faith.
- Community is the center of our lives.
- Reconciliation is the center of our work.

In each mission trip, Becker stresses that Anabaptists believe in following Jesus in daily life, studying and interpreting Scripture with other believers from an ethical, Christ-centered approach, structuring the church for community, and that forgiveness from God and forgiveness and peace among each other is essential for community.

“Much of the distinctive way in which we hold these beliefs was new to the pastors,” Becker says of the Indian Christians and those he has taught in other countries. “There are always many expressions of appreciation for helping them understand what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian.”

In rural areas of India and other countries, Christian leaders may have the passion, but not necessarily education beyond high school, much less seminary training. While his seminars have been well-received, Becker senses an urgent need in Asia for establishing practical pastoral training programs based close to the churches.

Becker first developed the outline of what would become What Is an Anabaptist Christian? while preparing to address the Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series conference at Hesston (Kan.) College in 2002. The lecture was received enthusiastically, which led to the booklet’s publication in 2008, he said.

“When they read the book, missionaries or local people working with people of Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Vietnamese, Thai, Lao, Ethiopian, Hindi, Filipino and Arab backgrounds have said, ‘This is what my people need!’” Becker says. “They have arranged for the translation and publication of the booklet and then invited me personally to introduce the concepts.”

The booklet and a leader’s guide are downloadable and are being studied by many Sunday school classes and small groups in North America. In 2010, Becker taught the concepts from the booklet at churches in China and churches and universities in Korea. He has also taught other topics, such as Anabaptist identity, pastoral care and counseling, and leadership and discipleship, which he taught earlier in the Hesston College Pastoral Ministries Program and this year at Meserete Kristos College in Ethiopia. After the India workshops, Becker visited Vietnam and Hong Kong, where he taught on discipleship and experiencing God in daily life.

“Mennonites worldwide are seeking to find and clarify their identity,” Becker says. “Most published materials have been addressed more to those in academia than to the common lay person. What Is an Anabaptist Christian? is brief and written in a style that seems to be understandable at a lay level.” Download copies for free at www.mennonitemission.net/Resources/MissioDei/Pages/WhatIsAnAnabaptistChristian.aspx. Order larger quantities at store.mennomedia.org/What-is-an-Anabaptist-Christian-P669.aspx—Wil LaVeist of Mission Network
Esteban and Susana González Zugasti always cherished their family visits with the indigenous communities in the Chaco region of Argentina, where they, along with their three children, are mission workers.

But when their second child, Bernabé, was born with Down syndrome and required around-the-clock care, Susana realized she would no longer be able to continue making regular trips.

So she prayed that God would open another area of mission. God answered her prayer with *Patch Adams*.

The film, starring Robin Williams, is about a doctor who uses humor to connect with the children who are his patients. After watching the film, she realized she could do the same thing.

She learned about a local program of payamédicos—clown medics—that supports hospital patients emotionally. Now, she is a trainer, helping prepare new payamédicos.

The González Zugasti family—now Paloma, 9, Bernabé, 8, and Raquel, 4—has served since 2004 as part of the Mennonite team—an intercultural, interdenominational ministry sponsored by Mennonite Mission Network in the Chaco region of Argentina.

Originally from Mar del Plata, Argentina, they live in Resistencia, the capital of the Chaco province, and a launching point for visiting the Mocovi and Toba-Qom communities.

“This was important for me because I knew I was in the place I needed to be (caring for their children), but I was thinking about how I could work with indigenous folks who had much pain and sadness,” she says.

The clown medics work in groups of two or three, using improvisation and silliness to help patients release anxiety and share their feelings.

And while her face may be painted, she’s recognizable as a source of joy. When visiting an indigenous community, a woman looked at her with a glimmer of recognition in her eye. The woman approached Susana with a young girl in tow, her face beaming.

“You visited her in the hospital,” the woman said. “We were in the burn unit. You had a blue wig.”

Though Susana mostly stayed in Resistencia, Esteban continued visiting indigenous communities, walking with the spiritual leaders of the Mocovi and Toba-Qom groups.

One of his most important tasks was to help convene conferences in which the indigenous community leaders could come together to discuss not only theological issues but also the common challenges their communities face—lack of land, difficulties gaining access to good nutrition, discrimination by the broader society, and drug and alcohol abuse.

“In churches in general, people don’t talk about these things,” Esteban says, “so we felt it was important that we open a space to reflect together.”

**In Argentinian society, indigenous groups** are almost invisible, even among evangelical churches in the country, Susana says.

“There is little connection between the ‘white’ Argentinian world and the indigenous world,” she says. “For most white Christians, the only time indigenous groups are visible is when they (white Christians) come to give out clothes or do evangelistic crusades.”

But since the 1940s, the indigenous evangelical churches in the Chaco have had their own leadership, pastors, teachers, evangelists and missionaries.

“Our role as the Mennonite team is not to plant churches but to accompany the indigenous churches and encourage their own theological development,” Esteban says. “Our approach comes from an Anabaptist perspective.”

Esteban and Susana said their experience of Christian community with other members of the Mennonite team in the Chaco has led them down a new path. They have learned from team members who lived in intentional communities in the United States. When the house next door to their good friends became available, they felt God’s call to buy it, and the money became available in amazing ways.

Upon their return to Mar del Plata last month, they were starting an intentional Christian community. Esteban plans to continue visiting the indigenous churches in the Chaco two or three times a year. They also hope to continue educating the “white church” about the presence and importance of the indigenous communities and churches.

*—Andrew Clouse of Mennonite Mission Network*
Approximately 325 Indian Mennonite women gathered in Cuttack, Orissa, India, for the All-India Mennonite Women Conference (AIMWC) to participate in the first Sister Care seminar to be held outside North America.

Rhoda Keener, codirector of Mennonite Women USA, and Carolyn Heggen, a psychotherapist who specializes in trauma healing and women’s issues, led the Sister Care sessions Oct. 24-28, 2012.

It was AIMWC’s triennial conference, this year hosted by the Brethren in Christ churches in Orissa. Nearly twice as many women as usual participated. Women from eight of the nine Indian Mennonite conferences traveled by train to fellowship with each other and to learn how they might nurture and encourage each other through times of loss and grief.

Heggen and Keener’s presentations were adapted to fit the Indian context to communicate about equipping women for caring ministry in their churches.

In USA Sister Care seminars, several women share their stories of loss and grief and how the church was helpful or could have been more helpful. Heggen and Keener were advised by Indian women to use anonymous stories rather than asking women to share their own stories publicly. Indian women oversaw the writing of real-life stories, working with Twila Miller who spent many years in India with Mennonite Central Committee.

The stories were written with fictitious Indian names and “told” by a third-party narrator who read each woman’s story. Four such stories presented in this way throughout the five days triggered intense responses from the participants. Women talked among themselves and eagerly took the microphone to tell others how women in their church communities minister to each other when a faith sister suffers or faces a challenging situation.

They talked passionately, addressing the crises introduced by the vignettes.

One story in particular struck a chord with many of the women. During the second session a narrator read “Meena’s story,” first in Hindi, then in English. Meena is married to a pastor who becomes verbally and physically abusive to her, especially on weekends, when he starts to worry about the Sunday morning service. Meena cannot make chappatis to his satisfaction on weekends, and he becomes verbally abusive and often gets so angry that he beats her.

Heggen asked the conference participants, “How might the women of the church help Meena?”

Drawing from passages in Genesis, Ephesians and 1 Corinthians, Keener taught that violence against women is a sin and is not part of God’s plan for how women and men should relate to each other.

Keener said, “There are many verses in the Bible that point to equality between women and men. One example is...
how Jesus respected the woman at the well.”

Heggen noted that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, saying, “Violence against women is a sin against God.” Numerous women responded later to the speakers: “You speak good words.” One Indian woman leader said, “We have never had teaching like this.”

Following the conference, Heggen, Keener, Twila Miller and Cynthia Peacock visited nine churches in Champa, Korba and Dhamtari to meet women who had been unable to attend the Cuttack event.

They shared ideas and excerpts from the Sister Care seminar. When asked what was significant about the teaching at Cuttack, women talked primarily about Meena’s story. Many women said they or their good friends are “Meena” in the story.

Heggen says, “We experienced incredible hospitality and graciousness. These are such courageous, amazing women. Even though our worlds seem far apart, when we shared our stories, women trusted us and responded with their own stories.”

The seminar concluded with an invitation to women to anoint themselves with water symbolic of their tears and the tears of their sisters, and then to anoint one another with “living water” from Jesus.—Twila Miller for Mennonite Women USA
Displaced Congolese displaced again

Mennonite Central Committee worker was in Goma during the takeover.

During Thanksgiving week, more than 250,000 people in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo were displaced from their homes and camps as rebel group M23 took control of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu.

Many of the displaced people were moving for the second or third time, having already been forced from their homes and villages earlier in the year as M23 fought Congolese troops and terrorized villages on its way toward Goma.

These displaced people are among the latest to join the 1.5 million people in eastern Congo who have been forced from their homes by decades of fighting among many different local and regional armed groups.

The casualties are the civilians, says Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker Michael J. Sharp, who was in Goma during the time of the takeover. Sharp is from Goshen, Ind.

“It’s not just this displacement,” Sharp says. “These are very vulnerable people who were already displaced multiple times. People are pushed further and further away from their homes and are increasingly vulnerable. You can only get run down so many times until you can’t survive anymore.”

For example, Sharp says, M23 emptied the Kanyaruchinya camp, about six miles north of the city, of its estimated 70,000 people who had already been uprooted from their homes.

Many of them followed the main road south toward Goma, seeking shelter in the city or continuing on the main road west of Goma to camps for internally displaced people (IDP) close to the town of Sake.

However, when M23 overtook Goma, the exodus of displaced people continued, including 345 families from North Kivu who had taken refuge at a school near Goma in the fall. MCC had provided them with basic food and household supplies.

The exodus led many to Sake, only to be chased back to Goma when M23 engaged the Congolese army in heavy fire there.

“Even though Goma was an area of fighting, once it calmed down, some people went there. People know it’s a hub for international organizations,” Sharp says.

In Goma, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), an umbrella organization for 16 Protestant denominations in eastern Congo and an MCC partner, is responding to the needs of as many displaced people in the city as it can.

With MCC’s support, they plan to provide food, water and basic household supplies to about 750 families. ECC denominations will provide spaces for the families to stay.

Already this year, MCC has contributed $128,000 of locally purchased food and material aid for ECC projects that impact displaced people.

In addition, through Canadian Foodgrains Bank, MCC provided $393,087 for food, seeds and tools to support families in North and South Kivu who are hosting displaced people.

ECC also is calling on people in Europe and the West to advocate with their governments on behalf of Congo, including refusing to give any military aid to Rwanda, a neighboring country that is linked to various armed groups in Congo, including M23, Sharp says. Uganda, too, is suspected of aiding M23.

While Tim Lind, MCC representative in Congo with his spouse, Suzanne, agrees with the ECC’s call for advocacy, he says the problem is not just neighboring countries. They live in Kinshasa-Gombe.

“The Congolese government has been unable to maintain and establish basic infrastructure in areas such as justice, order, health care, education and transportation,” he says.

“This vacuum has encouraged multiple local militias, armed ethnic coalitions, Rwandan rebel groups and the national Congolese army to fight to control agricultural land, exploit mineral resources and settle local and ethnic scores.”

—Linda Espenshade of Mennonite Central Committee
Girl’s desperate prayer leads to mother’s healing
Southeast Asian girl faces criticism for Christian faith in tribal animist context.

While growing up on her family’s coffee farm, Becky (names and location have been omitted due to sensitivities) heard the name of Jesus in a song sometimes sung in her village. But in her tribal animist context, she had no idea who Jesus was or why he was in a song.

From an early age, Becky could see the hollowness of her family’s religion. She saw her parents give alms to the monks, who would turn around and say, “That’s all you’re giving?”

She found her parents’ beliefs—animist, with a thin veneer of Buddhism—to be dark and hypocritical, but because she wanted to be “a good girl,” she honored her family’s religion and tried very hard to never disturb the peace. One day while Becky was picking coffee, her mother was squatting by the river scrubbing dirty clothing. She had given birth two days before. Suddenly the water at her feet turned red. Her husband came quickly in response to his wife’s alarm, but by the time he realized the blood was coming from Becky’s mother, it was too late. She had collapsed and was barely breathing. The doctor they called could do nothing to help her. They called the local spirit doctor, but he, too, was powerless to save Becky’s mother. Her husband and friends began mourning her impending death. Family members ran into the fields to let Becky and her siblings know what had happened. Becky’s brothers and sisters, wailing, ran to their mother.

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But Becky stole away to the kitchen. She looked up and cried out, “Whoever is the one true God, whoever is real, whoever created everything, please save my mother!”

Moments later, her mother revived as if nothing had ever happened. Everyone was amazed. Happy but fearful, Becky was too afraid to tell anyone what had really happened and locked the experience deep inside her heart.

Years later, Becky connected with Eastern Mennonite Missions workers living in her region. Gradually she learned more and more about God and began to understand the story of Jesus. Her curiosity grew. Eventually, Becky openly admitted that she no longer believed her family’s religion. Earlier this year, God used a dream to unlock her heart. She chose to commit her life to Christ.

Becky began enthusiastically sharing her journey to Jesus with many, but still she lacked the courage to tell her mother the story of who had saved her life so many years before. Then while at home one weekend, Becky felt the need to be honest, so she told her mother about her childhood prayer to the one true God. Reverently, her very traditional mother admitted that she believed Becky.

Some weeks later, Becky’s mother began thrashing around, displaying nonhuman strength as she punched a hole through a wall without receiving even a scratch. No one could stop her. Becky and two of her Jesus-following friends took her mother to a home where they felt they would receive less spiritual opposition. Once there, Becky’s mother was calm but still felt exhausted and terrified. It was then that Becky decided to tell her mother that she had become a Christian and confidently declared that she no longer feared the spirits. Becky’s mother sat in silence as she tried to take everything in. After some time, she confided her interest in Jesus, but said she first needed to talk to her husband. If he agreed to believe, then she and Becky’s siblings who were interested in Jesus could also openly become Christians.

Though she has become a target for ridicule and gossip, Becky finds great joy in sharing her faith. She does not keep track of the nasty things people say but prays for them to know the love of Jesus.—Nita Landis of Eastern Mennonite Missions

Women planting rice during the rainy season in Southeast Asia.

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Lancaster County, Pa., known for its Amish and Mennonite communities, will soon be home to one of the nation’s few replica Native American longhouses.

Major construction is complete on the 62-foot Lancaster Longhouse being created on the grounds of Lancaster County’s oldest building, the 1719 Hans Herr House.

Longhouses were multifamily homes with long, arched roofs and were prevalent across eastern North America for hundreds of years before European settlement.

Now local Native Americans and the Circle Legacy Center—a Lancaster nonprofit dedicated to empowering First Nations Peoples—are collaborating with the 1719 Hans Herr House and Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society to create a longhouse as an educational exhibit.

“Mennonites were the first permanent European settlers here,” says Becky Gochnauer, Herr House director. “We have three generations of Herr family homes on this property, but until now we had no way to represent the neighborhood the Herr family moved into. A longhouse enables our organizations to tell the Lancaster County story from the 16th century up to the turn of the 20th century.”

Construction of the longhouse began in April 2012.

“They’re coming together to help Native People but also to help themselves,” says MaryAnn Robins (Onondaga), board president for the Circle Legacy Center, “to build bridges in regard to race, in regard to religion.”

Throughout the project, organizers struggled to integrate modern construction standards with historic practices.

Dimensions were based on a longhouse excavated in nearby Washington Boro, Pa., in 1969. Post ends were charred before being buried. Bark saved from stripping the saplings was used to lash them together, and joints were also reinforced with metal hardware. Sheets of synthetic bark were used in place of natural bark to cover the roof.

“We want it to look as authentic as possible, and we want it to be safe for school groups,” construction manager Ned Pelger says. “We want to be environmentally responsible, and we want it to last for future generations.”

Attention now shifts to the inside of the house. Furnishings coordinator Ruth Py (Lenape) is working with Native craftspeople to create reproduction artifacts, including spears, arrows, fish hooks, gourds, bowls, baskets, necklaces, boots and leggings.

In October 2012, a small group of staff and board members from the Circle Legacy Center, Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society and the Hans Herr House gathered with members of the Native American community to dedicate the space. Gochnauer says, “Native Americans and Mennonites share a history of misunderstanding, persecution and hardships that—while very different—provided a common place where mutual support and understanding could transcend culture and race.”

Monetary donations are also needed to complete the project. Donations can be made at www.lancasterlonghouse.org. The longhouse is scheduled to open in May.—Lowell Brown

of Lancaster Historical Society
When Jan Unzicker visited her daughter in Portland, Ore., she met a woman who received free lunches during her days as a student. “It meant a lot to her that someone cared about her, and it helped keep her in school,” says Unzicker. Unzicker attends Metamora (Ill.) Mennonite Church.

This same woman now runs a backpack lunch program in Portland. Unzicker says she thought, “This is something I could do back home in Illinois.”

So, in 2011, Unzicker started the Weekend Snackpac program, which provides weekend lunches for students who qualify for free or reduced price lunches in the public school system.

By November 2012, the program was serving 1,130 children in 43 schools in 24 towns through partnerships with 50 churches. School administrators hand out information to families that qualify.

The families opt in by returning a permission slip. Then teachers put the lunches in the students’ backpacks at the end of day on Fridays while the class is in gym or at recess.

Local churches provide the lunches. They buy the food, pack the lunches and deliver them to the schools. Some churches partner with just one school; others provide for multiple schools.

Contents vary, but included in each lunch are food items that balance nutrition with accessibility, meaning students can prepare the food themselves.

Unzicker first contacted the principal of Lowpoint-Washburn (Ill.) Elementary School where her children went to school. The first partnership was between Metamora Mennonite Church and the Lowpoint-Washburn school.

“Jan’s ministry is clearly one that was born out of a vision that God placed on her heart,” says Michael Danner, pastor of Metamora. “She bears witness to what God is doing to help hungry kids get food.”

Danner says that Jan makes partnerships between churches and schools possible.

“She’s very passionate about building up smaller churches that have…been taught by our culture that they are failures,” says Danner.

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There are countless good schools that prepare all manner of public servants. We have great doctors and lawyers, business leaders and scientists—thanks be to God. But as Craig Dykstra of the Lilly Endowment reminds us, leadership of the church requires a complexity and integrity of intelligence that is unusual: One has to be smart in lots of really interesting ways. That smartness involves substantive knowledge and practical know-how along with the remarkable ability to move into contexts that are full of joy, misery and conflict and name what is really going on—through the eyes of faith. There is no other work like it, Dykstra says.

A confession: As an educator and a president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., I presumably know a few things about how leaders are formed. But I must confess that I am confounded by the mystery. When I see a leader guide worship that awakens body, mind and spirit, I am in awe. When I watch a pastor initiate ministry that attends to the well-being of an entire neighborhood, I give thanks. When leaders of a congregation empower everyone’s gifts for the good of all, my spirit dances with joy.

There is no foolproof formula for educating leaders of any organization, and certainly not for the church. Biblical stories of God’s call often surprise us by the ways unspectacular people become spokespersons for God’s reconciling mission—some of them highly educated, others not so much.

What I do know, however, is that many ordinary people who said, “Here am I” and gave themselves to study, prayer and practice in one of our Mennonite seminaries have become spiritually mature, respected leaders in congregations, businesses, universities and social service organizations. During my travels in the last two years, many alumni have told me about the transformative impact their seminary education had on the quality of their leadership.

A sober acknowledgment: There’s a lot of talk these days about “the future of the seminary”—from The Chronicle of Higher Education to Canadian Mennonite, from the Association of Theological Schools (with its 260 accredited schools) to the “Sam-Hedrin” (20-plus Mennonite retired professionals with whom I recently spoke). Lots of concerned people are cogitating about how theological education needs to change in order to better serve the church.

I’ve participated in countless conversations about the cultural, pedagogical, financial, demographic and spiritual dynamics in flux as we form leaders for a rapidly changing world. There are calls to move more learning from the classroom to “the streets” with extended apprenticeships.

Financial strains many seminaries face have led to a search for fiscally sustainable models. Educational pedagogy is expanding to make learning accessible to people from the distance. Faculty are shifting their specialized focus to create interdisciplinary learning experiences.

But more needs to change. The future church may not look much like the established congregations of today, with our lined-up pews and scripted bulletin worship. The evidence is everywhere that people are hungry for spirituality and for genuine relationships, but they are not coming to church like they used to. What if the primary purpose for an Anabaptist biblical seminary was to educate Christian leaders to form and guide communities of shalom? What if a seminary was an intentional community—a community solely devoted to:

- understand the Bible,
- speak fluently about faith,
- discern the Spirit at work in culture,
- grow into spiritually mature disciples of Jesus Christ?

One doesn’t acquire the qualities needed to serve as trustworthy, Christ-centered leaders without being deeply formed by the biblical story. Neither will one be ready to serve the reconciling mission of God without theological flu-
ency as ambassadors of Christ’s peace. Within a culture polarized around divisive issues, one won’t confidently lead community discernment without practice. Neither can people serve as worthy spiritual guides without themselves growing in spiritual maturity.

**Reading the Bible:** More and more of us want to engage the Bible on its own terms, not through some preconceived theory imposed on the Bible. We want to read the Bible as the astonishing drama it is—a multisplendored drama of the Word who was there at the beginning with God yet became one of us, full of grace and truth.

Gerald Gerbrandt, a Canadian Mennonite educational leader, told a recent gathering of Mennonites that we’ve had inadequate imagination for what Scripture is and how it can be authoritative. Scripture is an ancient, narrative book. We need to treat it in a manner consistent with its true nature, he said. Scripture offers us a great authoritative and divinely inspired drama that is as yet unfinished. We need to go back to Scripture to better understand our role in the drama.

An Anabaptist biblical seminary that’s worth its salt will teach Spirit-attuned readers to translate, preach, pray, sing and dramatize the biblical narratives. Why? Because of their enduring ability to reveal God to us wherever we are.

**Theological fluency:** Whether because of laziness, fear or immaturity, many of us are unable to think, write or talk persuasively about what we believe. This was hardly a shortcoming of the Anabaptists.

Theology should not be an esoteric discipline reserved for the experts. Theology is what any faith-filled person does (more or less well) to make sense of how God is active amid the dilemmas, tragedies and joys of everyday life.

An Anabaptist seminary will make fluency in the language of faith a priority. We draw from deep wells of ancient wisdom to enrich conversations about who God is, who we are and how we are called to live. To become confident, respectful and God better by engaging in the difficult conversations that we currently find ourselves in the midst of.—Mary Schertz

**Discerning culture:** Gone are the days when we could hide in ethnically separate, homogeneous enclaves of assumed purity. Gone are easy bifurcations into tidy categories of sacred and secular. But front and center is the need for us to discern the spirits—to become detectors of where the Spirit of God is moving.

Our communities are increasingly diverse, making life richer and making it more challenging to find unity—the kind of unity that Christ so longed for his disciples to cultivate. Jesus prayed for his disciples, just before he was arrested, “May [they] become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me” (John 17:23).

AMBS New Testament professor Mary Schertz writes that the Mennonite tendency to divide over disagreements rather than learn to be a discerning yet unified community has not been one of our strengths. Taking the cross of Jesus seriously means that suffering love is to be played out in the arena of discernment around difficult issues, as in all other areas of our common life. There can be no holier work, she says, no more compassionate work than to understand each other and God better by engaging in the difficult conversations we currently find ourselves in the midst of.

The splits our community has often experienced are a tragic fracturing of Christ’s body. It is no wonder that many people’s immediate association with religion—Christian and otherwise—is of conflict. An Anabaptist seminary has an important responsibility to educate leaders who can guide discernment processes around difficult issues, so that everyone will know by our costly love whose disciples we are.

**Spiritual maturity:** Almost nothing is more painful and disillusioning than when a trusted leader is found to be abusive, deceptive or more into self-promotion than the glory of God.

An Anabaptist seminary provides opportunities in an overwhelmingly self-indulgent culture to grow in spiritual maturity. We invite each other to grow as disciples of Christ, willing to be accountable with our longings, failures and joys in spiritual friendships.

We invite each other to affirm lifestyles that steward the goodness of creation and are financially disciplined. We invite each other to affirm vocations of singleness and uphold public covenants of marriage. We are committed to foster sexual shalom, as AMBS theology professor Gayle Gerber Koontz calls it—holding together the unity of the church and holiness of life.

As spiritually mature people of faith, we invite each other to covenant together to incarnate the saving reign of God.

There can be no holier work, no more compassionate work than to understand each other and God better by engaging in the difficult conversations that we currently find ourselves in the midst of.—Mary Schertz

We covenant together to become, by the grace of God, the visible body of Christ, led by the Spirit.

The qualities I name above—biblical understanding, theological fluency, cultural discernment and spiritual maturity—seem to be weakening in many of our faith communities. Thus my assertion with full-hearted conviction that more than ever we need seminaries—reimagined. The mission of an Anabaptist biblical seminary to educate Christian leaders to form and guide communities of shalom has become ever more critically important.—Sara Wenger Shenk, president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.
Contributors set new record

$83,497 from 911 households is new record for *The Mennonite*.

Contributions to *The Mennonite* from 911 households, congregations and organizations totalled $83,497 between Dec. 16, 2011, and Dec. 13, 2012. This was a 2.7 percent increase over the previous year and includes the single largest donation on record: $6,995.73 from the distribution of the assets of Bethel Mennonite Church in Pekin, Ill., a former Central District Conference congregation that closed in 2009.

“The generous support of our readers is an inspiration,” says Everett J. Thomas, editor of *The Mennonite*. “We receive no subsidy from our denomination. So these contributions, along with subscription and advertising revenue, are the third leg of the stool that provides stability for us.”

The Bylaws of Mennonite Church USA require *The Mennonite* to be a self-supporting entity. However, at their April 2012 meeting, the board of directors for The Mennonite, Inc., formally requested that *The Mennonite* be included in the formula whereby undesignated contributions to Mennonite Church USA are distributed.

The following list of contributors does not include the names of members from 190 households who requested to remain anonymous: IM

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CALENDAR


Spirituality & Shalom: Living at the Intersection of Faith & Justice, the 2013 Intercollegiate Peace Fellowship conference, will be held Feb. 8-10 at Bluffton (Ohio) University. Spirituality’s role in peacebuilding—and peacebuilding’s role in individuals’ spiritual lives—is the focus of the conference, an annual gathering of representatives of Mennonite colleges and universities but open to the public as well.

DEATHS


WORKERS

Akerson, James, was ordained as pastor of Beldor Mennonite Church, Elkton, Va., on Dec. 2, 2012.

Baruti, Maurice, was licensed as lead pastor of French Speaking for Revival, Elkins Park, Pa., on Oct. 21, 2012.

Detweiler, Randy, began a term as lead pastor of Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa, Ind., on Nov. 5, 2012.

Fyffe, Joshua, was licensed as pastor of West Liberty Mennonite Church, West Liberty, Ky., on Nov. 18, 2102.

Kaye, Caleb, was licensed as assistant pastor of Capital Christian Fellowship, Lancaster, Md., on Dec. 2, 2012.

Monger, Dawn, was ordained as Minister of Congregational Life at Lindale Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., on Oct. 28, 2012.

Scott, Christopher, was licensed at Stephens City, Va., on Dec. 2, 2012 for his church planting ministry with The Exchange in Winchester, Va.


Does the Christian community have the resources to develop a coherent response to today’s health care challenges? In a comprehensive survey covering the full scope of the Bible and three millennia of Christian belief and practice, Willard Swartley fleshes out the central place of health care in the church’s mission.

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—Roman J. Miller, Eastern Mennonite University


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Salem Mennonite Church, Salem Ore., seeks **full-time pastor**. Find full details and job description at http://www.salemmennonitechurch.org.

Zion Mennonite Church in Hubbard, Ore., seeks **senior pastor (full-time)**. For more information about the congregation, please contact Joe Parker (Search Committee Chair) at jparkerpdx@yahoo.com. To apply, please contact Katherine Pitts (PNMC Conference Minister) at kjpitts@pnmc.org to submit a Ministerial Leadership Information packet.

I saw two paths in the forest; I wanted to take both. Imagine what a good editor could do

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Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center of Berlin, Ohio, is looking for a new **executive director**. Duties include general administration, management and promotion of the Center including fund-raising and public relations skills. A good knowledge of Anabaptist history and literature is important. For information or send resumes: Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center, P.O. Box 324, Berlin, OH 44610, Attn: Director Search Committee, email to amhcdirsearch@myomicity.com or call Dennis Hostetler at 330-231-1088.

**Sales and marketing director** needed to lead MennoMedia’s sales and marketing department. Preference given to candidates with sales and/or marketing experience in trade book or curriculum publishing. Must have an entrepreneurial mindset and creative drive to stay abreast of latest sales and marketing strategies and media technologies in a rapidly changing publishing industry. MennoMedia is the primary publisher of all things Anabaptist and Mennonite in North America and are best known by the trade book imprint Herald Press. Contact RussE@MennoMedia.org.

Laurelville Mennonite Church Center (www.laurelville.org), a 600-acre camp, conference and retreat center located in the foothills of Western Pennsylvania’s beautiful Laurel Highlands seeks an **executive director**. This vibrant organization, with a $1.5MM budget and 15 full-time employees, has growing programs, a strong financial position and serves a broad range of faith-based and service organizations. Qualified candidates will have a deep commitment to the organization’s mission, administrative expertise with budgeting/board relations/staff and donor development, the gift of hospitality and an ability to cultivate financial support for the organization. Interested candidates may contact Caryn Howell with MHS Alliance at Caryn@StiffneyGroup.com or 574-537-8736.

Rockhill Mennonite Community (www.rockhillmennonite.org) a continuing care retirement community, seeks a chief executive officer. Situated on 44 picturesque acres in historic Bucks County, Pa., the organization provides a broad range of services including independent living, personal care, healthcare, and adult day services. Preferred candidates will be a member of an Anabaptist affiliated congregation, be eligible for Nursing Home Administrator licensure in Pa., and have at least five years leadership experience in a healthcare or social service organization. Interested candidates may contact Caryn Howell with MHS Alliance at Caryn@StiffneyGroup.com or 574-537-8736.

The new Sunday school curriculum produced by MennoMedia and BrethrenPress is accepting applications to write for Pre-school through Junior Youth age groups for 2014-15. All writers will attend an April 22–25 orientation in Milford, Ind. See Job Opportunities at www.gatherround.org. Application deadline Feb. 9, 2013.

**Food services manager** position open at Spruce Lake: Full-time, year-round; oversees all food service operations for 25,000/year guest facility. Looking for a person with integrity, a positive attitude and heart for Christian ministry. Details at www.sprucelake.org/employment tab. Contact Dan Krug, 800-822-7505 x 128, email foodmgr12@sprucelake.org, or mail to Spruce Lake, 5389 Route 447, Canadensis, PA 18325 (Pocono Mts., northeast PA).

Bethesda Mennonite Church, located in rural Henderson, Neb., is seeking a full-time **lead pastor** to lead a multi-pastoral team. The candidate should have a strong commitment to Anabaptist values and theology, along with strong preaching, leadership and communication skills. A Master of Divinity degree with pastoral experience is required. The Bethesda congregation is a member of the Central Plains Conference and Mennonite Church USA. Interested persons should contact the Central Plains Conference Minister, Tim Detweiler at P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247; 319-458-0224.
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Mennonite or Christian?

If a stranger asks you about your religion, what do you say? Do you tell her you’re Mennonite, or do you prefer to say Christian?

Most of the Mennonites I know have a clear preference, but they don’t all have the same one. And they often have strong opinions about those who answer differently. Do you tell strangers you’re Mennonite? Well then, maybe you’re ashamed of Christ. Do you tell strangers you’re Christian? Well then, maybe you’re ignorant of your roots.

They’re loaded answers, and they reveal a fault line in our identity. It’s not just different semantics; it’s different ways of seeing ourselves. It shouldn’t be surprising, then, if our youth and young adults aren’t sure how to see their identity either. Do they focus on what Christians have in common, or do they focus on what makes them unique? As a church body, we don’t give them a consistent answer.

For most of my life, our differences have kept me in the church. In high school, Anabaptist history convinced me that I belonged to something important. At my public college, peers and professors showed an interest in my “Mennonite-ness” that they never showed in Christianity. Throughout both stages of my life, whenever I was ready to give up on mainstream Christianity, I didn’t turn from faith. I just nestled deeper into our Mennonite expression of it.

Those experiences laid the bedrock for how I teach Mennonite studies. In fact, they’re probably why I teach Mennonite studies. But recently, through the prodding of a thoughtful colleague and a committed student, I’ve felt God nudging me toward the crack in that bedrock. They’ve challenged me to ask myself, Can we pass on an identity that is Mennonite and ecumenical?

I’m now wondering if the following threefold approach might help us as we pass on our faith:

1. **We nurture a longing for common ground.**

   Even though I’d failed to notice it, this one should be obvious. In fact, we probably all learned it in Kindergarten. When we interact with others, we should start with what we have in common. The same goes for how we define ourselves. When Terry Schellenberg, the vice president external of Canadian Mennonite University, visited my school, he used two lists to define Mennonites. The first established basic Christian beliefs that would be held by all Christians. They were obvious, which may be why I’ve usually skipped them. But now I’m feeling called to breathe new life into them. What if we consistently reminded our youth and young adults of the beautiful connections they can make outside the Mennonite community? And what if we helped them start building those connections?

   **2. We nurture a passion for our uniqueness.**

   Terry’s second list included many of the descriptors we’ve traditionally used to emphasize how we’re different. These were Anabaptist classics such as nonviolence, social justice, simple living and community. Though Mennonites don’t hold a monopoly on any of these, they are undoubtedly tied to the unique way we interpret our past and present. They are the faithful discoveries of a particular path that only we are on. As such, we need to remember that our faith tradition brings something valuable to the Christian body. We may not have all the answers, and we may have much to learn from others, but we’d do a disservice to the broader church if we neglected our particular gifts and contributions.

   **3. We nurture vigilantly critical minds.**

   While a longing for common ground and a passion for uniqueness are essential, both can become a problem if we don’t approach them carefully. You don’t have to study our history for long to recognize that the Christian majority isn’t always right. You also don’t have to study it for long to recognize that we aren’t always right either. Whether we’re embracing others or taking pride in ourselves, we need to do so with a constant awareness that both have pitfalls. It’s easy to follow the crowd, and it’s easy to feel self-satisfied. But if we approach ourselves and others with a healthy criticism, we’ll all have more integrity because of it.

   In short, I’ve become convinced that we need to make the next generation proud and critical of Christian commonality as well as Mennonite uniqueness. If we do, we may find that choosing to identify as Mennonite or Christian isn’t so divisive anymore. Instead, we’ll all have more integrity because of it.
**FILM REVIEWS**

*Lincoln* (PG-13) is a political drama about President Lincoln’s struggle to get the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, passed before the Confederate surrendered. Daniel Day-Lewis’s performance is outstanding. He reveals the human Lincoln behind the icon we tend to exalt.—*Gordon Houser*

*Life of Pi* (PG) is a fable about storytelling and belief. Based on the prize-winning book, it tells the amazing story of a teenage boy surviving a journey across the Pacific on a lifeboat in the company of a Bengal tiger. This magical film is one of the most religious released this year.—*gh*

*Anna Karenina* (R) is a creative adaptation of Tolstoy’s classic novel about Anna’s illicit affair with Count Vronsky. The film focuses on various views of love and how that is lived out in Russian society. Director Joe Wright’s artistic treatment is unique and arresting.—*gh*

**BOOK REVIEW**

The Gospel of Rutba: War, Peace and the Good Samaritan Story in Iraq by Greg Barrett (Orbis Books, 2012, $25) recounts the story of three U.S. Christian peacemakers, including a Mennonite pastor, who were in Iraq at the beginning of the war in 2003. After nearly dying in a car accident, they were rescued by Iraqi Muslims who took them to a clinic in the town of Rutba, whose hospital had been bombed by U.S. planes. They received protection and care and returned in 2010 to thank the doctors and others who saved them. Barrett’s account is thorough but doesn’t even pretend to be objective.—*gh*

A Hobbit Journey: Discovering the Enchantment of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-Earth by Matthew Dickerson (Brazos Press, 2012, $16.99) uncovers Christian themes in Tolkien’s writings. Included are his antipathy toward war and violence, toward human freedom and social justice. This is an expanded version of Dickerson’s earlier book, Following Gandalf.—*gh*

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**MOVIES (GASP) WITH FEMALE LEADS**

Ever heard of the Bechdel test? Named after the comic-strip artist and memoirist Alison Bechdel, it assesses movies according to a three-step formula. To pass the test, a film “(1) has to have at least two [named] women in it (2) who talk to each other (3) about something besides a man.”

Although a visit to the website bechdeltest.com suggests that things have been improving recently, the test underscores the reality that most films are presented primarily with male protagonists and from a male perspective.

In an article in the *New York Times* (“Hollywood’s Year of Heroine Worship,” Dec. 6, 2012), film critic A.O. Scott points out that 2012 has not only been a good year for movies but “a pretty good year for female heroism.”

He names some movies with female protagonists: *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Brave*, *Hunger Games*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and *Zero Dark Thirty*. This can be misleading, though, since the top-selling movies of the year, such as *The Avengers*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, *The Amazing Spider Man* and *Skyfall* feature mostly male heroes and are geared to a male audience.

And when we get to the Oscar race for best picture, the favorites, among whom may be *Argo*, *Flight*, *Lincoln* and *The Master*, feature male leads. An exception likely will be *Zero Dark Thirty*, which, though it features a female lead, is about the hunt for and killing of Osama bin Laden and thus appeals to male audiences.

While there are more Hollywood movies with female leads, these parts often resemble male leads in action films—they fight and kill their enemies.

Scott laments the loss of an earlier era, when Hollywood took “pride in its ‘woman’s pictures,’ a category that embraced many of the immortal romances and melodramas of the studio era and that made actresses like Bette Davis, Joan Crawford and Ingrid Bergman into powerful industry players as well as adored stars.”

That era also included many intelligent comedies with strong female characters. Such films are rarer today.

One place to broaden one’s exposure to female roles is in foreign films, either through Netflix or other sites. Many French films have strong female leads that aren’t under 30.

And if you look at British TV shows, you often find female leads who are older, not always strikingly beautiful and don’t look anorexic.

Beyond simply finding films with female leads, it is rewarding to find films with interesting characters. In such films, the characters develop and face complex situations beyond merely seeking revenge for some despicable act.

Scott offers some examples from this year. One is *Amour*, which won Canne’s Palme d’Or last May, tells of a couple in their 80s. Scott writes: “Anne, who is a wife, a mother, a musician and a teacher and whose decline and death, in the company of her faithful husband, Georges, constitute as intensively particular and as grandly universal a story as you could want. Anne is completely (and painfully) human. She is more than the sum of her domestic, artistic and professional roles, even though she bears the traces, in her extraordinary face, of the various roles she has performed.”

Films can serve to show us life and introduce us to new understandings of our life in this world. Portraying that world too exclusively from a male perspective does not serve us.
RESOURCES


The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World by Daniel M. Bell Jr. (Baker Academic, 2012, $19.99) compares and contrasts capitalism and Christianity, showing how Christianity provides resources for faithfully navigating the postmodern global economy.

A Hobbit’s Journey: Discovering the Enchantment of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-Earth by Matthew Dickerson (Brazos Press, 2012, $16.99) shows how a Christian worldview and Christian themes undergird Tolkien’s Middle-Earth writings and how they are fundamentally important to understanding his vision.

An Alzheimer’s Primer by Joanne Niswander (2012, $12.99) relates the experience of the author and her husband. She writes: “We lived our days at peace with what was happening and tried to make life the best it could be, all the way to the end.” It is available at amazon.com, bn.com and from the author at 700 Maple Crest Court, Bluffton, OH 45817.

How the Church BETrays the Gospel: The Unreasonable Dimension of the Teaching and Example of Jesus and Holy Experience: Making a Life That Honors Mystery: A Guide for Spiritual Direction by Garland Robertson seeks to bring to the surface of Christian tradition and practice the substance of the mission that defined the ministry of Jesus. Contact the author at P.O. Box 303515, Austin, TX 78703, glaruerobertson@gmail.com.

Kindred Spirit: A Collection by Carrie Newcomer (Rounder Records, 2012, $11.49) collects 19 songs from Newcomer’s catalog and includes two previously unreleased songs. Her music explores the intersection of the spiritual and the daily.


The Jesus Tribe: Grace Stories from Congo’s Mennonites 1912-2012 (Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2012) is a project of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission that marks the centennial of Mennonite witness in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It collects brief stories of Congolese Mennonite Christians.
God sightings

_There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears._—Philippians 1:6 (The Message)

_And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose._—Romans 8:28. (TNIV)

God is at work in the world to redeem and reconcile it, making all things new. Our mission in the world is to align ourselves with God’s reconciling work. But how can we know with confidence what God is doing?

David Miller, a professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., speaks of “tracking God” as one of the core tasks of the missional church. He employs the analogy of hunters, who often rely on clues to help them find wild game. A tuft of hair on a thorn bush, scratches on the side of a tree, a torn leaf—all point to the presence of animals passing through. So, too, God leaves subtle but visible clues.

What then are the signs that God has been passing through an area, or that God has been at work?

Jesus told Nicodemus that “the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

We can of course tell when the wind is blowing through the trees—especially when the leaves and branches are waving wildly. We can’t see the wind, but we can see its effects. Jesus is saying that we can’t see the Spirit of God, but we can see its effects.

In her research regarding the missional church, Lois Barrett of AMBS discovered that many Christians, including Mennonites, find it difficult to speak of God as the subject of an active verb. She says this is true even when people are invited to respond to a direct question, such as, “What has God been doing in your life?” From my point of view, all the following responses would meet Lois’ criteria:

“Last week, God was with me during a very difficult transition at work.”

“When I was 20 years old, Jesus rescued me from a destructive lifestyle. I’ve been walking with him ever since.”

“At the time I was at a loss for words, but the Holy Spirit gave me the words to say.”

“God surprised us by bringing a group of Hmong immigrants to our church who have helped us develop a new outreach.”

“The Spirit convicted me about the need for a Sabbath, so I took a day off just to relax.”

Barrett says that in response to the question, What has God been doing in your life? we are more likely to say things like:

“Our church started a new outreach to homeless people in the neighborhood.”

“I’ve been attending a Bible study.”

“We had a great worship service last Sunday.”

“I work as a volunteer for the Mennonite Central Committee sale. We set a new record last Saturday.”

Do you notice the difference between the two sets of responses? The former depicts God as the actor or initiator in a situation, whereas the latter puts humans in the driver’s seat.

I’m grateful to Lois for sensitizing me to the difference between these two ways of speaking.

Jesus is saying that we can’t see the Spirit of God, but we can see its effects.

Ever since, I’ve been listening to testimonies at a deeper level all across the church. And I’ve been reading the Bible with new eyes for the “God sightings” throughout Scripture. Now, when I read verses like Philippians 1:6 or Romans 8:28, a sense of God’s action leaps off the page.

I’m so intrigued by this concept that I’m going to tell stories of “God sightings” in this column for the next months. You can be confident that God will be the subject of many active verbs.
Conflict is normal

Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats and act in a nondefensive, non-reactive way.—from Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love

Like most newspapers and magazines, we have allowed letter-writers wide latitude to say whatever they wish on the pages of this magazine. Consequently, some letters have been judgmental and reactive. We recognize that such a policy has not always been edifying to the church and have decided to change it.

During its October 2012 meeting, the board of directors for The Mennonite asked for a change to the letters policy. Specifically: Publish only letters written with a positive tone—even if the letter is offering a critique. The challenge, however, will be in deciding whether a letter is edifying in its tone and content. That will be the responsibility of the editorial team.

While some of the most negative letters are in response to the editorials I write, this is not a defensive move. The editor of our denominational magazine must be open to correction, especially when addressing controversial issues. Now, we will not publish letters that are mean-spirited and serve no positive purpose. Here’s an example from the beginning of one letter last year:

“I see a few people in the pictures in your February issue who are not obese. Are these people really Mennonites? Obesity seems to be a Mennonite value. Have you covered this topic in your rag?”

It is within this slightly more controlled environment, then, that we also lift the 13-year moratorium we have had on letters and articles that address Mennonite Church USA’s teaching position on sexuality. There are numerous reasons for doing so.

First, we think it is possible to have civil and loving disagreements in the church, and those disagreements can be reflected on the pages of The Mennonite.

Second, some readers think we no longer have a moratorium because we publish news stories of congregations or pastors disciplined for various reasons by the area conference to which they belong. These reasons include discipline for pastors performing same-sex covenanting ceremonies.

Third, some readers think we have had the moratorium so the church can quietly change its convictions around sexual practices. These readers want us to publish articles that reinforce the church’s teaching position rather than being silent about it.

We lift the moratorium with some additional conditions (beyond the tone of an article or letter). If a letter-writer is responding to an article we’ve published, we reserve the right to have the author of the article respond to the letter-writer in the same issue. We also will limit the number of letters we will publish on issues related to sexuality and not publish a letter that repeats what was said earlier by someone else.

We acknowledge that conflict is normal and affirm that God walks with us in conflict, we can work through to growth."

We acknowledge that conflict is normal and affirm that God walks with us through conflict. We invite you to do so also.—ejt