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‘cursed is the ground’
The power of enough

I am part of a consumer society bent on finding happiness in the acquisition of more stuff. The average house in the 1950s was 900 square feet and often built without a garage. In the 1970s the average house was 1,400 square feet, with a double garage. The average home today is 2,300 square feet, with the triple garage becoming the new standard. Why do we need all that space? It’s not because of larger families. We need it to store stuff.

Licensed cars in the United States now exceed the number of licensed drivers. When is enough enough? How do we get off this consumer merry-go-round of anxiously getting more and more stuff?

1. Enough is not created by circumstances. The Apostle Paul writes, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Philippians 4:11 NIV). Paul was writing out of the deprivations of being a prisoner of Rome. “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty” (v. 12). Paul’s contentment did not depend on good circumstances. Often we think, If I just had a little more, I’d be satisfied. If I could have a car with 50,000 less miles. If I could get a new outfit once a season. If I could we go out and eat once a week, then I’d be happy.

In his book The Power of Enough, Lynn Miller writes: “We are here, the TV tells us, to be consumers: to buy and accumulate and store and buy more. We are here to be consumers because consuming will make us happy! The problem is, it isn’t working. We’re not happy! … In the U.S. we have more stuff than anyone in the world at any time in history, but we still are not happy.” Miller notes that the best-selling medication in the United States is Xanax, an anti-anxiety pharmaceutical.

2. Enough is an acquired behavior. In Philippians 4:12, Paul writes, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Enough is an educated mind-set; it is an adjusted attitude; it is an acquired behavior.

Part of this learning is recognizing the cultural lies and saying no to them. One of the cultural lies is that you are a consumer. That label implies that you are a person of bottomless appetite. You were created to use things and use them up. But you were not created to use stuff; you were created to take care of God’s stuff. So when you are labeled a consumer by that TV commentator, talk back. “I am not a consumer. I am a caretaker of God’s creation. I am a citizen of God’s kingdom.” That is my identity. Caretakers and citizens behave differently from consumers.

3. Enough is not readily experienced. Paul calls enough a “secret.” It is countercultural. Our culture is saturated with more, bigger, better, stronger, newer or—if you are into antiques—older.

Trying to be more than we are by owning or wearing something does not work because there is no end to it. Someone else always has more.

4. Enough is essentially a spiritual reality. In Philippians 4:13, Paul lets out the secret: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” I can live in contentment through Jesus Christ. I can renounce the cultural lies and live in the enough of being blessed by God.

What’s true for Paul is also true for the Christians at Philippi. “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (v. 19). Do you need significance? Get it from Jesus as your Protector and Provider. There’s nothing you can buy that comes close. Do you need security? Get it from Jesus as a son or daughter of God. There’s nothing you can buy that will make you more secure. Do you need purpose? Get it from Jesus and join him in his kingdom work of restoring this planet and its peoples to God’s shalom. There’s nothing you can buy that will give you greater purpose.

The Mennonite

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**Professionalism in music not appropriate**

I appreciated the March 16 issue emphasis on music in the church; however, I am saddened by the emphasis of professionalism both in leading and in singing. While adequate skills are important to lead music, and all who worship should offer God their best, worship should not be a time of rehearsal or performance. Those who come with hearts full of love and offer God a joyful noise need not be reminded that their ear for harmony is not all it should be or be required to concentrate so much on singing properly that all the joy of worship is lost. I disagree with the statement by William Eash (“Tips for Song Leaders”) that singing is a difficult and complex task. In a church worship setting it should be the opposite. I do not believe that offering ourselves to our God in worship requires “outstanding congregational singing,” and as much as I love to hear good four-part singing, it is more important to me that all who come are welcomed to join in regardless of their musical abilities.—Joyce Nussbaum, Apple Creek, Ohio

**Messiah complex**

Glenn Lehman’s suggestion that we pursue works other than Messiah (“Messiah Complex,” March 16) is important, yet I would caution against creating unnecessary “issues” about the value of its ongoing widespread use. Although Messiah was conceived for the concert hall, it has “worked” in countless settings to gather, teach and inspire. My home congregation, Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, Ohio, has “rendered” Messiah 70 times since the 1930s. I remember the sense of awe I felt when learning it as an MYFer as well as a new bond with the adults who had been singing it for years. It is still my dream that our daughters can sometime soon experience singing Messiah at Oak Grove, perhaps even with their 80-something Grandpa, who is still singing it after all these years.—Diane Schroth Hertzler, Goshen, Ind.

**Hate the sin, love the sinner**

I am deeply sympathetic for Melissa Meserole’s unfortunate outcome in her service on the Youth Evangelism Service team (“EMM Worker Wounded By Gunshot”). I definitely would like to see justice served upon the assailants. Remember we are to hate the action of crime but to love the criminal. The Bible teaches us as Mennonite Christians to hate sin but love the sinner. I pray for all parties: first for Melissa, that she can and will forgive, then for the attackers to come to repentance sincerely and to ask for forgiveness. I am a penitent Christian within prison walls. Though I, too, am forgiven, I still must endure the consequences until my last penny has been paid. Likewise, I pray that the Birmingham, Ala., authorities will capture these guys and let God deal with the outcome of this tragedy. May God richly bless Melissa and her family.—Kevin Fannin, Meridian, Miss.

**The Passion**

Re Gordon Houser’s Mediaculture column (“The Passion: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly,” March 16): What a “picky-picky” and malicious attack on Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. Shouldn’t we be ever so thankful to have this message come from Hollywood? Gibson bucked the movie establishment and put his money and efforts where his heart and convictions were. Who of us would stand so strong and long and have such a passion to tell the story of Christ’s suffering to the world?—Harold E. Franz, Wichita, Kan.

I appreciated Houser’s discussion of The Passion of the Christ. I haven’t seen the film, as it sounds too violent for me. But many people are talking about it. When I reflect on this film and other recent films with biblical themes that were produced for the theater, I believe God may be taking his message to the world again through the theater as he did with Handel’s oratorios. Some ask if God’s Son suffered such cruelty to redeem the world why is there still so much evil and violence in the world? We should remember that the world, by rejecting Christ, chose Barabbas and his way of evil and violence.—John F. Murray, Kouts, Ind.

In answer to Houser’s question, “But isn’t it who Jesus is that saves us rather than only the bloody way he died?” There are many Scripture verses that speak of the blood and show the all-important place the blood has in our salvation and our walk in the Lord. We also have many old gospel songs. Sorry to say many of these songs are not in our songbooks anymore. Why?—John E. Penner, Freeman, S.D.
A passionate faith
I couldn’t help but reflect on “A Passionate Faith” (Grace and Truth, March 16) while visiting a church today. I am the worshiper described by Donna Mast. Today I was prepared to give. I received blessings all week, and I wanted to worship, to think about the songs, to thank my God, to bow down before him and to reflect the reality that life is better with Jesus. But the first prayer today was addressing our needs. The second prayer was for all of the special needs in the congregation. The third prayer was how we could have hope as Christians, another about how we can be forgiven, and the closing prayer was a blessing for us during the week. I came away mixed up and disappointed.

What does God want from us in worship? More of our needs fulfilled? Or during this holy time, can we spare a few minutes from our requests and needs to address God in his holiness and truly worship who God is?—Judy Miller, Orrville, Ohio

Lord and Savior
Re Everett J. Thomas’ editorial about Lord or Savior or both (“Lord and Savior,” March 16): This is one of the defining issues for the Mennonite church of the future. It seems to me that a polarization takes place and we emphasize one aspect of salvation over the other.

Some voices in Mennonite Church USA are so afraid of being seen as Evangelical that to talk of a conversion or a time of invitation seems unnecessary or troublesome. Others are heavily influenced by the reductionism we see in certain Evangelical circles which boils salvation down to a neat package: Say this one prayer and you are in. The church is in grave trouble when discipleship is viewed as extracurricular or optional. The church is also in trouble when we strip the guts out of the gospel and do not call individuals to repentance and a personal relationship with Jesus. We as Anabaptists have been preaching this for many years. Let us stay true to the gospel.—Chad Miller, Hartville, Ohio

Slaves and ambassadors
Karl McKinney’s cogent self-understanding and clear call to all of us in “Emissaries From Another Realm” (Grace and Truth, March 2) is to be commended. As he said, “When will the slave, the servant, the meek and the living sacrifice move from the margins and become norms for discipleship?” Indeed. May God bless all who work at it by the grace of God.—Milo D. Stahl, Harrisonburg, Va.

Tuning the piano
As a registered piano technician, I was disappointed to see that “Tuning the Piano” (March 16) turned out to be a poem. Sorry, Jean Janzen. Pianos have been a part of my life as long as I can remember. I began tuning pianos part-time while teaching music at Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite High School. This is now my full-time occupation. My “patients” are varied: expensive Steinways to el cheapo spinets, well-maintained to neglected for decades. Some can be made to sound almost worthy of heaven, while others can only be made to sound less terrible. Sometimes they even seem to have personalities. “Thank you, thank you, thank you! I’ve been waiting for you for years!” or, “You touch me and I’m gonna break a string!” I always have Band-Aids with me.

I consider it a special privilege to work on a church piano. While tuning I am all alone, but I know that, come Sunday morning, the instrument will be used for the praise and worship of God. Most worshipers will never know that I’ve been there, but it is one way I can contribute to the work of the kingdom.—Clyde Hollinger, Lititz, Pa.

Mennonite policeman is pacifist
As a member of the law enforcement profession and a Mennonite, I take exception to Dan Lais’ letter (Readers Say, March 16). Two points that Lais makes are erroneous. First, Lais makes a statement about the officers featured in the Jan. 20 article, “Police Officers Consider Peace Role, Beliefs,” as police officers wanting to be Mennonite. As I read the article, those officers are Mennonites, not Mennonite wannabes. Lais also says, “If one looks closely at the law-enforcement people of U.S. downtowns, one will see that lethal force is prominently displayed as an option.”

Lethal force is, and always will be, the last and final option in law enforcement. As a law enforcement officer, one is trained to use a force continuum: force by an officer escalates only when confronted with escalating force from the accused, and that force is in direct proportion to the force encountered. It is a sad moment when lethal force must be used—a moment made even worse by exaggeration and misinformation about such occurrences in the media. (The media always fail to mention that most police officers will never draw their gun in the line of duty during their career.)

I am a proud Mennonite. I strongly believe in the peace practices of our church. I oppose the war and subversive activities that our country continues to undertake around the world. But I am also proud of my profession. I am proud to place my life on the line to keep not only my fellow Mennonites but all members of my community safe. I am proud that God has seen in me the ability to accomplish this for my fellow man. I am proud to be a peace officer.—Gregg Rosenbery, Haslett, Mich.
**New York to join Mennonite Church USA**

SENECA FALLS, N.Y.—New York Mennonite Conference delegates on April 3 came to a unanimous consensus to join Mennonite Church USA as a full member.

“We began discussing full membership and it took off on a life of its own,” said LeRoy J. Mast, conference moderator and pastor of Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church, Hammondsport. At least 13 of the conference’s 16 congregations needed to support the decision to make it binding. The executive council wanted consensus rather than voting. But voting was the last thing on anyone’s mind by the end of the day.—Laurie L. Oswald

**Congolese ordain development minister**

STRASBOURG, France—The Congolese Mennonite Brethren Church has taken the unusual step of ordaining a minister to work in economic development.

The conference ordained Mama Kadi to a special ministry of spiritual formation and economic development among pastors’ wives. She will help women in the conference establish small businesses and work toward equitable distribution of resources among Congolese men and women.

To elevate economic assistance to the level of recognized ministry is unusual, although Mama Kadi is not the first Congolese Mennonite Brethren woman to be ordained.

The Congolese church ordained Madame Charly Lukala Londa in 2000 to pastor a congregation in France where she was studying.—Mennonite World Conference

**Canadians protest missile defense systems**

WINNIPEG—Twenty Canadian church leaders, including Mennonite Church Canada moderator Henry Krause, have spoken out against ballistic missile defense, or BM D, systems.

In a March 15 letter sent by the Canadian Council of Churches to Prime Minister Paul Martin, church leaders said proposed security solutions like BM D “can never satisfy the deep human yearning for immunity from nuclear terror … [and] fail to counter the nuclear threat and precipitate further insecurities.”

The United States has been researching BM D technology since the 1940s. A Canadian government Web site states that officials are “examining possible Canadian participation” in a BM D program.

**Mennonite youth quiz off on Exodus**

The Pleasant View (Wayne County, Ohio) quiz team celebrates a come-from-behind win in the Exodus 2004 Invitational Bible Quiz Tournament held March 27-28 in Pettisville, Ohio. More than 600 quizzers on 87 Bible quiz teams from five Mennonite areas in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia participated in the tournament.
Karisten Buckwalter

Service with a smile
From left, Danielle Martin, Abbey Basom and Amanda Forte, students at Locust Grove Mennonite School, Lancaster, Pa., organize toys at TLC, formerly Harb-Adult, during the school’s annual service day on March 26.

Mennonite Camping Association meets
LINCOLN CITY, Ore.—Representatives from Mennonite camps and retreat centers across Canada and the United States attended Mennonite Camping Association’s binational convention March 22-25 at Drift Creek Camp.

Larry and Mary Jane Eby have been commissioned to write the historical sequel to Jess Kauffman’s A Vision and a Legacy: The Story of Mennonite Camping, 1920-80.—MCA

Mennonites and Orthodox converse
READING, Pa.—More than 50 Mennonite and Orthodox clergy and laypeople met March 5-6 in Reading for “Traveling the Tradition: An Orthodox-Mennonite Conversation.”

Orthodox priest Father Joseph Gibson described his search for meaning through agnosticism, Eastern religions and charismatic Christianity and culminating in coming to Orthodoxy. He pointed out that the Bible is “an Eastern book” and that the “founding communities of faith were Eastern.”

Roy Hange, a Mennonite pastor from Charlottesville, Va., and former Mennonite Central Committee worker in the Middle East, said that Orthodoxy gives a broader sense “that Jesus is more than somebody who just saved me from my sin, that overwhelming presence of the Spirit as being in our midst, as working through the body of Christ in the community to call us toward a closer relationship.”

Father Demetrius of Reading expressed a desire to learn from Mennonites’ ability to work for social justice.

Ray Reitz, a Mennonite pastor from the Lancaster, Pa., area, said, “This [meeting] exceeded our wildest expectations.”—Kenton Glick

CPT names new co-directors
CHICAGO—Christian Peacemaker Teams has named Doug Pritchard and Carol Rose its new co-directors, effective Sept. 1, following the resignation of Gene Stoltzfus, who has been CPT’s director for 16 years.

Rose, 44, of Wichita, Kan., in February completed six years as pastor of Mennonite Church of the Servant in Wichita. She worked 13 years with Mennonite Central Committee in Honduras, Thailand, the Philippines and Lancaster, Pa. Rose has taught the biblical and theological basis for nonviolence at the last four CPT trainings.

Pritchard, 55, of Toronto, has been coordinator of CPT Canada since that program began in 1997. He has overseen the recruitment, training and placement of CPT workers and developed a strong financial and prayer support base for CPT with churches and individuals. He is a member of Toronto United Mennonite Church.—CPT

IN BRIEF

Canadian Mennonite names new editor
Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service, which publishes Canadian Mennonite, has named Timothy Dyck editor-publisher, effective Aug. 1. He is completing a year of studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. He is a member of Waterloo (Ont.) North Mennonite Church.—Canadian Mennonite

Credit union in top 100
Mennonite Financial, a credit union serving Mennonites and members of related Anabaptist groups in the United States, has been recognized as one of the top 100 credit unions in the country for savings growth in 2003 (18 percent). It also received a “best in class” for its loans-to-savings ratio (101 percent) and its loan growth (21 percent). The honors come from Callahan and Associates, an independent credit union monitoring organization in Washington. President Larry D. Miller noted that Mennonite Financial has almost doubled its asset size since it was formed from the merger of three Mennonite credit unions in October 2000, from $28 million to $51 million.

April 20, 2004 TheMennonite
‘Cursed is the ground’
The story of God’s creation of the world describes a garden of beauty and abundance. The man and the woman live at peace with each other and with God in the midst of this garden. When they sin, they are driven from the garden into an inhospitable land. Because of their sin, God says, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field” (Genesis 3:17b-18).

Later, Cain kills his brother Abel. In response to this act of violence, God demands to know of Cain, “What have you done? Listen; the voice of your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength” (Genesis 4:10b-12a).

These stories point to a connection between peace and the state of the earth. God brings forth a wondrous creation and places humankind in its midst. Where people live in harmony with God’s intention and in peace with each other, the beauty and abundance of the garden is preserved. Where there is violence and sin, the land is cursed and in turn curses. God’s entire creation suffers.

War harms the earth. The sin of war and violent conflict is one of the preeminent ways humankind contributes to “cursing” God’s creation. In our time, war is one of the most ecologically destructive of all human activities. Warfare pollutes air and water, erodes soil, denudes forests, destroys natural habitats, kills wildlife. Mass movements of refugees seeking to escape war in turn impose undue pressure on the land and its resources. The collateral
damage of warfare to the environment is colossal. Here are just a few examples.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military used a potent herbicide called Agent Orange to denude forests and thereby make it more difficult for Viet Cong guerrillas to take cover in the jungle. Besides creating severe health problems for the human population, about 40 percent of Vietnam’s forest was destroyed, some of it permanently.

In El Salvador the Armed Forces used a similar strategy to crush a rebel insurgency during the 1980s. Intended to weaken the rebels’ rural support base, the “scorched earth policy” destroyed forests and agricultural lands. In only one year, 1984-85, a total of 2.8 million tons of bombs were dropped, turning huge areas into virtual wastelands.1

During the Gulf War of 1991, oil tankers and oil production sites were primary targets for both U.S.-led and Iraqi forces. About 10 million barrels of crude oil were either spilled into the Persian Gulf waters or turned into toxic airborne fumes. Some 30,000 marine birds were killed, 20 percent of mangrove swamps contaminated and 50 percent of coral reefs affected.2 Additionally, missiles coated with depleted uranium disbursed tons of radioactive dust through the atmosphere. The impact of this environmental disaster on the human health of Iraqi people is showing itself through dramatic increases in cancers and birth defects; the long-term impact on soil, animals and groundwater is yet unknown.3

Landmines and cluster bombs are among the cheapest and smallest of conventional weapons, but their impact on the earth is also devastating. Besides the toll they take on human life, often long after wars have officially ended, they contribute to environmental destruction by rendering farmland inaccessible. Small farmers often have few choices but to try farming elsewhere, thereby contributing to deforestation and the degradation of already fragile lands.

Conventional warfare has always been destructive to the environment. Weapons of mass destruction—whether nuclear, chemical or biological—are so devastating that they threaten the survival of the earth as we know it.

Environmental scarcities and disparities contribute to war. Environmental scarcity or disparities in access to environmental resources also contribute to conflict and warfare, particularly where other issues are involved.

The dispute between Israelis and Palestinians is a complex one, with many issues contributing to the armed conflict that has gone on for decades. A significant environmental factor is water scarcity. About a quarter of the water use by the State of Israel originates in the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza). Much of this water goes to support Israeli settlers living in illegal settlements in the territories. While Israel restricts their use of water, settlers still consume about four times as much as Palestinians. Authorities conclude that water scarcity and the resulting economic impact has contributed to the Palestinian uprising against Israel.4

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda usually has been portrayed by the Western media as an ethnic conflict between Hutus and Tutsis. But analysts argue that ecological scarcities, compounded by the structures of international trade, were much more significant factors.5 Rapid population growth after independence, plus rapid transformation of pasture into agricultural land for the production of export crops (primarily coffee), put undue pressure on the soil. As land became scarcer and more degraded, poverty deepened. When the price of coffee plummeted in the early 1990s, resentments over inequi-
Peacemaking should not only be about transforming conflict within the human community. It must also include care for the earth and just access to the earth’s resources.

Many analysts suggest that the growth of terrorist groups, particularly those that target Western interests, are rooted in resentment over unequal access to the earth’s resources. They argue that oppressed peoples around the world are aware that laws governing financial assistance and global trade benefit those already wealthy. They see their own agricultural land, forests and fishing grounds being depleted to meet Western demands. They see their own water resources coming under the control of private, foreign-owned corporations. They regard the current “war on terrorism” as being not about democracy and freedom but about America securing control over Middle Eastern oil.

Environmental degradation and conflicts over access to environmental resources are important causes of violent human conflicts both within and between states. A former director of the United Nations Environment Program put it this way: “The ultimate choice is between conservation or conflict. Trees now or tanks later.”

**Peacemaking and earthkeeping go hand in hand.**

As people fight wars, they harm God’s creation in untold ways. Moreover, as they exploit God’s creation, particularly when they use more than their fair share, they contribute to the conditions that fuel conflict—and—in some instances—war. A vicious cycle is set in process. Human violence and ecological destruction feed each other, and the land is cursed.

Christian peacemaking and caring for God’s good creation must go hand in hand. Peacemaking should not only be about transforming conflict within the human community. It must also include care for the earth and just access to the earth’s resources.

The apostle Paul promises that in God’s good time God will bring healing to a broken creation (Romans 8:19-20). Human sin and violence and the curse it casts upon the land will be overcome. In the meantime, Christian peacemakers are called to live in ways that anticipate and participate in that healing.

Esther Epp-Tiessen is a member of Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg and serves as coordinator for the peace ministries program of Mennonite Central Committee Canada. Canadian Mennonite published an abbreviated version of this article in January.

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3. See Akira Tashiro, Discounted Casualties: The Human Cost of Depleted Uranium (Hiroshima: The Chugoku Shimbun, 2001). See also the works of Dr. Douglas Rokke, former health physicist and director of the U.S. Army Depleted Uranium Project.
6. See for example, the writing of Anup Shah, a U.S.-trained Indian living in England, at http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/MiddleEast.asp
here are some things in the Bible that make me shudder. Case in point: Psalm 88. One Old Testament scholar has called Psalm 88 “an embarrassment to conventional faith.” He writes: “It is the cry of a believer ... whose life has gone awry, who desperately seeks contact with [God], but who is unable to evoke a response. This is indeed ‘the dark night of the soul’” (Walter Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms).

Here is just a portion of Psalm 88 (vv. 1-2, 4-8a, 14).

“O LORD, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.

... I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;

I am like those who have no help, like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them.

... O LORD, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?”

Angry psalm: The tone of this psalm is unrelentingly dark and desperate. Even more, the psalmist accuses God of being the cause of it all: “You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep. You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them.” This is an angry psalm, and the anger is directed at God. There is not a single word of praise to be found here.

How did such an outpouring of despair and anger make it into the pages of Holy Scripture? I’ll never forget how surprised I was when I first realized this kind of language was in the Bible. I was in high school and had decided to read through the Psalms. I’m not sure who or what prompted me to do that, but I could hardly believe what I was reading. I had no idea the writers of Scripture expressed such doubt, such anger—anger at God, no less. I remember thinking, What a relief! How refreshing to discover such honesty. If it was OK for whoever wrote the Psalms to express their doubts, their anger, to God, then surely it was OK for me to do the same. Reading the angry psalms was liberating for me at that point in my faith pilgrimage. When I got angry at God or doubted God’s love or even God’s existence, it was all right. God could handle my doubts, my rage.

I still believe that. I think it is a mistake for Christians to suppose that faith is always a matter of being cheerful and upbeat. Where did we ever get this idea that God wants us to be happy all the time? Maybe we breathed it in from the messages in our culture, in a North America that has been described as “the officially optimistic society” (Douglas John Hall, Lighten Our Darkness).

Ours is the great love affair with “success,” defined usually in terms of growth—a rising stock market, more material goods. This definition of success has infected even the church of Jesus Christ.
with “successful” churches being those with more members, programs or money than surrounding churches. This is strange when we remember who Jesus was and what he told his disciples: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43b-45).

God desires from us our entire selves, just as we are. We don’t have to come to God with the masks we so often wear for the benefit of others. “How are you doing?” “Oh, fine.” And often we are fine. But sometimes we aren’t. Sometimes our lives are filled with the brim with worry or pain or anger or despair. God welcomes whatever feelings we have. The great commandment, Jesus said, is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Not just with the good stuff in your heart, soul and mind. Love God with everything you have. Love God with the best in you, and love God with the worst in you.

**Goodness:** That’s not easy to do. We have been conditioned to be good, to think good thoughts and do good things, especially when we imagine God is watching or listening. The writer Madeleine L’Engle says that when she was a little girl she ended her prayers with, “and God bless me and make me a good girl.” Now, looking back, she says, “I become less and less sure that it was a good prayer.” Now she understands that goodness is what God can do in us, not something we can accomplish by an act of will. She writes, “If I am ever good, it is not because I am trying to be but because goodness is for a moment offered me as a gift of sheer grace” (A Stone for a Pillow).

How freeing it is to come to the prayer book of the Bible, the Psalms, and find there both great joy and great despair. Some of the Psalms express a desire for revenge on enemies. Psalm 109 contains a string of curses directed at those who, the psalmist says, “attack me without cause.” “He loved to curse,” is the accusation, therefore “let curses come on him!” “Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children!” On and on goes this chilling set of curses. And again we ask, What is stuff like this doing in the Bible?

Again, the answer is honesty. The psalmist is being ruthlessly honest to God about feelings of rage. Let’s face it, you and I can get angry about the way others have treated us. People we count on offend us or betray us. Sometimes we’re afraid to acknowledge our anger or rage to God because such feelings aren’t, well, nice. The psalmist suffers from no such misgivings. The longing to have the wrongdoer suffer is poured out to God with a vengeance. But notice that the psalmist does not exact revenge. Instead the feelings are given to God because there is a trust that God will know what to do and will do what is just. What a healthy kind of faith this is. Sometimes just naming our anger and giving it to God may be just the right therapy for our anger.

Often we think our prayers should contain the right words. We wrap ourselves in a cloak of religious piety and goodness, when what we may be feeling is the opposite. In fact, praise of God that is genuine comes from the depths of our being, and in those depths there is always a measure of suffering, of pain.

When I read the prayers in the Psalms, I am comforted in knowing that prayers from the heart are not just OK but are welcomed by the Holy Shepherd who longs to lead me by still waters.

God knows that situations arise in our lives for which there are no clear answers. Why am I feeling so depressed? Why did my loved one have to die? When we hear someone express such questions, you and I are tempted to answer with an explanation or a word of encouragement. But that is probably not the best response. Sometimes the best we can do is to point to a psalm like Psalm 88: “My soul is full to troubles.”

And the final word is not the reality of suffering. In the words of Psalm 30: “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” When that morning comes and exactly what it will look like, you and I cannot say. At best, we have clues to it from our faith, from the Scriptures: clues such as an empty tomb, a risen Lord preparing breakfast for his friends, John’s vision of “a new heaven and a new earth,” God wiping every tear from our eyes.

And even though Psalm 88 ends on a somber note, with the psalmist unable to give voice to praise, it is hard to miss what follows. These are the opening words of Psalm 89: “I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.”

That can be our song, too, a song of God’s steadfast love, a love that will not let us go, no matter how long and winding the road, no matter how dark the shadows in the valley, no matter what.

Ken Gibble lives in Greencastle, Pa.
Aubade

by Suzanne Miller

Open your eyes from prayer.
This is the past we live

making the future in which we have prayed;
this is our chance to remember the clarity

of forgotten images—night clothes hanging
in a shaft of morning light, night clothes limp

in a wash of morning light, tired, heavy in spirit.
This Spirit is light encased in our darkness,

this treasure in our clay pot.

Suzanne Miller lives in Goessel, Kan.
Something more

A lesson in generosity

by Ruth Naylor

Every once in a while something happens that makes my heart beat a little lighter and brings inspiration to the average day. Such was the case today.

While I was serving on the pastoral staff at our church, I took a training course in spiritual guidance. In retirement I've continued to offer spiritual direction to those who want to deepen their sense of God's presence and direction in their lives. Today a pastor from another denomination in a nearby city was ready to leave my home. Our hour together was finished, and she was looking through her purse. “I seem to have forgotten my checkbook,” she said.

“That's OK,” I said. “You remember that I don't charge anyway. Anything you ever leave for me is pure gift. Just forget it this time.”

She ignored my offer and sorted through the cash in her billfold. Slightly flustered, she said, “Without my check record, I can't even remember how much I usually pay you.”

Trying to put her at ease, I told her she usually leaves me $35, but now I was embarrassed as well. “Just let it go,” I said. “You are an inspiration to me, and I’m happy you find benefit in coming.”

“I don’t have the right change,” she said as she laid a $20 bill and a $10 bill on the end table beside her. “I’ll leave this for you now and then next time I’ll give you more.”

We hugged and she left. I blew out the Christ-light candle, picked up the money, straightened the cushions on the couch and picked up our two teacups to return them to the kitchen. As I was rinsing them at the sink, the doorbell rang.

This attractive young pastor, in her early 30s, still a bit ruffled, was smiling. “Without telling you the whole story behind this,” she said, “I want to pay you more rather than less.” She pushed another bill into my hand, her eyes reflecting the joy of acting on spiritual impulse.

Glancing down, I saw that it was another $20. I was speechless but also curious. Although she needed to be on her way, she agreed to explain briefly. “It is budget planning time in our church,” she said, “and in last Sunday’s sermon, our lead pastor shared a recent experience that is related to support of kingdom work.”

This is the story she told me:

An unchurched man in the community had called First Church* to see if he could consult with Rev. Smith* about a personal family matter that was troubling him. The church secretary made the necessary arrangements, and at the appointed time a well-dressed gentleman appeared.

Behind closed doors, the pastor and his visitor talked for a long time. When the conversation seemed to be winding down, this successful businessman turned to the pastor and in a magnificent voice said, “Rev. Smith, I really appreciate the time you've given me this afternoon. You’ve helped me a lot.” His voice brightened as he continued, “I’d like to make a contribution to your church if I may.”

Rev. Smith was more than willing to accept his gift. It was obvious the man was well-to-do, and the finance committee would be more than happy to channel the money into some worthwhile kingdom project.

The businessman reached for his billfold and pulled out a $20 bill. “Have you got change for a twenty?” he asked. Taken aback, the pastor felt for his billfold, only to find that he’d left it at home.

“That’s all right,” the businessman assured him.

A few days later, when the pastor returned from lunch, his secretary said the man had just been in to leave a contribution in appreciation for the time the pastor had spent with him. On his desk, the pastor found an envelope containing a $10 bill.

My pastor friend chuckled and said, “So now you know why I want to give you more rather than less.”

We hugged again. I thanked her for the story and for the unexpected gift. She went back to her car, and I went back into the kitchen, knowing I was feeling a new burst of generosity myself. I know that in the days ahead there will be unexpected opportunities to pass on that feeling of goodwill that comes with generous kingdom giving.

I’ll drop something off later in the week.”

Ruth Naylor is a member of First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio.

* Names in this true story are fictitious.

May 2 is Stewardship Sunday.

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Lebanon County, Pa., his boyhood home, is the last place Clair Weaver thought he wanted to live as an adult. But it’s the very place he feels most at home in following God’s call for his life.

Hearing that call to “come home” many years ago was difficult for Clair, now executive director of Jubilee Ministries. Some congregations belonging to the Lebanon District of Lancaster Mennonite Conference sponsor the ministry that reaches out to people in and around Lebanon Valley. Many of these people have been involved with the prison system and have needs related to their transition back into community life.

Clair, who loved being a respiratory technician, wanted to pursue the medical field further. But God steered him in another direction. So when people asked him to become executive director at Jubilee 14 years ago, he gave up his professional love to reach out in love to disenfranchised people: troubled youth, prison inmates, people addicted to drugs and alcohol, those who can’t make ends meet financially and those transitioning from prisons into the community.

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“After I left Lebanon County as a young man and went into Mennonite Voluntary Service in Florida, I thought I’d never come back to this area,” says Clair, who was pastor at Lebanon Christian Fellowship, one of six Jubilee-sponsoring congregations that grew from people coming out of prison. “I just felt I had changed too much to fit here anymore.

“But then the parents of Betsy, my wife, needed us back in the area, so we came home to Pennsylvania and settled in Pottsville for a time, then Hershey, where I worked in local hospitals. We later moved to Lebanon, where I did home-care respiratory therapy for the Good Samaritan Hospital, after which my boss and I started our own medical supply business.”

But increasing struggles with Medicare costs and competition caused them to sell the business. While being pastor, Clair did some part-time work in a doctor’s office and part-time administration at Jubilee before he became the full-time executive director in 1990.

“My life is shaped like a funnel, where God just kept narrowing my options until I ended up at Jubilee full-time,” he says. “My people within the congregation helped me make one of the toughest decisions of my life. I really loved the medical field, but after praying and talking this out with friends, I knew Jubilee was where God wanted me.”

Struggling to find his place in life has shaped Clair into a man who can help others find their place, too. For example, he works with Howard Melton. A participant in Jubilee’s after-care program to transition people back into the community after incarceration, Howard lives at Jubilee House and works at the used-clothing and furniture store. Part of the year-long after-care includes working in one of the Jubilee’s used clothing and furniture stores or at a construction site.

“I’m really nervous about getting back into the world, but working here, under the good care of a supervisor, is helping me relax,” Howard says. “It’s really hard to get back into the regular routine of life, after all the drama I’ve had in my life.

“I left my family and drank day and night for years and years. As it got worse and worse, I met people from the Jubilee prison ministry who helped me to see that God could forgive me. They also helped me read the Bible and to learn to know Jesus Christ.

“After I got out of the Marines, I’d been in 15 to 18 programs to help me with my alcohol problem. But Jubilee and Jesus are the first ones who really helped me. This place is special. It’s not just a program. They really care about people here, about your personal relationship with God and your relationships with others. They don’t want to fix your life. They want to offer you Jesus.”

Jubilee ministries are fruit on the vine of Jesus. Caring about all aspects of Howard’s life and the lives of others is the driving motive behind Jubilee,
Clair says. Jubilee believes its food, clothing and shelter ministries are “fruits on the vine” of the life of Jesus Christ, which is the reason Jubilee exists, he says. Jubilee strikes a balance between offering food for the body and food for the soul.

The after-care program in which Howard participates is part of Jubilee’s community ministries, which primarily serve those related to the criminal justice system. This branch of ministry provides pastoral counseling to hurting and seeking people, material assistance, a craft group for women, Faith House—a temporary shelter for families owned by Lebanon Church of the Brethren and operated by Jubilee—and a summer camp for children whose parents are in prison or on parole.

Jubilee also supplies several chaplains for the region’s state prisons and trains volunteers to visit the prisons and share God’s love through worship, Bible studies, mentoring, discipleship classes, stress and anger management and counseling, he says.

“We found that many of the chaplains assigned in these prisons were more concerned with politics than with inmates’ souls,” Clair says. “We send chaplains into these facilities who care about the inmates as people and who have the ability to share Jesus.”

And Jubilee offers low-cost clothing and furniture items in its stores, and a Christian coffee-house, Café Beracah, in downtown Lebanon that helps prevent a life of crime for youth and adults.

The Jubilee used clothing and furniture stores in Lebanon and Palmyra help support about 46 percent—or about $450,000—of yearly operating costs for Jubilee ministries. The total budget has grown from about $100,000 15 years ago to about $1.2 million in 2003.

Other sources of support—in donations and volunteers—include seven Lancaster Conference congregations: Lebanon Christian Fellowship, Gringrichs Mennonite Church, Krall Mennonite Church and Freedom in Christ Fellowship (a church plant reaching out to young people at the café) in Lebanon; Meckville Mennonite Church and Schubert Mennonite Church in Bethel; and Roedersville Mennonite Church in Pine Grove.

Volunteers from these congregations and other groups desire to reach people’s hearts with Jesus—the most important source of life and goodness that Jubilee offers, Clair says.

“The biggest challenge is reaching people’s hearts so that they truly know Jesus,” Clair says. “We have discovered that in teaching about Jesus, only about 10 percent of the people in prison make a firm commitment and stick with it for the long haul.

“On the flip side of that, our biggest joy is when someone really commits himself or herself to Jesus. There’s a guy who for 40 years was an alcoholic and a drug abuser. Just recently a light bulb went on in him about God’s love. And he came in to see me; [he was] just glowing. I knew he’d had an experience with God.”

Laurie L. Oswald is news service director for Mennonite Church USA.

‘Fruits on the vine’:
From left, Clair Weaver, executive director of Jubilee Ministries in Lebanon, Pa., works at one of Jubilee’s used furniture stores with Carlos Barrero and Howard Melton.
You have probably read by now that the next biennial assembly of Mennonite Church USA will be held in Charlotte, N.C., July 4-9, 2005. You have probably heard that Mennonite Church Canada will also meet with us in Charlotte. This will be the first time for our churches to come together since the integration of the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) and Mennonite Church (MC). Charlotte will offer an excellent opportunity to reconnect with friends and family.

People have asked me which came first, the decision to meet jointly or the selection of the meeting location. The answer is simple: neither. We had originally planned to meet in Canada. In fact, Canadians recommended that our office contact Toronto and Montreal, both wonderful cities with enough meeting space and hotel rooms to accommodate a group our size. We were also seriously considering the possibility, had Toronto been chosen, of offering billeting in the Kitchener-Waterloo area for anyone willing to make the 90-minute car ride each way every day.

What happened? We hit a snag. July is a busy month for hotels in Toronto and Montreal, with many tourists and other groups wanting meeting space. Hotels were not willing to give us the rates we normally get in the United States. This is how hotels figured it: Why should we give Mennonites an $80 U.S. rate when someone off the street is willing to walk in and pay us more than $100 U.S. for the room? It was my sad duty to recommend to the Joint Executive Committee, the group working on the 2005 convention, that we reconsider meeting in those cities.

We could have made a sacrifice and paid the much higher rate in order to meet in Canada. But at least two big issues worked against us. First, in late 2002 and early 2003 the United States was in a recession and cost was a huge concern for everyone. Second, and not necessarily the most important but the one with the greatest long-term effect on our meetings, was that once the word was out that our group had paid more than $100 for a room it would have been difficult to convince future cities that we were not able to pay a higher room rate. There were other, nonmonetary considerations for this decision, but they are beyond the scope of this article.

Just for your information, the average hotel rate in Charlotte will be $5 lower in 2005 than it was in Atlanta in 2003. Although the number of Canadian youth and delegates coming to Charlotte won’t have a huge impact on our overall numbers, the symbolic value of meeting together is huge. U.S. and Canadian delegates will spend time dealing with joint agenda and will come together for all worship sessions. The rest of the time will be spent on country-specific agenda. The committees working with our office to put all this together have Canadian representation on them.

Speaking of committees, our first planning meeting for Charlotte was held in January, and we have a creative bunch. After three days of hard work, the group came up with the theme “Can’t Keep Quiet,” based on Acts 4:20. Before deciding to go forward with this theme, we looked at past convention themes for the former GC and MC denominations to be sure we were not recycling an old theme. We found that in the last 30 years this type of theme had not been considered by either group. One of the committee members wrote: “The convention planning committee embraces the story of the disciples in Acts 4:1-31 as having a message for the Mennonite Church today. We commend this entire text to the worship planning committees. It challenges us to speak the good news, to pray for boldness, to believe that God will act with and through us. As narrative, it is a model of the stories we could tell each other about God’s activity in our lives.”

The worship planning committees met in early March and are well on their way to giving life to the work of the planning committee.

Atlanta was memorable because it was the first gathering of Mennonite Church USA this side of integration. Charlotte will also be memorable because it will be the first time Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA gather jointly. It will be good to watch friends and family reconnect in an assembly setting. I invite you to start making plans now to join us in July 2005. Don’t stay quiet about this. Spread the word to others. See you in Charlotte.
MPN board decides to vacate Scottdale
Will locate administrators, programs in Mennonite population centers

Mennonite Publishing Network, in a March 11 board meeting, decided to develop a long-term strategy to vacate its Scottdale, Pa., facility and begin locating programs and administrative positions in centers of Mennonite population in Canada and the United States. The transition to new locations could take up to five years.

A central factor in considering such a move was the MPN board’s commitment to the new vision and network model for publishing.

“MPN has been called by the church to change from being a ‘house’ to becoming a ‘network,’” said MPN board chair Ron Sawatsky, “responsive to the diverse and changing requirements of its constituency.”

Less than half the 70,000-square-foot Scottdale facility is being used by MPN. With major changes over the past two years—staff downsizing that included the closing of the printing division—the number of Scottdale-based staff has been reduced from 95 to 30.

“The ongoing space needs for MPN have significantly decreased,” said Phil Bontrager, MPN board member and treasurer. “The overhead cost associated with maintaining the current facility cannot be justified by MPN requirements alone.”

The question about future facility requirements was further focused by a Facility Task Group appointed by the MPN board last fall. The task group considered various options for the Scottdale facility, ranging from shared commercial or residential use to community or church use. However, in order to know which options to explore in depth, the task group asked the board to indicate whether or not MPN will continue to utilize any part of its facility in Scottdale.

The board indicated that in the long term, MPN should limit the amount of property it owns and should not be a property landlord in Scottdale or elsewhere. Consequently the board decided to develop a plan to vacate the building in a way that is both financially and operationally feasible.

Alternate locations for MPN have not yet been determined. However, the board decided to announce its long-term direction to create the broad framework for ongoing planning.

On March 27, the Joint Executive Committee of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada endorsed the decision, underscoring the need for a sound financial plan as part of the long-term strategy (see page 21).

On March 30, Ron Rempel, executive director, shared the board’s strategic direction with the MPN staff.—Mennonite Publishing Network

Two new leaders for Executive Board
Staff restructuring marks shift in communication, fund-raising strategies

Barth Hague and Marty Lehman will join other members of Mennonite Church USA’s staff to help chart the denomination’s course. Both will be accountable to James Schrag, executive director of Mennonite Church USA.

Hague, vice president of marketing services for M M A, the stewardship agency of Mennonite Church USA, began April 1 as interim director of communication. Lehman, CEO of Adriel School, a residential and foster-care ministry in West Liberty, Ohio, will begin July 1 as full-time director of financial development.

These appointments result from actions taken by the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA at its late January meeting, Schrag says. The board requested that he plan to collaborate with M M A based on the pew survey and communications inventory that Hague initiated in fall 2003 (see “Survey: One-Third Excited About Church,” Feb. 17).

“Constituents told me in many spoken and unspoken ways that they want to commit to the denomination,” says Hague, who will implement some of his recommendations arising from the survey-inventory. “They want to feel emotionally connected to the missional calling of Mennonite Church USA and want ownership in how that gets expressed in their communities and around the world.”

That survey revealed that many constituents are still vague about Mennonite Church USA and thus are slow to support it financially. Hague hopes to help buoy the missional identity of the denomination, while Lehman hopes to help build its funding base.

“I believe younger generations have a lot to say to us about this,” says Lehman, who worked at the former Mennonite Board of Missions and as director of admissions at Goshen (Ind.) College.

M M A is releasing Hague to work three-quarters time for the denomination. Funding for Lehman’s position will be shared by Executive Board, M M A, Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Publishing Network and Mennonite Education Agency.—Laurie L. Oswald for Mennonite Church USA News Service

MPN has been called by the church to change from being a ‘house’ to becoming a ‘network.’
—Ron Sawatsky
Health, service agencies form alliance
Network of institutions will be accountable to Mennonite Church USA.

A network of institutions will be accountable to Mennonite Church USA. An association of some 70 health-care and human-service organizations formally joined together to become MHS Alliance on March 25. Their combined budgets total $892,651,000 with more than 1,500 employees serving 75,526 clients, many of whom are members of Anabaptist congregations in the United States.

Most of the MHS Alliance member organizations already relate—at least indirectly—to one of three U.S. denominations: Brethren in Christ, Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite Church USA. New bylaws adopted by representatives from those organizations will make MHS Alliance formally accountable to all three denominations after each denomination approves the bylaws, as expected, by July 1.

“The bylaws provide a degree of accountability and subordination to the relating denominations,” says Rick Stiffney, CEO and president of Mennonite Health Services. “While we have three denominations that we relate to, Mennonite Church USA is the big one.”

The new relationship to denominational structures is an about-face from the direction established for many of these same Mennonite institutions in the 1980s. At that time, Mennonite health-care and human-service organizations—most of which began as ministries of the church—were rebuffed when they asked for a formal accountability to denominational structures (see box).

“I remember Mennonite Church saying to us in 1985, ‘You institutions are too complex for us,’” says Duane Oswald, Fresno, Calif. At the time, Oswald worked with Mennonite Mental Health Services; currently he owns a consulting business and is moderator of Mennonite Church USA.

The board structure, established by MHS Alliance provides six seats to be filled by the “relating denominations,” six seats to be filled by member organizations and two at-large seats to be filled by the board itself. Of the six seats set aside for the three denominations, four will be for Mennonite Church USA. The Brethren in Christ and Mennonite Brethren denominations will each have one seat.


In the “alliance” structure all organizations participate as equal members. In addition, 18 organizations are sponsored by MHS Alliance. That means they will be reviewed annually against a set of Alliance values and have acceded to MHS Alliance certain reserve powers, such as approval of their bylaws, appointment of some board members and Alliance participation in the hiring of a chief executive officer.

Stiffney said that the process of moving from Mennonite Health Services to MHS Alliance resulted in the organization growing: Only one former member dropped out while as many as nine new organizations are joining.—Everett J. Thomas
Although logistics for the Charlotte 2005 convention are falling into place, the Joint Executive Committee (JEC) is unsure what to do with three hours of time reserved for Canadian and U.S. delegates to meet jointly. This uncertainty follows an about-face on whether to even have a joint U.S.-Canada assembly in 2005.

In March 2003 the JEC decided to “discontinue our planning for a binational convention in 2005.” But Mennonite Church Canada General Board rejected the JEC’s decision and indicated they wanted to hold their 2005 gathering in Charlotte, N.C., with Mennonite Church USA.

The JEC debate on March 26-27 about what to do during three hours of joint delegate sessions at Charlotte 2005 quickly turned to the future of the relationship between Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

“If we want to have a serious relationship north and south,” said Mennonite Church USA moderator-elect Roy Williams, “then we need to do more than get together and sing ‘Kum Ba Yah.’”

Williams noted that racial-ethnic groups in Mennonite Church USA question why the U.S. church should have an ongoing and special relationship with Mennonite Church Canada.

“The European cultures [in the two denominations] feel it is very important … to get together,” Williams said, “but within Mennonite Church USA, the white folks want to maximize relationships with the North, and Hispanics want to maximize relationships with the South.”

Dan Nighswander, general secretary for Mennonite Church Canada, says Asian groups are the growth edge for his denomination; that means Canadian Mennonite relationships in the future will increasingly extend west.

“Our churches are moving in different directions,” Nighswander says.

JEC directed the moderators and staff to bring a proposal for delegate sessions to their fall meeting.

Theme: Other parts of the 2005 convention are decided, however. Convention planner Jorge Vallejos announced that the theme for the convention will be “Can’t Keep Quiet.” The theme was chosen by the convention planning committee as an expression of Acts 4:20. All worship sessions will be joint as well as workshops and tours.

Participants from the United States will pay a registration fee of $165 U.S., which is the same amount charged for the Atlanta 2003 and Nashville 2001 conventions. Canadian delegates will pay $75 Canadian, while Canadian youth convention participants will be able to pay their $165 registration fee in Canadian dollars. However, all participants will pay room and board in U.S. dollars. The 13-meal plan will be $167, and the average hotel room price will be $75 per night. Vallejos said that the average hotel room rate in Charlotte will be lower than the average hotel room rates were at the 2003 Canadian and U.S. conventions.

Charlotte 2005 will begin Monday, July 4, and conclude on Saturday, July 9. Vallejos said this schedule will be less problematic than former schedules for those who take off work to attend.

The JEC also heard a financial report from Mennonite Publishing Network leaders and ratified the MPN board’s action to develop a plan to vacate their facility in Scottdale, Pa., within five years (see page 19).—Everett J. Thomas
Seeds planted over three decades blossomed and bore sweet fruit when people from various parts of the West African country of Burkina Faso gathered to dedicate two books of portions of the Bible in the Samogho language last month. The event celebrated God’s written word and Samogho culture in Saraba, a remote village where only a handful of people read and write.

Burkina Faso has been home for the Donna and Loren Entz family since the 1970s. There they minister with the support of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission and Mennonite Mission Network. The three Entz children learned to work alongside Burkinabé friends while their parents learned the Samogho language and gained the confidence of the village elders.

“Before our arrival in Burkina Faso, we were told that we might be obliged to do some sort of development work in order to earn a hearing for the gospel message [among a Muslim people],” Donna says. “What we experienced was that people loved to talk about their religious beliefs, and we could be very open in talking about our relationship with God. Had we gone with the idea that it was wrong to share our faith with these brothers and sisters, we would almost certainly have been cut off from any deep relationship.”

From the beginning of their ministry in Burkina Faso, the Entzes were opposed to mass evangelistic campaigns because they felt the here-today-gone-tomorrow approach inoculated people against radical discipleship. They chose instead an incarnational strategy emphasizing deeply rooted relationships and the powerful impact of God’s Word shared in a people’s native tongue.

Working as a team with educated Muslim translators, Donna and Loren began to translate Bible stories. During the translation process, the translators decided to become followers of Jesus and founded the first Samogho church.

Over the years, the biblical story of salvation has been shared around evening fires—the Samogho schoolroom—where traditional stories pass on values to subsequent generations. To further extend the impact of the story of Jesus, solar-powered cassette players have been given to village elders in neighboring villages.

The 22 one-hour cassettes feature 80 Old Testament narratives, the Gospel of Luke and the story of the early church found in the first chapters of Acts.—Lynda Hollinger-Janzen for Mennonite Mission Network News Service
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Herald Press will produce a new cookbook following in the tradition of More-with-Less and Extending the Table. The book, to be written by nutritionist Mary Beth Lind and journalist Cathleen Hockman-Wert, will encourage eating locally produced foods, in season.

“Today the average item of food travels over 1,000 miles before it lands on our tables,” Lind says. “The results are far-reaching but seldom considered by consumers. This new cookbook will explore how the foods we put on our tables impact our local and global neighbors.”

Recipes will be collected from a variety of sources, including MCC constituents, and tested by volunteers following the model of the other books in MCC’s World Community Cookbook series. A Web site will serve as a clearinghouse for these activities. At www.morewithless.org, interested people can submit recipes for possible use in the book, volunteer to be testers and give feedback about the recipes they’ve tested.

Hockman-Wert and Lind are seeking simple, nutritious and delicious dishes prepared with whole foods, but with 21st-century twists such as pesto and tofu. Highest priority will be given to recipes that use primarily ingredients that are ripe in one season.

MCC constituents are invited to share their own reflections on eating with the seasons on the www.morewithless.org discussion board. Those without Web access may request a recipe submission form by calling 888-563-4676.—Mennonite Central Committee News Service

Calling all cooks
MCC invites recipes, food testers.

Today the average item of food travels over 1,000 miles before it lands on our tables.
—Mary Beth Lind
FOR THE RECORD

CALENDAR

6th Annual Hymn Sing for Peace, U.S. Capitol Building Reflecting Pool steps, Washington, D.C., May 22, 2:00-2:30 p.m. For more information call 804-359-1308; email leshorning@aol.com; or go to http://peace.mennolink.org/hymnsing.

WORKERS

Rodriguez-Lora, Nancy, was licensed March 21 as pastor at Roselawn Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind.

Ulrich, Sarah, began a one-year voluntary service assignment in the Hertford (England) Community Church March 22 with Mennonite Mission Network’s Youth Ministry.

BIRTHS & ADOPTIONS

Bauman, Carly Avery, March 17, to Rod and Gloria Brubacher Bauman, Elmira, Ont.

Browning, James Laurence, March 11, to Brian and Sharon A. Browning, Cary, N.C.

Emerson, Elliott Charles, March 2, to Bruce and Marguerite Mongru Emerson, Des Allemands, La.

Good, Austin Travis, March 3, to Travis and Janie Lucas Good, Ephrata, Pa.

Hamm, Madelynn Faith, March 13, to Kevin and Renee Schmidt Hamm, Newton, Kan.

Kauffman, Ryli Nicole, Jan. 2, to Roger and Jody Kauffman, Gibson City, Ill.

Maillet, Lexi Brooke, March 5, to Brad and Carmen Hackman Maillet, Luling, La.


Mast-Hochestedler, Norah Grace, Feb. 27, to Ben Hochestedler and Sarah Mast, Milwaukee, Wis.

McMannis, Hunter Wilson, Jan. 6, to Michael and Kristy Ramirez McMannis, Pa.

Phengsitthy, Rachel, March 1, to Kevin and Sivilay Phengsitthy, Harrisonburg, Va.

Rhodes, Sidney Louise, March 15, to Winston and Rene Emswiler Rhodes, Harrisonburg, Va.


Schrag, Jacob Warren and Timothy Daniel (twins), March 8, to Eric and Gretchen Gering Schrag, Goessel, Kan.

Terven, Blake Alexander, March 17, to Kevin and Amy Rogers Terven, Dewey, Del.


MARRIAGES


Fawcett/Mauton: Derek Fawcett, Sterling, Ohio, and Samantha Mauton, Kansas City, Mo., Jan. 10 at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church, Kidron, Ohio.

Nelsen/Rinlee: Lacey Nelsen, Dorchester, Neb., and Matt Rinlee, Lindale, Texas, Feb. 7 at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Neb.

Nisly/Sommers: Robin Nisly, Hartville, Ohio, and Brendan Sommers, Jan 17 at Hartville (Ohio) Mennonite Church.

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— Amy Barker
Campus Pastor

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1-800-522-1687
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DEATHS


Rouner, Evelyn, 82, Hessoton, Kan., died March 5. Parents: Jacob and Emma Mae Reber Rouner. Funeral: March 14 at Hessoton Mennonite Church.


FOR THE RECORD

To submit event information to The Mennonite, log on at www.TheMennonite.org and use the “For the Record” button to access our on-line forms. You can also submit by email, fax or mail:

• Editor@TheMennonite.org
• Fax 574-535-6050
• 1700 S. Main St., Goshen, IN 46526-4794

A new generation of pastors and church leaders is being formed at AMBS as students study, worship, learn ministry skills and explore their gifts.

You can help prepare the next generation of pastors for the church.

To recommend a student or make a gift to AMBS, see the AMBS web site: www.ambs.edu

April 20, 2004 TheMennonite 25

It is important to have a firm rooting in the history, culture and theology of the Mennonite church. AMBS is a gathering point of Mennonite thinkers and doers and is an excellent place to form lasting relationships with present and future church leaders.

— Joel Millet, AMBS student in the Master of Divinity program from Bellefontaine, Ohio, and St Louis, Mo., recipient of a full tuition Church Leadership Award.


Bluffton College seeks applicants for the following positions: Archives and special collections librarian beginning Aug. 1. This 12-month position has primary responsibility for the archives and the Mennonite historical collections. The focus of this position is in the development of a program that supports the integration of these collections into the curriculum of the college and encourages undergraduate research. Required: Master’s degree from an ALA-accredited program; archives and/or special collections experience and training, including preservation; commitment to user-oriented library services and undergraduate research; excellent oral and written communication skills. Preferred: Minimum three years experience in an academic library setting; broad knowledge of Mennonite and Anabaptist history and thought; reading knowledge of German; familiarity with MARC format cataloging for special collections materials and knowledge of current archival descriptive practices.

Assistant professor in art for one year (with possible extension) beginning fall semester 2004. Teach courses in graphic design and two-dimensional studio media. Additional assignments in art foundations and general education. MFA in graphic design with two years professional experience. Expertise in painting and drawing or printmaking also preferred. In addition to the materials listed below, submit an exhibition record with the vita and a slide portfolio featuring 20 works of art.

Review of applications begins immediately and continues until an appointment is made. Send letter of interest, vita, three letters of reference (submitted directly from the referee) and official transcripts to Elaine Suderman, Academic Affairs, Bluffton College, 280 W. College Ave., Bluffton, OH 45817-1196. Bluffton College welcomes applications from all academically qualified persons who respect the Anabaptist-Mennonite peace church tradition and who endorse Christian higher education in a liberal arts environment. Equal opportunity employer. Members of underrepresented groups are encouraged to apply.<http://www.bluffton.edu/about/employment/index.html>.

Cove Valley Youth Camp near Mercersburg, Pa., is accepting applications for the position of executive director. This position will be available in July 2004. This position is responsible for the overall operation of the camp, including rentals, promotion, hiring and supervising staff. The executive director works with the program director in managing the summer youth camps and with the caretaker in overseeing the camp facilities. Please send resume to Del Martin, 1910 Spring View Drive, Chambersburg, PA 17201; email del@delprint.com.

Filer Mennonite Church, in south-central Idaho, a stable and mature congregation of 50, is looking for the pastor that God has prepared for us. All inquiries treated with respect and confidentiality. Gary Hooley, chair, pastor search committee, 3575 N 2300 E., Lake, Ont., requires a full-time senior pastor. The pastor will be responsible for a 600-member congregation. Candidate should have strong biblical and Anabaptist beliefs, be good in preaching and administration, and be able to work well in a team ministry. Please contact Paul M. Zehr, 209 Henrietta Ave., Lancaster, PA 17602; phone 717-299-6104; email zehrpm@emu.edu.

Eastern Mennonite University is seeking qualified applicants for the position of director of alumni and parent relations. This position is responsible for the alumni and parent constituencies of the university: to listen and secure their advocacy, to promote the mission of EMU and to encourage participation and support. The director plans alumni and parent programs that achieve the above purposes. Bachelor’s degree required. Experience in alumni and parent relations programming preferred. Must demonstrate strong verbal, written and administrative skills.

For more information visit our Web site at www.emu.edu. Send letter of application, resume and three references to: Human Resources Office, Eastern Mennonite University, 1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, VA 22802; fax 540-432-4444. Review of applications will begin immediately. The position will remain open until filled. Persons who bring gender, ethnic and cultural diversity are encouraged to apply.

Oaklawn Psychiatric Center in northern Indiana has an immediate opening for a psychologist. Doctoral degree meeting the requirements for Indiana licensure. Indiana license with HSPP endorsement or eligibility preferred. Salary is commensurate with experience and qualifications. You may send a resume via mail, fax or email to Human Resources, Oaklawn, P.O. Box 809, Goshen, IN 46527; fax 574-537-2698; email humanresources@oaklawn.org. Learn more about us and other opportunities available by visiting www.oaklawn.org. An equal opportunity employer.

Tri County Mennonite Homes (TCMH) invites applications for the position of executive director. TCMH, with its head office in New Hamburg, Ont. is a not-for-profit charitable corporation sponsored by 18 congregations of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. TCMH is a comprehensive community resource serving the counties of Waterloo, Perth and Oxford that provides residential services for seniors ranging from independent housing through to long-term care as well as services to adults with developmental disabilities. The executive director is accountable to and responsible for implementing the actions and directions of the TCMH’s board of directors and for coordinating the activities of the corporate office staff, in addition to supporting the administrators in each of three operating divisions.

A full employment description is available online at www.tcmhomes.com. Resumes for this position will be received until April 26 and may be submitted by email to ed@tcmhomes.com; or mailed to Search Committee Chair, Tri County Mennonite Homes, 200 Boulee St., New Hamburg, Ont. N3A 2K4.

Penn View Christian School is seeking a librarian beginning in the 2004-05 school year. This individual will provide vision, leadership and management for all aspects of a technology focused media center including the instruction of students (K-5) in library and information access skills. Experience in teaching is preferred; advanced degree in library science is helpful. Candidate must be willing to pursue certification in library science. Penn View offers a Christ-centered, academically excellent education for students in preschool through eighth grade. Send your resume to Robert Rutt, Executive Director, Penn View Christian School, 420 Cowpath Road, Souderton, PA 18964; 215-723-1196; email brutt@pennview.org.
Unique reunion opportunity in Pennsylvania for families. Because of a shift in Spruce Lake Retreat’s 2004 summer calendar, two weeks have opened up in our otherwise full summer schedule that may provide an ideal time for your family reunion: June 6-11 and June 13-18. As a special offer, during these two weeks only, family groups will receive a 20-percent discount on all meals and lodging. Rates include full use of Spruce Lake’s beautiful Pocono Mountain property and numerous recreation options. First come, first served! For reservations, please call Spruce Lake Retreat at 800-822-7505; email info@sprucelake.org; or visit the Web at www.sprucelake.org.

Lake Center Christian School is accepting applications for the following positions: full-time special needs coordinator; full-time J.H./H.S. science teacher; part-time phys. ed. teacher; part-time Spanish teacher. LCCS is a K-10 school (adding 11th and 12th over the next two years) of 500 students in the Akron-Canton area. For an application and further information, contact Matt McMullen, Superintendent, at 330-877-2049, ext. 32 or lccsmcmullen@yahoo.com. Lake Center Christian School, 12893 Kaufman Ave. N.W., Hartville, OH 44648.

Jubilee Association of Maryland provides residential and support-living services to adults who have developmental disabili- ties. We have two key positions: Director of program services to provide leadership and supervise nine professional staff and all services to 90 participants. Req: B.A./B.S. (master’s preferred); five years relevant and progressively responsible experience. Starts mid- to upper 40s. Program manager to supervise team of 10-15 staff and the services they provide in group homes and semi-independent living. BA/BS in human service field and minimum two years experience required. Starts mid-30s plus great benefits. Please visit our Web site: www.jubileemd.org for a complete list- ing of our services, positions and benefits. Email cover letter and resume to hrmanager@jubileemd.org or mail to 10408 Montgomery Ave. Kensington, MD 20895.

Camp Deeppark is seeking to fill the position of food service director. This person is responsible for all aspects of food service, including planning menus, food preparation and supervision of kitchen volunteers and staff. Salaried position with benefits, including housing and insurance. Camp Deeppark is owned and operated by the New York City Mennonite Churches and offers people of all ages, races and backgrounds the opportunity to enjoy Christian camping at an affordable price. For more information please contact Ken Bontrager at 845-754-8669 or Deeppark@warwick.net.

Mennonite Home Communities invites applicants for the position of director of development. The director of development will be responsible for developing, planning, organizing and implement- ing creative fund-raising activities, projects and special events. The position will work to increase funds available for benevolent care, building programs and other needs. Requirements include a bachelo- rer’s degree and three to five years experience in fund-raising.

To submit resumes to Dave Shenk, VP Human Resources, Mennonite Home Communities, 1520 Harrisburg Pike, Lancaster, PA 17601; email dshenk@mennonitehome.org; or visit the Web at www.sprucelake.org.

Classified

Advertising space in The Mennonite is available to congre- gations, conferences, businesses, and churchwide boards and agencies. Cost for one-time classified placement is $1.15 per word, minimum of $30. Display space is also available. To place an ad in The Mennonite, call 800-790-2498 and ask for Marla Cole, or email TheMennonite@TheMennonite.org.
Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College invites applications for a newly opened, full-time position in agroecology. The academic focus of this position is in the field of agroecology. The assistant professor of agroecology is responsible for designing and teaching pilot courses in the summer program. The role of the collegiate program director includes program development, student recruitment, grant writing and collaboration with other institutions of higher education and professional organizations. The programs and pedagogy will utilize Merry Lea's distinctive field opportunities. A graduate degree in an area of agroecology is required, with preference given to candidates with a doctorate and/or significant relevant work experience related to the administrative functions of the job description.

To apply, visit the specific position announcement on the Goshen College Web page, www.goshen.edu. Women and minority persons are encouraged to apply. Goshen College, an affirmative action employer, is committed to Christian beliefs and values as interpreted by the Mennonite Church. Administrative and teaching faculty members are expected to share this commitment.

Eastern Mennonite University, Lancaster, Pa., branch, seeks director for the M.A. in Education program. Director will provide leadership to M.A. in Education program and teach courses. Ph.D. preferred. Responsible for vision, marketing, recruitment and candidate advisement. Position open July 2004. EMU seeks persons who are supportive of Anabaptist-Mennonite Christian faith practices. Candidates send letter of application, vitae, transcripts and three references to Beryl Brubaker, Academic Provost and Graduate Dean, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, or email provost@emu.edu. Review will begin immediately. AAEO employer. Women and minorities are encouraged to apply.

Anabaptists! Anabaptist Connections newsletter available. Newsletter reviews Swiss-Anabaptist reconciliation status and timely articles. Also the book Rekindling the Anabaptist Flame. $10 PPD. Phone 406-293-2442 or 406-293-2980; HCR61 Box 140RD, Bonners Ferry, ID 83805.

Eastern Mennonite University seeks part-time pastoral ministry program director, Lancaster, Pa., to implement an associate degree-level program for pastors in Lancaster Mennonite Conference. Will increase to full-time in future. Master's degree in pastoral/theological field and pastoral experience required. Doctorate preferred. Experience in adult education including expertise in nontraditional delivery systems preferred. Position open July 2004. Candidates send letter of application, vitae, transcripts and three references to Beryl Brubaker, Academic Provost and Graduate Dean, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, or email provost@emu.edu. Review will begin immediately. AAEO employer. Women and minorities are encouraged to apply.

Spruce Lake Retreat, a dynamic, multifaceted camping ministry relating to the Mennonite Church, seeks a ministry-minded person with fund-raising experience to serve at least three-quarter-time as development associate. This person will work alongside our development director in soliciting gifts for our current major capital campaign and in planning and coordinating fund-raising activities. Salary and liberal benefits package provided. On-campus housing may be available if needed, or applicant may work out of their home community if within a reasonable proximity. Spruce Lake Retreat is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. Send résumé to Executive Director, RR 1, Box 605, Canadensis, PA 18325; phone 800-822-7505; fax 570-595-0328; email director@sprucleake.org.

Mennonite Publishing Network is seeking a director of operations. Responsibilities include: providing on-site supervision for MPN's administrative support services currently located in Scottdale, Pa.; helping develop and implement a long-term strategy to relocate MPN operations to centers of Mennonite population. This new position is required by MPN as soon as possible. Contact Ron Rempel, executive director, rrempel@mph.org, 519-496-9487.
Looking for God in all the pop places

One of the premises of this column is that the wider culture and its artifacts (media) are the ocean we swim in, the air we breathe, and we need to pay attention to what is going on there. Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor go further: “Popular culture stands as a vibrant and vital arena of spiritual expression.”

In their book A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture (Baker Academic, 2003, $17.99) they “examine different aspects of popular culture ‘not as ends in themselves but as means of unlocking their meaning in the culture as a whole.’” Whether we like it or not, ads, movies, television and music have a huge influence on people—including us. These writers go so far as to call pop culture “the collected wisdom of our era.”

They are more positive than I am (and you may think I’m too positive) about popular culture. Nevertheless, I agree with them that the church dare not ignore the wider culture or the spiritual hunger it shows. They write, “There is a conversation about God going on in popular culture that the church is not engaged in and is often unaware of.”

Detweiler teaches mass communications and is a screenwriter. Taylor teaches theology and is a professional musician and painter. Together they tackle the ambitious task of exploring the interplay of a Christian worldview with various aspects of popular culture. They include chapters on advertising, celebrities, music, movies, television, fashion, sports and art. The breadth of their coverage of these areas is impressive, and a discussion group could spend several rewarding sessions with each of these chapters.

Here are just a few provocative nuggets: “Advertising has replaced spirituality as our shaping story.” “People are not as naive or as gullible as we sometimes think they are.” “We should take seriously the religious function of both advertising and consumerism.” “Fashion is a series of signs that unlock at least part of the pop culture psyche.” “Art continually explores new ways of expressing timeless facts about human existence. Theology often seems intent on simply maintaining the status quo, and that will not suffice in these times.”

Also sure to provoke discussion, Detweiler and Taylor conclude with “A Top 10 Theology” that speaks to the new, postmodern era we live in:

1. Post-national—Diverse
2. Post-rational—Experiential
3. Post-literal—Mythological
4. Post-human—Real
5. Post-traumatic/therapeutic—Bloody
6. Post-racial—Colorful
7. Post-sexual—Embodied
8. Post-scientific/technological—Mysterious
9. Post-ethical/institutional—Humorous
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These writers believe “popular culture continues to redefine the relationship between the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane. People of faith should do the same.” Yes, we should.

BOOKS

Fierce Goodbye: Living in the Shadow of Suicide by G. Lloyd Carr and Gwendolyn C. Carr (Herald Press, 2004, $10.99) tells of one family dealing with suicide (the authors’ daughter-in-law), offers guidance and provides a summary of Christian thinking about suicide, which families and pastors will find useful. The title comes from one of Gwendolyn Carr’s poems interspersed through the book.

Films

The Barbarian Invasions (R), which won the Oscar for best foreign-language film, is about death—both the imminent death of a retired professor in Montreal and the looming death of civilization. The dying man, surrounded by his ex-wife, friends, former mistresses and his estranged son, shuns religion yet experiences a mysterious grace as his life draws to an end.

DISTURBING STATS

- More Bethlehemites live in Chile than in Bethlehem. Today Christians make up less than 2 percent of the population of Israel-Palestine.—New York Review of Books, quoted in Context
- All told, America is taking 75 gallons of groundwater for every 60 that nature puts back in. The Ogallala Aquifer, which stretches from North Dakota to Texas and supports a fifth of the irrigated farmland in the United States, is half gone. In 2001, the Rio Grande ceased flowing into the Gulf of Mexico.—Jonathan Rowe in Business Ethics, quoted in The Marketplace
- Black Americans are less likely than white Americans to own homes, don’t earn as much as whites, don’t live as long and don’t do as well in school. Black earning power is about 73 percent that of whites.—National Urban League in a report released March 31
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Mennonites and cinema

Joe Longacher of First Mennonite Church, Richmond, Va., writes in the church’s newsletter about a group of members who watched movies, then met to discuss them. Joe writes that movies “can evoke a wide spectrum of emotional response to spiritual themes and provide opportunity for dialogue among those of widely divergent reactions.” They discussed each movie’s story line, identified heroes and villains, noted whether or not there was a Christ figure and what moral lessons might be gleaned from it. Over a 3½-year period they discussed about 30 movies, including The Cider House Rules, Keeping the Faith, You Can Count on Me, Chocolat, Finding Forrester, A Beautiful Mind, In the Bedroom, Rabbit-Proof Fence, About Schmidt, Bruce Almighty and Seabiscuit.—MennoNet (March)

Goshen (Ind.) College held its second annual Hazel Wolf Environmental Film Festival March 31-April 2. The 16 films covered such topics as industrial agriculture, wetlands biodiversity, pesticides, Thomas Berry, consumption and “timber wars.”—Goshen College News Service
Today we enjoy more wealth, more choices, and more opportunities than ever before. But with them comes greater responsibility — and often, more difficulty deciding how to use these resources.

To help you manage your assets in ways that are consistent with your values, MMA offers products, services, and expert advice — all grounded in the Anabaptist faith tradition:

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- Programs and tools to help share your resources with others

Make the most of your God-given resources. Call us today at (800) 348-7468 or visit us online at www.mma-online.org.

All products may not be available in every state.
The tide turns

A rising tide lifts all boats. In this case, the tide is God’s Spirit moving under Mennonite Church USA. Just as one cannot literally see the tide move up the shoreline, neither is it possible to see changes immediately. But by looking away for a while and then back, the change becomes clear.

Over the past months, an accumulation of evidence points to Mennonite Church USA gathering momentum. The following developments illustrate the good news:

• Lancaster Mennonite Conference bishops recommended to their congregations that their conference become a permanent member of Mennonite Church USA. South Central Mennonite Conference leaders did the same, and now New York conference follows suit (page 6).
• A powerful group of organizations—with the new name MHS Alliance—want to connect with Mennonite Church USA for primary accountability (page 20). This alliance, with nearly $900 million in operating budgets and 1,500 employees, sees strength emerging in Mennonite Church USA and is determined to align itself with our denomination.
• Funding for denominational programs and agencies has begun to stabilize; most ended their recent fiscal years with more money than expected after reducing their budgets.
• The Constituency Leaders Council—which functions as a rough parallel in Mennonite Church USA to the council of elders in Acts 15 that led the New Testament church—has finally worked through the big and potentially divisive issues around church membership. At their last meeting, this group of key leaders was able to step back and examine the important rather than the urgent.
• The identity of the new denomination is making significant headway. From a dead start three years ago, a recent survey showed that already one-quarter of the members in Mennonite Church USA understand that this denomination’s identity will be different from the identities of its predecessor denominations. In ecumenical circles, leaders from other denominations are amazed at how quickly Mennonites are coming to see that the church’s responsibility is to respond to ways God is already at work in the world.

These markers show the tide rising for the fledgling Mennonite Church USA, and leaders across the church deserve credit for being faithful to God’s calling in this new chapter of our ecclesiastical history. However, there remain some significant challenges ahead for these same leaders:

• Too many area conferences are struggling for their own viability and identity. All the energy spent creating this new denomination came at a cost to some area conferences that now are struggling to adjust their budgets—and identities—as the denominational field of gravity increases.
• The new realities of this denomination come at significant cost to individuals who worked faithfully for years in the predecessor denominations and agencies. Layoffs in Newton, Kan., and Elkhart, Ind., terminated the jobs of dozens of church agency employees. Most dramatic now is a decision by Mennonite Publishing Network to create a plan for vacating the Scottdale, Pa., facility in the next five years (page 19).
• The relationship of our new denomination to Mennonite Church Canada is confusing. At St. Louis 1999, leaders in both countries spoke of “one denomination; two-country structures.” But leaders may have allowed that phrase to remain on the lips of delegates to placate those grieving the loss of their sisters and brothers in the other country. We now need leaders in both denominations to provide new language for the relationship (page 21).

God has been good to us during the 27 months since the official beginning of Mennonite Church USA. The decision to create two national denominations out of two binational denominations was the right thing to do. But some of the changes caused by that decision have been painful, and it may have felt like the church was running aground at times. Nevertheless and through it all, God’s Spirit buoyed us: Our new denomination is now being lifted by God’s providence and graciousness. This rising tide floats our boat.—ejt