Special offerings at Phoenix 2013

- **Support the DREAMer Fund.** This fund provides help with application fees for undocumented young adults as they apply for U.S. DREAM Act deferment. Partner with us to meet our goal of $15,000 to help 50 young Mennonites realize their dreams.

  If your group is not planning to attend our 2013 convention, consider supporting the DREAMer Fund directly. For more information, visit [www.mennoniteusa.org/executiveboard/immigration/](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/executiveboard/immigration/).

- **Support the creation of the new “Shine” Sunday school curriculum** by MennoMedia and Brethren Press. The new curriculum will supplant the highly successful “Gather Round” series.

  Congregations, youth groups and delegates are asked to bring their offerings to the Phoenix gathering.

Like us on: [www.facebook.com/mcusa.convention](http://www.facebook.com/mcusa.convention)
Follow us on: [twitter.com/menncon #Phoenix13](http://twitter.com/menncon #Phoenix13)
## CONTENTS

12 A Mennonite anarchist  
   — Joanna Shenk

18 Convention is coming

20 Questions to women leaders  
   — Juanita Nunez

21 Post-Christendom or neo-Christendom?  
   — Ron Adams and Isaac Villegas

26 Death and spirituality  
   — Elena Yoder

29 Growing pains  
   — Lynn Parks

32 Executive Board prepares for Phoenix 2013  
   — Everett J. Thomas

34 California peaches in Georgia—Melanie Hess

35 John Powell retires after 23 years of service

36 Roanoke Church rebounds after 100 members leave—Anna Groff

38 Living as missionaries in Los Angeles—Doreen Martens

39 Lázaro works to bridge Bethel cultures  
   — Melanie Zuercher

41 Who speaks for Mennonite Church Canada?  
   — Dan Dyck

44 Prayer and action for Gazan—Timothy Seidel

47 MCC helps 120 Gaza families with destroyed homes—Linda Espenshade

## DEPARTMENTS

4 Letters  
6 News Briefs  
8 Grace and Truth  
9 Global Anabaptism  
10 Miscellany  
12 Features  
30 Leadership  
31 Opinion  
32 News  
48 For the Record  
51 Classifieds  
52 New Voices  
53 Mediaculture  
55 Mennonite Church USA  
56 Editorial

---

ON THE COVER: Photo by Everett J. Thomas
Inconsistent on issues

Three and a half years ago, Everett Thomas had an editorial entitled, “Don’t Abort the Truth” (June 2, 2009) in which he said, “Mennonite Church USA can help change the national debate about abortion by insisting that all of life is sacred from conception to natural death. Those who claim to be pro-life can be so only if they are as concerned about the lives of convicted criminals or soldiers as they are concerned about the lives of unborn babies. The conviction that all life is sacred needs to come ‘full-term’ and be born as a whole and healthy truth.”

If this is the truth, why has the church been so silent on the killing of the innocent unborn when violence in the womb far exceeds any other killings—be they in electric chairs, on the battlefield, in schools or however? Mennonite Church USA leaders decry pro-life Christians who are not pacifists. But our leaders are just as inconsistent with prolific articles against violence outside the womb, while being completely silent about abortion. To have an official statement hidden away in a document and then remain silent about abortion year after year means that killing the unborn is not as important as Thomas has implied it is.

Is it true that we don’t want to be strong pro-life advocates because we don’t want to be at peace with our sisters and brothers in Christ who are not exactly like us on peace and justice issues? We are told that to agree to disagree in love on the homosexual issue is putting our peace and reconciliation theology into practice. But where is our peace and reconciliation theology with the evangelicals?

It seems we are as inconsistent in our faith as any other Christian group. So why point a finger at those who are not of the same mind-set as us on the issue of pro-life and all applications of nonviolence?—Stan Kauffman, Pellstone, Mich.

Repentance, not penance

Felix Manz, the first of the Anabaptist martyrs in Zurich, Switzerland, penned a final statement that is one of the most eloquent and profound in our tradition. As sung in the Ausbund, the ninth verse contains the following phrase, “wirckt Büß mit reinem Hertzien.” In The Mennonite Hymnal (1969), in “I Sing With Exultation,” this phrase was translated as, “With heart made pure do penance.”

In discussions with native German
Day of the Dead is pagan

Having recently joined the Mennonite church, I now regret my decision after reading the article promoting the “Day of the Dead” (“Day of the Dead Offers Living Voices,” December 2012)—an openly pagan ritual dating back 2,500 years—with prayers said for the dead and a day at the cemetery. I joined for the peacemaking stance, but there’s no way I’m going to remain in a church that condones the shameful worship of a pagan ritual full of skulls, food for the dead and all the shams that Christ came to deliver us from. Please remove my name from your magazine membership as I no longer will attend the local Mennonite church for the same reason.—Chris Wood, Sarasota, Fla.

Response from Bethel College

Like many Christian holy days, including Christmas and Easter, the celebration of el Día de los Muertos has roots in pre-Christian traditions.

Today, however, the heart of this observance can be found in 1 Corinthians 15: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? … Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Father Juan Garza of Our Lady of the Dead.

Response from MEA

College affordability is an extremely important area that concerns all our Mennonite higher education institutions. Our institutions work hard to keep costs down, provide high academic standards and work individually with applicants from all socioeconomic levels to find ways to make the college experience affordable.

Although people typically look at the sticker price, that is not the most accurate indicator of what the cost would be. The majority of our students receive considerable financial aid, so the bottom line cost is much lower than the sticker price. In the last number of years our schools have increased financial assistance significantly in an attempt to respond to the economic realities facing many of our students and their families.—Carlos Romero, executive director, Mennonite Education Agency

Rethink costs of education

I wonder if you have had any stories about what appear to be out-of-control costs of a Mennonite university/college education? I think our local university, Eastern Mennonite University, is now at about $38,000 a year. Since an undergraduate degree no longer assures a young person of getting a job and since costs are so high, we may need to rethink our justification of a denominational institutional education.—John N. Keim, Harrisonburg, Va.

Thanks

Just a note to tell you how much Merle and I enjoyed and appreciated the December 2012 issue of The Mennonite. I especially was blessed by Everett Thomas’ editorial “God Needs Marys.”

Thanks.—Rebecca Sommers, Goshen, Ind.

IN THIS ISSUE

Several months ago, Executive Board staff member Joanna Shenk brought Mark Van Steenwyk through the Elkhart, Ind., offices, introducing him to many staff members. He left a copy of his book, That Holy Anarchist. After reading it, we decided to have Shenk do a profile of Mark for a cover story (page 12).

“I am a Christian and an anarchist,” Mark says, “because I believe Christianity can teach anarchists about love, spirituality, forgiveness and grace. And because anarchists can remind Christians of the radical political and economic implications of the way of Jesus.”

Isaac Villegas and Ron Adams co-wrote the article “Post-Christendom or Neo-Christendom?” (page 21) as a rebuttal to claims made by Stuart Murray in The Naked Anabaptist.

“Murray leads us astray,” they write, “when he announces the imminent demise of Christendom and discusses the Christian’s marginality to mainstream society. … To proclaim Christendom’s death prematurely only serves to mask all the ways we benefit from the institutional prominence of cultural Christianity as it shapes our society.”

This is the year for Mennonite Church USA’s biennial convention, and this issue carries several articles that focus on the gathering in Phoenix in July. However, convention staff elected not to offer a package of articles describing convention plans. Instead, they present a two-page description of optional events and the lineup of speakers for both adult and youth conventions (page 18).

In the news section we report on a Jan. 9-11 Executive Board meeting in Phoenix that featured a lively debate about some administrative updates to denominational membership guidelines and whether to send the updates to the delegate assembly at Phoenix (page 32).—Editor

LETTERS
Stutzman reappointed to three-year term
ELKHART, Ind.—The Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA has appointed Ervin R. Stutzman of Harrisonburg, Va., to a second three-year term as executive director of Mennonite Church USA. The new term began Jan. 1. The appointment was made at a Dec. 18, 2012, board meeting following a review that included input from executive conference ministers, members of the cabinet and the Executive Board.

The review showed widespread appreciation for Stutzman as a strong servant leader in his role as chief staff person for the national conference. There was significant affirmation for his being present in area conference settings across the country, his listening skills, his passion in preaching and his continued focus on the Purposeful Plan, which was supported by delegates at the Pittsburgh 2011 Delegate Assembly to be the plan and focus of the national body. Stutzman provided leadership in developing the plan after conversations across the church at the beginning of his first term.

During his second term, Stutzman plans to emphasize the Purposeful Plan, giving particular attention to youth and young adult ministry, planting more peace churches and exploring ways the church is engaging people of other-than-Christian faith.—Mennonite Church USA

MWC, Catholics, Lutherans talk about baptism
ROME, Italy/BOGOTÁ, Colombia—An international trilateral dialogue between Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans began in Rome, Dec. 9-13, 2012.

According to a joint release issued after the Rome meeting, the overall theme of the five-year process is “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church.” The release further stated: “This innovative trilateral forum will allow the dialogue to take up questions surrounding the theology and practice of baptism in the respective communions.”

The three international communions came to the inaugural meeting with a history of bilateral dialogues. They mutually agreed to hold three-way talks on baptism, a topic that had surfaced in earlier exchanges.

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and the Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) held conversations from 1998 to 2003. This resulted in the report “Called Together to be Peacemakers.” Understandings and practices of baptism were among the divergences identified for further study. Mennonites practice adult baptism and Catholics infant baptism, as do Lutherans.

MWC and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) participated in a joint study commission from 2005 through 2008, which resulted in a final report entitled “Healing of Memories: Reconciliation.” During these talks, Mennonites and Lutherans agreed that two areas of difference that existed in the 16th century still exist today, namely the relation of Christians to the socio-political order and baptism.

Further, the PCPCU and the LWF have held 11 rounds of dialogue, with the current one focusing on “Baptism and Growth in Communion.”—MWC

Hmong groups agree to ministry partnership
HILLSBORO, Kan.—On Nov. 22, 2012, a delegation from North America, including Kuaying Teng of Mennonite Mission Network; Jeff Wintermote, pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church, Hillsboro, Kan.; Steve Steiner of Kidron, Ohio; Vang Kou Yang, pastor of the Denver Hmong Mennonite Church, and Jonah Yang of Fresno, Calif., president of Hmong Mennonite Churches Mission, met with about 15 church
leaders and pastors of the Churches of Christ in Thailand Hmong churches in Khunklang, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. During the meeting, Kuaying Teng taught on Anabaptist history and theology using Palmer Becker’s *What is an Anabaptist Christian?*

For over 15 years, North America Hmong Mennonites have been building relationships with Hmong pastors and church leaders in Thailand in hopes of establishing an Anabaptist presence there. This work began with Pastor Shoua Moua of Fresno who had a vision of seeing his Hmong brothers and sisters in Southeast Asia become Christians and follow Christ with an Anabaptist understanding. Through his many trips to Thailand, three Hmong pastors from Thailand eventually came to the U.S. to pastor Hmong Mennonite Churches.

In 2010, differences of opinion during a meeting about a cooperative project between Hmong Mennonite Churches Mission, Mennonite Mission Network and Thai Hmong pastors brought the relationship to a standstill. Teng and Wintermote made visits to Thailand, meeting with Hmong pastors and church leaders in hopes of restoring the relationship.

On Nov. 24, 2012, the group heard the vision of the Thai Hmong churches for supporting their churches and for future church plants. The three groups talked about the break in relationships in 2010. By the end of the meeting, each group acknowledged its part in the misunderstanding and asked for forgiveness. The groups committed themselves to continued dialogue and a ministry partnership.—*Jeff Wintermote*

**Everence to discontinue two small health plans**

GOSHEN, Ind.—In December 2012, Everence announced its direction for health insurance and services to members who will be affected in 2014. In communication to its members with health plans, Everence announced:

- Two small health plans, for people under 65 and for small employer groups, will be discontinued in 2014. Everence will help these members move to new insurance options that will be available next year.
- All other health insurance and services will continue to be developed for future growth. Services include Medicare supplement plans for older adults and third-party administration services for organizations, businesses and church denominations.

Everence has been evaluating the impact of national health-care reform on the organization’s insurance plans, particularly plans for members under 65 and for small employers. “We believe new state health exchanges or other insurance options becoming available in 2014 will better serve these members,” says Larry Miller, president and CEO.

Everence continues to develop and grow other health insurance and services for older adults and large organizations. The number of retiring baby boomers increases every year. For their retirement years, many people choose Everence Medicare supplement insurance plans to cover medical expenses that aren’t covered by Medicare. In 2013, Everence will be actively working to expand its Medicare supplement plans into additional states.—*Everence*

**DeBerg named editor of MW USA’s Timbrel**

ELKHART, Ind.—Mennonite Women USA has named Claire DeBerg of Minneapolis as editor of MW USA’s bi-monthly magazine, *Timbrel*, following the resignation of Patricia Wells Burdette. DeBerg, an active member of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, is a graduate of Bethel University, St. Paul, Minn., and the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls.

DeBerg has worked as project manager for numerous websites, as copywriter and copy editor and as a writing instructor at the University of Northern Iowa. She is a published writer of poetry and prose and a musician.

Burdette completed her work as MW USA editor at the end of 2012. She served for four and a half years as editor, during which time she produced *Timbrel*, wrote numerous articles and news releases regarding the work of MW USA and assisted with other writing for the organization.—*Mennonite Church USA*
Be imperfect

Have you ever given thanks for your shortcomings? Maybe you said, “Thank goodness for my high blood pressure.” Or, “Thank God I’m overweight.” Or, “I’m glad I struggle with depression.”

Not I. I’m likely to feel like a failure when I don’t meet my goals or expectations in life. In many ways, it’s ridiculous to celebrate our failures. Yet our shortcomings are often the door that opens to our salvation. Just ask Zacchaeus.

In the Gospel of Luke (chapter 19), Zacchaeus—rather than catching a glimpse of Jesus passing through Jericho—finds himself staring at the watching crowd’s backs. He is short, plus nobody likes him because he overcharges them on their taxes to Rome.

Yet for some reason Zacchaeus is eager to meet Jesus. So he hauls his pint-sized, notorious self into a tree for a better view. Jesus sees him, calls to him and says he is coming over for a meal.

The fact that I didn’t notice this until mid-sermon hints at how much I struggled to study and preach in a second language. My comment was not the main point of my sermon—it wasn’t even in my manuscript—but I returned to the idea over and over in the following week: How might my own limitations become my way of connecting with Jesus? And how might my connection with Jesus change how I relate to others?

In an opening devotion for an antiracism meeting I attended, John Stoesz identified with how Zacchaeus benefited from an unjust system; as a white man, John, too, has benefited from an unjust (racist, sexist) society. Acknowledging his failures to live justly has helped him meet Jesus in people of all colors and ethnicities and to challenge racism within himself and his community.

How might my own limitations become my way of connecting with Jesus?

In The Gifts of Imperfection (just the title may make some readers shiver with disdain), social worker and researcher Brené Brown writes that she began by researching shame and fear, eventually realizing that wholehearted living requires accepting and loving oneself fully. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky, Brown says, but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light. Courage, compassion and connection are the three gifts she names that come from being honest and vulnerable. It’s as if she were studying Luke 19 instead of interviewing thousands of 21st-century women and men.

Social science and Scripture agree on this: We must draw near life with openness rather than with fear, self-protection and excuses, and we often gain more through failure than success.

Oh, how we protest! We make new year’s resolutions so that this year we will be different. Still we drink more alcohol or eat more cookies or work more hours to avoid noticing that we are not well. We banish solitude and prayer and intimacy so we can keep Jesus at arm’s length.

This doesn’t mean we’re hopeless causes. It means we’re like Zacchaeus and so many others who’ve managed to awaken from the sleep of sin and fear. Good news.

My stilted sermon in a Spanish-speaking church left me feeling slightly embarrassed. I wondered whether I had said anything of value to those gathered for worship. It wasn’t until the next day—after having described the sermon as “clumsy” to several inquiring friends—that I remembered the side comment I had made about Zacchaeus’ shortcomings being the key to his salvation.

It slowly dawned on me that my last-minute insight might not have been possible had I been working more easily in my native tongue. And if God had worked through my halting Spanish preaching, maybe my other difficulties could open doors to redemption, too.

May God be at work in each of us through our shortcomings and our failures. ¡Aleluya! And hallelujah!
The gift of vulnerability

In May 2012, more than 200 people from nearly 50 different countries gathered at a retreat center close to Basel, Switzerland, for the triennial meeting of the Mennonite World Conference General Council. The gathering was a significant opportunity for the important business of sharing reports, clarifying budgets and establishing priorities. Also, the newly established MWC commissions pressed forward with their work, and participants enjoyed times of shared worship, singing, Bible study and teachings.

But around the edges of the formal meetings a host of smaller stories were also playing themselves out in ways that did not make it into the official minutes. For a group that does not have many formal ecclesiastical structures, these small threads of connection—the unexpected encounters of individuals, cultures and circumstances—create a space for the Holy Spirit to be present in a transformative way and help form the warp and woof of a global fellowship. Here is one example.

On May 27, the Sunday following the conclusion of the meetings, many Mennonite congregations in the region invited participants to take part in their worship services. Walter Ortiz had been asked to give the sermon at the Ingolstadt congregation in Germany, a six-hour train ride from Basel. Walter is a member of the Enlhet tribe, an indigenous group in Paraguay, and the head of the Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet. Though fluent in Spanish and several local languages, Walter spoke no German or English, and he had no experience traveling alone in a European context. On Friday evening, the day before his departure, he spent much of the night on his knees praying that God would send someone to help him navigate the trip. The next day, Walter walked to the nearby bus stop with an assurance that God would answer his prayer.

Walter insisted, he was assured that God would provide for his people in their time of weakness.

Following the sermon, someone in the Ingolstadt congregation suggested that a basket be made available in case anyone wanted to make a contribution in support of Walter and his community. The spontaneous offering totaled nearly $2,400. At lunch, a guest of the family hosting Walter and Johan noted that it would not be difficult to drop off Walter at the Frankfurt airport on their way home, thereby resolving one more obstacle as Walter thought about the long journey back to Paraguay.

All of us would agree it is not good to be alone in an alien culture and that floods are unwelcomed catastrophes. But circumstances of vulnerability can also become occasions for the gifts of God’s people to be revealed in surprising ways. Walter shared the gift of trust and gratitude; Johan offered the gift of cross-cultural bridge-building; the Ingolstadt congregation gave of its hospitality and resources. Such is the body of Christ—a living, breathing organism knit together by 1,000 relationships of love.

When have you offered the gift of vulnerability? When have you made yourself available to someone else in need? When have you spontaneously shared your time or money?
Pontius’ Puddle

Joel Kauffmann

Torture doesn’t work, in spite of what movies say

For years it’s been common knowledge that the CIA practices torture but won’t admit to it. Officials in the George W. Bush administration, notably Vice President Dick Cheney and CIA director Michael Hayden, have defended the use of torture in investigation of terrorists.

Then, on Dec. 13, 2012, the Senate Intelligence Committee approved a report concluding that “harsh interrogation measures used by the CIA did not produce significant intelligence breakthroughs,” writes Greg Miller in the Washington Post (Dec. 14, 2012).

The Democrats on the committee adopted the 6,000-page document over the objections of the committee’s Republicans (big surprise), even though the CIA’s use of waterboarding and other severe interrogation techniques were banned four years ago.

The report is significant, nevertheless, because it is independent and details the agency’s efforts to “break” dozens of detainees through physical and psychological duress.

Some question the relevance of the report because, writes Miller, “the agency abandoned its harshest interrogation methods years before President Obama was elected, and the Justice Department began backing away from memos it had issued that had served as the legal basis for the program.”

Still, the report is important because it confronts a popular perception, predominant in many movies and TV shows, that such torture does produce helpful information. The recent film Zero Dark Thirty is a case in point.

The film chronicles the decade-long hunt for Osama bin Laden after the September 2001 attacks and his death at the hands of the Navy S.E.A.L. Team 6 in May 2011. (See my capsule review on page 53.) It shows torture in its graphic horror. Yet it also depicts CIA agents obtaining information from detainees who have been tortured, though the information comes when the detainees are being fed or treated kindly.

Evidence shows that useful information rarely comes from torture. Treating detainees kindly and building trust has been shown to be much more effective in obtaining accurate information. For example, read The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11 by Lawrence Wright (Knopf, 2006), which shows an FBI agent obtaining information after developing a relationship with a prisoner and gaining his trust.

The film also depicts the use of secret prisons around the world where detainees were sent to be interrogated, i.e., tortured. Sen. Diane Feinstein, D-Calif., chair of the committee, issued a written statement that called the decisions to use these secret prisons “terrible mistakes.”

While all but one of the Republicans on the committee opposed the report, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, issued a statement saying the committee’s work shows that “cruel” treatment of prisoners “is not only wrong in principle and a stain on our country’s conscience but also an ineffective and unreliable means of gathering intelligence.”

No one knows when or if the report will be made public. For now, it has been turned over to the Obama administration and the CIA to provide a chance for them to comment, writes Miller.

Miller reports that “earlier this year, the Justice Department closed investigations into alleged abuses, eliminating the prospect that CIA operatives who had gone beyond the approved methods would face criminal charges.”

While any final report may not have much impact on government practice, it could help counter the public perception, based mostly on fictional treatments, that torture is effective.

—Gordon Houser
My Jihad is to build friendships across the aisle. What’s yours?—Ahmed Rehab, who started an ad campaign on San Francisco buses aimed at trying to change public perception of the word “jihad,” which he says has been distorted by extremists, Muslim and anti-Muslim alike

Churches told to quiet down or pay up
Government officials in East Africa are cracking down on noise pollution, telling church leaders to reduce worship-related noise levels or face penalties—including being shut down. Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, is enforcing penalties after receiving “overwhelming complaints” of “deafening noise from churches,” where charismatic worship services often involve loud music. Meanwhile, Uganda’s capital, Kampala, has drafted legislation to reduce noise levels, prompting protest from many churches. Others are pursuing measures, such as soundproofing their worship centers, in order to comply.—Christanity Today

Unbelief is now the world’s third-largest ‘religion’
A new report on global religious identity shows that while Christians and Muslims make up the two largest groups, those with no religious affiliation—including atheists and agnostics—are now the third-largest “religious” group in the world. The study, released Dec. 18, 2012, by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, found that more than eight in 10 (84 percent) of the world’s 7 billion people adheres to some form of religion, while “nones”—those who say they have no religious affiliation or say they do not believe in God—at 1.1 billion make up 16 percent.—Religion News Service

The average temperature in the contiguous United States in 2012, breaking the 1998 record by a full degree Fahrenheit.—New York Times

How to fight diabetes with better policy:
1. **Combat poverty**
People who make $15,000 or less are three times more likely to have diabetes than people who make $50,000 or more, regardless of race.

2. **End junk food subsidies**
Between 1985 and 2010, the price of beverages sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup dropped 24 percent, while the price of fresh fruits and vegetables rose 39 percent.

Do 4 things to cut your risk of diabetes by 93 percent:
1. **Eat healthy**
The lowest rates of Type 2 diabetes in the world occur in populations consuming a whole-foods, plant-based diet.

2. **Lose weight**

3. **Exercise**
Overweight people walking 150 minutes a week can reduce the risk of developing diabetes by nearly 60 percent.

4. **Stop smoking**—Yes! Magazine

Numbers to ponder
- Number of guns confiscated at U.S. airports in 2012: **1,500**
- Number of guns confiscated at U.S. airports in 2011: **1,300**
- Percentage of guns confiscated: **85**
  —Associated Press

80 percent of world is religious
A new, comprehensive demographic study of more than 230 countries and territories conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life finds that more than eight in 10 people worldwide identify with a religious group. The report estimates that there are 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children around the globe, representing 84 percent of the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion.—Pew Forum

Faith on the Hill
The newly elected, 113th Congress includes the first Buddhist to serve in the Senate, the first Hindu to serve in either chamber and the first member of Congress to describe her religion as “none,” according to a new analysis by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life of congressional data compiled primarily by CQ Roll Call. This continues a gradual increase in religious diversity that mirrors trends in the country as a whole.—Pew Forum Communications

35%
of all American motels are owned by immigrant families from one Indian state, Gujarat.

49%
of garbage in the California cities of Richmond, Oakland, San José and South San Francisco comes from fast-food trash.

1%
of Vermont residents are black.

10%
of Vermont prisoners are black.
  —Pacific Standard

55.3
Mark Van Steenwyk’s journey to radical Christian community

A Mennonite anarchist

Interviewed by Joanna Shenk

Mark Van Steenwyk, originally from Becker County, Minn., lives in Minneapolis with The Mennonite Worker community. The Mennonite Worker (formerly Missio Dei) has been affiliated with Central Plains Mennonite Conference since 2007. I got to know Mark when I began working with Mennonite Church USA in 2009. Since then we have worked together on a variety of projects, including The Iconocast podcast and Widening the Circle: Experiments in Christian Discipleship, to which he contributed a chapter. In this interview I was interested to learn more about the journey that led Mark to become Mennonite. His testimony offers encouragement and challenge to Mennonites today.

Mark Van Steenwyk  Photo by Everett J. Thomas
Did you grow up with a Christian identity? What were formative childhood experiences related to faith?

My family was functionally irreligious in my childhood. I'd visit Sunday schools from time to time, but it wasn't until my early teens that I began to explore Christianity. A particular formative spiritual experience happened when I was 14 and attending a Bible camp in rural Minnesota.

Camp Joy had a campfire the final evening, right after the talent show. As the campfire blazed, a counselor led us in songs, and between them campers were encouraged to share testimonies. On this particular evening in the summer of 1990, most of the stories were depressing. Everyone shared melancholy stories of death and disappointment, of loss and regret.

In the midst of it all, I suddenly felt overwhelmed with a feeling that I had never before experienced. It was as though their pain was my pain. I felt connected to the suffering of the other campers and, even more confusing, to the suffering of the world. Nothing in my life had prepared me for that experience. It wasn’t merely a feeling of empathy—it felt cosmic. It didn’t feel abstract either; I felt as though I could feel the woundedness of the world. And the most painful part of that experience was that I knew, deep in my being, that I was a part of that. I was broken and incomplete. And I sobbed.

I felt connected to the suffering of the other campers and, even more confusing, to the suffering of the world.

Sobbing isn’t the sort of thing a 14-year-old is supposed to do in front of peers. My camp counselor noticed my tears. He took me aside. He handed me a handkerchief, and asked me, “Would you like to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?”

I didn’t know what that had to do with what I was experiencing but assumed he knew more about these things than I did. I said yes. He then led me through the “sinner’s prayer.”

Looking back, I regret saying yes. While I love Jesus and affirm the spiritual nature of that campfire experience, I don’t believe what I was experiencing can be described as “being convicted of sin.” It was different—something that required discernment. However, the end result was that my mystical experience was pushed and shaped into the easy template afforded by evangelicalism.

How were you taught to think about your identity as a Christian after that experience?

Well, when I returned from camp, I was given a Bible. I was told to start reading in the Gospels. Since I was a bookish kid, I dove in. I read through the entire New Testament.

The strange thing is that I immediately came to a radical conclusion from the Gospels: that killing and hating and ac-
quiring wealth were counter to the gospel. I didn’t know my conclusions were out of step with my fundamentalist charismatic congregation until one morning in Sunday school, when I offered to pray for the vets in our congregation—that God would forgive them for the killing they had done in the war.

**Ethics**—how we live out the life of Jesus in our world today—is at the center of what it means to be a Mennonite.

And, shortly after that, I rebuked a youth worker who came to church driving a brand new, cherry-red Corvette. My rebuke was certainly lacking in charity, but I still think it was fair to critique the purchase, particularly because Becker County is a relatively impoverished place.

The response to all these early radical impulses was basically exorcism. Oh, they didn’t call it that—they called it “deliverance.” For several hours, I had the spirits of poverty and rebellion “cast out” of me. My radical instincts were cast out of me like demons. And so I became a good conservative charismatic youth.

**As you got older, did the spirits of “poverty and rebellion” return, leading to a faith crisis at some point?**

Yes. It was a combination of things that hit all at the same time of my life. Right around the year 2000, I started studying church history. I was overwhelmed by the corruption and violence found in so much of it. Around that time, I was considering seminary and enlisting with the Air Force with the intention of becoming a chaplain.

I started asking, Am I personally OK with killing? It was still an open question when 9/11 happened. I saw the Christian community capitulate to the will of a government bent on war. And I had been an adamant supporter of George W. Bush. But for some reason, it seemed obvious that the government was telling lies to justify war. Here I was, a Bush supporter, seeing obvious lies, while the church in America called for bloodshed.

All this pushed me toward pacifism. I began to realize, at the same time, that I didn’t have any theological use for Jesus besides his sacrificial death. I began to question everything, which led me to re-engage the teachings of Jesus. I became convinced that what he said and taught should be at the center of my faith.

What led up to you starting an intentional community in Minneapolis? What kinds of challenges did you face as a leader?

In 2005, Amy, my spouse, and I formed Missio Dei (we recently changed our name to The Mennonite Worker) with a simple premise; we would simply read the Gospels and ask three questions: (1) What is Jesus saying or doing in this passage? (2) What excuses are stirring in our minds as a way of justifying why we shouldn’t do likewise? (3) What is at least one thing we can do to walk in the direction of what Jesus is saying or doing?

These questions eventually led us into becoming an intentional community that centered its life around the practice of hospitality. The approach was largely experimental; there were no preset notions of what it should look like to follow the way of Jesus. Now, this was a messy process. We didn’t start as an intentional community but as a “hip” urban church. And we were doing fairly well with that. However, as our church slowly grew, it was comprised primarily of commuters. Only a handful of us lived in the neighborhood.

About a year into things, I scrapped it all and started over. This was a difficult decision. It appeared so foolish; why scrap what could be a successful church plant in order to start over? The

Mark and his son Jonas protest fracking. Photo by Josh Miller
only folks who continued on with us were ones receiving hospitality at our house and a couple friends.

**Were you finding support for your community from other Christian groups as this shift was happening?**

No. Before the “shift,” we were affiliated with the Baptist General Conference. Nobody there supported us becoming an intentional community. And we simply didn’t know any groups out there who were exploring the same radical ideals we were.

**When did you first hear about Mennonites?**

I knew Mennonites in high school. And, interestingly enough, the pastor of the church I attended in my teens was a Mennonite who had been kicked out of his church in the wake of the charismatic movement. I was rebaptized by a charismatic Mennonite. I like to tell Mennonites that this fact makes me technically more “anabaptist” than anyone I know.

For most of my life, Mennonites were just a group of old-fashioned Christians with strange beliefs. They lived, for the most part, in history.

As my community began to feel isolated, and I felt alone as a leader, I reached out. At this point in my life—about six years ago—I knew there were Mennonites out there who were keeping the Anabaptist spirit alive. I was familiar with Christian Peacemaker Teams and had read *The Politics of Jesus*. I went to the Mennonite Church USA website, found out there were Mennonite churches in the Twin Cities and sent off an email. That’s how it started.

**What compelled your community to seek relationship with Mennonites?**

I initiated it, but my community was on board. At first, there were a few folks resistant to the idea of joining a denomination. We tend toward anti-institutionalism. But for me, it hasn’t been about joining a denomination but about placing ourselves within a tradition in which to practice mutual submission.

**What’s been life-giving about connecting to Mennonites? What’s been demoralizing?**

It’s always amazed me how quickly Mennonites get what we’re about. It can’t be overstated how much this helps our sanity. When we first shifted into an intentional community, I remember trying to explain the shift to some pastors I know. After an hour, they still couldn’t wrap their minds around it. The majority of Mennonites I’ve met understand the gist of The Mennonite Worker in just five minutes. Ethics—how we live out the life of Jesus in our world today—is at the center of what it means to be a Mennonite. That is huge. Many Mennonites share our commitment to active peacemaking; almost all of them respect our commitment to hospitality.

We enjoy our relationships with other Mennonite churches in our area. Faith Mennonite has let us use their facilities for events. We’ve had friends from Washington Mennonite Church in Iowa teach us how to can food. We get visitors from various Mennonite communities who want to get to know us; we love visitors.

But there have been some demoralizing pieces as well. I’ve met folks who have been Mennonites for decades who still feel like outsiders. We welcome folks with our words but often push them away with our actions and cultural hang-ups. To be a Mennonite, for me, means accepting the reality that I’ll never be as Mennonite as other people. I can handle it because as an educated white man with Dutch ancestry, it isn’t a huge cultural leap for me to bridge. And since I get invited to speak at Mennonite gatherings, I have access. But it is discouraging to me that some of the members of my community will always be on the outside of the Mennonite world.

I find it challenging trying to talk about economics with Mennonite folks. We confuse frugality with living simply. To me, living simply in the way of Jesus is about living with our basic needs met so that we can share the abundance of God with others. It’s about challenging economic injustices and living into the Jubilee. Many Mennonites don’t see how their commitment to peacemaking is at odds with their acceptance of capitalism, wealth and privilege.

Many Mennonites don’t see how their commitment to peacemaking is at odds with their acceptance of capitalism, wealth and privilege.

**What led you to change your name?**

When we started Missio Dei in 2003, we were a hip urban church with a cool Latin name. And the theological concept of “Missio Dei”—God’s mission—was important to me.

Over the past eight years, we’ve found ourselves walking within two traditions. In addition to Mennonites, we’ve rubbed shoulders with Catholic Workers. We’ve discovered that while our theological convictions often line up with our
Mennonite siblings, our politics and our practices look like the Catholic Worker movement. Since Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin sparked the Catholic Worker movement in the 1930s, communities have centered their lives around housing the homeless and feeding the hungry in ways that are direct and personal. Workers live with the folks who receive hospitality. Catholic Workers often embrace an anarchism—trying to tackle injustice directly, show compassion directly, build justice directly.

**What values or commitments guide your community? How were they chosen?**

We are committed to following Jesus’ way of simplicity (seeking a sustainable life with a healthy relationship to possessions), hospitality (inviting friends and strangers to share life together), prayer (being rooted in life-giving spiritual rhythms), peace (breaking our addiction to power as we get in the way of violence and injustice) and resistance (naming and challenging oppression wherever we find it as we seek to embody an alternative).

We chose all these by consensus. Hospitality is our “mother value”—it shapes and informs the other values. And communal discernment is the practice that animates all our values.

**How many people live in your community, and how many houses do you have? Describe the rhythm of your life together.**

We have about 20 people living between two households: Clare House and Sattler House. We are a mix of members (folks who have been around at least a year and formally discerned to commit to our way of life indefinitely), long-term residents and guests. There are also six chickens. The youngest person in one of our houses, Clarence, is 9 months old. The oldest participant is Martin. He’s in his 60s and has afflicted us with his penchant for puns.

We have several community meals through the week. On Saturday mornings we gather for communal discernment. It’s been difficult to cultivate, but more than any other practice it has helped me learn submission and truthtelling.

On Sunday nights we gather at our Oratory—a place of prayer and worship in the space above the garage at Clare House. Our worship is a mix of singing, a short personal reflection or sermon, a healthy dose of Quaker-style silence and prayer. After our time of worship, we go downstairs and gather around the table for an Agape meal.

**In addition to community life, you do speaking and writing. Recently you’ve authored a book called That Holy Anarchist: Reflections on Christianity and Anarchism (see box below). What was the impetus for that book?**

For the past few years, I’ve given the seminar on Christian anarchism at the annual Jesus Radicals conference. I wanted to have an introduction to the subject in writing. It’s hard to be a Christian anarchist. Most Christians don’t think it’s appropriate to be an anarchist, and most anarchists are atheists. Yet I believe the two can learn a lot from each other.

Anarchists seek to reject or undermine forms of static authority in human relations, recognizing the many forms of oppression (class, race, gender, Scripture in authoritarian contexts. Once you start pulling the loose threads, you begin to find the whole authoritarian fabric unravelling.” This small book is not a thoroughgoing argument but a stimulus to a discussion that could be fruitful. Christian anarchism is about living according to a kingdom (an "unkingdom," according to Van Steenwyk) that is not one of domination. “The best way forward, …” he writes, “is to be rooted in the particularity of the story of Jesus and the church.” That’s a good starting point for a needed conversation.—Gordon Houser
species) that make up a system of domination. I am an anarchist because I believe our world works best when we live with a mutuality—when we care for each other and the land without a few people ruling over the rest. I’m a Christian because I believe Jesus shows us a way to do that, and I believe this way is rooted in the source of all life. To me, to be a Christian anarchist is the logical conclusion of taking Jesus seriously when he calls us to love God and neighbor.

Was there a time in your life when the word “anarchism” would have been jarring for you? How did that change?

Certainly. But even after embracing what I now know to be anarchist views, I would have reacted to the word. When someone said “anarchist,” my brain envisioned someone dressed in black angrily throwing bricks through windows. And there are anarchists who do that.

That changed as I read radical history. The first Anabaptists were, in many ways, revolutionaries. Most were nonviolent, but some were violent. The same is true for the liberation movements around the world. Anarchists are as complex and diverse as the early Anabaptists. And one of the fathers of anarchism, Peter Kropotkin, wrote that anarchism has its roots in the Anabaptist movement.

How do you see Mennonite faith connected to anarchism?

Jesus’ vision of the kingdom of God has anti-domination, anarchic implications; it also assumes that only by nurturing practices centered on the presence of the living Christ can we move from domination to nondomination, from death to life, from oppression to liberation and from alienation to love.

Mennonites have a rich history of creating small communities that do the “Jesus stuff” directly without outsourcing it. I am a Christian and an anarchist because I believe Christianity can teach anarchists about love, spirituality, forgiveness and grace. And because anarchists can remind Christians of the radical political and economic implications of the way of Jesus.

If we care about homelessness, then rather than simply voting for a progressive candidate or complaining against the wealthy, we should offer someone our guest room or couch. What gifts do you think the Mennonite tradition has to offer Christians today?

In a society grappling with economic fallout and inhospitality, Mennonites can teach about our practices of mutual aid and hospitality. Mennonites have theology and history that can help other Christians who are questioning the war machine and social injustices but lack the theology or the ecclesiology to go deeper. We have to share our success and our failures and find a way to support others engaging in a similar struggle.

Folks are emerging into convictions that are similar to Anabaptism. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and we have an obligation to help them embrace the call of Jesus Christ to live more fully into the kingdom of God. And we should do that without trying to absorb them into our particular Mennonite story.

If we care about homelessness, then rather than simply voting for a progressive candidate or complaining against the wealthy, we should offer someone our guest room or couch.

What’s next for The Mennonite Worker?

We are raising funds for the purchase of a new hospitality house. We will be looking for a building with at least eight bedrooms and 3,200 square feet. We intend to name the new house Simone Weil House, after the French mystic, philosopher and activist. We’ve raised about $60,000 so far.

Simone Weil House will provide much-needed space for new guests and interns. The house will host several open meals a week and provide additional garden (and chicken) space.

The building serves not only as a hospitality house but also as home to the Gene Stoltzfus Center for Creative Peacemaking. (Gene was director of Christian Peacemaker Teams from its founding until 2004. He passed away in 2010.)

After the new house is established, we’ll look at acquiring land for a rural sister community—to provide not only a place for us to grow food for our urban households but to live more into practices of environmental sustainability.

Joanna Shenk is editor of Widening the Circle: Experiments in Christian Discipleship (Herald Press, 2011) and communication coordinator and interchurch relations associate for Mennonite Church USA.
Mennonite Church USA’s next convention in Phoenix, Ariz., is only five months away; it will be held July 1–6 at the Phoenix Convention Center.

**Special events**

When registering, note these opportunities:

- **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) tour of Florence Detention Center, followed by a visit to the Florence Project office** (Monday, July 1, 7:30 a.m.–early afternoon, limited to 13 people). **Cost: $20** (lunch not included)

  As we gather in Phoenix, we can choose to learn more about the immigration crisis that affects all of us in our various contexts. Perhaps the most invisible part of this crisis is the number of immigrants held in detention centers across the United States. On Monday morning, 13 people will have the opportunity to visit the Florence Detention Center, which is approximately an hour’s drive south of Phoenix. The ICE Agency will conduct the visit, and Tina Schlabach, a Mennonite minister from Tucson, will accompany the group.

- **All-day learning trip to the U.S./Mexico border with BorderLinks** (Tuesday, July 2, through Friday, July 5, 6 a.m.–9 p.m. daily, limited to 39 people per day). (U.S. passport or U.S. passport card is required if traveling into Mexico.) **Cost: $125**

  Consider giving one of your convention days to an experiential learning opportunity that will bring new insights and perspectives on border migration. Your own questions and background will contribute to the group experience. Tuesday through Friday, 39 people daily will have the opportunity to travel on a charter bus from the convention center two hours south to Tucson. There the group will split into three smaller groups for the day; two groups will cross into Mexico, and the other group will stay on the U.S. side of the border. A leader from Shalom Mennonite Fellowship will help welcome and host the group each day. BorderLinks will guide each group’s activities.

- **Traveling choir** (limited to 48 people). **Cost: $15** (to cover transportation)

  This choir will travel to several locations throughout Phoenix to sing songs of healing and hope. There will be one rehearsal.

- **Servant projects** (available options: 9 a.m.–1 p.m. on Monday; 12–5 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday). **Cost: $7**

  Servant projects have been part of the convention experience for many years. These service experiences allow adults and youth to contribute their time to local ministries and to learn about both the strengths and challenges of the host city.

- **Purposeful Plan fund-raising meal** (Tuesday, July 2, 5:30–7 p.m.)

  Join executive director Ervin Stutzman, moderator Richard Thomas and agency executives for dinner and conversation about how God is working in Mennonite Church USA, with a focus on the Purposeful Plan and ongoing ministries. **Tickets are $50**, with additional opportunities to provide ongoing financial support for Mennonite Church USA.

- **Wet ‘n Wild** (Wednesday, July 3). **Cost: $29**

  Set on more than 35 acres in North Phoenix, Wet ‘n Wild water park is the largest theme park in Arizona and features more than 30 slides and attractions. The cost includes admission and transportation to the park. (Children 2 and under are free.) All children must be accompanied by a parent/guardian.
Adult worship speakers

• **Monday evening: Richard Twiss**, a member of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate from the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, is president of Wiconi International, an organization that works to promote community, strengthen culture and foster spiritual vitality among Native American or First Nations people.

• **Tuesday morning: Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño**, a native of Edinburg, Texas, and a third-generation Methodist, is president of the College of Bishops of the Western Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church. She also has served as a pastor and district superintendent.

• **Thursday evening: Meghan Good**, pastor of Albany (Ore.) Mennonite Church, frequently speaks on topics such as biblical hermeneutics, integrative worship and the church’s generation gap. She previously worked with Duke Divinity School’s Center for Reconciliation (Durham, N.C.) while completing a Master of Divinity degree.

• **Friday evening: Elizabeth Soto Albrecht**, moderator-elect of Mennonite Church USA and an ordained pastor, is coordinator of field education at Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary and associate chaplain at Lancaster General Hospital. She has a Doctor of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Joint worship speaker

• **Wednesday morning: Ervin R. Stutzman**, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, has served the church as a pastor, district overseer, missions administrator, conference moderator and denominational moderator. He also was a professor and dean at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va. Ervin holds a Ph.D. from Temple University in Philadelphia.

Youth worship speakers

• **Monday evening: Hal L. Shrader**, lead pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz., was first drawn to Anabaptism when in college he first considered, What if Jesus was really serious about what he said in the Sermon on the Mount? He has a Master of Theology degree from Pepperdine University, Malibu, Calif.

• **Tuesday morning: Isabel Castillo**, a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., is the founder of Dream Activist Virginia and co-founder of the National Immigrant Youth Alliance. In May 2011, the University of San Francisco awarded Isabel an honorary doctorate degree for her unwavering advocacy for the passage of the Dream Act.

• **Tuesday evening: Rachel Swartzendruber Miller**, vice president of admissions and financial aid at Hesston (Kan.) College, formerly was director of Convention Planning for Mennonite Church USA. She is a Ph.D. candidate at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich.

• **Thursday evening: Ingrid DeSanctis and company.** An actor, director, playwright and teacher, Ingrid teaches at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va., and is artistic director of Fifth Wall Productions, LLC. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has worked as an associate director of drama at Willow Creek Community Church.

• **Friday morning: Luke A. Hartman** is vice president for enrollment at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va. He has served as a university professor, head basketball coach and administrator of a diverse public school. He has a Ph.D. in educational policy studies at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

• **Friday evening: Glen Alexander Guyton** is director of finance and convention planning for Mennonite Church USA. A former officer in the U.S. Air Force, Glen followed a call to ministry and served more than 17 years at Calvary Community Church (C3) in Hampton, Va., with his wife, Cyndi. Glen and Cyndi are now campus pastors of C3-San Antonio (Texas).

---

It’s not too early to make plans to attend. To learn more about convention, register and reserve lodging online, see [http://convention.mennoniteusa.org/](http://convention.mennoniteusa.org/). (Deposits are $199 per youth, junior youth, sponsor and adult.) And follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
Juanita Nuñez serves on the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board. She works as co-pastor with her husband, Eligio, at Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer in Apopka, Fla. She is also an ex-officio member of Iglesia Menonita Hispana general board and a chaplain in Marketplace Chaplains USA. In the past she served as moderator of IMH and as Hispanic Women’s Mennonite Conference coordinator.

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

When I was 5 years old in the Dominican Republic, two humble women left a great impression on me—Benita and Estebania Ramirez. Both of them were in difficult marriage situations, but they held on to their faith and were an inspiration to the whole congregation. When I went to Bible school in 1981, I had the opportunity to meet the director, Maria Luisa Gomez, who took me under her wings.

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

I have a friendship and mentoring relationship with Madeline Maldonado. I have also been able to influence my daughters, Alexandra and Jovanna. Alexandra is currently a leader in a Christian microfinance organization, serving people in the Dominican Republic and in Haiti, where she acts as a leader and a person committed to God.

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

Madeline and I are from different upbringings. I was born in the Dominican Republic, and she was raised in the United States. She is also from another generation of Hispanics growing up with a different culture. Luisa and I currently belong to different denominations. Finally, while my daughter Alexandra and I will always have a parent-child relationship, we have been developing stronger bonds of a caring friendship.

**What impediments have you faced in becoming a leader?**

First, I am a Hispanic woman of color. Sometimes the fact that I speak English with an accent has an impact on my leadership. Second, serving in a different country from my own has its challenges. Third, the Hispanic community historically has been male-dominated. Some women prefer men in leadership roles, mostly based on past experiences or personality clashes with other women.

**When you face challenges as leader, what encourages you?**

Prayer and knowing God’s Word has been an important part of my journey. God is able to see me through all things. My family, my congregation and my friends are a significant part of my life, as they love me and accept me as I am. Serving God is the highest calling anyone can receive. What higher honor could anyone ask for?
We shouldn’t equate the decline of Christian piety with the end of Christendom.

Post-Christendom or neo-Christendom

by Ron Adams and Isaac Villegas

We live in confusing times. Perhaps that has always been the case, for in every era the powers and principalities of the world mutate into different forms, inventing new temptations that lead followers of Jesus away from the gospel. Part of what it means to live faithfully involves discerning the signs of the times, paying attention to our ever-changing environment as we repent of the church’s failures and renew our witness to the gospel here and now.
Recently, some have labeled our confusing situation the “post-Christendom era.” According to this trend, we are living in an epoch after Christendom. Traditionally, Christendom described the time when the church hierarchy exercised domination over European society, with the Pope vying for power with the emperor. Stuart Murray, a Baptist in England, explains that during Christendom “Christians had organized themselves into a powerful institution that could impose its beliefs and practices on society.”

But, it is claimed, since the travails of the 16th century, the church has been losing its hold on society. Murray, among others, argues that Christianity is no longer a dominant influence in the West. Christendom is dead or dying as “the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.” This is the framework Murray offers for redefining contemporary Anabaptism in his recent book, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Herald Press, 2010). We are witnessing the historical moment, writes Murray, when the “Christendom era draws to a close and the churches find themselves back on the margins, no longer feted or favored by society.”

“Imperial Christianity is finished,” Murray goes on to say, which means Christians should turn to “the resources [that] are to be found in the radical tradition associated with Anabaptism,” because Anabaptists, historically, have developed ways of life that operate without the support of Christendom’s structures.

Yet Murray leads us astray when he announces the imminent demise of Christendom and discusses the Christian’s marginality to mainstream society. We are now “a powerless minority of resident aliens,” he writes, “in a culture that no longer accords Christianity special treatment.”

We Mennonites listen to Murray because he gives us a way to identify ourselves as a minority religious community in the midst of worldly persecution; he taps into our Anabaptist penchant for associating marginality with faithfulness. But the trouble with Murray’s claim is that Christianity still dominates Western politics and culture. As Christians, we are not marginalized from the powers that be. To proclaim Christendom’s death prematurely only serves to mask all the ways we benefit from the institutional prominence of cultural Christianity as it shapes our society. To declare Christendom’s demise hastily misleads us into thinking that Christians are now marginalized victims.

While recent surveys show a decrease in church attendance in the United States, we shouldn’t equate the decline of Christian piety with the end of Christendom. There is more to
the dominance of Christendom than regular church attendance. Christendom names a social arrangement in which Christianity penetrates the structures of power. As Murray explains in his book *Church Planting* (Herald Press, 2001), Christendom is a system where “Christians had organized themselves into a powerful institution that could impose its beliefs and practices on society.” Our argument is that such an era has not ended, that the era of politically powerful Christian institutions is not dying, that we do not live in a “post” Christendom age. Instead, Christendom is reinventing itself as it mutates into a new form: call it neo-Christendom. This mutation differs from the political system of the Medieval Ages yet retains the same preference for Christian sociopolitical ascendency.

“In Christendom,” writes the historian Alan Kreider, “Christians came to occupy central positions in society. … Christians were no longer deviant.” This is still the case in the United States, especially as we consider who citizens vote into the executive office. The rhetoric of last year’s presidential race revealed the widespread assumption that only Christians should rule the country. Both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney spoke boldly of their faith on the campaign trail, each trying to identify himself as sufficiently Christian to be elected President. In *The Presidents and Their Faith* (Russell Media, 2012), Darrin Grinder and Steve Shaw document how, in order to win elections, every president has had to be “not just religious but acceptably religious, for it does appear to be the case that we do have a religious litmus test concerning the American presidency.”

**Christianity is not a deviant faith** in the United States. Christianity is the status quo for people with power, a prerequisite for presidential electability, the credential required to convince voters of a candidate’s political virtue. The office of President has been Christianized. For example, the job description of the person who sits in the oval office involves offering pastoral care to the nation, like a shepherd to the flock. Last year, President Obama offered words of comfort, preaching from Psalm 46, at the memorial service in Tucson, Ariz., as mourners remembered Jared Loughner’s victims. After the mass murders in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001, President George W. Bush used Psalm 23 to reassure a devastated populace with the promise of God’s blessing and presence even as evil overwhelms. In 1995, after the Oklahoma City bombing, President Bill Clinton encouraged the crowd with words from Romans 12: “Let us not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” In these crucial

While pundits may doubt the sincerity of a leader, no one questions the political use of the Christian Scriptures.
moments for this nation, the turn to the Bible is natural to our culture, both socially acceptable and expected. The Christian Scriptures have become an instrument of civil power.

If we lived in a post-Christendom society, a president who quoted from the Bible in a public address would be considered a social deviant, a foreigner to the culture, a politician out of touch with the people. But we do not live in post-Christendom, for the media and the masses approve of presidents when they Christianize their speeches and leadership. While pundits may doubt the sincerity of a leader, no one questions the political use of the Christian Scriptures.

We should actively disown the systems of neo-Christendom that permeate our lives by forming relationships that draw us into the borderlands of cultural Christianity.

While European societies differ from our situation in the United States, our nations are infused with the same powers of Christendom because we share a cultural and political genealogy. Given the constant mutations and varying forms, perhaps we should talk about “neo-Christendoms” in the plural, not singular. For despite the significant differences between the United States and Europe, including the disparity in church attendance, the legacy of Christendom still permeates its politics and cultures. In a December 2011 speech, British Prime Minister David Cameron said, “We are a Christian country, and we should not be afraid to say so.” The language and culture of Christianity is “the glue that can help to bind us together,” Cameron declared. For him, Christendom infuses British identity and promises to bring unity among disparate peoples.

In Switzerland, a so-called secular country, citizens amended their constitution to forbid the construction of minarets on mosques. According to the advocates of the law, the skyline of Swiss towns and cities should display the unambiguous Christian legacy of European civilization, enshrined in church architecture. By popular vote, the Swiss defended the cultural roots of their society in Christendom, warding off the challenge of a growing Muslim population.

The point is unambiguous: Islam must not be allowed to challenge the favored position of Christianity. Robert Louis Wilken, a church historian, explained the significance of the Swiss stance against minarets: “The peoples of Europe apparently still believe in the potency of Christian symbols.” Without the privileged position of these Christian symbols in Europe, Wilken continued, society will lose “all memory of its Christian traditions” and may forfeit “those things that make western civilization unique.”

The claim that Western civilization belongs to Christianity was defended by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2006 papal address at the University of Regensburg in Germany. “Christianity,” he argued, “took on its historically decisive character in Europe.” The theology of the early church, “with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, cre-

For a perspective that differs from Adams and Villegas, two recent books address Christian practices and how to read the Bible in light of Christendom’s “unraveling.” Forming Christian Habits in Post-Christendom: The Legacy of Alan and Eleanor Kreider, edited by James R. Krabill and Stuart Murray (Herald Press, 2011, $22.99), includes essays and appreciations by contributors from around the world who have been influenced by the ministry of the Kreiders, who have taught and written about mission, community and worship from an Anabaptist perspective for almost 40 years, about half that time living in England. Each chapter includes excerpts from the Kreiders’ writings, followed by responses of the contributors. There’s much to learn here.

Reading the Bible After Christendom by Lloyd Pietersen (Herald Press, 2012, $19.99) argues that the church in a postmodern, post-Christian society needs to look at Scripture with a different focus. He examines how the Bible was interpreted before Christendom and afterward, then how Anabaptists developed an alternative approach that subverted Catholic and Protestant forms. Next, Pietersen turns to reading the whole Bible from this perspective. Finally, he considers contemporary applications in two areas: spirituality and mission. He wisely calls for reading the Bible from the margins and in community. There’s much to learn here as well.—Gordon Houser
ated Europe and remains the foundation of what can be rightly called Europe.” Pope Benedict insists on the essential link between European societies and Christianity. While the Pope uses this historical connection to promote the continual dominance of the church, which is not our argument here, he articulates the genetic link that binds Christendom and western societies together. The connection between “Christendom” and “Europe” is so intimate that it seems unnatural to name them as separate identities, as if we could talk about one without the other.

As the anthropologist Talal Asad has put it, “Christianity is regarded as a central tradition in ‘the West,’ even for atheists, and the constant reinterpretation of its history is part of what ‘the modern West’ is about.” In other words, as citizens of Western societies continue to engage in the kinds of political debate that define their cultural identity, they cannot help but operate within the evolving mutations of Christendom.

Once we leave behind the myth that we live in post-Christendom, we can see at least two possibilities for faithfulness to the gospel, two options that start from a realistic appraisal of our cultural situation within the different forms of neo-Christendom.

The first option can be associated with the work of Lesslie Newbigin, the foundational thinker of the missional church movement. According to Newbigin, Christianity saved Europe from social disintegration and political anarchy. It would have been “an act of apostasy,” he wrote in *Foolishness to the Greeks* (SPCK Publishing, 1986), for believers to step away from the opportunity “to create a Christian civilization, to shape laws consonant with the biblical teaching.” We shouldn’t abandon the legacy of Christendom, he argued, but adapt it to the changing times. What we need is “a Christian society,” where we maintain “a privileged position for the Christian faith in the public domain,” wrote Newbigin in a 1994 essay called “What Kind of Britain?” The alternative to a Christian society, according to Newbigin, even as it subtly grows under the auspices of secularism, is Islam: “I do not wish my grandchildren,” Newbigin admitted, “to live in an Islamic state.” This fear, it seems, still feeds the powers of neo-Christendom as it lives in the systems of Western societies.

A second option has to do with forming relationships of solidarity with minority religious groups, the communities among us that are pushed into the margins of society because of their faith. While the post-Christendom thinkers want us to imagine ourselves as deviants because we are Christians, we want Christians to recognize that we are not foreigners to the powers that be, that we are not social deviants because of our faith in Jesus Christ, that we are not a persecuted minority within the cultural and political systems of western societies. Alternatively, we believe that we should actively disown the systems of neo-Christendom that permeate our lives by forming relationships that draw us into the borderlands of cultural Christianity. Instead of pretending we are “a powerless minority of resident aliens in a culture that no longer accords Christianity special treatment,” we should join our lives to actual resident aliens in our society, religious minorities in our Christianized culture, powerless communities that do not benefit from the favoritism of our political systems.

We would argue for the second response, a creative and humble engagement with estranged religious communities and cultures. For example, what would it mean to give up the social power that comes with owning prominent buildings and calling them churches and instead renting space from a local mosque or Sikh temple? Such a relationship would be a small step toward disestablishment within our neighborhoods and communities and an embodied commitment of solidarity with people rendered outsiders to mainstream cultures. To become renters rather than owners would start us on a divergent path from groups who claim institutional and geographic power. Of the many gifts we would receive from the hospitality of minority communities, they could share with us what it feels like to gather for worship on the fringes of neo-Christendom. As we assemble as Christians within the sacred space of Muslims or Sikhs, we would be invited to make ourselves vulnerable to the violence they experience from Christian bigotry. This would be one way to learn from others how Christendom remains a source of oppression and fear, realities hidden from us so long as we live by the illusion that Christendom is dead and gone.

Ron Adams is pastor at Madison (Wis.) Mennonite Church. Isaac Villegas is pastor at Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Church.
There are many belief systems in the world today. This reflection embraces the Judeo-Christian faith. Those who embrace faith have also been given much hope. As an introduction, and to give you some insight relative to the spirituality of dying, I will quote a story from Henri Nouwen’s book on Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring (HarperOne, 2009). It is a story about a conversation between twins in their mother’s womb.

Death and spirituality
Making peace with death

by Elena Yoder

The sister said to the brother, “I believe there is life after birth.”
Her brother protested vehemently, “No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but cling to the cord that feeds us.”
The little girl insisted, “There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move.” Still she could not convince her twin brother. After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, “I have something else to say, and I’m afraid you won’t believe that, either, but I think there is a mother.
Her brother became furious, “A mother,” he shouted. What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have.”
“Don’t you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They’re quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful. I think these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face to face. Don’t you think that’s exciting?”
This story may help us think about death in a new way, says Nouwen. We can live as though this life is all we have and the thought of death is absurd and we shouldn’t have to take the time to even think about it. Or we can agree with the sister in the story that there must be a Creator, greater than ourselves, and we can “choose to claim our divine childhood and trust that death is but the painful but blessed passage that will bring us face to face with our (Creator) God.”

Nouwen’s statement means this world is not what it’s all about. There is a larger reality out there that we have yet to experience. This recognition may be our first step in the process of making peace with death or our mortality.

Nouwen says that simply recognizing we are dependent on God brings freedom. Whereas human dependency enslaves, divine dependence leads to freedom. “Divine dependence is a gift and makes dying part of a greater and much vaster way of living,” writes Nouwen in Our Greatest Gift. This freedom allows one to see the whole human race as brothers and sisters and children of the one Creator God, who is perfect love. Thus, he says, “when we can reach beyond our fears to the One who loves us with a love that was there before we were born and will be there when we die, oppression, persecution and even death will be unable to take away our freedom. Once we have come to the deep inner knowledge—a knowledge more of the heart than of the mind—that we are born out of love and will die into love, that every part of our being is deeply rooted in love and that this love is our true Father and Mother, that all forms of evil, illness and death lose their final power over us and become painful, but hopeful reminders of our true divine childhood.”

The Apostle Paul’s way of expressing this freedom is recorded in Romans 8:35-39: “Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ’s love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture. … None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us” (The Message).

These verses give us confidence that even in death we are not separated from God’s love, and we can walk through life and especially the latter stages of life and through the very gates of death itself with the confidence of abiding in God’s love and presence at all times. As David Roper in his book The Song of a Passionate Heart Psalm 23 (Discovery House, 1996) says: “Death for God’s children is not bitter frustration but mere transition into a larger and permanent love—a love undisturbed by time, unmenaced by evil, unbroken by fear, unclouded by doubt.”

The story about the twins suggests that we are born to die. We are born for a larger reality, a reality that we are blinded to in this present life. This can be compared to mothers giving birth. We do not want the babies in our wombs to be afraid to leave the darkness of those wombs. People who have near-death experiences have often seen beyond the present reality and have given witness to a larger reality. Most of their experiences agree as having encountered feelings of tremendous love, warmth and peace, saying that they will never be afraid of death again.

One young man said to his wife before he died, “It’s all about love.” Living is about love and the joy of knowing the source of love and belonging to one human family. Dying is also about love because we return to Perfect Love—the One who created us in the first place.

Whereas human dependency enslaves, divine dependence leads to freedom.

Dying, however, is seldom a sweet sentimental event. Rather, it is a great struggle to surrender our lives completely and let go of the familiar and earthly about us, to let go of all we have humanly experienced. It may evoke feelings of fear because the path we are going, we have never before experienced. The common human tendency is to cling to this life, to the known and to the relationships we love.

There are exceptions, however. My own mother, sensing that her life work was completed, begged Jesus to come and take her. Another example is a friend’s son, who at college age became deathly sick. It appears that on his hospital bed he had heavenly visitors who prepared him for the journey, and he was ready to leave his sick body. Many dying people experience a deep peace and even before they leave their bodies become aware of their larger reality, seeing God or deceased loved ones. My father-in-law was one of these. He seemed happy,
As we approach the end of life it is especially important to be in harmony and communion with others, especially family, as much as possible.

Death is nothing we can practice for but we can practice achieving and maintaining a sense of peace about it. As we approach the end of life it is especially important to be in harmony and communion with others, especially family, as much as possible. Actually, it can be called keeping our lives updated in our relationships or letting go of our resentments and making peace with those who have hurt us one way or another as much as possible. Life is too short to hold on to resentments and refuse to love. Otherwise, we will have too much to do when the actual time comes. One of the greatest gifts we can give our families is to let them know we have peace with death and give them a good example of how to die. The importance of leaving good or positive memories cannot be stressed enough. Another wonderful gift to give to our families is to think and plan ahead. Talking to our family about this is often not the most desired conversation. However, it is a good teaching method, and the family will be grateful, when the time comes for your departure, to know that you have already made your final plans. They will know exactly what your wishes are.

As one gets closer to the end of life, there is a shift in what one sees as important. We see life in a new light and old values and reassess priorities, which tend to change. We focus anew on the deeper meaning of life and begin to realize that all of life’s experiences have meaning for us. Things that once seemed crucial will diminish in importance, while other things that were kept on the back burner take on major significance. Processing the meaning of these experiences becomes important and is emotionally hard work.

At this point, it is important that the caregiver or family members have accepted the reality of death and embraced it as a part of life. In this way, they can encourage a deeper sense of peace and tranquility for the dying.

In conclusion, let’s remember that it’s important that we see dying as a natural and inevitable part of living. It is healthy to befriend death, that is, to think about and process our own ways of looking at it so that when we are confronted with it, we see it not as an enemy or as something we have to fight against. It means we define our own values and priorities and seek to be true to our convictions throughout our lives.

It is good to remember that life and dying are all about love; recognizing and responding to God’s love and surrounding ourselves with loving relationships. Edgar Cayce in his book *A Course in Miracles* (Foundation for Inner Peace, 1975) stresses the importance of pure love in our lives. He believes such love is at the core of the universe, the true God, and he is confident that death is simply a return to that core. Let us encourage one another with these thoughts and words.

—— Gordon Houser

Elena Yoder mentions several helpful books in her article on dying and spirituality. Another excellent resource is *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* by Allen Verhey (Eerdmans, 2012, $30). Verhey, who teaches theological ethics at Duke Divinity School, experienced a life-threatening illness before writing this book. But this is not a memoir. Instead, he surveys the development of what he calls “medicalized dying” and notes that while medicine has brought progress in treating illness, it has also “prematurely alienated people from their own bodies, from their communities and from God.” Then he looks at the 15th-century Ars Moriendi, a spiritual self-help manual on the art of dying, which he finds helpful, but “more Platonic than Christian.” Verhey then develops a contemporary art of dying that focuses on following Jesus’ example, who willingly suffered and died. “If life and its flourishing are not the ultimate goods,” Verhey writes, “neither are death and suffering the ultimate evils.” Finally, he considers the practices of the Christian community and the practices of dying well and caring well for the dying. “Dying in America is hard work,” he writes. “And American Christianity has not helped much.” Thanks to Verhey’s fine book, we have some help in learning to practice the art of dying.—

**Elena Yoder is a hospice chaplain and bereavement coordinator and attends Albuquerque (N.M.) Mennonite Church.**
The vision statement of Mennonite Church USA says we are to “grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.” But growth brings some challenges.

We have a bamboo plant at our church that is growing out of its container. The roots are crowded and the stalks are close together, with leaves entangling each other. This has become a metaphor for our growing congregation with help needed in many ministry areas. The needs at church and the many responsibilities and activities of our lives make us feel crowded, longing for breathing space. We’re suffering from growing pains.

In Luke 10, Jesus deals with this same problem as he takes his disciples from a place of dependence on him and scatters them out into places where they can grow and learn. What can we learn from this story to help us with our own growing pains?

We need to pray for more workers. Jesus tells his disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest issue such a compelling command to join in the work of the kingdom that all resistance would be overcome and many would join in the work. We need partners, and developing partnerships among congregations is a priority of Mennonite Church USA. Jesus sent out his disciples in pairs because two can accomplish more together than either one can alone. We are to pray for partners and join together to increase our capacity.

We are also to be prepared for failure. Jesus tells his disciples that he is sending them out as lambs among wolves, a scenario with a high chance of failure. He also warns them that there will be people who will not welcome them or their message. They are not to waste time mourning over failure or trying to make things work that aren’t going to work. They are to simply move on. Implied in this is the idea that we are to be open to new things. If something is not working, try something else. This is also how new leaders are developed, as we open ministry opportunities up to new people.

Jesus told his disciples that when they were welcomed, they were to stay in that place, in the same house, ministering peace and accepting hospitality. There is a sense of rest in their work. They weren’t to expend all their energy jumping around from place to place but instead were to concentrate on specific things in one place. Rest restores our energy so we must take time to rest. Practicing Sabbath regularly, taking time for worship and play, is essential for spiritual health.

After Jesus’ disciples return from their mission, elated that even demons submitted to them in Jesus’ name, he tells them not to rejoice so much in what they have done but in who they are. Their names are inscribed eternally in heaven. Focusing on what we have to do, rather than who we are, is sure to drain us. We are to remember that first we are beloved children of God and, as such, we have access to all the authority that has been given to Jesus to overcome the evils in the world. This is foundational to Christian formation, the first priority of our church.

Jesus’ disciples had to do all that Jesus was telling them to do. We also have to make room in our lives for what God is telling us to do. As purposeful people, we are to make conscious decisions about how we live our lives based on biblical principles such as practicing Sabbath, partnering together in the work of the kingdom, offering peace and accepting hospitality.

In this way we can grow in our capacity as disciples of Jesus.

Lynn Parks is associate pastor at Oxford Circle Mennonite Church in Philadelphia.
A word from Mennonite Church USA leaders

Post-Christendom: lament or opportunity?

According to megachurch pastor Rick Warren, who was interviewed in the Dec. 10, 2012, issue of Newsweek, America is “in the doldrums.” Warren is on the road pitching the 10th-anniversary edition of his bestselling book The Purpose Driven Life. His book sold more than 32 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 50 languages. He hopes his new and expanded edition will figure into a spiritual revival that he says our nation desperately needs.

I wish Warren well, even as I harbor some doubts about his methods and outcomes. I have respect and admiration for the fact that his ministry has always emphasized reaching out to the unchurched.

According to Newsweek, though, not everyone feels that Warren’s message will resonate as well the second time around. Many fault his message as being too simplistic and shallow. “A new generation is looking for a bit more seriousness and depth,” says Michael Horton, host of the White Horse Inn radio ministry.

I believe Warren is correct when he identifies that we are in a malaise. While I think the treatment he is prescribing won’t fully satisfy this time around, I, too, think our culture is hungering for much, much more.

Warren and others lament the drift in America toward being “more European,” meaning less churched and more secular. Maybe that’s not such a bad thing. The “post-Christendom” phase that Europeans entered decades ago can be an opening for all Anabaptists (and Mennonites in particular)—an opportunity to return to our roots of not wanting our faith to be compromises by political power and wealth. The Anabaptists questioned and rejected many aspects of Christendom (a unity of faith, culture and government) five centuries ago and may be seen as the forerunners of post-Christendom—a “decoupling” of Christianity, culture and power.

In my work, reading and travels I am constantly bumping up against and relating to “Neo Anabaptists,” i.e., those who have more recently identified with Anabaptist faith but have not been born into it. (I am one of these: I jokingly refer to myself as someone afflicted with what I call Adult Onset Anabaptism, or AOA.) Many Neo Anabaptists look to us in Mennonite Church USA for help and leadership.

Stuart Murray of the United Kingdom, author of the best-selling book The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith, says: “We hope and expect that the experience of those who rejected the Christendom system long before it disintegrated might inspire and guide us as we live among its ruins and move out into post-Christendom.”

While acknowledging that post-Christendom will require gifts from a diversity of faith traditions, Murray and others look to the Anabaptist faith distinctives of peace, community and a costly, Jesus-centered discipleship. To the extent that Anabaptists have been dissidents—marginalized and willing to suffer—they stand as inspiration in a post-Christendom environment in which the missional church relocates from the power centers to the margins of society.

I wonder if we are up to Murray’s challenge. Too many of us suffer from the same malaise: We are drowning in materialism and juggling the all-consuming time demands of careers, families and church life. For many of us, “church” is just a place we go once per week for a worship service.

For many of us, “church” is just a place we go once per week for a worship service.

Are we nurturing communities of faith that radiate a spiritual “seriousness and depth” that people in our culture crave? Or is church just another annoying commitment that places unwanted demands on us?

In Luke 14, Jesus tells the parable of a banquet to which many were invited but most wouldn’t come. Their excuses resonate today: “I’m busy with my business, my family, my social life—maybe next time.”

Jesus is among us today; we may not recognize him, but we are invited to his banquet. What will our response be? The culture is hungering for spiritual depth, for community, for peace—all integral to our faith tradition. As its heirs, will we rise to the occasion and recognize our moment when it is upon us, or will we miss it? If we miss it, what will our excuse be?
O ur Membership Guidelines for the Formation of Mennonite Church USA say it is a teaching position of our church that homosexual sexual activity is sin.

The framers of the guidelines were wise in using the term “teaching position.” It is a valuable tool that gives weight (but not too much) to our church statements. It helps us both honor the collective counsel of the gathered denomination and open ourselves to the Spirit speaking to us through the voice of the minority.

In preparing for Pittsburgh 2011, our leaders hinted that they might limit the visibility of Pink Mennos. The Mennonite blogosphere lit up. TMail’s blogger cried injustice; he even quoted Martin Luther King Jr. against our leaders. I posted on his blog that I agreed with him that limiting the Pink Mennos can be injustice, those in power helping silence a minority.

I also challenged him not to reduce our leaders to one dimension (for or against justice) but recognize their felt responsibility to let our church’s discernment shape our assembly. We would not cry “injustice” if our leaders restricted the voice and visibility of people advocating war; such restriction would flow from who we are. We also have churchwide documents (from 1986/87, 1995, 2001) against same-sex eroticism. How do our leaders give the dissenting minority a voice yet let those statements (while they stand) continue to impact the message that people hear from our church statements. It helps us both honor the collective discernment of the gathered denomination but maintains room for the possibly prophetic minority voice. When the guidelines call a particular stance a teaching position, they do not demand that we assent to it. They even make space for us to vigorously dispute it in non-teaching settings. In fact, they go on to invite this by declaring that the call to “be in dialogue with those who hold differing views” is also a teaching position of our church. The guidelines only expect us who are members to recognize that our church’s teaching on sexuality is our “best human understanding of God’s way.”

I heard of a man, not a pacifist, who nonetheless joined a Mennonite congregation, knowing that his kids would be taught peace. He even served as adult Sunday school teacher but chose not to teach against our denomination’s position. Similarly, the guidelines do not say that one has to hold to the church’s teaching on sexuality to be a member. They only ask us to acknowledge it, and they call our credentialed pastors not to act against it.

Let’s talk: Dialogue on our church’s position on sexuality is indeed needed, to the dismay of those of us who are sure the sexuality issue was settled by the Bible long ago and by the church in 1986/87, 1995 and 2001. Goodhearted brothers and sisters have sincere questions about the church’s position on same-sex partnerships, and we must talk.

I welcome The Mennonite’s move toward ending its moratorium on this subject. During the years that our society has been dramatically shifting on homosexuality, we have been largely silent —no articles in our church periodical, no churchwide consultations or conversations. Do we really want our young adults making up their mind while only hearing the world? The only thing our denomination has said during the last 12 years is that in the past we said such and such. That has little appeal to young adults; if anything it moves them to run the other way.

So let’s talk. Without mutual accountability through dialogue there is no chance of unity on this issue.
The 2001 guidelines for membership in Mennonite Church USA congregations bedeviled Executive Board (EB) members when they attempted to update those guidelines more than a decade later. The Executive Board met in Phoenix Jan. 9-11.

“There are some strong feelings,” said EB member Charlotte Hardt, “—maybe more [among people] on the West Coast—who feel like they’ve been betrayed. They thought they were assured the guidelines would be changed in six years [after the 2001 adoption].”

The 2001 guidelines allow congregations to set standards for individual membership, authorize area conferences to set membership criteria for congregations in the conference and authorize the delegate assembly to set membership standards for area conferences wishing to be members of Mennonite Church USA.

“I was the chair of the committee that wrote [the guidelines],” said Mennonite Church USA executive director Ervin Stutzman, “and some committee members explained them differently to their friends.”

According to Stutzman, there were different understandings about the duration of the guidelines.

“There were some who agreed to the guidelines believing they would go away,” Stutzman said. “[They now] feel betrayed if we don’t get rid of them. Others will feel betrayed if we do get rid of them.”

Whether or not to revise the guidelines was the presenting issue for the board on Jan. 10. Stutzman proposed an “administrative update” that would be taken to the delegate assembly at the Phoenix 2013 convention.

The update primarily removes language related to the 2001 merger that created Mennonite Church USA. But it did not materially change the polity in the guidelines. Stutzman also proposed that in addition to the updates, the EB should authorize a new process for an initiative that might use “covenant” instead of membership language in the future.

EB member Samuel Voth Schrag objected to Stutzman’s proposal to send the administrative changes to delegates at Phoenix 2013.

“I’m uncomfortable passing this,” Schrag said. “I don’t want to have a fight about sexuality at Phoenix. … What does this minor administrative update do except run the risk of having a big fight two years early?”

However, the Executive Board vote to send along the “administrative changes” narrowly passed, with two members voting against it, eight members voting for it and four members abstaining.

The EB was meeting in Phoenix in part to prepare for the July convention. This preparation included discussion about how to address U.S. immigration policies in the delegate assembly agenda. Stutzman led a group exercise to identify Bible texts that might be used in the delegate assembly discussions. Most of the group also traveled to the U.S.-Mexico border on Jan. 11 to experience one of the activities available to convention participants (see page 7).

In other business, the EB reviewed a new Everence policy that would allow some investors to opt out of socially responsible investing plans for their retirement accounts.

Moderator Dick Thomas also proposed a change in the EB’s meeting patterns to save staff time and money. His proposal would also eliminate the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) meeting in a convention year.

“A great deal of time, energy and resources go into preparing for [EB and CLC] meetings” Thomas said. “Staff spend a minimum of 80 hours preparing for and attending these meetings. Over the course of any year we have three Executive Board meetings and two CLC meetings. It would not be unreasonable to say that each [participating EB staff member] spends 400 hours (almost 20 percent of their time) in preparation for EB and CLC meetings. Over $48,000 of the EB staff funds are budgeted for these meetings. This does not include staff travel, the cost to the conferences or the cost of agency staff to attend.”

Thomas estimated that changing the number of in-person meetings would save the organization a minimum of $25,000 annually. The suggested changes will be recommended to the Constituency Leaders Council, which meets in March. If the CLC agrees, the EB can take final action at its April 4-6 meeting in Kansas City, Mo.

The board’s consent agenda included the reappointment of Ed Diller and reaffirmation of Leonard Dow as Mennonite Church USA representatives to the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. board of directors.—Everett J. Thomas

I don’t want to have a fight about sexuality at Phoenix. … What does this minor administrative update do except run the risk of having a big fight two years early?—Samuel Voth Schrag
Convention leaders suggest homework

De León-Hartshorn: If not attending convention, spend the week volunteering.

Participants in Mennonite Church USA’s biennial convention in Phoenix this July will have various opportunities to engage in issues related to U.S. immigration. This is, in part, due to the convention location and the controversial nature of Arizona’s anti-immigration law, the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (SB1070).

Iris de León-Hartshorn, director of transformative peace-making for Mennonite Church USA, recommends that those who attend convention prepare themselves by learning about immigration in their own communities.

“It’s important to understand the issues of immigration before coming to Phoenix because while we’re there, we’ll have more intense learning experiences on the subject,” she says. “If you come somewhat prepared, you’ll get a lot more out of convention.”

“Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Central Committee U.S., MCC West Coast and the MCC Washington Office all have wonderful immigration resources on their websites, from videos to books to discussions,” she says. “The MCC Washington Office offers basic information as well as more advanced materials on engaging in policymaking and advocacy work. Mennonite Church USA offers resources designed for congregations, Sunday school classes and small groups.”

In addition, de León-Hartshorn suggests that individuals and congregations contact local groups that are involved in immigration issues and find ways to join their efforts.

Some individuals and congregations have decided not to participate in the Phoenix convention as a sign of solidarity with people who are undocumented. De León-Hartshorn believes it is important to back up such a decision with action.

“I’d like to challenge these congregations and individuals to take the convention week off and volunteer that time with different local organizations that work with immigrants,” she says. “... Become aware of the policies that are being enforced in your area.”

De León-Hartshorn’s biggest hope is that those who come to convention will prepare themselves well and arrive “with an open heart” to hear the stories of immigrants and accept them as a part of the church, whether or not they are legally in the United States.

Learning opportunities at Phoenix 2013 will include:

1. introductory seminars focused on immigration, and two-hour blocks for more in-depth learning;
2. an interactive Bible study led by Elaine Enns and Ched Myers on what it means to think of God as undocumented;
3. Bienvenido program trainings led by Gilberto Pérez Jr. (Bienvenido is a prevention/intervention program that increases access to mental health services and improves the mental health and quality of life of immigrants.);
4. an Immigration and Customs Enforcement tour of Florence Detention Center, followed by a visit to the Florence Project office (The detention center is where the majority of undocumented immigrants are sent, and the Florence Project coordinates free legal services for people detained in Arizona for immigration removal proceedings.);
5. all-day learning trips to the U.S.-Mexico border with BorderLinks (more information on page 18);
6. a traveling choir that will sing songs of healing and hope in several locations throughout Phoenix;
7. a prayer walk that will bring participants to places of significance around Phoenix.

In addition, a special offering will be taken at convention for the DREAMer Fund, which provides help with application fees for undocumented young adults as they apply for U.S. DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act deferment. The goal is to raise $15,000 to help 50 young Mennonites.—Hilary J. Scarsella

Prayer walk: Members of the Mennonite Church Executive Board participated in a Jan. 9 prayer walk past the Maricopa County (Ariz.) Supreme Court building (background), the Madison Street Jail and Sheriff Joe Arpaio’s offices in anticipation of similar prayer walks by participants at the Phoenix 2013 convention.
California peaches in Georgia

‘Food justice’ is part of the curriculum at DOOR Atlanta.

Chefs from LeCordon Bleu Culinary Institute donate their time to prepare food for DOOR Atlanta’s Sow and Grow event.

The peaches were from California. Standing in the produce section of an Atlanta grocery store, David York couldn’t help but notice that while he lived in a state best-known for its peaches, the bins of fuzzy fruits had come from a state 3,000 miles away. It was a particular concern for York because of his job. As the co-interim director of DOOR Atlanta, he had interest in serving its participants local food. DOOR hosts youth groups who come to the city to do weeks of summer service, and during the summer of 2012 the focus was on food justice.

That focus started small, with a few questions at a spring staff meeting about the produce they planned to serve over the summer. Tim Showalter Ehst, York’s co-director, had an interest in farming and food justice as well as connections at Berea Mennonite Church’s local farm, where DOOR volunteers sometimes work. He broached the idea of using local produce and helping participants bake their own bread.

“Tim was the driver and he educated all of us,” York says. “I was the cheerleader.”

So they started with bread, locally grown produce and organic cheese. From there, they investigated options for local chicken. They provided the groups with local, organic soda and popped local popcorn instead of snacking on potato chips. Brownies were made with fair trade chocolate.

“We made the whole concept of food justice part of the curriculum and talked with the kids about it,” York says. “We really let the food make a social and theological statement about who we are.”

That social and theological statement spilled over into the community. Back at the grocery store, York alerted the manager to his interest in Georgia peaches. Once the store staff heard about what DOOR was trying to do, they made an effort to supply them with local produce.

“We taught the groups that if they ask at their stores, and if enough people do that, the stores will change what they stock,” York says. “Soon the grocery store knew our cycle, and they’d have the boxes ready to go when I showed up.”

It wasn’t just the grocery store that got involved, however. York says that DOOR participants took the message to heart as well.

“A lot of people really got into it and carried the concept back home,” he says. “We’ve heard from participants who plan to plant a garden or have changed the food menu at a youth group event.”

Tonya Greene took over the directorship from Showalter Ehst and York in August 2012 as the last of the groups were participating. She plans to continue emphasizing food justice in all DOOR programming.

“I have access to our local farmers’ market, so I can go there,” she says, “and I’m learning of other farms here in Atlanta, so I’m reaching out to them to see if we can send volunteers.”

Greene says one of DOOR’s yearlong participants is using food justice in his work with homelessness.

“Justin Chambers is in charge of picking up the food for Mercy Church, which has one of the food pantries we work
John Powell retires after 23 years of service

Powell, who worked to dismantle racism, has retired from Mission Network.

John Powell, who has worked tirelessly toward creating an antiracist culture in the Mennonite church, retired Dec. 31, 2012, from Mennonite Mission Network after 23 years covering two different time periods.

Included in Powell’s large range of gifts is his beautiful tenor voice. Powell led those who attended his retirement celebration on Dec. 12, 2012, in singing “Guide My Feet,” a song that symbolizes his faith journey.

Powell worked for Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network, from 1969 through 1974.

He left the Mennonite church, angered and disillusioned by the racism he encountered. However, he later returned, serving with Mennonite Mission Network from 1994 through 2012.

“I am deeply humbled,” Powell said. “This leave-taking feels different from my leaving in 1974. It feels good. It is painful in a different way. This time I’m leaving for my own good. I have enjoyed working at Mennonite Mission Network, but finally, at 71, I can say, Enough.”

“We appreciate the leadership you gave in cultivating a vision for justice and reconciliation,” said Stanley W. Green, Mission Network Executive Director, in a statement read at Powell’s retirement recognition. “We are especially grateful for the special care you gave to shepherd the agency in pursuit of its vision of becoming a nonracist institution. Your grace, patience and courage challenged and inspired us to go further than we might otherwise have, and we particularly celebrate the momentum you helped stimulate for us on this journey toward a more faithful future.”—Mennonite Mission Network staff

California peaches (continued from page 34)

with,” she says. “One organization, called More For Atlanta, has been giving him freshly grown produce. He always tells them how much he appreciates that.”

Additionally, the board of directors of DOOR Atlanta recently adopted food as one of their main priorities in the coming year. This idea carried over into their most recent fund-raising event, which they called Sow and Grow.

The event brought together past and present participants, artists, board members and DOOR national staff. Organizers served a menu that included fresh salad, butternut squash soup and an apple dessert, and students from Atlanta’s LeCordon Bleu Culinary College, where Greene taught classes, volunteered to make the meal.

Heidi Aspinwall, DOOR’s associate executive director, is excited by the new priority for DOOR Atlanta and by what happened at the Sow and Grow event.

“Atlanta is known as the most forested major U.S. city and it has the climate for a seriously long growing season,” she says. “But, ironically, Atlanta’s poorer neighborhoods are ‘food deserts.’ Fresh, healthy food is hard to come by.”

Aspinwall hopes DOOR’s emphasis on food justice plays a role in “reforesting” these food deserts in Atlanta.

“Through the education of programs like ours, the volunteer work in urban gardens and the long-term work of advocacy, access and awareness, we can shorten the distance between fresh produce and our city’s people,” she says.—Melanie Hess of Mennonite Mission Network
In May 2010, Roanoke Mennonite Church in Eureka, Ill., held a vote to decide whether or not to remain as a member of Mennonite Church USA. The vote occurred after a recommendation by the church elders to withdraw from Mennonite Church USA.

The vote required a two-thirds majority; it failed by a small amount, about 3 percent. At that point, about 100 church members left to start another congregation, and 70 remained at Roanoke Mennonite Church.

Roanoke’s divide caused intense pain to the members. However, attempting to find healing, the remaining Roanoke members established a new vision and formed a new pastoral team.

“We were rejoicing in a new sense of freedom in Christ in the midst of deep grief over the loss of friends and family due to the split,” says Mary Kennell, a member of the new pastoral team. “Our church’s journey has been a lesson in how God, through the Holy Spirit, can work in the midst of brokenness and bring healing and new opportunities.”

Before the fateful vote, Chuck Neufeld, Illinois Mennonite Conference minister, says he sensed deep tensions in the congregation.

One group felt strongly about remaining in Illinois Mennonite Conference and in Mennonite Church USA, and the others were wary of the denomination and carried more fundamentalist theological understandings. Whether women could be in leadership positions emerged as a divisive issue.

“For 30 to 40 years prior [to the vote], we worshipped together as two congregations,” says Alice Kennell, another member of the pastoral team. “We managed to coexist.”

When the previous pastor left Roanoke in June 2005, the congregation struggled for five years to find a pastor before the 2010 vote. Many turned down the offer as they sensed the underlying divides in the church.

“Some male candidates caught wind of the resistance to women in leadership and withdrew their names,” says Neufeld.

Mary says the church was asking for two different people. “We couldn’t find someone that satisfied everyone,” she says.

The leadership at that time maintained church life but did not move it forward, creating anxiety among the members, Mary says. Many members simply accommodated one another to “keep the peace.”

“You learned to talk of pleasant, safe topics and steer away from anything controversial,” says Mary. “When you can’t really talk about what is important to you, can there be real unity?”

This conflict culminated after the vote, when two-thirds of the church left.

“Strong emotions indicated how seriously we all took ‘being church’ together,” says Mary. “Separating brought intense reactions and opinions on both sides.”

Late in July 2010, Gary Martin began as transitional pastor for the 70 members who stayed. During this time, members faced conflicting realities, says Mary.

“The congregation’s sense of identity had taken a hard hit too,” she says.

Martin worked with a newly formed transitional leadership team comprised of eight people, both men and women. Additionally, a committee was formed to look at structure and compared the previous “hierarchical” structure with a proposed “flat structure,” factoring in the new size of the church. The new proposal was approved.

“Gary facilitated us in forming a vision of doing ‘kingdom business,’ rather than ‘church business,’ ” says Mary. “He helped us see that structure is important and can be a vehicle for churches to better utilize individuals’ gifts and passions.”

Next, a pastoral search committee looked for pastors from within and outside the church to make up a pastoral team of three. On Aug. 21, 2011, the church affirmed Alice and Mary as members of the team. Alice and Mary are both in Anabap-
tist Mennonite Biblical Seminary’s Journey program for leaders.

“Being called and accepting the call to pastoral ministry was a huge leap for me” says Mary. “Trusting God as we take on new roles is freeing and disconcerting at the same time.”

In 2012, Bryan Miller joined the pastoral team from the Pastoral Ministries Program at Hesston (Kan.) College. Prior to that he lived in Apple Creek, Ohio. The three pastors are viewed as equal in that they are all called to pastoral ministry, although there are differences in time commitments and salaries. Alice says there is strength in the different ages, life experiences and perspectives.

“We all bring a different history,” she says.

The team model isn’t the only new element for Roanoke. Other members now serve in ways they never have before. Alice says Roanoke empowers people to use their abilities that they initially thought were not needed.

“Now we all do everything we can,” Alice says.

“One dear member who is 97 laments that she can no longer help in the ways she wants,” says Mary. “But she commits to prayer and regular attendance. She also made us delicious peach coffee cakes for pastor appreciation.”

Despite the newness, pain still exists. Miller parallels “One dear member who is 97 laments that she can no longer help in the ways she wants,” says Mary. “But she commits to prayer and regular attendance. She also made us delicious peach coffee cakes for pastor appreciation.”

Over time we realized there isn’t something wrong with us,” he says. “God loves us for who we are.”

Their new mission statement points to where the church is on its journey: Seeking and extending God’s healing, hope and reconciliation.

Members of Roanoke see former members at weddings, funerals and more—although most are not talking about the conflict. Relationships on an individual basis still exist. Alice says she has one friend who left who she meets with weekly.

They are still friends despite the challenges. One way the two groups maintain contact is through prayer for one another, particularly regarding health issues, Alice says.

Mary also maintains a friendship with a member who left. “I’ve always been able to be honest with her, even when we disagree."

At this point, current members of Roanoke have forgiven, welcome fellowship with and wish to bless those who previously left, with the hope that those who left can do the same for current members of Roanoke, says Miller.

“The challenge for me is to be real and honest about who I am in Christ, while exhibiting a nonjudgmental curiosity about who they are in Christ,” Mary says.

Neufeld says his obligation is to care for the congregations that are part of IMC. “I can say that my heart longs to reestablish some contact with the congregation that left and find ways of us blessing each other—even some measure of fellowship,” he says.—Anna Groff
Living as missionaries in Los Angeles

Hurs launch peace center; one goal is to address North-South Korea conflict.

Hyun and Sue Hur feel “a strong call to live as missionaries,” but not in the stereotypical context that probably comes to mind. Hyun, raised in Korea, and Sue, his Korean-American wife, see one of the richest possible settings for missional work and peacemaking right in their own backyard: Los Angeles.

Four years after planting one of only two Korean-language Mennonite congregations in the United States (Church For Others, the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference-member congregation in Temple City), they are branching out—not only to launch a sister congregation but also to pursue the exciting vision of a Peace Center that would share the unique “gift” of Anabaptist teachings on peace and reconciliation with a broader immigrant church community.

The Hurs planned an official launching service for the Peace Center, dubbed ReconciliAsian, on Jan. 21 in Los Angeles. Among other things, the center will offer workshops on conflict resolution for congregations and continue something called the North Korea Table Talk, a gathering of individuals to consider ways to help transform the decades-long conflict between North and South Korea. The Hurs also envision facilitating connections between peacemaking efforts in Korea and America and among Asians (Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and Filipinos) whose historical animosities and misunderstandings sometimes carry over into the American context.

The concept for ReconciliAsian grew naturally out of Hyun’s longtime passion for Christian reconciliation and conflict transformation, issues that stirred his heart years ago when he was a seminary student at a Baptist institution in Korea, discovered Anabaptist theology and enthusiastically joined the Mennonite fold.

Strife is common in highly hierarchical Korean churches, Sue observes, but also in congregations of all kinds that are composed mainly of immigrants. For newcomers struggling with cultural adaptation, economic difficulty and a loss of status and sense of control over their lives, stress often bubbles over into conflict in the one setting where they “can find their identity and practice their power,” says Hyun: the church.

For the Hurs, peacemaking goes hand in hand with church planting. A struggle they experienced in founding Church For Others, a house fellowship that will continue under the leadership of Pablo Kim, is a sense of being small and alone in a Korean-American community highly suspicious of small denominations like the Mennonites—to the point where one Church For Others member was officially shunned as a heretic by the church he had formerly served as young adult leader.

“I know a lot of Korean pastors, and when they found out I was Anabaptist, it was really hard to have conversations with them,” Hyun says. Observing that most Korean Christians know nothing about the theology or practice of conflict transformation, he considered how he could be a part of offering that knowledge to other denominations.

Launching a second Los Angeles-area Korean-language congregation, as the Hurs plan to do alongside the peace center work, will improve opportunities for fellowship and connection and ease the sense that Church For Others is alone in its ministry and theology.

Though they’re only getting around to an official “launch” now, the peace center has been active since last April. It hosted the first North Korean Table Talk last July, which included a presentation by Don Mosley about the Fuller Center for Housing project to help bring much-needed housing to North Korea, among other events.

The Schowalter Foundation provided a $15,000 grant in November 2012 to continue the work the Hurs are already doing. A local ministry support team led by Anne Dueck of Pasadena (Calif.) Mennonite Church has also formed to support the Hurs’ work. The team invites churches to get involved through prayer, reading email updates and making a financial gift or pledge to help raise $66,000 to help cover the Hurs’ expenses.—Doreen Martens, reprinted with permission from the January 2012 issue of Panorama, the PSMC newsletter
As he’s begun working to bridge cultures at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., Caleb Lázaro has found one of the most effective tools to be salsa dancing.

Lázaro just finished his first semester as Multicultural Student Union adviser at Bethel—not a new position but a greatly expanded one.

“I came into a program that had been largely focused on fellowship,” Lázaro says. “We’re now trying to get at it from more angles—trying to find diverse ways of engaging marginalized populations on campus.”

By “marginalized populations,” he says, he means “students from other cultures, particularly inner-city or large-city, unfamiliar with the dominant culture—which is white and rural/small town. They are often underrepresented here because of how they communicate, the music they listen to, a different worldview.”

“The Multicultural Student Union is a safe place to voice some of that.”

Though the formal MSU group that meets monthly is not large—nine or 10 at most—one of its goals is “to engage all cultures on campus,” Lázaro says. To that end, they planned several events during the fall, including the salsa dancing, when Lázaro’s sisters, Daniela and Myriam, came from Colorado Springs one weekend in September to lead dance instruction. About 60 students showed up for salsa, cumbia, merengue, bachata (a traditional dance from the Dominican Republic) and open dancing with recorded music.

The public event for October was a miniconcert at Bethel’s Fall Festival, with a half-dozen students performing in their preferred styles, ranging from gospel to hip-hop to slam poetry.

He set up a recording studio in a spare room in his campus apartment—all that was required was a condenser microphone, computer and audio interface.

“Most of my day-to-day work as multicultural adviser involves being intentional about building relationships—with students of color in particular and all students in general,” Lázaro says. “[My wife] Mai and I are having people over to the apartment all the time to record or to have supper.”

Lázaro also eats one meal a day in the cafeteria during the week in order to get to know more students and find out what’s important to them.

He has learned that “even within minority cultural groups on campus, there’s a great diversity—in what it means to be black, Asian, Hispanic. You can’t lump all these groups together. There are subgroups within minority cultures.”

“It’s been a challenge to reach out to them creatively, to bring them all to the table, to be a part of the fellowship experience. But there’s a growing sense of solidarity [among the students who’ve been involved in MSU programming and leadership.]”

Late in the fall semester, through email balloting, the MSU selected its first leaders, co-presidents Ajai Brown, sophomore from Oklahoma City, and Lupita Gonzalez, junior from Newton, Kan.

“Caleb knows and gets along with students well,” says Gonzalez. “He knows what we want, partly because he’s a student, too.” Lázaro, who has an associate degree, is studying for his bachelor’s degree at Bethel.

Now, with his first semester of experience behind him, both Lázaro and his boss, Vice President of Student Life Aaron Austin, are looking ahead to an even broader role for the multicultural adviser.

Lázaro notes that “another challenge [has been] realizing how much Bethel focuses on race issues as being our biggest social justice concern on campus, when really there’s so much more. As someone who’s committed to discussing race issues openly, I’m also aware that there are gender issues, sexual identity issues, homophobia issues that need to be discussed.”

After informally “advocating for those voices to be heard,” Lázaro will be exploring how to do that more deliberately in the future.—Melanie Zuercher of Bethel College
Zehr completes 25 years as chair of editorial council

Believers Church Bible Commentary was ‘a good journey, a labor of love.’

Paul M. Zehr, a retired bishop and seminary instructor, is retiring after serving as chair of the editorial council of the Believers Church Bible Commentary (BCBC) series for over 25 years.

“While it’s been a labor of love,” Zehr says, “It is time for someone else to take over.”

Zehr will work with a co-chair Gordon Matties, professor of biblical studies at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba, until the November meeting of the council, at which point Matties will become chair. Matties has also served on the council since 1987 and represents the Mennonite Brethren on the council.

The goal of the Herald Press commentary series is to facilitate Bible study for all and aid in understanding the original message of Scripture and its meaning for today. The BCBC series is a cooperative effort of six denominations: Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, Brethren in Christ, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Brethren and Brethren Church.

The commentaries include “good scholarship using up-to-date biblical studies,” says Zehr. The writing and language is upper high school and beginning university level, and the commentaries are used in college and seminary classes.

**By February 2013, when the John commentary** will be published, there will be 26 volumes in print, with 11 more volumes covering Old Testament books in process, and six more in writing or development stages from the New Testament. Some volumes cover several books of the Bible; there will be 44 volumes in all when the series is complete, now projected for 2020.

Zehr was appointed to the council by the Mennonite Church in 1987 and has been involved with 24 of the 26 volumes published so far. Zehr’s own volume, *1&2 Timothy and Titus*, was published in 2010.

Amy Gingerich, director of media for MennoMedia and Herald Press, says, “Paul is an astute leader with a true gift for leading meetings.” She says Zehr never loses sight of the commentary’s intended audience, pastors and church leaders, and what is readable for that audience. “At the same time, Paul is deeply committed to the highest level of academic scholarship,” adds Gingerich.

The idea for the series emerged in the mid-1970s, when Ben Cutrell, then publisher of Mennonite Publishing House, tested the idea with the various denominations involved and with seminary and Bible college faculties. Cutrell set up the structure and by 1981 had begun to appoint editors; by 1986, the first volume was published.

The Old Testament editor is Doug Miller, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kan., and the New Testament editor is Loren Johns, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

**Zehr says his time on the council** has been marked by good working relationships among all on the editorial council, with one person appointed by each of the six denominations. Members don’t always agree on theological or biblical interpretation, but the group has worked by consensus.

Levi Miller, an editor at Mennonite Publishing House for many years, says of Zehr’s leadership, “Paul Zehr brought together a Lancaster bishop and a Princeton scholar, a happy combination for the Believers Church Bible Commentary leadership.”

Some volumes are produced in about five years, from assignment to published book, especially when a writer is able to utilize a sabbatical from other work for dedicated study and writing. Other volumes take 15-20 years to write, edit and publish.

“I’ve enjoyed the good relationships with the editors and writers,” says Zehr. “It has been very meaningful personally and professionally to work with the content of the Bible in this way. It’s been a good journey.”

**Zehr sees the commentaries helping** aid the church over the next 50 years, since commentaries have a much longer shelf life than other books.

Zehr says that as Bible scholars outside the Anabaptist tradition review the commentaries, they sometimes comment on the “Anabaptist hermeneutic” that comes through in the books. “This means that the larger scholarly world is becoming aware of a Believers Church perspective on the Bible,” says Zehr. Most reviews have been very positive, only disagreeing with minor points.—MennoMedia staff
Who speaks for Mennonite Church Canada?

Mennonite Church Canada works to find a voice in the midst of MCC.

Mennonite Church Canada (MCC), MDS, MFC—the list of acronyms for Mennonite-related organizations goes on. But who speaks specifically for Mennonite Church Canada membership in an identity confused community?

This was the thrust of a panel discussion at Mennonite Central Committee’s (MCC) Annual General Meeting on Sept. 21, 2012, at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. What began as a broad conversation about advocacy and MCC’s role as an organization that represents seven church conferences took a twist when Willard Metzger, executive director of Mennonite Church Canada, brought another challenge to the table: With MCC’s broad involvement on many social justice issues, Mennonite Church Canada struggles to find appropriate ways to express its voice—a primary task for its membership.

Metzger has been part of two ministry reduction exercises at Mennonite Church Canada since 2002. As MC Canada leaders worked to define what the national church should stop doing and what it should continue doing, Metzger said at the meeting, “It felt to me that we always would bump up against MCC … we would say, ‘MCC does that’ and so MC Canada doesn’t need to be engaged in that. We didn’t want to duplicate the work that MCC was doing, and we didn’t want to be in a position of competing against MCC.”

Metzger has been in persistent dialogue with congregational and area church leaders to define key responsibilities for the national church. “We’ve realized that one of those responsibilities is to have that collective voice of [our] whole [membership] because no other part of our entity possesses that unique responsibility.”

Metzger asserted that the responsibility of a collective voice matters a great deal “when speaking to the rest of our [Mennonite Church Canada] family of faith, other parts of the wider family of Christian faith and representing our [collective] voice to our government. When I think about that, I find myself again bumping into MCC,” adding, “It does feel important to me that [the national church] shouldn’t give up that responsibility.”

Panel member Jennifer Wiebe of MCC’s Ottawa office spelled out the numerous complexities of speaking for many voices, since MCC is made up of partners abroad and domestically. MCC has seven supporting partner church conferences. “We’re not only speaking exclusively for the church. We’re hopefully framing our advocacy work as being rooted in our Anabaptist values,” said Wiebe.

Metzger has been broadly seeking input on what primary areas the national church needs to focus its voice. What he has learned is that “for MC Canada to have integrity, I can’t imagine not speaking to three issues,” he said: “climate change, indigenous relations and interfaith relationships.”

When Metzger attended the United Nations climate change action event in South Africa in late 2011, he informally polled Mennonite Church Canada members asking what he should tell Canada’s Environment Minister, Peter Kent. The feedback, which came primarily from young adults, helped shape the subsequent meeting with Kent.

But one email comment stuck out for Metzger: “It makes me proud of my church to know that my church and our church leader is there.”—Dan Dyck of Mennonite Church Canada
The Catel Mennonite Church in Guinea-Bissau joyfully commissioned five men as missionaries to five villages in its region on Nov. 18, 2012. The commissioning marks a significant milestone in the development of the seven-year-old church.

Momadu Mane, Dauda M’boina, Gibby Mane, Celino Feirari and Siga Mane have all been active in village evangelism for some time but have now been sent to specific villages by the Catel congregation to evangelize and plant churches.

Beryl Forrester and Andrew Stutzman are Eastern Mennonite Missions’ regional representatives for West Africa. At the commissioning service, Stutzman preached about Jesus sending out the 12 in Matthew 9-10.

The Catel congregation is asking its five new missionaries to be good examples of those transformed by the spirit of Christ and to help people understand Jesus as one who loves them, heals them, forgives them and offers a new way to live in relation to God and their neighbors.

Further, the sending congregation charged the missionaries with establishing visible fellowships of believers who gather together for worship and are ready to follow Jesus in all aspects of life.—Nita Landis of Eastern Mennonite Missions

Putting you in the driver’s seat

Do you need a vehicle? Your credit history shouldn’t stop you.

To help you get behind the wheel, we offer financing for people in many different credit situations. Visit one of our credit union offices or call (800) 451-5719 to find out more.
Carrying her 2-year old daughter Ester on her back, Jerisa Muro walks to a sewing class almost two miles from her home in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan. Muro, a mother of four children, ages 2 to 11, hopes to start a tailoring business and earn enough money so that her children can go to school.

She is especially concerned that her two eldest children are not attending school.

“I didn’t go to school because of the long war,” she says. “My father died of a stroke when I was young. My mother had no means to send us to school. If I acquire good skills here, then I can send my children to school, and they will not be illiterate.”

Mennonite Central Committee has been supporting this project since 2009, when it was started by Florence Ayikoru and the Episcopal Church of Sudan’s Mother’s Union.

Each year, 20 women learn sewing, life skills and small business management skills.

Graduates of the six-month program can buy their sewing machines at a reduced rate and take out small loans to help them start a tailoring business.

“I feel so good about what we are doing,” says Ayikoru. “We are changing lives. We are making a difference. Every time I see graduates of our program, I ask them if they have customers, and they do.”

It is these success stories that motivate Muro to learn skills that will help build a better future for herself and her children.

Her life is marked with hardships. Her eldest brother was killed during the civil war, 1983-2005.

“During the war we spent many years in the bush,” she recalls. “We went to a refugee camp in Uganda, but I did not get any training there.”

Six years ago, Muro left an abusive relationship. She maintained custody of their baby, who is now 7 years old, but lost custody of her two eldest children. These children are being raised by their grandmother, who cannot afford to send them to school.

Now remarried, Muro sees a brighter future for herself and her two youngest children. But she also wants to help her eldest children.

“If I could make two dresses a day, I would be much taller,” she says as she looks forward to the day when all her children can go to school.—Gladys Terichow of Mennonite Central Committee
In 2005, the Israeli human rights organizations B’tselem and HaMoked jointly published a report describing the Gaza Strip as “one big prison.” Over seven years later, this report remains terribly relevant. Gaza is one of the most crowded places on earth with 1.7 million Palestinians crammed into a 140 square-mile area that has been under an Israeli siege since 2006. The majority of Gazans are refugees, living in refugee camps. With decades of limited economic access and opportunity due to Israeli closures—leading to a debilitating process that one scholar has labeled “de-development”—today some 80 percent of Gazans receive food assistance, 60 percent of households are food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity, and 40 percent live below the poverty line.

Despite its “disengagement” in 2005, Israel continues to maintain control over the Gaza Strip, leaving it still very much an occupying power, not least through a siege that many have condemned as a form of collective punishment. Palestinians do not have control over borders (land, sea or air) or movement in and out of Gaza and live constantly under the threat of Israeli military incursions, shelling and extrajudicial “targeted assassinations” that terrorize Gaza’s civilian population. The vulnerability of this population was again evidenced during Israel’s recent military operation “Pillar of Defense” that left over 170 Palestinians and six Israelis killed, as it was during Israel’s “Operation Cast Lead” (2008-2009) in which 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed.

As with many situations around the world today, many observers of situations like the one in Gaza are left with a sense of helplessness, asking, What can we do? Mennonites in the United States have been building relationships in Palestine for more than 60 years. Agencies such as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) have worked alongside Palestinians for more than 60 years and with Israelis for 40 years. An important expression of that work has been education and advocacy, communicating the stories of Palestinian and Israeli peacebuilders to U.S. audiences. And part of that task has been not only to offer a way to think about responses to questions like, What can we do? but to point out that our observations are not as distanced and disinterested as we sometimes believe them to be.

The recognition that we already have—and have had for decades—relationships with Palestinians and Israelis arguably changes the question to something less abstract and more particular: What kind of relationships do we have with Palestinians and Israelis, and what are our responsibilities in those relationships?

It is a fundamental recognition that we are not detached, that we cannot opt out and that we have to struggle in pursuing not only fidelity in those relationships but fidelity in response to the gospel call to self-giving love.

In December 2009, more than a dozen Palestinian church leaders co-authored this document as a “cry of hope in the absence of all hope,” addressed to Palestinians, Israelis and “Christian brothers and sisters in the churches around the world.”

In addition to challenging theologies that legitimize violence and dispossession, it points out the mission of the church “to speak the word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly” and to “stand alongside the oppressed.”

Many would have us understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in abstract religious terms—such as Christian Zionism—or part of a broader “clash of civilizations” or “global war on terror.” It could be argued, however, that Palestine is best understood as an encounter between a settler colonial movement—looking for liberation, for a land without a people for a people without a land, seeking to extend control over particular territory—and the indigenous population already inhabiting a land that turned out not to be empty after all.

This dispossession is often referred to as “Nakba,” the Arabic word for “catastrophe.” It is used by Palestinians to refer to what happened to them in 1948, when between 750,000 and 900,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes and more than 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed. “Naksa,” another Arabic word, is used to refer to the expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza during the 1967 war, with some 400,000 Palestinians becoming refugees. It also marks the beginning of Israel’s illegal military occupation of these territories.

The Kairos Palestine Document calls the military occupation of Palestinian land a “sin against God and humanity.” And counter to the optimism accompanying various “peace processes” over recent years, the Kairos Palestine Document describes the expansion of Israeli domination over Palestinian life and land. Palestinian livelihoods are devastated as more land is expropriated for the construction of the 470-mile/760-km separation barrier cutting through the West Bank, the dramatic growth of illegal settlements, including in and around Jerusalem, the proliferation of checkpoints and roadblocks that obstruct mobility, the demolition of homes and other forms of collective punishment, the one-big-prison-status of Gaza and the continuing state of dispossession of 7 million Palestinian refugees worldwide.

As the Kairos Palestine Document urges Christians to “take a position of truth with regard to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land,” it favorably notes that some Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations and churches, support boycotts and divestment as a form of nonviolent resistance to the occupation.

Boycotts and divestment continue to be discussed in many church circles as Christians reflect on the nature of our investments and whether they contribute to justice and peace. Indeed, it is due to the seemingly ineffective nature of international political or legal mechanisms to find a just peace in Palestine-Israel that a growing conversation about exploring alternative mechanisms, such as economic pressures, has developed. It was on the one-year anniversary of the International Court of Justice 2004 ruling condemning Israel’s separation barrier as illegal that Palestinian civil society lifted up a nonviolent method to resist the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian land by launching a boycott, divestment and sanctions, or BDS, campaign, arguing that Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land continues in part because it is profitable for companies in Israel and around the world.

Many have criticized the BDS approach for reasons ranging from claims of its polarizing effect, that it marginalizes Israeli peace voices, to claims that it unfairly singles out the state of Israel. Some argue that it will be unduly harmful to Palestinians who are dependent on the Israeli economy. While others argue that it simply will not work to bring about a just and sustainable peace.

Palestinian civil society lifted up a nonviolent method to resist the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian land by launching a boycott, divestment and sanctions, or BDS, campaign.

Those who would discourage such “negative” or “critical” measures as boycotts and divestment instead suggest more “positive” approaches such as “investing” in the future of a Palestinian state. But without freedom of movement or access to resources or services, such investments can hardly produce “positive” benefits—economic or otherwise—for Palestinians. Ideas such as “cross-border industrial zones” built along the “borders” of what some are calling “reservations” or “Bantustans”—isolated islands of land on roughly 40 to 50 percent of the West Bank where Palestinians are confined—will prove to be only another way for Israeli and Palestinian business elites to profit from the desperate and cheap Palestinian labor of a captive market. BDS advocates ask, Is this the type of future for Palestinians or Israelis in which any of us want to invest?

The recent Palestinian Authority bid for statehood at the United Nations notwithstanding, those who closely follow the conflict increasingly wonder if current realities have rendered a two-state solution unfeasible. If they are correct, then those who care about the well-being and security of
Palestinians and Israelis must imagine new ways for both to live side by side in justice, freedom and equality.

Palestinian Christian leaders underscore this need, describing a message of “love and living together” to the Muslims and Jews of the “Holy Land,” condemning “all forms of racism.” The Palestine Kairos call is for a “common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security.” It is only in this manner that “justice and security will be attained for all.”

The Kairos call understands peacebuilding as a shared work for justice. For more than 60 years, Mennonites have been present, building relationships, walking alongside Palestinians and Israelis with that same understanding of peacebuilding. We have heeded calls challenging us to work for justice in the United States and Canada, a work requiring our attention to the historical—and often unpleasant—truths about our roles in this conflict. It is a work that requires hope, courage and risk.

There is much we have done, and much more we can do—and seek to be faithful in our relationships. For example, last year Mennonite Church USA issued a formal response to the Kairos Palestine Document, committing to expand opportunities for Mennonite leaders to visit Palestine and learn firsthand about the suffering there. They also wrote a letter to members of Mennonite Church USA, asking them to read and discuss the Kairos Document, to study Scriptures together on the matter and to consider how their financial lives may be enmeshed in Israel’s military occupation. In this response, there is the recognition of our relationships, “that the way of the cross binds together great love for every person and courageous resistance to injustice and sin,” and the prayer “that as we journey together we will grow in our faithfulness to the One who leads the way and whom we proclaim as Lord and Savior.”

Another example was a 2010 open letter by students from several Mennonite-related colleges and universities. In their letter they call for attention to and support for selective divestment from the Israeli Occupation. They state: “Our purpose is to promote peace in Israel/Palestine by first removing our complicity. We urge Mennonite churches and institutions to join us in resisting the structural violence of the illegal Israeli Occupation by making sure our investments are not supporting international law or human rights violations.”

This past October, MCC U.S. joined 14 other church leaders in writing to Congress urging an immediate investigation into possible violations by Israel of U.S. laws and policies which prohibit assistance to any country that engages in a consistent pattern of human rights violations. In the letter, church leaders also urged Congress to undertake careful scrutiny to ensure that U.S. aid is not supporting actions by the government of Israel that undermine prospects for peace.

Last fall, MCC published an issue of their Peace Office Newsletter devoted to this conversation, offering perspectives on the role of boycott, divestment and sanctions as a tool for resisting and ultimately transforming violent conflict (peace.mcc.org/system/files/PONL_July-Sept2012.pdf). In it we hear voices such as Sam Bahour’s, a Palestinian businessman, who asks both about the presence and the agency of the church: “There is no excuse today for the church community to be at a loss on how to engage to bring peace and justice to the Holy Land. Palestinian civil society is leading the way.”

We also hear Samia Khoury as she holds up the persistent witness of the Palestinian church, which, despite its shrinking presence due to the brutality of military occupation, begs the question most directly: What is our role, the role of the church in the United States? If not support of this effort at nonviolent resistance—BDS—what are we saying about the seriousness with which we are committed to the nonviolent transformation of conflict? And what are we saying about the seriousness with which we view the church in Palestine?

This is again a question about the nature of our relationships. The ongoing tragedy the people of Gaza and all of Palestine face daily does not warrant the question, What can we do? but rather, in the context of the BDS conversation, What do we need to stop doing? From the perspective of our relationships with Palestinians, it is most appropriately articulated as obligation: What do we owe our brothers and sisters?

The call to BDS is an invitation. “Leaders of North American churches frequently ask where the Palestinian nonviolent movement is.” Bahour points out, “Well, it is here in Palestine and everywhere those who seek justice reside; it’s alive and well and is called BDS. Everyone is invited to join.” How will we respond?—Timothy Seidel worked for more than seven years with Mennonite Central Committee, first as peace development worker in Palestine-Israel and then as director for Peace and Justice Ministries. He is a member of Community Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pa., and is currently pursuing doctoral studies in international relations.
As casualties rise because of fighting between Israel and Hamas, the ruling party in the Gaza Strip, Mennonite Central Committee is sending emergency funds to help Gazan families whose homes have been bombed. In addition, MCC Palestine/Israel has joined 43 other organizations that are calling on world leaders to enforce a ceasefire.

Ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip erupted last November after Israel killed the military chief of Hamas. Since then, Hamas continued to fire rockets into Israel, and Israel conducted an intensive attack from air and sea.

“In Gaza there’s nowhere to go to feel secure,” says Joanna Hiebert Bergen, MCC Palestine/Israel representative with her spouse, Dan Bergen. They are from Winnipeg, Manitoba, and live in Jerusalem.

Gazans have limited space to move out of harm’s way and no safe shelters in which to take refuge. Israel controls and restricts the flow of goods and people in and out of Gaza, so Palestinians there are unable to escape constant bombardment by fleeing to another country or safer space. Getting medical supplies into Gaza is also difficult, even for the United Nations, Hiebert Bergen says. Hospitals are overcrowded and supplies are limited.

Through a media statement issued by the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), MCC Palestine/Israel and the other organizations are asking world leaders to enforce a ceasefire, to deal with ongoing human rights abuses in Gaza and to address root causes of the conflict, says Hiebert Bergen.

She underlines the need to implement the 2009 UN Security Council Resolution 1860, which laid out a plan for reaching a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and a path to long-term security for both sides. The plan emphasizes the importance of the safety and well-being of all civilians.

In Gaza, violence, poverty and unemployment are constant threats. MCC’s partners work with programs that strengthen people’s ability to grow their own food, earn a living and get an education. However, the bombing has threatened livelihoods and closed schools that children and adults were attending.

All three of MCC’s partner organizations in Gaza have reported bombing that seems random, making it impossible to feel safe, says Bassem Thabet, MCC Palestine/Israel director of partner relations. People are running to neighbors’ or family members’ homes, not because it’s safer but because they need to be together, he says.

Majeda Al Saqqa, who works with MCC partner Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA), says her family cannot sleep at night, fearing their house will be destroyed by a missile just like their neighbor’s house was demolished, Thabet says.

People must leave their windows open, he says. If they don’t, the reverberations of the bombs can break them.

All of MCC’s partners are scared, he says, but they also are risking their lives to determine need and to purchase and distribute supplies, supported by $20,000 from MCC’s emergency budget. In addition to CFTA, MCC also works with the Near East Council of Churches and Al-Najd Development Forum.

Al-Najd and CFTA will purchase mattresses, pillows, blankets and kitchen utensils for 60 families in Khan Younis and 60 families in the Gaza City area. All the families’ homes have been destroyed by the bombing, Hiebert Bergen says.

Only peace will bring security to Israel and Gaza in the future, says Thabet. Continued violence will only bring more hatred and more violence.—Linda Espenshade of Mennonite Central Committee
**WORKERS**

**Akerson, James**, was ordained as pastor at 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 at Holdeman Mennonite Church, Wakarusa, Ind., on Nov. 5, 2012.

**Fyffe, Joshua**, was licensed as pastor at West Liberty Mennonite Church, West Liberty, Ky., on Nov. 18, 2012.

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

**Nickel, David James**, was ordained at Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, Chapel Hill, N.C., for his prison chaplaincy ministry with Alamance/Orange Prison Ministry.

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

**OBITUARIES**


**Brunk, Milford Franklin**, 90, Bluffton, Ohio, died Dec. 5, 2012. Frank was born June 9, 1922, in Biglerville, Pa., to Christian and Jeannette Leakey Brunk. He was the oldest of six siblings. He married Beatrice Hartman on June 19, 1948, in Wissemborg, France, during the last year of a two-year term with MCC where he was part of a postwar reconstruction unit. They had three children: one son, Rene’, and two daughters, Susie and Jeannette. Frank’s love for nature and its beauty were reflected in his lifelong choices of work and recreation. He was a member of the Audubon Society in Phoenix, Ariz. He organized and led camping trips to Mexico and Northern Arizona and hikes down Havasu Canyon for the youth and young adults at Sunnyslope Mennonite Church. Frank and Bea moved their family to Colorado in the early 1960s when he became Director of Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp. During those twenty years, he designed and built buildings in the Swiss Chalet architectural style. He took classes in rock climbing and taught many campers how to rapel off the face of Monkey Rock. His love of hiking resulted in his climbing 43 “fourteen-ers,” as the 14,000 foot high mountains of Colorado are fondly referred to. Frank was an expert at identifying hundreds of wildflowers that grew below and above the tundra line. He was convinced that no other wildflowers could compare to the beauty of those growing in the Rocky Mountains. Following retirement from RMMC, Frank became an amateur naturalist and docent at Bear Creek Nature Center in Colorado Springs. He was a member of the AdAmAn Society, a group of professional men who hiked Pikes Peak every New Year’s Eve to give Colorado Springs a midnight fireworks show as a way of celebrating the new year. In the last months of his life, as he was mostly confined to lying in bed, he would often say, “Like the Navajos, I see beauty in everything.” The following is an excerpt from the “Traditional Navajo Prayer.” May it be beautiful before me, May it be beautiful behind me, May it be beautiful below me, May it be beautiful above me, May it be beautiful all around me. I am restored in beauty. I am restored in beauty. I am restored in beauty. I am restored in beauty.

He is survived by his wife, Beatrice Brunk of Bluffton, Ohio, daughter Susie and son-in-law Bill Swartley of Bluffton, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Frank was preceded in death by a son, Rene Brunk and daughter, Jeannette Gingerich. A memorial fund has been established at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp to honor the life and work of Frank. Contributions may be sent to the Frank Brunk Memorial Fund, RMMC, 709 County Road 62, Divide, CO 80814.


Group subscription plan

Keep your congregation connected to MC USA with a group subscription plan to TheMennonite.

With a minimum of five households, your congregation qualifies for a discounted group subscription plan. If your congregation is already enrolled, renewal forms will be in the mail soon.

To begin a congregational group subscription plan, e-mail rebecca@themennonite.org or call 800-790-2498.

A FORUM FOR THE VOICES OF MENNONITE CHURCH USA

Books from the editors

**Present Tense: A Mennonite Spirituality**

By Gordon Houser

Houser’s gentle, forthright, and theologically astute voice has nothing to prove. His many years as an “insider”—a church journalist—and “outsider”—one who did not grow up Mennonite—render these reflections on Mennonite spirituality into a unique alloy of intimacy and objectivity.

—Valerie Weaver-Zercher, contributing editor of Sojourners

$16.95

Order from cascadiapublishinghouse.com, amazon.com or bn.com

**Johann**

By Everett I. Thomas

Everett Thomas’ novel Johann is historical fiction describing the life of Mennonites in Pennsylvania in the 18th century as the French and Indian War unfolded.

$8.95

Order from Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society (www.lmhs.org), amazon.com or betterworldbooks.com

A very enjoyable read! Johann is grounded in a clear sense of place, with vividly drawn nautical motifs. It’s clear that Thomas had fun writing the novel.

—John D. Roth, professor of history, Goshen College

Johann was uplifting. It made the Lancaster Mennonite story in the mid-1700’s come alive from various perspectives: cultural, political, faith and personal.

—Rolando Santiago, executive director, Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society
**Eastern Mennonite University** seeks gifted candidates (walking on water not required!) for a full-time (10-month FTE) position as *undergraduate campus pastor* to invite and encourage undergraduates to follow Jesus’ call to witness faithfully by words and actions, serve compassionately and walk boldly in the way of nonviolence and peace. The successful candidate will: have a passion for and proven record of attracting and serving the spiritual needs of emerging adults; relate well to diverse EMU students (50 percent Mennonite) representing 40 Christian denominations, other religions and those questioning faith; recruit and mentor qualified ministry assistants; communicate effectively through preaching, worship leading, teaching and pastoral counseling; and collaborate with faculty and student life administrators to develop a co-curriculum based on Anabaptist principles that builds faith within and outside the classroom. Qualifications include: master’s degree in related discipline (M.Div. or doctorate preferred); record of exemplary teaching/preaching, including youth/campus ministry; leadership and administrative ability; familiarity with and commitment to following the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and the mission of Mennonite/Anabaptist higher education. To apply, send a letter of application, contact information for three references, and resume to Dr. Ken L. Nafziger, VP for Student Life, via email at hr@emu.edu. For more information, visit our website: www.emu.edu/humanresources. Position begins Aug. 1, 2013. Review of applications begins Feb. 1 and continues until the position is filled. EMU is an equal opportunity employer with a strong commitment to diversification of its faculty, staff and administration.

**Springdale Mennonite Church**, Waynesboro, Va., is looking for a full-time *lead pastor* or a *husband-wife co-pastor team*. This is our primary interest; however, all applications will be considered. Anticipated starting date is April/May 2013. Springdale is an active participant in Mennonite Church USA and Virginia Mennonite Conference. Membership is 160 and attendance around 120-130. We are looking for a candidate with strong skills in preaching, pastoral care and church leadership from an Anabaptist perspective. Mennonite Church USA guidelines for salary and benefits will be followed. Church website: www.springdale-mennonite.org. Contact person: Danny Showalter, chair of search committee, email dcs@ntelos.net, telephone 540-943-2392.
Marriage has been on my mind lately, and after my husband read my draft, he was dismayed with how sad it sounded. He went off and wrote how he viewed marriage. I then merged both our ideas as if we were having a conversation. My hope is that you’re able to see how well we complement each other.

**Janet:** After 10 years, I stand at the crossroads of commitment and honest with battle wounds to show the conflicts we’ve endured. We have carried our struggles mostly in isolation from others, and I’ve hesitated to even share them with my partner.

**Roberto:** I’ve been learning that it’s one thing to carry on as individuals in marriage and another to be together in this. I suspect that a committed partnership is the most creative relationship on earth and a constant discovery of myself and us as a couple.

**J:** With 16 sessions of premarital counseling, I believed we were all set for success. But it seems it’s taken 10 years to begin to truly unravel our parents’ relationship and the preconceived ideas we had.

**R:** Marriage for me has been a chance to know myself more thoroughly: my story, the parental influences and culture—being able to look in the mirror with the qualities and defects of my personal story.

**J:** And so life brings us back to therapy for awhile, and that’s helpful. The work of marriage keeps us there and gives us tools to move forward in hope that things will be different one day. But for me, the larger question is, What now while we wait for real change within me, within us?

**R:** I have understood that marriage is not two separate individuals with qualities, needs and flaws that are in the same boat for life. Rather, it’s a relationship with oneself while seeking to birth something together. Being married is more than 1+1. It’s synergy. It’s an intense hurricane on the one hand, and a calm and peaceful morning in the other. Marriage is what we are together. It is a party where I am invited many times in many ways to learn how to love and be loved.

**J:** And this is why I am with this guy. Even with all my doubts and struggles, he’s exactly what I need because he shows me another way.

**Marriage is like jumping out of an airplane in a parachute:** You cannot control it, it’s intense and it’s glorious.

—Roberto
BEST FILMS OF 2012
1. A Separation
2. Lincoln
3. Zero Dark Thirty
4. Argo
5. Beasts of the Southern Wild
6. Life of Pi
7. Moonrise Kingdom
8. Cloud Atlas
9. The Perks of Being a Wallflower
10. The Invisible War
—Gordon Houser

BEST BOOKS OF 2012
Atonement, Justice and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church by Darrin W. Snyder Belousek
Dear Life: Stories by Alice Munro
The Round House: A Novel by Louise Erdrich
When I Was a Child I Read Books: Essays by Marilynne Robinson—gh

FILM REVIEWS
Zero Dark Thirty (R) chronicles the decade-long hunt for Osama bin Laden after the September 2001 attacks and his death at the hands of the Navy S.E.A.L. Team 6 in May 2011. This riveting film uses an intelligent script and an outstanding performance by Jessica Chastain to follow the trail of clues and tenacity required to find bin Laden. While its depiction of obtaining information from torture is misleading, it shows its horror.—gh

Silver Linings Playbook (R) shows the struggle of a man who moves into his parents’ home after eight months in a state institution. Wanting to reconcile with his ex-wife, he meets Tiffany, who has problems of her own. The film has some fine acting and makes good points about general dysfunction but follows the predictable lines of a romantic comedy.—gh

Rape in the military

Kirby Dick’s gut-wrenching documentary The Invisible War (No. 10 on my list of best films of 2012) explores the preponderance of rape in the U.S. military.

The film uses interviews of victims of sexual assault with cases going back to the 1960s and up to the present. While each story has its particular differences, all reflect the double horror of not only being raped but seeing their perpetrators walk away.

In addition, many are injured in the assaults and can’t get proper medical care for the long-term effects of those injuries, physical and psychological.

The film reveals the unjust military system that provides no accountability to rapists. There is no court these victims can appeal to. Instead, each unit is under the authority of a unit commander, who serves as judge and jury in such cases. At times, this person is the perpetrator, and the victim is left with no recourse but to resign, often with a dishonorable discharge.

Those interviewed for the film joined the armed services (whether Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard) out of a strong patriotism. Many had other family members who had military careers.

The statistics, which, the film notes, all come from the Department of Defense, are alarming:
• more than 20 percent of women in the U.S. military have been sexually assaulted;
• in 1991, over 200,000 had reported sexual assault;
• 80 percent of assaults are not reported;
• 15 percent of recruits have committed rape before entering the military;
• 40 percent of homeless female veterans have been raped;
• women who have been raped have a higher PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) rate than men who have been in combat;
• 1 percent of men (20,000 per year) in the military are sexually assaulted (and not by homosexuals);
• the average sex offender has 300 victims.

The film also interviews counselors in the film who point out that when there is no accountability for sexual assaults, that is an invitation for sex offenders to do as they wish.

Congress has tried to address this travesty, and each time, spokespeople for the military insist they have a no-tolerance policy. Yet it continues without abate. And since the military is outside the civil court system, victims have no recourse. The courts have ruled that rape is an occupational hazard of the military.

The military does acknowledge some cases. In 2010, it catalogued 3,158 cases of sexual assault, but only a sixth of these came to court-martial, and only 175 men, one in 20 of those charged, did any jail time.

Major General Mary Kay Kellogg, director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, tells the camera that assault victims should petition the Defense Department’s Attorney General. But of the 2,994 cases forwarded to the AG, not one was investigated.

We learn that one woman’s assailant “is still in the Air Force and was awarded Airman of the Year during her rape investigation.” Another assailant “became a supervisor at a major U.S. corporation and sexually assaulted a female employee. He was never charged and lives in Queens, N.Y.”

Last April 14, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta watched the film. Two days later he took the decision to prosecute away from commanders.

It’s something, but it’s not nearly enough. IM

Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.
Responding to shootings
Recent news of shootings of school children in Connecticut remind us of similar news from Amish country Pennsylvania. What can the churches do? Teach truth on oath and demystify liturgy.—James A. Neufeld, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Will miss Kniss columns
I hope your “goodbye” will not be forever, Sharon Kniss. Your final regular column, “What I’ve Learned from Mennonites” (New Voices, December 2012), ends on a note of optimism and hope: that we Mennonites continue to hold to essential New Testament “particularities” that are far less common, even largely missing, in other denominations. As you say, this “third way” so natural for us—what we too often simply take for granted—is often less apparent in many other church traditions.

Amazingly, you mention discipleship as one of these “distinctives.” And I wholeheartedly agree with you when you say discipleship “was a new concept for many Church of England and other Christian adherents.” I would add that neither is discipleship central to classical Protestantism or even general Catholicism (it does surface naturally in Catholic monastic groups). I also agree that for Mennonites overall, “the value of community is distinctive.”

I’m glad you’ve learned from other traditions; we all need to reach out in this regard as we at the same time realize where our own roots lie.

Please keep The Mennonite in mind. We need your profound insights, founded as they are on distinctives essential for living out a New Testament faith as we follow the Jesus of Galilee, walking together in his resurrection.
—Leonard Gross, Goshen, Ind.

RESOURCES
Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty and Early Christian Formation by Helen Rhee (Baker Academic, 2012, $29.99) analyzes the significance of wealth and poverty in constructing Christian identity in the complex socioeconomic situation and cultural milieu of the early Roman Empire. Rhee shows how early Christians adopted, appropriated and transformed the Jewish and Greco-Roman moral teachings and practices of giving and patronage.

Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes Our Souls by Clive Marsh and Vaughan S. Roberts (Baker Academic, 2012, $22.99) show that popular music is used by religious and nonreligious people alike to make meaning, enabling listeners to explore human concerns about embodiment, create communities and tap into transcendence.

The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective by Ben Witherington III (Eerdmans, 2012, $18) shows why and how all the normal activities of life should be done to the glory of God and for the edification of others, in light of biblical teaching about the kingdom of God and the Christian hope for the future.

A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions About Christian Care for Animals by Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker (Cascade Books, 2012, $23) assembles provocative essays from authors of various denominational, national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds to wrestle with the text, theology and tradition in order to answer questions about Christian care of animals.

Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan (Columbia University Press, 2011, $29.50) argues that nonviolent resistance is more than twice as successful as armed struggle, even in the face of brutal regime repression. The authors, both social scientists, examined 323 violent and nonviolent uprisings from around the world between 1900 and 2006.

Why Can’t We Talk? Christian Wisdom on Dialogue as a Habit of the Heart by John Backman (SkyLight Paths, 2012, $16.99) illustrates that drawing close to God, acting in concert with God’s desires and practicing virtues of our faith are as important as interpersonal skills in effective dialogue.

Dementia: Living in the Memories of God by John Swinton (Eerdmans, 2012, $25) develops a practical theology of dementia for caregivers, people with dementia, ministers, hospital chaplains and medical practitioners that explores two primary questions: Who am I when I’ve forgotten who I am? What does it mean to love God and be loved by God when I have forgotten who God is?
God sightings: God and the new Subaru

It seems presumptuous to say that we’ve seen God at work in specific ways. I’ve often cringed when I heard people tell about the way God answered their prayers—in a way that seemed out of character with the God of Scripture.

Early in December 2012, I conversed with a group of leaders about the need to look for God at work in the world. Reflecting on that conversation, a pastor wrote me, asking: “Can I offer an encouragement? You’ll remember at our Saturday meeting that many of us talked about being alienated by people who glibly put God at the front of all their sentences. (“God told me to buy this Mercedes.”) Might you write a … column in The Mennonite about the difference between authentically naming what God is doing and this kind of superficial (and often selfish) ‘God talk’? In other words, how can we talk about God—and in God’s name—in ways that are reverent, humble and truthful?”

Great idea. The pastor’s mention of a Mercedes triggered two memories for me. The first was a flashback to a moment more than 40 years ago when I was riding with a carload of friends from my church youth group. We were listening to Janis Joplin sing, “Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz?”

Perhaps the pastor was thinking of that song as well, a humorous example of the “junk mail” requests God often gets in prayer correspondence from us.

The pastor’s note also reminded me of an incident that took place one weekend about 20 years ago among a group of friends in a Mennonite congregation near my home. A businessman named Dan, along with his wife Naomi, went shopping for a new car. In the showroom they were both drawn to a Mercedes-Benz. They could clearly afford the car but hesitated to close the deal. They agreed with each other that they wanted to see if God had anything to say to them before they made the purchase. So they decided not to say anything to anyone about it, waiting to see if God would speak to them about it by some means other than the opinion of friends.

The following Sunday at the worship service, God answered their prayer in an unexpected way. As was the custom in that church, the congregation had a time of worship and singing, followed by a time of “listening” prayer. The worshippers were invited to listen for God’s voice and then share with the congregation what they were hearing or seeing. A young woman named Teresa stood up and said that she was seeing a sporty car up on a pedestal. She was also seeing a red light flashing and hearing a voice that was saying no. She admitted she had no idea what this “picture” meant but that perhaps someone else would.

Dan and Naomi took this as God’s answer to their request for discernment and decided not to buy the car. Because they had already saved up cash for a new car, they asked God what to do with the money. They sensed God telling them to use it to buy a new car for the pastor of the church, since his car was practically worn out.

So they deposited a good sum of money into a church account and invited others to contribute to the fund. Within a few weeks, the church bought the pastor a brand new Subaru.

I’ve had several rides in that Subaru. As I reflect on what happened prior to the purchase of that car, I can see God at work in at least the following ways: helping Dan prosper as a businessman, prompting Dan and Naomi to listen for God’s voice in financial decisions, granting a prophetic gift to Teresa, prompting Dan and Naomi to give generously, and prompting the congregation to bless their pastor.

A God sighting indeed.
The real and the foolish

God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.
—1 Corinthians 1:25

While watching Executive Board members taking a prayer walk through Phoenix on Jan. 9 (see page 33), I was struck by how futile—even foolish—the gesture seemed.

The Arizona industry built up around the detention and deportation of undocumented residents is huge—and profitable for some. The massive Maricopa County Supreme Court building, a large detention center nearby and one of sheriff Joe Arpaio’s numerous facilities testify to the resolve and power wielded by state and federal authorities as they administer a broken immigration system.

This summer, participants at the Phoenix convention will be invited to take a similar walk through those beautifully landscaped streets that mask so much misery. At certain points along the way, participants will stop in silence, kneel and pray. According to André Gingerich Stoner, one of the organizers, the walk is designed to cultivate “a long, loving gaze at the real.”

It is very real, and it is ugly.

But there are other realities as well. It is from them we can draw hope.

While President Obama’s administration continues to deport record numbers of undocumented residents, a few small ministries light candles in the darkness.

Through a Tucson, Ariz.-based program called BorderLinks, several dozen of us visited both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border in the binational city of Nogales, Ariz./Mexico. In small groups and with translators, we talked to people recently picked up by the U.S. Border Patrol and unceremoniously deposited back in Mexico.

One 20-something mother had lived in Oxnard, Calif., for years; when she was deported she left behind a husband, three U.S. born children and an employer who wanted her help picking strawberries. We were told that just having people listen to their stories without judgment was a comfort to these would-be immigrants.

The high point for our trip, however, was dinner at Casa Mariposa in Tucson, a hospitality house for people released from immigration detention. The primary benefit for those detained is a physical address—a requirement for release.

The evening we visited, four young men—recently released—were enjoying the hospitality. Marco, the rotund and effusive chef, told us his story after dinner. He had been in detention seven years. One day, he said, he told God, “I am tired of praying to you and nothing happens. If nothing happens today I will stop praying.”

That day, a BorderLinks staff member succeeded in raising the bond money necessary for his release.

Ministries such as BorderLinks and Casa Mariposa are miniscule when compared with the machinery of government detention and deportation. But in the face of untold human misery, they offer some relief to a few.

Several times I have heard Stoner say convention participants should not go to the Phoenix convention expecting to fix Arizona but should participate to learn about the system—and take those learnings home. That and praying for “God’s foolishness” to abound is about all we will be able to do. And as we pray, we may be as frustrated and feel as hopeless as did Marco on his last day in detention.—ejt