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**Modeled for Amish novel**

Regarding Valerie Weaver-Zercher’s “The Amish Makeover of Christian Fiction” (April): Beyond being an editor with Mennonite Women USA, I am also a model and actress in Minneapolis. Last summer, I was hired for a book cover of an Amish romance novel. It was a reshoot of an old cover of Beverly Lewis’ book *The Prodigal*.

When I went to the photographer’s studio to get my hair and makeup done by an Amish makeup artist expert, I ended up having a wonderful conversation with the crew about Mennonites and Amish and the roots of Anabaptism. This particular photographer shoots many of the book covers for Beverly Lewis, since her books are published by Bethany House Publishers, which is in Minnesota. He takes his work very seriously and has actual Amish clothes made by the Amish. Each head covering is stored alone in its own container.

For this book cover, the best one conveyed the woes of its main character. See it at [http://d.gr-assets.com/books/1364182262l/236903.jpg](http://d.gr-assets.com/books/1364182262l/236903.jpg).—Claire DeBerg, Timbrel editor

**Ethiopia did have alphabet**

I am much in agreement with John Roth on his observations of the Meserete Kristos Church of Ethiopia as outlined in the first two paragraphs of his column, “And When They Shall Ask” (April). However, I question his understanding of Ethiopia’s long-standing Axumite civilization and his conclusion about the country’s written tradition throughout his comments. His assertion that in Ethiopia nothing is fixed in print deserves a response.

Ethiopia is the only country on the continent of Africa that had its own alphabet since A.D. 330 and its calendar since A.D. 212. Sharing the Christian gospel in Ethiopia is a centuries-old practice. Research shows that Ethiopians had heard the Christian gospel long before the followers of Menno Simons were known to the world. In the words of Nathan Hege (1998), “While our barbarian [forebears] were fighting each other and were drinking from the skulls of those they killed, Ethiopians were chanting the Psalms and worshiping the Lord God.”

One would assume that there must have been something in writing in order for Ethiopians to chant from the book of Psalms. Roth asked what stories we will tell our children. As for me, I tell my children that Ethiopians actually had a written language in Geez for centuries, enabling them to share the gospel story both in writing as well as orally. I hope we can all find ways to accurately share the story of Ethiopian history.—Zenebe Abebe, Indianapolis

**I am a Christian**

Your March issue was full of commendatory articles, but there’s not enough space to comment on all. Justin King’s “I am a Christian” was evidence of a brave revelation of his strong sense of what it is to be a Christian. I concur heartily with what he is expressing. I sent a copy of this issue to my friend, a college professor in a southern university who is struggling to be a Christian among his “far right” colleagues.—John Bergey, Hesper, Kan.

**Subtitle is troublesome**

Here at Eastern Mennonite Missions, our communications team is again disappointed about the choice of subtitle for our recent news release printed in
the April issue of The Mennonite:
“Dows tried to cap their household at 25 children, slept with eight infants.”
I do not deny that the phrase “slept with eight infants” exists in the text of our news release. But in a day when child abuse is frequently in the news, the choice of this phrase as a subtitle borders on sensationalism. If I had known that this phrase would be highlighted in this way I would have pulled it from the text before releasing.

We work very hard to keep our releases focused on the positive and potential rather than over-emphasizing or sensationalizing the negative. Please help us in this regard.—Joe Hollinger, advancement director, Eastern Mennonite Missions

Decision was agonizing
The April issue was truly an extra “Resurrected Joy” for us this Easter. Both the news report of MHS Alliance’s unanimous decision seeking to become a program agency of Mennonite Church USA and the “Welcome Back!” editorial were well-written and positive. And I chuckled at Gene Yoder’s blunt yet realistic reflection that “a firewall” was needed 30 years ago. But I also know the many hours that Mennonite Board of Missions—both staff and board—spent agonizing through that “spinoff” process. It was painful in many ways. Yet the mission board had neither the time nor expertise to continue dealing with governance issues for a variety of institutions scattered from east to west. So I join the prayer that Phoenix will indeed be a healing celebration for all who have been involved.—James Metzler, Remlap, Ala.

Support for Van Steenwyk
Thank you for Joanna Shenk’s interview of Mark Van Steenwyk entitled “A Mennonite Anarchist” (February). We, the members of the Outreach and Service Committee of Central Plains Mennonite Conference, have worked with and gotten to know Mark over the past few years. Through prayers and finances, the Central Plains Mennonite Conference has supported Mark’s work as he interacts with Mennonites and other groups throughout the United States, seeking to be followers of Jesus.

We hope the readers of The Mennonite will understand that Christian anarchists try to take direct action to support the poor and feed the hungry instead of merely waiting or relying on others to address this never-ending need. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “[if you] share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house, … then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."

We applaud and encourage Mark Van Steenwyk and the members of The Mennonite Worker community in Minneapolis as they fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah by living the life that Jesus calls us to live.—Roger Farmer, Dennis Lehmann, Fernando Ramos, Rachelle Luitjens, Gebremichael Heramo, Don Kemp, Katie Spohn, Holly Blosser Yoder and David Boshart

I am responding to Jeff Linthicum (March) and his admonition that there are “no Mennonite anarchists.” I would never question brother Linthicum as to his “evangelical Mennonite” belief system. He calls himself a Mennonite, and I take him at his word. Maybe we should do the same with brother Mark Van Steenwyk, who was the subject of “A Mennonite Anarchist” (February).

I found the argument put forward by Van Steenwyk compelling and in need of being expanded in our Radical Reformation circle of ideas. We do not need to stand around with our arms folded guarding the gate in fear that a new idea might destroy our total belief system. We could call Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, Hans Denck, Felix Mantz, Michael Sattler and (Continued on page 54)

Rachel Weaver Kreider will turn 104 on May 28. Hers is a remarkable life, and we are grateful for the profile of this centenarian written by Dorothy Yoder Nyce (page 12).

We are also grateful for the work Rachel Halder (page 20) is doing to raise awareness of sexualized violence in the church.

“Sexualized violence affects everyone and is a widespread issue in the United States,” Halder writes. “Yet … the majority in the Mennonite church seems uninterested in discussing the topic. There are many reasons why.”

In “Jesus’ ‘Feminine’ Wisdom” (page 28), Bert Newton offers a fresh look at Jesus in John’s Gospel and says Jesus’ teachings “often inverted the male honor code of his day.”

As we approach the Phoenix convention in July, we also increase the number of articles related to this convention and one of the primary issues focused by the location: U.S. immigration policy. Marco Saavedra, an undocumented poet and painter, writes “An Undocumented on Justification,” the third article in our series of convention-related articles (page 24). In Leadership, archivist John D. Thiesen asks, “What Does an Immigrant Look Like?” (page 30), and Executive Board staff member Hillary J. Scarsella describes the Mennonite churches in the Phoenix area, including how they care for their undocumented neighbors (page 33). In another convention matter, Gordon Houser reports on two Executive Board resolutions coming to delegates (page 32).

Finally, a midwinter debate about “The Naked Anabaptist” brings Alan Kreider and Stuart Murray (page 16) with a response to Ron Adams and Isaac Villegas, who asked in a February article, “Post-Christendom or Neo-Christendom?”—Editor
European Mennonites plan multimedia project
AMSTERDAM, the Netherlands—“A contribution to the public debate” is what Fernando Enns, professor of Mennonite Peace Theology and Ethics at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, calls euMENNet. This multimedia project aims to reveal the influence of five centuries of Mennonite migration and to sharpen the Mennonite identity in Europe for the future.

For centuries, Anabaptists moved away, lingered and moved on. The Anabaptist diaspora led Mennonites to Ukraine, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and elsewhere. The purpose of euMENNet is get to know our Mennonites throughout Europe. It should be ready for use in the summer of 2014.—Mennonite World Conference

Lecturer emphasizes understanding spiritual identity for social action
ELKHART, Ind.—The stories a congregation or denomination tells about itself—even when they are not factual—shape its identity, church historian Quinton Dixie demonstrated March 27-28 in the annual Theological Lectureship at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart.

Dixie reflected on how individuals, congregations and denominations establish their identities through their stories and the rules they establish. He then challenged people to strive for a clearer understanding of one’s own spiritual identity when working in areas of reconciliation and social action.

Dixie enumerated steps for effective social action that can re-energize and reinvigorate social movements with Christian emphasis. He drew on the writings of Howard Thurman, a theologian and educator instrumental in shaping the vision of nonviolence in the U.S. civil rights movement.—AMBS

Marching for peace on Palm Sunday
March 24 was the 11th annual Pasadena (Calif.) Palm Sunday Peace Parade, a tradition started in the days after the invasion of Iraq. It has been replicated in Harrisonburg, Va., Elkhart, Ind., and Toledo, Ohio. More than 100 people joined the march.

—Tim Nafziger

Bethel works to expand connections with China
NORTH NEWTON, KAN.—Jim and Shirley Goering of North Newton have spent a dozen summers in China teaching English. In January 2012, they took their 23rd group to China—Bethel College students along with President Perry and Dalene White and Allison McFarland, professor of business. They’ll soon lead their 24th trip.

Bethel’s three-year-old China initiative, for which the Goerings are major donors, has resulted in Lijun Zhu being in her second year teaching a Mandarin Chinese language class at Bethel.

There are new efforts underway to recruit more Chinese students to Bethel. Thanks to the Goerings’ financial support, Lijun has begun working with Bethel admissions to make connections with Chinese students at Mennonite high schools.

Over spring break, she visited with and made presentations to students at Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite High School, Christopher Dock Mennonite High School in Lansdale, Pa., and Freeman (S.D.) Academy.

Lijun will also act as a mentor and support person for any Chinese students who do choose to come to Bethel.—Bethel College

Documentary made on Apostle Paul’s journeys
GOSHEN, Ind.—A documentary filmed and produced by Goshen College students that takes viewers through the journeys of the Apostle Paul as he broke down barriers to share the gospel of Jesus Christ has been completed.

The film, “Breaking Down Barriers: The Journeys of Apostle Paul,” is an effort of FiveCore Media, a video production company of the college’s Communication Department that employs communication faculty and students.

In May 2012, Seth Conley, assistant professor of communication, and Kyle Hufford, general manager of FiveCore Media, led a team of nine students through Greece and Rome for three
weeks to collect footage exploring how Paul ministered to the Jews, nonbelievers and early churches. Since the filming, six additional students have worked on editing the documentary alongside producers Conley and Huf-ford.

The film follows Bob Yoder, Goshen College campus pastor, and David Sparks, director of Footstep Ministries, as they guide viewers through cities such as Philippi, Corinth, Rome, Athens and Thessaloniki. Yoder and Sparks explore how Paul overcame religious, cultural and physical obstacles as a leader of the first generation of Christians.—Goshen College

**A vision and a gift**

HESSTON, Kan.—A love for plants and an eye for the Kansas prairie’s beauty were the spark and vision for a treasured Hesston landmark that is left as Evie Dyck’s ongoing legacy with the Dyck Arboretum of the Plains. Dyck died April 7 at the age of 88.

The Dyck Arboretum was a wheat field on the edge of town when Dyck and her husband, Harold, who died in 2007, donated its 31 acres to Hesston College in 1981. The Dycks wanted to create a place in Hesston where people of all ages could enjoy nature, find a peaceful place for reflection and encourage a greater understanding and appreciation of the prairie.

“Few communities the size of Hesston have a public garden,” says arboretum director Scott Vogt. “Evie had a love and appreciation for the Kansas landscape.”

Thousands of people visit the arboretum each year for educational events, entertainment or simple enjoyment of nature. Its location next to Schowalter Villa and a block south of the college makes it a convenient place to unify people across the age spectrum.—Hesston College

**Enbridge pipeline provokes prayers of lament, hope**

David Wenger, co-director of the Hermitage retreat center (an affiliate of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference) in Three Rivers, Mich., leads in a lament March 30 for the land about to be disrupted by the installation of the Enbridge pipeline. More than 50 people attended the service to offer confessions and lament for the ongoing dependence of oil requiring a pipeline and to offer prayers of hope for more sustainable living.—June Mears Driedger

**Prayers for Colombia**

Juaniber and his daughter Karen Dayana (last names withheld due to concerns for safety) stand in the house where they were living in Bogotá after being displaced from their home in central Colombia in this 2006 photo. Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office and other faith groups designated April 28-29 Days of Prayer and Action for U.S. congregations to stand in solidarity with brothers and sisters in Colombia.—MCC

**Israeli soldiers arrest boy**

AL-KHALIL (HEBRON), West Bank—On the night of April 14, Israeli soldiers in Hebron took a 13-year-old boy from his house, blindfolded and handcuffed him and closed him inside a nearby checkpoint container for 20 minutes.

The soldiers then walked him, still blindfolded and handcuffed, to another checkpoint a block away and shut him into that checkpoint box. After about 15 minutes, they walked him to an Israeli Army Base. International volunteers who tried to follow were stopped by soldiers who called them “Nazi pigs.” Several adult armed settlers were also present and were aggressive and threatening.

After another 15 minutes, soldiers put the boy in a military jeep, drove him to Checkpoint 56 and released him to Palestinian officials on the other side.—Christian Peacemaker Teams
A mother’s love

I have only a few fond memories of my mother during my childhood. Circumstances of life simply made it hard to celebrate the good memories because they were clouded by so many bad memories. But I cling to the memory of my mother caring for us when we were sick. I recall the vast love, compassion and sacrifice she displayed anytime we were under the weather.

I remember having a really bad cold or flu when I was 5 or 6 years old. She rubbed Vicks vapor rub on my chest to help me breathe, made me homemade chicken noodle soup and helped me sip the broth from my bowl. She sat by me in the bathroom and rubbed my back with a cold washrag while all the virus worked itself out of my body. But most of all, I remember her sitting up all night, holding me in her arms, close to her body in order to help break the fever and elevate my back so I could breathe easier.

This was not a once-in-a-while or special situation my mother displayed. She did this for each of her children every time we felt ill. She was attentive to our needs and concerned about our well-being, even at the expense of her own. I remember when I became a young mother, I tried to mimic my mother’s behavior with my sons—not sure if I got it completely right—but I was thankful for her example.

One of the most important figures in the Christian story is Mary, the mother of Jesus. From the beginning of Mary entering the story we see extraordinary gifts of a very young lady.

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). And we see it in her song of praise in Luke 1:46-55.

Throughout the story, we see this mother with the ultimate task of caring for the Savior of the world. Mary, like all mothers, is saddled with the reality of motherhood, late-night feedings, numerous diaper changes, academic and moral teachings and, most of all, safety. As her son grew, she, like other mothers, occasionally lost him (Luke 2:41-46), was shocked by his growth and wisdom (Luke 2:48-49), experienced his complete love and concern for her well-being (John 19:25b-27) and encouraged him to be exactly what he was called to be (John 2:1-5). Most of all, she stood by his side when he was falsely accused, tortured and killed (John 19:30).

Mary, like my mother (and so many others), did not leave her child when the most difficult reality of life came their way. Mary followed her son every step as he carried his cross (and ours) to Calvary. She stood with him and prayed as they nailed him to the cross and pierced his side. She was there when he took his last breath. A mother’s love knows no boundaries, no limits to what she will do with or for her children. Mary is the prototype of motherhood for all mothers to aspire to.

This month as we celebrate the exceptional women in our lives, let us remember the signs of character, love, compassion and sacrifice. Let us seek to be mothers whose love for others (especially our children) is a shining example of God’s love toward us. Let us remember not to take ourselves so seriously—like Mary we will make mistakes, turning our heads for just a minute and realizing our child has wandered off, underestimating our children’s gifts only to be reminded by them what God created them to be.

Like Mary, let’s remember to encourage and call those gifts out of our children when they fail to trust in themselves. But most of all, let’s remember to stand with our children when the most challenging times of life come their way, knowing that we serve a God who has that same love, compassion and sacrifice for us.

We are not alone in this most terrifying and blessed experience of motherhood. God has specifically chosen us to assume this task biologically or through adoption, and he is with us every step of the way. May the grace and love of God be with every woman who expresses a mother’s love to children in some capacity in their life.

Cyneatha Millsaps is pastor of Community Mennonite Church in Markham, Ill.
Mennonites and the Catholic Church

On March 19, the newly elected Pope Francis celebrated his inaugural Mass at St. Peter’s Square with some 150,000 people in attendance. Among those gathered for the occasion were two Mennonites—Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands and Rainer Burkart of Germany—who were present on behalf of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) in response to an invitation from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The next day, Stenvers and Burkart attended a service at the Vatican in which Pope Francis formally welcomed international and ecumenical guests. In their brief conversation with the pope, Stenvers said they expressed gratitude for the inclusion of “small churches” in dialogues promoted by the Catholic Church and, he continued, “we assured him of our prayers.”

From one perspective, the brief encounter of Mennonites and the pope was a relatively small matter—a ceremonial formality overshadowed by the presence of more famous and powerful guests and by the fact that Catholics outnumber Mennonites in the world by approximately 1,000 to 1. Still, the fact that Mennonites were present at the event—coupled with our participation in recent dialogues and evidence of growing Mennonite-Catholic interaction at the grassroots level—suggests that Mennonite relations with the Catholic Church have been undergoing a tectonic shift.

In the centuries following the tumultuous divisions of the 16th century, Mennonite attitudes toward the Catholic Church and its hierarchy were suspicious at best. As with most groups born out of conflict, the heirs of the Anabaptist tradition have tended to define themselves in negative terms over against the groups they left behind. Mennonites, we have said, are “neither Catholic nor Protestant.” We do not baptize babies, worship saints, believe the bread and wine of Communion become the literal body and blood of Christ or are willing to use violence to defend our faith. At the root of this identity of opposition were the memories of Anabaptist martyrs whose suffering at the hands of Catholic authorities reinforced a sense of Catholic “otherness.” In some parts of Latin America, especially Colombia and Argentina, this wariness toward the Catholic Church was bolstered in the 20th century by ongoing stories of harassment and even persecution of Mennonites and other Protestant minorities. Indeed, it is still common in Spanish-speaking set-

tings to refer casually to “Christians” and “Catholics,” suggesting the two do not overlap.

Yet there are also many signs that this identity of opposition is changing. Already in the 1980s, historians of Anabaptism began to note how much the radical reformers were shaped by the writings of Thomas à Kempis, currents of Catholic piety and the influence of certain Catholic mystics. Though Amish groups may find the comparison surprising, one can also trace significant lines of continuity between Catholic monastic orders and the disciplined, communal, nonconforming, pacifist, hierarchically structured way of life—sealed by a solemn vow of commitment to Christ—that characterizes the Amish today. In 2003, Mennonites and Catholics concluded a sustained conversation on their shared commitment to peace with a joint statement, “Called Together to be Peacemakers.” And more recently, MWC has joined in a trilateral conversation with Catholics and Lutherans to discuss our differing understandings of baptism. Signs of an ecumenical thawing were dramatically symbolized closer to home by the recent creation of the “Michael Sattler” house adjacent to St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minn., as a center of hospitality and a “permanent bridge” between the Mennonite and Catholic communities.

So what does all this mean for the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church? First, it is significant that Pope Francis—like César García, general secretary of MWC—comes from the Global South, home to 60 percent of the world’s Catholics and two-thirds of all Mennonites. Even more important, in his inaugural Mass, Francis made clear that he wants his pontificate to be characterized by humility and focused on the poor. The role of the pope, he said, is to speak especially on behalf of “the weakest, the least important, … the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison”—surely a message that Mennonites all around the world can embrace.

Differences between Mennonites and Catholics persist, but the time has come for Mennonites to move beyond an identity of opposition to celebrate our shared commitments and proclaim with our Catholic brothers and sisters the good news of Christ’s healing and hope. “Today amid so much darkness,” the pope concluded in his homily, “we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others.” Amen.

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John D. Roth is professor of history at Goshen (Ind.) College, director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and editor of Mennonite Quarterly Review.

Mennonite relations with the Catholic Church have been undergoing a tectonic shift.
Digital natives keep getting younger

In 2001, education and technology writer Marc Prensky popularized the term digital natives to describe the first generations of children growing up fluent in the language of computers, video games and other technologies. (The rest of us are digital immigrants, struggling to understand.)

In her article “The Touch-Screen Generation” in The Atlantic (April), Hanna Rosin writes about how young children—even toddlers—are spending more and more time with digital technology. She asks, “Should parents recoil or rejoice?”

In 1999, Rosin writes, the American Academy of Pediatrics discouraged television viewing for children younger than 2, “citing research on brain development that showed this age group’s critical need for ‘direct interactions with parents and other significant caregivers.’” In 2006, 90 percent of parents said their children younger than 2 consumed some form of electronic media. Yet in its updated policy in 2011, the AAP “largely took the same approach it took in 1999, uniformly discouraging passive media use, on any type of screen, for these kids,” writes Rosin.

**What are parents to do?** Well, Rosin is one, with three children “who are all fans of the touch screen.” But when she talks with people (also parents of young children) who help develop interactive media for children, she finds them more restrictive than she is about their children using technology.

Rosin describes “the neurosis of our age: as technology becomes ubiquitous in our lives, American parents are becoming more, not less, wary of what it might be doing to their children.” Parents are afraid that if they don’t use the new technology just right, “their child could end up one of those sad, pale creatures who can’t make eye contact and has an avatar for a girlfriend.”

Rosin asks, How do small children actually experience electronic media, and what does that experience do to their development?

Because much of the recent technology is new, most of the research in this area concerns toddlers’ interaction with television. Researchers eventually identified certain rules that promote engagement: “stories have to be linear and easy to follow, cuts and time lapses have to be used very sparingly, and language has to be pared down and repeated.”

Now researchers are beginning to study toddlers’ use of iPads to see what they can learn and if they can transfer what they learn to the real world. They ask further, “What effect does interactivity have on learning? What role do familiar characters play in children’s learning from iPads?”

**Rosin wondered if too many apps** developed for children emphasized education over play. Then she came across apps designed by a Swedish game studio named Toca Boca.

In 2011, the studio’s founders, Emil Övermar and Björn Jeffery, launched Toca Tea Party. “The game is not all that different from a real tea party,” writes Rosin. It’s not overtly educational, and there’s no winning and no reward. “The game is either very boring or terrifically exciting, depending on what you make of it,” she writes. For kids, the game is fun every time, “because it’s dependent entirely on imagination.”

Rosin notes that “every new medium has, within a short time of its introduction, been condemned as a threat to young people.” However, despite “legitimate broader questions about how American children spend their time,” parents have to decide for themselves.

Rosin decided to let her young son have access to an iPad for six months. “After about 10 days, the iPad fell out of his rotation, just like every toy does.” It was just one more tool.

We digital immigrants will continue to struggle with our digital natives.—*Gordon Houser*
That we are captivated by issues surrounding something called ‘sexuality’ is an indication of the captivity of the church to money, class and liberal political arrangements.—Stanley Hauerwas in “Living Well in Ordinary Time: A Tribute to Rowan Williams”

New effort by MDs to cut wasteful medical spending
Nine medical societies representing nearly 375,000 physicians are challenging the widely held perception that more health care is better, releasing lists last year of tests and treatments their members should no longer automatically order. The 45 items listed include most repeat colonoscopies within 10 years of a first test, early imaging for most back pain, brain scans for patients who fainted but didn’t have seizures, and antibiotics for mild-to-moderate sinus distress. Also on the list: heart imaging stress tests for patients without coronary symptoms. And a sobering recommendation calls for cancer doctors to stop treating tumors in end-stage patients who have not responded to multiple therapies and are ineligible for experimental treatments.

The recommendations are being circulated to consumers and doctors by a coalition calling itself Choosing Wisely (www.choosingwisely.org), which includes employer groups, unions, AARP and Consumer Reports. Neither the insurance industry nor the federal government was involved in the process.—Associated Press

Temperatures highest in 4,000 years
Global temperatures are warmer than at any time in at least 4,000 years, scientists reported March 7. Over the coming decades they are likely to surpass levels not seen on the planet since before the last ice age. Previous research had extended back roughly 1,500 years and suggested that the rapid temperature spike of the past century, believed to be a consequence of human activity, exceeded any warming episode during those years. The new work confirms that result while suggesting the modern warming is unique over a longer period.—New York Times

2.9%
of full-power commercial U.S. TV stations are owned by Latinos.

0.7%
are owned by blacks of any nationality.

2.9%
are owned by Asians/Asian-Americans. —Columbia Journalism Review

Waste not
About half the food produced in the world is wasted, according to a study by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, based in the United Kingdom. This waste is the consequence of unnecessarily strict expiration dates, Western consumer demand for cosmetically perfect food, poor agricultural practices, inadequate infrastructure and poor storage facilities. Up to half the food purchased in Europe and the United States is thrown away. Wasted food also wastes resources used to produce it, including water.—Christian Century

Tongue in cheek
Not in My Backyard Sunday, Nov. 13: Bulletin inserts will make it clear that life-changing mission work only takes place overseas, where the people are really grateful. Church members who have taken trips abroad will wear ponchos and speak on how they received even more than they gave. Youth will feel a call to ministry, which should dissipate by the fourth hymn. Local poverty within driving distance of the church, gun control legislation and union organizing drives need not be mentioned.—huffingtonpost.com/lillian-daniel/the-church-calendar-new-a_b_2600258.html

The costs of health care
• Sean Recchi was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma at age 42. Total cost, in advance, for his treatment plan and initial doses of chemotherapy: $83,900. Charges for blood and lab tests amounted to more than $15,000; with Medicare, they would have cost a few hundred dollars.
• Charge for each of four boxes of sterile gauze pads, as itemized in a $348,000 bill following a patient’s diagnosis of lung cancer: $77
• Patient was charged $18 each for Accu-Chek Diabetes Test Strips. Amazon sells boxes of 50 for about $27, or 55¢ each.
• Emilia Gilbert slipped and fell in June 2008 and was taken to the emergency room. She is still paying of the $9,418 bill from that hospital visit in weekly installments. Her three CT scans cost $6,538. Medicare would have paid about $825 for all three.
• Patient was charged $333 for a chest X-ray. The national rate paid by Medicare is $23.83.
• Patient was charged $24 per 500-mg tablet of Niacin. In drugstores, the pills go for about a nickel each.
• The charge for one 325-mg tablet of Acetaminophen, the first of 344 lines in an eight-page hospital bill: $1.50. You can buy 100 tablets on Amazon for $1.49.
• The hospital charge for standard saline solution: $84. Online, a liter bag costs $5.16.—from “Bitter Pill: How Outrageous Pricing and Egregious Profits Are Destroying Our Health Care” by Steven Brill in Time, March 4

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Connected centenarian

A profile of Rachel Weaver Kreider

by Dorothy Yoder Nyce

Connections affect outlook. How people network varies during life’s decades. For Rachel Weaver Kreider, both ancestry and current experience prompt stories to retell. As a child, Rachel heard her Grandma Weaver talk of her Yoder grandmothers, who in turn knew more grandmas. Stunned, Rachel pondered those grandmas.
Rachel’s connections grew. Her grandma talked intensely of her astute Uncle Reuben Yoder, who no longer lived. Young Rachel watched her grandma page through the big Hochstetler book of 1912 for links, read letters from Aunt Vinora’s early 1920s work with Mennonite Central Committee in Constantinople among Russian immigrants, and pondered Uncle John’s questions about cousin marriage.

Rachel loved the family lore. When called for an errand by her mother (Laura Johns Weaver), Rachel told her grandma, “Don’t say anything until I return.”

Perhaps conservative in appearance, Rachel’s family exposed her to ordinary and liberal ideas. For some years her father, Samuel E. Weaver, combined farming with duties as Shipshewana, Ind., school superintendent and Forks Mennonite Church ministry. He read Christian Century writers; she listened with him to Sunday afternoon broadcasts by Harry Emerson Fosdick. Her mother, orphaned at 11 and with an eighth-grade education, read magazines; she absorbed Ladies Home Journal content cover-to-cover for 25 years.

Born May 28, 1909, Rachel describes herself as ordinary. She represents many women with tasks to do, hobbies and siblings—for her, two brothers and a sister. While distinct from women, she echoes their being socialized to be undervalued. “We let others lead” she says.

Now nearing 104, Rachel Weaver Kreider might ponder a grandson’s computer yen or review a listing of book titles she recently read before turning to proofread a recent issue of the Yoder Newsletter (YNL). But those details rush the story.

Alongside relatives, Rachel inwardly nurtured and questioned Mennonite roots. Her maturing religious links knew conviction and pain. She noticed when her mother could not receive Communion emblems because she had refused “proper” strings for her bonnet. She doubted when her father resigned, outwardly due to health but also because he was educated beyond that expected for “men of the (minister’s) bench.” In 1920, the family moved from Sam’s well-managed farm to near Goshen, Ind. New connections followed, with friends whose church loyalties were broader than Mennonite.

That adjustments took time reflects self-understanding. Regarding church life, Rachel was baptized at College Mennonite Church (meeting on the Goshen College campus). Then in 1922, her family and a dozen others shifted without valid letters to “that other” (General Conference Mennonite) church on Eighth Street. A year later, nearly 100 people changed membership due to turmoil that closed Goshen College for a year (1923-24). Rachel later wrote about that surge of activity in a 480-page book, The History of the Eighth Street Mennonite Church (1913-1987). “Ordinary” Rachel knew the poignant, emotional power of transition. Honored oldest member, she now celebrates Eighth Street’s centennial year.

Rachel enjoyed Goshen High School years, spurred by a woman Latin teacher who described her as “a bud opening.” Rachel excelled in writing via memories: 20 snowbound travelers housed in the Weaver home overnight became a story. A cousin’s week-long visit from Chicago had prompted Rachel’s writing a novel about a boy resistant to admitting the strengths of rural life.

She noticed when her mother could not receive Communion emblems because she had refused ‘proper’ strings for her bonnet.

On receiving the “best all-around senior girl award” (1927), she felt her parents’ lack of praise. To them, being humble and ordinary mattered. A repeated observation of her mother’s fingers: “For how smart you are, I never cease to be surprised by how dumb you can be at times.”

Reserve marked Rachel’s Goshen College years. She describes Old Mennonite students (the Mennonites) as straight-laced or super good. General Conference Mennonites were judged “not good enough” for leadership with the religious “Y.” A day student, Rachel liked Verna Graber Smith’s teaching about Roman life, Edward M. Yoder’s Latin teaching and Gustav Enns’ German class. But Enns’ horror of “modernism” provoked her. One of two from her class of 31 to find a job directly after being graduated, she broadened connections while teaching English and Latin at Roann, about 50 miles away, for two years prior to marriage.

Leonard Kreider, a Goshen College classmate of 1931, asked if she was “willing to be as poor as he.” When he also proposed that they “go for further education together,” she felt relief from the typical burden of putting husband through school. “I trusted my fulfillment to emerge.” Rachel married Leonard, son of Lloyd and Adelia (Stover) of Wadsworth, Ohio, at her home on June 20, 1933.
Living in an attic while students at Ohio State University (OSU in Columbus, she for a master’s degree in philosophy and he for a doctorate in chemistry), they knew economic restraints during the Depression years. Together they lived on 65 cents per day for food. Connections broadened—with Jews, atheists, secular professors and communists. Not dogmatic in view, with candor they heard new perspectives.

Rachel feeds son Emil in their North Newton, Kan., home. Photo provided

Rachel through letters asked Ohio Mennonite pastors to support the fellows facing ROTC.

“Ordinary” Rachel’s Mennonite convictions also surfaced. Her seven-page letter of Sept. 28, 1935, to former Goshen College professor Guy F. Hershberger details her involvement on the OSU campus with students protesting the rule that, except for physical reasons, fellows were required to take Reserve Officers Training Corp or be expelled. (See James Juhnke, Mennonite Life, December 2002.) One of 25 Mennonites and part of a “United Front” cluster of campus organizations, she spoke directly to OSU President Rightmire: “If our boys are true to their 400-year history to not bear arms, being so barred from a state institution is unjust discrimination against law-abiding, tax-paying people like Ohio Mennonites.” Rachel also expressed conscience with philosophy professors and through letters asked Ohio Mennonite pastors to support the fellows facing ROTC.

The Kreiders also broadened insights while in New York City during 1937. Leonard published seven research articles at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, and Rachel pursued housekeeping with self-awareness. “I just had to write something.” Her attempt with fiction—a serialized story about her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother—never materialized. But Uncle John’s box of Yoder genealogy materials, left with Rachel before he died, rarely lay dormant.

Leonard agreed to teach chemistry several years at Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., that evolved into 12. North Newton proved to be a good town in which to raise Kreider children born in 1938, 1940 and 1943. Daughter Anna, from age 12 on, documented her life. Speaking for Herself: The Autobiographical Writings of Anna K. Juhnke describes Rachel’s mothering experience; “…21 songs that Mom used to sing to us. … Mom told us stories—as from 1-2 Kings—while she ironed. … Mom began to untangle Amish Yoders. … pies were Mom’s specialty. … Mom and I had a good relationship, intimate conversation. … Mom taught me organizing skills—how to lead meetings, keep records. … Mom was my first model for women in church leadership. She ‘pastored’ every Sunday—greeting people, integrating them into action, inquiring into their grief or joys.”

“Ordinary” Rachel soaked up opportunities while in North Newton; writing continued. Her printed booklet “Key in Your Hand” nudged young women to be peace advocates alongside young men engaged in alternate service during World War II. She joined Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, founded by Jane Addams, a social activist among Chicago immigrants. Mennonite WILPF women, alert to denominational experience as immigrants in 1874 and 1920, wrote letters opposing war.

From Kansas, the Kreider family moved to Wadsworth, Ohio, for Leonard’s employment as researcher with natural rubber at B. F. Goodrich in Akron. With family her first priority, Rachel nevertheless broadened connections. She started a local branch of Church Women United, in part to meet women of diverse denominations. She served as secretary with her church’s mission committee for nine years and prodded congregations to keep records for the Central District Conference historical committee. Asked to write the 100-year history of First Mennonite Church of Wadsworth, she studied the Old Mennonite story in order to write the General Conference one. Together with several couples, the Kreiders started a peace project later used as a model by American Friends Service Committee.

“I was learning all the time,” ordinary Rachel says. She researched and wrote a genealogy of
Leonard’s parents. With genealogist Ford Coolman she wrote The Mennonite Cemeteries (3) of Medina County with a Brief Historical Sketch of the Churches (1952). After searching through peace plays, she wrote “Overcoming Evil” (1957), a play about the Hochstetler massacre by Indians in 1775; her play lives on at Hochstetler reunions.

Leonard’s professional experience and Rachel’s yen for history influenced their children’s academic pursuits. Emil (married to Louise Pankratz), Anna (to James Juhnke) and Sara (to Gregory Hartzler) earned doctoral degrees before teaching, respectively, at Beloit College in Wisconsin, Bethel College and Goshen College. Growth and interests of eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren inspire Rachel.

**Rachel’s life, made rich** through anecdotes and connections, also knew poignant, sacred loss. During the fall of 1982, both adult daughters were diagnosed with cancer. Sara’s aggressive type allowed only several months before her death. Leonard and Rachel were grateful to have moved to Goshen, where they helped care for three grandchildren. Anna lived 23 more years. Her recital of a journey of active involvement with treatment of kidney cancer exudes faith—faith that marks generations. Leonard died in 2001. Profound insight accompanied Rachel’s grief—into her mother’s coping as an orphan, her parent’s economic and church trials, and her deepened claim of “The Anabaptist Vision.” “I could do no less” she says.

Rachel W. Kreider’s Yoder genealogy hobby became public by 1970. Connecting her Christian Yoder “lines” spurred careful attention to detail. Hugh F. Gingerich of Washington, D.C., visited Rachel in Wadsworth. Learning that she had collected and indexed needed, tedious information from obituaries, census, cemetery and marriage records, along with county historical biographies, he invited her to become co-author of the eventual classic *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies* (1986).

In the book’s preface, Gingerich credits Rachel’s genealogical strengths: “having worked up preliminary studies of many of the families, kept up with the plethora of newly published books and booklets on Amish genealogy and carried on practically all the extensive correspondence required in the compilation of a volume of genealogies such as this one.”

Discovering connections among Amish Yoders, the co-authors paid attention to practices (such as baptism or dress mode), oral tradition, schisms, patterns of migration, and variant spellings. Surname Yoder variants include Joder, Jotter, Yothers and Ioder. Another Yoder researcher, Chris Yoder from Michigan, soon asked if Rachel knew of his great-grandfather Reuben Yoder (1831-1912). That Reuben proved to be none other than her own Grandma Weaver’s Uncle Reuben. Rachel then invited Chris Yoder to her kitchen table along with Ben Yoder. Together they founded the *Yoder Newsletter* in 1983; Rachel remains senior contributing editor. Published for 30 years, two issues per year, the *YNL* informs hundreds of subscribers of upcoming reunions, St. Joder Day—Aug. 16—activities, Yoder DNA testing results and more. A home page was begun in 1997: www.yodernewsletter.org.

**Profound insight accompanied Rachel’s grief—** into her mother’s coping as an orphan, her parent’s economic and church trials, and her deepened claim of ‘The Anabaptist Vision.’

Feature articles appear in each eight-page *YNL*. Over the decades, Rachel has authored varied titles, such as: “Revelations from Barbara Shirk’s Will,” “‘Strong Jacob’ Yoder Stories,” “The St. Joder Chapel” (in Switzerland) and “Speculations on Earliest Ties to European Joders.” Reflecting historian concerns, another article reports a problem that has dogged Rachel for five decades; another warns of “a garbled mystery of two lines.”

Recently, Chris Yoder took nine boxes of Rachel’s Yoder materials to his home. While she graciously expects him to pursue the puzzles that have haunted her, she admits a measure of grief, realizing that she can no longer add a newly discovered “tidbit” to her files. Rachel may also inform friends of her other extensive writing or travels (to 65 countries) not mentioned here.

This ordinary, connected centenarian might better be described “extraordinaire” as she instills this truth: “No Future without knowledge of the Past.”

*Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, Ind., is author of Multifaith Musing: Essays and Exchanges (2010) and compiler of her mother’s ‘Talks’ that Teach from Bessie King Yoder 1906-2008 (2012).*
In post-Christendom we will need to learn to live distinctively.

A case for post-Christendom

by Alan Kreider and Stuart Murray

In their article “Post Christendom or Neo-Christendom?” (February), Ron Adams and Isaac Villegas take issue with the way we use “post-Christendom” in The Naked Anabaptist and other writings. We think “post-Christendom” is a useful clarifying lens that enables us to see Christianity’s loss of cohesion and control in multifaith, secular and materialistic American and European societies in which committed Christians are increasingly marginal. They disagree, pointing to Christendom’s resilient capacity to change and to Christianity’s continuing dominance in the politics and culture of western societies. They call this “neo-Christendom.” Does this matter, or are we simply quibbling about terminology?
We agree with Adams and Villegas that terms matter. We agree that neo-Christendom helpfully reminds us that “Christendom” has assumed different forms throughout history and in diverse cultural contexts and that Christendom is not dead. In fact, we could argue that the United States throughout its history has been an example of neo-Christendom. Unlike many European countries in old Christendom, America has not had a state church. The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution prevents that. But Christendom assumptions, values, priorities and expectations have permeated this society. For centuries most Americans have assumed that

- their country is Christian,
- most Americans are Christians,
- America’s political leaders are Christian,
- mission is not necessary in America,
- careful baptismal preparation is not necessary,
- the upside-down way of Jesus doesn’t apply to their country’s life.

These Christendom assumptions are old hat. It is not a sign of a novel neo-Christendom when we discover people who make vigorous Christian noises in the United States, even in Britain and other western societies.

**What is our situation today?** Adams and Villegas claim that we live in “confusing times” that require of us discernment and careful theological reflection, and we agree. Interpreting the present and pondering even the near future is not easy in a time of cultural turbulence and competing analyses. So we welcome Adams’ and Villegas’ challenge to the way we understand our context and the proposals we make for missional responses to it. Like them, we take seriously the rhetoric of American presidents and British prime ministers. We, too, are interested in Christianity’s long half-life in American and European societies. But do these things place us in neo-Christendom?

We think post-Christendom is more helpful in equipping us to face reality. We in America as well as Europe are entering a new world that we and others call post-Christendom. It’s not that the Christendom era has suddenly ended or that a fully formed new culture is present or imminent. On the contrary, in our writings we have emphasized that Christendom’s vestiges continue. For some years members of the Anabaptist Network in Britain have carefully traced the ongoing influences of Christendom in the United Kingdom. They have found these widespread but retreating. So when Stuart circulated Adams and Villegas’ article to network members, they were fascinated and bemused. Of course, they said, the legacy of Christendom remains, but it’s a shell.

Adams and Villegas quote Britain’s prime minister saying, “We are a Christian society, and we should not be afraid to say so.” The UK Anabaptists view this as defensive bluster. The UK they live in varies from place to place, but overall it is a secularized, multicultural, materialist society. A tiny fraction of its people go to church and would view with horror a Christendom-style attempt to coerce uniformity of religion or impose conservative Christian values on society.

**Post-Christendom describes a transitional period in western culture, a twilight zone between the slow dying of the Christendom era and the emergence of whatever will replace this.**

**In the United States**, these issues are more contested than they are in the UK. Some Americans continue to try to impose Christianity on others, while others vigorously oppose these attempts. But they have less energy than they did a decade ago. Studies indicate that in the 2012 presidential election, to which Adams and Villegas refer, candidates Romney and Obama were far less willing to “boldly speak of their faith on the campaign trail” than the candidates were in 2008. Not only nationally but locally in many parts of the United States as well, post-Christendom reflects realities already present and becoming increasingly prevalent. (For an examination of this, see Appendix I of Alan and Eleanor Kreider’s *Worship and Mission After Christendom* [2011], “Are Americans in Christendom?”)

Post-Christendom describes a transitional period in western culture, a twilight zone between the slow dying of the Christendom era and the emergence of whatever will replace this. The “confusing times” we live in are at least partly due to this overlap between Christendom and post-Christendom realities. It’s not at all surprising that vestiges of Christendom, such as those Adams and Villegas mention, can easily be identified. These will surely continue to litter the post-Christendom landscape for many years. A culture that has flourished for 1,500 years does not suddenly disappear without trace. But we are convinced that Christendom and neo-Christendom are fading and that if Christianity is to have a future
Church attendance is a serious indicator of Christian faith and commitment.

in America, we must grapple with the realities of post-Christendom.

**What are these realities?** What challenges and opportunities do they offer us in our daily experience, on the ground? Perhaps different contexts are responsible for our different perceptions. But in view of what we know of Adams’ and Villegas’ contexts, we are surprised by their comments. The vestiges of Christendom they point to are national in scale and political in nature. What about the scenes locally in Madison, Wis., or Chapel Hill, N.C.? Certainly there are large, vigorous churches there. But if these cities fit with national trends, there are vastly fewer people who attend worship services today than there were 50 years ago, and the trajectory of Christian practice is downward.

Does church attendance matter? Unlike Adams and Villegas, we think it does. Church attendance is a serious indicator of Christian faith and commitment. Experience in Europe demonstrates that when people stop going to church, they lose track of the Christian story and find it difficult to pass Christian faith and virtues to their children. So in Madison and Chapel Hill, as elsewhere in the United States and in Europe, “Christianity” becomes a general cultural term, bandied about by presidents as it loses the loyalty of the people. Its advocates, struggling to enforce a denatured faith upon an unwilling populace, resort to bluster before retreating. And the secularization of America continues, shown especially in its public universities, the increasing number of Americans without religious conviction (the “nones”), the proliferation of a wide variety of faith communities and the great passions of Americans that are evident not in worship and religiously inspired action but in consumerism, technology and sports.

Both of us have traveled widely in western societies and recognize that some parts of the United States have a greater residue of Christendom than others. There are even some communities that could fit the category of “Mennonitedom.” But overwhelmingly, western nations—even the United States—are now in pluralist post-Christendom. Even Topeka, Ind. In this quaint, Amish-influenced, industrializing town where Alan takes his car for servicing, there are two Muslim communities, one of which has a mosque in a strip mall; women in burkas mingle in the grocery with women in cape dresses; Japanese Buddhists work in a local factory, and a Campus Life group brings Christian witness to unchurched Anglos who live in the trailer court.

This is an interesting, bracing world to live in. We are grateful for some of the contributions of Christendom—in the arts, spirituality and theology. But we do not bewail its passing. Christendom was a brilliant and brutal civilization that made life tough for minorities and misfits, including Jews and Anabaptists. But post-Christendom makes Christians more marginal than they were in the Christendom centuries. Is marginalization necessarily a bad thing? The two of us tend to talk calmly about marginalization, but Adams and Villegas are concerned that this “misleads us into thinking that Christians are now marginalized victims.” We disagree. We insist that marginalization does not entail victimization and that the two can be and must be decoupled.

**Christians today cannot count** on the Chris-
In post-Christendom we will need to learn to live distinctively; baptismal preparation will become increasingly important, training us for the upside-down way of Jesus.

tendom Sunday, a day of worship on which the restaurants are closed, the stores shuttered and there are no sports and musical activities for the children. Christians in the UK in the 1990s campaigned vigorously to “keep Sunday special,” and they lost. Further, Christians cannot assume that in their towns pastors have prestige and influence on par with other professionals. This is fine. In this post-Christendom world, nonconformist Christians who follow Jesus radically and make upside-down decisions about lifestyle will feel at home.

So we don’t see marginalization as problematic. Neither do we think marginalization needs to produce a victim mentality. In post-Christendom societies there is little evidence of systemic religious persecution or victimization. In fact, marginality may be a gift to the Christian community. It frees us from the pretensions of imperial Christianity and gives us space to rediscover faithful discipleship and creative witness. The Scriptures reveal a God who frequently does new things on the margins. So we can accept marginality as a gift that enables us to be attuned to what the Spirit is saying and doing in our time.

We close with a final point of agreement with Adams and Villegas: We should encourage and nurture friendship with members of non-Christian religious communities. This may mean sharing facilities, as they suggest, or developing partnerships around social initiatives or standing with them when they face discrimination. But in many parts of America we will do this as marginalized religious minorities in societies that are experiencing increasing secularization. As these relationships grow, we will need to address the oppressive realities of the Christendom era, but it is the emerging reality of post-Christendom that provides the context in which we speak.

In post-Christendom we will need to learn to live distinctively; baptismal preparation will become increasingly important, training us for the upside-down way of Jesus. Further, we will need to speak about our Christian faith in a way we never did when “everybody was Christian”; God’s mission of reconciling all things in Christ will be an ordinary concern of post-Christendom churches. We can do these things only if our faith is embedded in our hearts, expressed in worship and Christian practices, and embodied in our lives. When that is true, we will find that post-Christendom can be a bracing time to be Anabaptist Christians. We and Christians in other traditions will also find resources in the marginalized Anabaptist tradition to help us face the challenges of following Jesus on the margins in post-Christendom.

Alan Kreider is retired professor of church history and mission at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. Stuart Murray is author of The Naked Anabaptist (Herald Press, 2010).
Before I clicked the enter button of my public Facebook status, questions plagued my mind: Was I really ready to talk about sex in a public space? Was I prepared to delve into the dirty, murky waters of sexualized violence and abuse against women and men, claiming that these things actually exist in the Mennonite church? Could I handle potential negative vitriol? Did I really want my personal story to be so exposed?
Pressing enter on the status, my answer was yes. There was no going back.

On June 5, 2012, I launched Our Stories Untold, an online platform for provoking conversation and allowing women and men to tell their stories about sexualized violence within the Mennonite church. Immediately my inbox was flooded with other Mennonite survivors’ stories. Originally terrified of putting myself out in the open, I (a somewhat anonymous figure behind a computer screen) was honored to receive a plethora of supportive messages and stories of personal abuse.

“Back in the mid-1980s, when I was a student at [a Mennonite] college I was raped.”

“I told my mother [of being attacked], and she asked one question and to the best of my knowledge did nothing else. Brushed it off.”

“How could I have two very dear Mennonite friends who were abused as Mennonite children, two different Mennonite communities, two different decades, one by her Mennonite father, another by her Mennonite schoolteacher?”

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I opened messages containing stories with these lines and many others. One woman wrote, “I am now beginning to truly understand the trauma and the effect it has had on my whole being. What a difference awareness and understanding can have on the recovery process! There is so much continual damage that can be done if such tragic secrets are kept or if help isn’t encouraged or sought because of shame about the issue.”

Other women shared how Mennonite colleges and churches didn’t support them through their incidents of rape. Rather, they covered up

Silence perpetuates the detrimental affects abuse has on victims who lack a place for their voices to be heard.

the incidents, leaving most women with no option other than to transfer or leave their churches. Men also sent in stories of childhood molestation, allegedly stating that I was the first to hear their tales.

Sexualized violence affects everyone and is a widespread issue in the United States. According to a 2010 survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States.” That includes 12 million women and men who are affected by abuse and more than 1 million women who are raped each year. To break it down further, one in four women and one in nine men will be sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetimes. And these statistics don’t include the 54 percent of rapes and sexual assaults that are not reported to the police, according to Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.

Yet, regardless of these statistics, the majority in the Mennonite church seems uninterested in discussing the topic. There are many reasons why: The idea of sexualized violence happening in our communities is threatening; it involves the “controversial” subject of sex; bringing up situations of assault can create conflict within our churches; those who experience sexualized violence also encounter severe stigma and shame, and many congregants are simply ignorant about the
subject and lack the proper knowledge in how prevalent sexualized violence is.

The truth is that when 1 in 5 female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner, or when 15 out of 16 rapists never spend a day in jail, these statistics do not exclude the Mennonite community. It happens in our churches, homes, schools and backyards. And sadly, ignoring the topic will not make it go away—instead, silence perpetuates the detrimental affects abuse has on victims who lack a place for their voices to be heard.

What can our Mennonite communities do about it?

Rape is an expression of masculinity and a fear of losing one’s strength and domination in the world.

We can start by debunking rape myths apparent in our churches.

Rape culture is a sociological concept that explains the prevalent attitudes, norms, practices and tolerance toward rape and sexualized violence. In rape culture—a culture that exists within religion and Christianity—people are surrounded by language, laws, rules and images that perpetuate rape myths and make sexual coercion appear so normal that sexualized violence seems inevitable. Behaviors associated with rape culture include victim-blaming, stigma, shame and the trivialization of rape, all prevalent forces in our churches. Rape has literally been engrained in our consciousness.

The following are rape myths especially prevalent in Christian circles:

Myth 1: Rape has to do with male “lust,” a biological need and impulse controlling male sexual urge.

Truth: The roots of rape go much deeper than sex. Instead, rape falls into the categories of violence, power, entitlement, domination and control. It’s an expression of masculinity and a fear of losing one’s strength and domination in the world. It’s often a view of sexual entitlement, where a man is under the impression that he is somehow owed a sexual exchange.

According to Lindsey and Justin Holcomb, authors of *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault*, “studies show that 50 percent of sexual assaults are premeditated and well-planned, not impulsive, spontaneous, uncontrollable sexual acts. This supports the view that sexual assault is learned behavior and does not arise from just biological need.”

Myth 2: Rape is just a woman’s issue, or for those who have personal experience with it.

Truth: Rape happens most often to women, but men experience it, too. Yet it’s important to keep in mind that most men aren’t rapists, some women are rapists, and some people who aren’t men or women or heterosexual still have experiences with the crime of rape and abuse. Turning on the news, you’ll be confronted with the harsh reality that rape happens all around us. Last December a California judge suggested that women are only truly victims of sexual assault if they put up a fight and had to struggle. What if next it’s your daughter in a court with the judge who claims her rape wasn’t legitimate because she didn’t put up a fight? And when, according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, one in three women on the planet will be raped, beaten, sexually coerced, trafficked or otherwise abused in her lifetime, you most likely stare straight into the face of a survivor every day you interact with other people.

Myth 3: Sexual assault and rape only happen when physical force, violence and/or weapons are used.

Truth: Following up on the California judge’s comments, sexual assault happens even when the victim doesn’t “put up a struggle.” Assault is any kind of unwanted act, usually sexual in nature whether verbally or physically, that is imposed on a person. When consent is not given yet sexual contact or behavior is made, this is grounds for assault. Sexual assault comes in a variety of ways, including verbal intimidation, coercion, manipulation, threats, deception, commands, abuse of authoritative position, or force and violence. Even when someone has agreed to sexual intimacy, they can still experience assault or rape. A person may feel OK with one type of sexual activity but not wish to pursue in another, and a person has the right not to go further if they don’t wish to.

Myth 4: Rape and sexual assaults happen to women who dress immodestly, who have been drinking or who are somehow “asking for it” in another way.

Truth: No person asks to be assaulted regardless of what they wear, where they go or what activities they participate in. All races, genders and ages are raped. In September 2012, a 73-year-old woman was raped in New York’s Central Park. Each year 15 percent of sexual assault victims are
under age 12. Using the argument of modesty is a rape excuse, and blaming alcohol becomes a rape apology. We must eliminate these ideas from our consciousness in order to be a supportive church toward survivors.

**Myth 5: The most common perpetrators of rape and abuse are strangers to the victim.**

**Truth:** Unfortunately this is not the case. In fact, 80 percent of sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. This includes family members, dating partners, spouses, best friends, pastors, teachers, neighbors, doctors, therapists and others. To believe that “rape can’t happen here” is only detrimental to those who experience it in your community.

**As a peace church we stand in a significant position to take a stand against sexualized violence and abuse.**

As a peace church we stand in a significant position to take a stand against sexualized violence and abuse. It is our responsibility to care about this topic and address this epidemic rampant in our world. Together, by understanding these myths and refusing to let them exist in our churches, we can knock down prejudices and negative stereotypes about sexual assault victims. We can share the psychological and emotional distress victims experience. We can create open, safe and supportive spaces for victims to come forward, and we can believe and validate women and men’s stories about abuse. We can prevent and eliminate feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame that victims tend to have.

Rather than having sexual assault victims present in our communities, we can have sexual assault survivors who know they are strong, empowered and—through the love we show them—can learn to love themselves regardless of the abuse they’ve experienced. We must let survivors know that acknowledging and naming what happened to them is both an important step in the healing process and necessary for putting an end to stigmatizing sexual assault and abuse in our churches.

Let’s send out the message of Our Stories Untold loud and clear: Survivors, we will be here for you when you are ready.

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**Website a ‘safe and open space’**

When Rachel Halder began the Our Stories Untold website, she never expected to reunite two women who had not spoken for 30 years, following an incident of sexual violence.

In November 2012, Rachel posted an anonymous story from a woman who was raped by two male students at a Mennonite college in the 1980s on Our Stories Untold. In the story, the woman described a “dorm do-gooder” who found her after the incident and offered her support. The “dorm do-gooder” found the story on Halder’s website and identified herself.

She posted a comment, “I am deeply sorry for my role in what you went through. I seethed with anger for the rest of that semester. I know it was nothing compared to what you went through, but I now knew that none of us [was] safe.”

Halder then connected the two women by sharing their email addresses, which led to them corresponding.

“I didn’t anticipate something that restorative happening,” Halder says. “It was amazing what came out of it.”

Halder began the Our Stories Untold website and blog in June 2012 as a “safe and open space to discuss sexualized violence within the Mennonite church.” Halder lives in Iowa City and attends area Mennonite churches. She graduated from Goshen (Ind.) College in 2010.

So far, the response is supportive and positive. “I’m surprised by people who come up to me that I don’t know and tell me that they read my website,” Halder says.

Halder began this project out of working with Joanna Shenk and Hilary Scarsella on the Women in Leadership Taskforce with Mennonite Church USA. They, along with several other women, are working on “Mennonite Monologues,” a collection of women’s stories. Shenk is communication coordinator and interchurch relations associate for Mennonite Church USA. Scarsella is associate for transformative peace-making and communications.

Since launching Our Stories Untold, Halder has been speaking at Mennonites churches and peace-related conferences. In February, Halder spoke (see photo) at her former high school, Iowa Mennonite School in Kalona, where she said the students were very receptive.

She hopes to broaden her audience to other Christian denominations and is exploring founding a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based on Our Stories Untold.

Our Stories Untold website is at ourstoriesuntold.com and its Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/OurStoriesUntold.—Anna Groff
A reflection on Romans 5:1-5

An ‘illegal’ on justification

by Marco Saavedra

What does an “illegal” have to say about justification? I mean, really, what does someone who has been judged (or prejudged) to have broken the law and is therefore not protected by it tell us—the church, the nation, sinners, lost and broken individuals—about gospel truth?

To us, at least, it means that a people, our people—numbering close to 11 million—who are living outside the law and outside the grace of so many of our neighbors need to exhibit faith even more as an act of survival. It is a gift that our very existence is an act of worship and a testament to our beliefs that are and will remain greater than discrimination, detention and deportation.
And this is the lesson to all others who similarly find themselves removed and estranged from their homes and themselves: That we are all at some level misplaced due to sin and that we all need benefit from the fulfillment of the gospel as it brings about a new creation both within and outside ourselves.

That is not the starting point for many who wish to talk about immigration. Really, immigration is only a metaphor that exposes what people already hold as truth and what justifications they have depended on as a definition for their identity.

**Justified through faith**

Who can dare live on faith alone? Especially when there are so many other markers for identity: possessions, power, idolatry, social positions, physical semblances. It is almost too liberating to say that belief alone is required to have:

**peace with God**

achieved through the life, light and love of Jesus Christ.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding;

The reconciliation with all creation which has been yearned for since the fall,

The ability to know your first love,

and commune with the source of all life.

Here is where humility comes in: displaced people who have been stripped of their tradition, native land and tongue, who have crossed borders, deserts and laws, who have forsaken their pride, perhaps lost dignity and traded in their comfort for the livelihood of their loved ones, know something about communion with God through Christ. They know deeply about the disenchanted systems of identity we have created, because they cannot be defined by bureaucratic and unimaginative laws, by a culture of fear and terror or by the violence we think necessary to preserve our way of life. The “illegal,” the migrant, who is too poor and desperate to wait for the world to change into what it should be, changes reality in greater accordance with the gospel when he or she dares to take on whatever circumstance, challenge and threat in pursuit of life (in flight from death), justified solely through faith.

This should inconvenience anyone who is “legal,” ensconced comfortably in a world that is demeaning to those who do not have documents. This should trouble the believer who partakes in a machine—with which we are all at some level complicit—that deports 1,000 people every day and sends forth waves of separation and distress at the loss of a family member multiplied over a million times.

Particularly in this recent season of Lent, we were forced to remember the Passion of Christ—an all-giving sacrifice to bestow on us the gift of an all-forgiving grace. We rejoice in the resurrection of Christ and suffer the cost of sin, too. This seemingly impossible paradox of holding horror and glory simultaneously is not unlike living illegally. People who suffer persecution fully value everything that could be lost if they were imprisoned, so both liberty and captivity take on greater meaning.

Immigration is only a metaphor that exposes what people already hold as truth and what justifications they have depended on as a definition for their identity.

**Glory, tribulation, patience, experience, hope**

Expanding on the metaphor of the migrant, aren’t we all finding our way home? Aren’t we all harried for years on end, searching for rest and delight? Isn’t that why in Revelation the redeemed are all given a new name after suffering a lifetime of removal from truth and alienation from God?

This is why sharing our stories is so crucial and so sacred, because it allows for the expression of our true selves and true loves. In another letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, in brief, “If I know all and have all and have not love, I am nothing.” This then proves the inverse correct: If I am, then I love, am loved and am beloved.

That love allows us to understand and to prophesy. At a more elemental level, the initial breath of life that awakened us from dust is the means through which creation begins and the Gospel of John is delivered, through the Word.

Therefore, if we are meant to live out God’s kingdom and begin doing so today—for heaven is at hand—then everyone should be welcomed to the water and allowed to drink freely and bid the Spirit and the Bride’s calling come. That is our definition of celestial citizenship—a beloved community where every voice is held on high, every tear is wiped from our faces, all things old
are made anew, and fear, shame, guilt and hate are overcome by faith, hope and love.

And hope maketh not ashamed
I grew up ashamed of who I was. I was ashamed of our poverty, our beauty, of my aunts and mother speaking our native Oaxaca’s Mixteco during subway commutes, of being fat, brown, unpopular and unattractive. I was ashamed of where we lived and of how many lies I had to tell others (and convinced myself about) because I could not say I was undocumented. I kept one of my biggest truths hidden, and the nearly insurmountable despair left me a hopeless child, teen and man.

The only thing worse than actively working toward systemic and spiritual change is to allow current processes and pathologies to continue.

The love of God is shed in our hearts by the Holy Ghost
My shame clouded the fact that the “Holy Ghost over the bent world broods” (“God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manley Hopkins). I was too ashamed to hear “Love bidding me welcome” (“Love” by George Herbert). I was too ashamed to trust others with my story, and therefore I indicted myself with the identity of being illegal. I was too ashamed to risk being vulnerable and experiencing the pain that produces patience, hope and glory.

The pain is not yet gone, and the restorative process of reconciliation continues, but at least the peace of God, comfort from the Spirit and intercessions by Jesus also add their healing balm to the wounds.

Subverting expectations and holding paradoxical thoughts in communion
We glory in tribulation
This letter to the church in Rome is not easy, and neither is its message: Abide not by the empire’s ways (despite living in its epicenter) but trust faith alone.

Similarly, every time we go before a magistrate or judge in court, stand before a classroom or parish, or are seized by a deportation officer or a police agent, we know we are in the right and thereby can trust our community organizing to deliver us, because the light of truth can only shine when darkness is confronted, because the healing gospel can only save when applied to the scars.

We use our experienced pain as authority over what we’ve yet to overcome and as legitimacy for our cause. We know that things cannot continue as they stand. We know the deep calling for change and the urgency of the moment. It is exhausting, arresting and tiresome and at times most despairing. But the only thing worse than actively working toward systemic and spiritual change is to allow current processes and pathologies to continue. Thereby we become true citizens of God’s kingdom, as agents of reconciliation to “change this miserable condition that exists on this Earth” (Malcolm X).

Last month, I told Judge Bain that I did nothing wrong when I crossed the border at age 3, and I was right. Yet this single truth took years to develop. If not for my friends, family and faith, I could not have gone before the law with the uncompromising position that the burden of proof was not on me and with the confidence that I could (we could) take on whatever decision came from the court—even a removal order—and fight it and win.

This is what we have discovered: When we come out, we are safe. When we organize, we develop power and can rely on the truth of our experience and courage of our convictions because they have been developed in a wellspring of a deeply loving faith.

This testament is needed as an awakening for the church, again. When Isaiah says every hill shall be made low and every valley lifted up, Jesus responds. The prisoners will be released, the brokenhearted will be healed, and a babe, a sex worker and, yes, definitely yes, an “illegal” can point toward justice flowing down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Marco Saavedra is an undocumented poet and painter in New York City who worships at St. Anne’s Episcopal Church in the South Bronx. Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, he was raised in New York and studied in Massachusetts, Ohio and Washington, D.C. He works with the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, educating and organizing and helping stop deportations. Marco is pictured here at the annual DREAM Act Graduation in Washington, D.C., with Alejandra Téllez, mother of Julio Téllez, whose deportation was stopped through community organizing.
**QUESTIONS TO women leaders**

**Moniqua Acosta** was on the Mennonite Central Committee Women’s Concern Advisory Board about 10 years ago and served as interim director of Women’s Concerns for eight months. She helped plan the Women Doing Theology Conference (The Red Tent). She also served on her church board for many years. She is on the Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite School quarterly board, the Philhaven board and two committees with Lancaster Mennonite Conference (decadal planning and celebrating church life).

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

Yes, I have many women leaders who serve as mentors. Some are older and some younger. I have learned tremendously from their life experiences, whether successes or failures. My mentors serve as a sounding board for me. When I have doubts about direction or certain challenges in my life, they are there mainly to listen but also to provide me with honest truths.

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

I’m teaching the middle school Sunday school class at church and have begun to interact more with our junior youth group at church. My youngest daughter, Isabela, is in the middle school class, and my oldest daughter, Andrea, is in the junior youth group. It is important to me that the girls in these groups have a positive experience with church. I’m trying to be a consistent part of the lives of these young people because I see all of them having the potential to be leaders.

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

This is difficult to answer. The young girls in my church are living in a different family setting than I did, but they still deal with some of the same societal stressors. They have a different way of communicating with one another, which is something I am learning.

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

I’ve faced some opposition over the years in my church family as I became a leader. Being a woman who is educated and not from an immigrant family and who is relatively young, I’ve faced some roadblocks and experienced sexism in my years in the Spanish-speaking Anabaptist world. Persevering and showing my commitment to the body has made an impression over the years. I have not left my church or given up on my brothers and sisters, and they have done the same with me.

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

I’m encouraged by the everlasting love of my Creator, my husband and all the strong women and men who have come before me and who are still working at dismantling racism, sexism, ageism and any form of oppression to another human being. I know I’m not alone and should never feel that way. I know I have others who will follow me (my children specifically) and that I, as well as those before me and after me, have a part to play until our Lord calls us home.

Persevering and showing my commitment to the body has made an impression over the years.—Moniqua Acosta
For those who follow Jesus’ way of love and nonviolence, these are difficult times. Both major parties in the United States boast of their nationalism and their machismo enthusiasm to hunt down “terrorists.” The corporate and Wall Street elite maintain a stranglehold on our political system, and we, the people, find ourselves virtually shut out of the political process. The greed-based Mammon economy, long the scourge of the poor, now threatens to destroy the very planet on which we live. More than ever we need the good news of God’s counterculture wisdom.

John’s Gospel proclaims, “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of a man, but of God” (1:12-13). These verses proclaim the good news of a counterculture gospel. They powerfully mark off the counterculture community of God’s people and elevate the status of the common poor who follow Jesus, declaring them God’s children.

In many societies of the ancient world, the ruling classes were thought to have the blood of the gods; they were the children of the gods; only their opinions mattered, and they controlled politics, economics and religion. Over against this ruling class mythology and domination, the Hebrew Scriptures asserted that the common people are made in the image of God; in ancient Israel, the people, not just the rulers, were God’s children.

Born “not of blood,” refers to the nonviolent ethic of the community.

Not long before Jesus was born, the propaganda of the Roman Empire proclaimed the Roman emperor “the Son of God.” One inscription from Myra reads, “Divine Augustus Caesar, Son of God ... Benefactor and Savior of the whole world.” Horace sang of Augustus, “Thine age, O Caesar, has brought back fertile crops to the fields ... has wiped away our sins and revived the ancient virtues.” The New Testament writers countered by proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God with the power to take away sin and that all who follow him are his brothers and sisters, children of God, endowed with the same power to forgive and to heal.

Biblical writers lifted up the common people as God’s children, having power and authority to heal, forgive, judge, rule and speak for God.

John’s Gospel uses the metaphor of rebirth and stipulates that the common people who follow Jesus are born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.” The three ways John states that this new community of Jesus-followers is not born point to the counterculture wisdom and practice of the early church.

Born “not of blood,” refers to the nonviolent ethic of the community. The Greek word for “blood” is actually plural, “bloods,” a Hebrew idiom used in both the ancient Hebrew and Greek versions of Israel’s holy texts to mean “violence” (see Micah 3:10, Habakkuk 2:12, Hosea 4:2, 1 Kings 2:5, 33, 2 Kings 9:7, 26). The children of God are not children of violence. The Gospel of John goes on to illustrate the nonviolent practice of the community: Jesus stops Peter from using violence to defend him and instead declares that his own nonviolent martyrdom will be the means by which he will drive out “the ruler of this world” (12:31-33), the spirit that inhabits all oppressive systems.
Born “not of the will of the flesh” refers to the transnational, transnational nature of the church. Those “born of flesh” are born into particular families, particular tribes and nations, but those born of the Spirit are no longer bound by the categories of the fleshly or biological birth. The reign of God is transnational. Nationalism, tribalism, racism and the like have no place in this new community.

Born “not of the will of a man” refers to the break with the patriarchal system. (The Greek word for “man” is necessarily male; it cannot be made inclusive by the NRSV.) The ancient Mediterranean world was highly patriarchal. The Roman Empire was structured and largely held together through interconnecting pyramids of familial patriarchies with the emperor conceived of as the grand patriarch at the top. To be born of God, according to John, was to break with this whole patriarchal system and its patriarchal values. The ethos of the new community was to be an ethos of mutual love and service, demonstrated in John’s Gospel by Jesus when he gets down on his knees and washes the feet of his disciples.

Scholars have noticed that Jesus’ teachings often inverted the male honor code of his day. This ancient code honored the powerful, men able to subjugate others to their will. Jesus turned this honor code on its head; he declared that the servant, not the one being served, is the honorable (“blessed”) one. This inversion of the male honor code might be understood as the promotion of a female honor code. The New Testament consistently declares that Jesus is the Wisdom of God (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:24; Matthew 11:19), a female figure in Proverbs, Sirach, Wisdom and Baruch that scholars call “Lady Wisdom.” Nowhere is the portrayal of Jesus as Lady Wisdom stronger than in the Gospel of John, where Jesus consistently talks and acts like Lady Wisdom, sometimes all but quoting her (compare John 7:34 with Proverbs 1:28-29; and John 6:22-59 with Proverbs 9:5 and Sirach 24:19-21).

This female aspect of Jesus’ persona does not lead, as some might fear, to a meek and passive Jesus. Lady Wisdom is nothing if not assertive and loud, even brash, much like Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus as Wisdom gives us a strong, assertive, nonviolently aggressive, “feminine” champion of the outcast and the common poor.

Our current culture, shaped by capitalism and empire, celebrates the rich and the powerful, those who are able to establish the greatest dominance over other people and the earth. Our culture is still caught in the grip of a “masculine” domination way of thinking and acting. This ethos has fueled the military, economic and environmental crises of our times. The wars waged by the United States constantly multiply. The economic crisis continues to hang over our heads, threatening our homes, jobs and retirements. Global warming, species extinction and other environmental developments threaten the global ecosystem that sustains civilization as we know it. We desperately need a different wisdom.

Jesus’ teachings often inverted the male honor code of his day.

The gospel provides us this different wisdom in Jesus the Messiah. He incarnates for us, and through us, a counterculture way of living that turns the dominant culture way of life upside down. He provides us an assertive, nonviolently aggressive wisdom that can drive out the spirit of violence and domination, so that we can establish a new heavens and a new earth through the way of mutual love, cooperation and a reverence for God’s creation.

There was a time when we in the wealthier and more privileged classes of the world could merely look to this different wisdom as an ideal to be reached sometime in the future. The havoc wreaked upon the world’s poor by the systems of oppression and domination did not usually touch us. The current global environmental crisis is quickly bringing that era to a close. Scientists tell us that if the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere grows greater than 350 parts per million (ppm) we enter the danger zone, putting our world on a path that threatens civilization as we know it. We are far past 350 ppm and are quickly closing in on 400 ppm. A recent study, published in the science journal Nature, predicts that we could cross the tipping point for global ecological collapse by 2025. The wisdom of Jesus is no longer a matter of theoretical inspiration; it is now a matter of our own survival.

Bert Newton is a member of Pasadena (Calif.) Mennonite Church and author of Subversive Wisdom: Sociopolitical Dimensions of John’s Gospel (Wipf and Stock, 2012).
What does an immigrant look like?

What faces come to mind when you hear the word “immigrant”? I think of several different faces:

- most of my predecessors in the archives and historical library where I work, the people who built these collections to help people answer questions about the Mennonite past: Cornelius H. Wedel (first president of Bethel College), H.R. Voth, Abraham Warkentin, Cornelius Krahn;
- many of the people who created the documents in the archives: Of the first 50 collections of personal papers in the archives, two-thirds were created by immigrants, and almost all the other third was created by second-generation immigrants (children of foreign-born parents);
- my mother, grandparent/s and most of my relatives in their generations.

In 2010, a museum exhibit designer contacted me at the archives, looking for material to represent Mennonites as one of many known immigrant groups in Kansas. This was part of an exhibit she was preparing for the U.S. District Court of the state of Kansas as part of the court’s 150th anniversary commemoration. (The federal district court in Kansas City, Kan., oversees citizenship and naturalization matters in Kansas.)

She wanted something that would make a coherent package—naturalization papers, photos, basic narratives of the people. We have a good number of such documents in the archives at Bethel, but what seemed easiest to put together into a complete package was from my own family.

I was able to represent the major Mennonite immigration from Russia and Eastern Europe of the 1870s as well as immigrants of the 1920s.

As I’ve reflected on my childhood years in the mid-1960s, I’ve come to recognize that I had certain experiences that differed dramatically from those of the majority of my schoolmates and acquaintances at that time. Neither of my parents spoke English until they started school. In family settings, I frequently heard people speaking non-English languages and people who spoke English with a noticeable accent. I traveled outside the United States at age 2, which was especially unusual for a blue collar/pink collar family like mine. My parents went out of their way to make connections with a good number of immigrants and international visitors in the Newton area, not all of them Mennonites. We regularly received mail from Germany, Sweden, Paraguay and Colombia. A couple of times a year, my grandmother received letters with a little red hammer and sickle stamp from her childhood friend and cousin in the Soviet Union. This was during the Cold War; it must have been incredibly rare for Newton, Kan.

On average, individual U.S. Mennonites probably have more of an international network than a typical American, considering Mennonites’ involvement in missions and relief/development work. However, I seem to see a difference in immigrant consciousness between two different white ethnic Mennonite groups. For the Swiss-German Mennonites, who are predominant especially in the eastern half of the country, immigration is usually something in the distant past. For the Dutch-Russian Mennonites, who are predominant in the Plains states (and Canada), immigration is still in many cases a “living memory.” The younger immigrants of the 1870s lived into the 1930s and ’40s, which means that many older people alive today are the grandchildren of the immigrant generation. In my own family, this living memory of immigration could last almost to the 22nd century, as those who are now teenagers remember their immigrant grandparents.

Being situated in this dense network of family and community ties to immigrants, I find the current anti-immigrant bigotry deeply unsettling. Even within the church, it’s discouraging that one too often finds indifference or even hostility toward immigrants and their concerns.

An implicit message of the federal court’s exhibit seems to be a pushback against the contemporary popular bigotry against immigrants. Immigrants are not strange insidious threats, the exhibit says; they are potential Americans, they are us. They are intimately familiar faces. What does an immigrant look like? A lot like me.

John D. Thiessen is an archivist for the Mennonite Church USA Archives in North Newton, Kan., and co-director of libraries at Bethel College. He is a member of Shalom Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan.
Can we connect pastors and business leaders?

There seems to be something going on in the Mennonite church—and I like it. Last October, I attended the Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series at Hesston (Kan.) College. The topic was “Top-Down Servant Leadership,” led by John Stahl-Wert, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation and Serving Leaders.

He spoke about the need for leaders to reconnect their work to purpose by focusing more on serving others than just making a profit.

Participants were encouraged to see leadership and authority the way Jesus modeled it—by leading others to grow in relationship with Christ and leading them in such a way that they flourish and become all God wants them to be.

From a biblical viewpoint, Stahl-Wert shared five powerful actions intended to transform any team, church or community from his book The Serving Leader for the People of God.

Later in the fall, I also attended the Mennonite Economic Development Associates convention in Niagara Falls, Ont., where the topic was “Business as a Calling.”

One particular workshop, just for pastors and businesspeople, focused on learning how to partner in leadership and ministry. Business leaders and pastors both provide leadership in their communities and congregations.

As followers of Christ, both wish to discern God’s call on their lives, work for God’s purposes in the world and extend God’s reign of justice and peace in their communities.

Yet despite these common goals, business leaders and pastors sometimes encounter barriers to pursuing a shared vision. This workshop was led by David B. Miller, associate professor of missional leadership development at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

We explored how business leaders and pastors can connect in a meaningful way with each other and jointly contribute to “God-activity” both inside and outside the congregation. During the session, the participants broke out into two caucus groups—for pastors and for businesspeople.

Pastors were asked to share how they experience businesspeople in the congregation. Do pastors really understand the needs of businesspeople? Can they relate? Are pastors intimidated by their wealth, power and/or prestige?

Business leaders were asked how they experience the church. Do they feel as though they are only needed for their money? How can the church see them as having other gifts to share? Do they feel supported by their pastor for also doing kingdom work or is it only reserved for Sunday mornings?

The results were compiled from both caucus groups and shared collectively. It was a great start to a long-overdue conversation.

As first a businessperson for 21 years and now a pastor for five years, I have a great passion for these two groups to connect. The real work of ministry doesn’t just happen on Sunday.

It takes place Monday through Friday, when Christian businesspeople have opportunity to interact with their co-workers, customers and community. It’s been said that “church begins on Monday,” so how can the church empower and better equip those to do the work of ministry? (See Ephesians 4:12).

Both pastors and business leaders need to recognize that we are in the same business—the “people business.” Jesus had to remind his own parents that he was to “be about my Father’s business,” which was to love and serve people. Isn’t that the reason Jesus came—to serve and not be served?

If it were not for businesspeople we may not have had the gospel. If we were not for businesspeople we may not have had the gospel. Think about the people Jesus chose to walk alongside him. Of the 12, at least four were fishermen, one was a tax collector and one was an accountant. Jesus bridged the gap and partnered with businesspeople to preach the gospel and advance the kingdom.

I am excited to see this chasm between these two groups start to close because both are vital to kingdom work here on earth. Can we keep this conversation going and reach across the pew?

I’m toying with the idea of starting a Christian Business Leaders Association in my community. What might you or your congregation be willing to do to advance God’s kingdom together? TM

The views expressed do not necessarily represent the official positions of Mennonite Church USA, The Mennonite or the board for The Mennonite, Inc.

David M. Miller is pastor at Bellwood Mennonite Church in Milford, Neb.
Two resolutions for Phoenix 2013

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Tits last meeting before the delegate assembly in Phoenix in July, the Executive Board (EB) of Mennonite Church USA met April 4-6 in Kansas City, Mo., and decided to send to delegates two resolutions for their consideration.

One resolution, “Protecting and Nurturing Our Children and Youth,” seeks to raise awareness of child abuse and neglect and encourage the adoption of policies and practices to protect children and youth in the church community. Because of concern for liability issues, the board decided to recommend its adoption, “pending legal counsel.”

Another resolution, on creation care, calls for congregations and members to care for creation as part of the good news of Jesus Christ. EB members recommended this without discussion.

A third resolution, on Israel/Palestine, had gone to the Constituency Leaders Council’s meeting in March for discussion.

However, said Dave Boshart and David Sutter, co-chairs of the resolutions committee, “nearly all table groups at CLC discouraged or had significant reservations about presenting the resolution ... to the delegate assembly.”

The committee did agree that the topic was important, and EB’s executive committee asked, What do we want to achieve?

Eventually, EB agreed on the following: “Executive Board desires to have conversation in the church which helps us understand both Israeli and Palestinian narratives and the Christian and American narrative in relation to them, and which helps us understand how we interpret the Bible in regard to these issues, particularly how we understand Christian Zionism.”

In an unprecedented occurrence, much of EB’s business time was spent in executive session, which means the press is not allowed to report on what is said.

In an April 8 email, moderator Dick Thomas said: “We spent about one-third of our meeting in either executive session or in session with agency staff and media present [but] where we requested no reporting of the conversation. Some of this conversation had to do with internal board processes and some with matters of discernment that will be reported after further conversation with individuals or groups that could not be at the board meeting.”

In other business, EB decided to reduced its number of meetings per biennium from seven to six, with one meeting in a non-convention year held by teleconference and the summer meeting in a convention year held at the convention site, with no meeting in the fall. EB members recognized the need for cutting budget but lamented the loss of meeting time. Larry Hauder said, “It’s hard to build relationships with fewer meetings.”

Executive director Ervin Stutzman said that the Purposeful Plan, which guides the work of the church, did not say anything about “our need for God.”

The board agreed to add the following to the document: “We recognize that because of sin, all have fallen short of the Creator’s intent, marred the image of God in which we were created, disrupted order in the world and limited our love for others. Therefore, through the reconciling power of Jesus Christ, we seek to walk in righteousness, or ‘right-relatedness’ with God and others.”

And in the section under Holistic Christian Witness, they added the following sentence: “Our allegiance to Jesus Christ calls us to love our enemies, demonstrating our willingness to die for our convictions but not to kill for them.” —Gordon Houser

Executive Board approves Church Extension Services transfer

At the Executive Board’s meeting April 4-6 in Kansas City, Mo., board members approved the March action of the Church Extension Services board to transfer responsibility for administering the CES church loan program to Everence (see page 35). CES will then be phased out as a separate entity. All the assets and liabilities related to CES will be transferred to Everence, except for $250,000 of equity to be placed in an Executive Board restricted fund to advance ministries consistent with the mission of CES. “The money will likely be invested back into the church loan program, and only the interest would be used for other ministries,” said Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA.

CES was managed by a board that was accountable to Mennonite Church USA. For the last couple of years, the CES board functioned under the oversight of Everence, which provided financial expertise and advice. On March 14, the CES board met and approved the recommendation from CES and Everence to transfer all assets and liabilities of CES to Everence Association. “Everence’s goal is to expand the reach of the original CES mission,” Stutzman said. “First, they hope to serve more emerging and disadvantaged congregations. In addition, they want to expand their impact to include new forms of ministry and outreach to communities.” —Marty Lehman, director of churchwide operations for Mennonite Church USA
Mennonites in Phoenix number 1,000
Two pastors note that members care for undocumented in spite of state law.

Mennonites preparing to gather July 1-6 in Phoenix for the biennial convention of Mennonite Church USA may wonder what kind of presence Mennonites have offered in this city of nearly 1.5 million residents—the sixth most populous city in the United States.

Steve Good, pastor of Sunnyslope Mennonite Church in downtown Phoenix, says the Mennonite presence in Phoenix began in the 1940s.

“Doctors sent people here from all over the country in hopes that a drier climate would bring relief from allergies, arthritis, asthma and all sorts of other ailments,” he says. “We began as a gathering of the sick.”

Peter Wiebe, former pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church, adds that Phoenix experienced another influx of Mennonites in the 1960s, when many young adults came to the city as voluntary service workers and students.

“They worked mostly with people in poverty, with migrants and with those who were ill in hospitals,” he says.

Today, Mennonites in Phoenix number around 1,000 and belong to at least 10 churches. There are six Mennonite Church USA congregations, three Conservative Mennonite Conference congregations and one Church of God in Christ Mennonite (also known as Holdeman Mennonite) church.

“We consider ourselves an ecumenical community,” Wiebe says. “Since there aren’t many of us Anabaptists around here, we have to stick together.”

Wiebe says that Mennonite leaders in the Valley [of the Sun] have enjoyed gathering for conversation when opportunities have arisen to connect with guests from the wider Mennonite church. “We are far from the Mennonite heartlands, and every ‘outside’ resource here is special,” he says.

Many Mennonite initiatives in Phoenix are supported by congregations within and outside of Mennonite Church USA.

For example, Glencroft Retirement Community was started by Mennonites, Brethren, Quakers and the Apostolic Church, according to Wiebe. This member organization of Mennonite Health Services Alliance provides housing for 900 residents with a continuum of care.

“Mennonites are quite involved in Glencroft, but the services provided by Glencroft definitely reach the wider Phoenix community,” Wiebe says.

House of Refuge and House of Hope are transitional homes that provide long-term assistance to men and women, respectively, who make a commitment to develop the skills necessary to recover from poverty and homelessness. While 25 to 30 congregations support these ministries, Sunnyslope Mennonite Church has been the primary support for House of Refuge for more than 25 years.

First Mennonite Church of Phoenix reaches out to the city through a weekly Wednesday after-school program for more than 40 at-risk youth. Pastor Al Whaley says they pick up youth from the neighborhood in two vehicles—one seating 30 and the other 15—and bring them to the church for planned activities.

“All the teachers are beyond retirement age, and the youth are in grades 1 to 12,” he says. “We have the oldsters teaching the youngsters, and it works. They accept us, and this ministry is God’s gift to us.”

Goldensun, a faith-based organization and residential community that serves adults with special needs, is another Phoenix ministry initiated by Mennonites. The Goldensun community also includes the Phoenix Menno Guest House, which is located near Trinity Mennonite Church and is designed to provide Christian hospitality to visitors and short-term volunteers.

“We believe the guest house supports the Mennonite presence in Phoenix in a good way, helping us connect to the wider Mennonite church and provide an Anabaptist witness to others,” says Wiebe.

[The Mennonite community in Phoenix] began as a gathering of the sick.
—Peter Wiebe

Participants in Mennonite Mission Network’s Service Opportunities for Older People (SOOP) program are regularly hosted by Phoenix Mennonites. Other Mennonites run a house repair program that assists those who can no longer care for their own homes. Still others build homes in Mexico for those in need. And everyone, says Wiebe, cares for their neighbors.

What kind of impact does Arizona SB1070, a law that makes it a crime to assist people who are undocumented, have on one’s ability to care for one’s neighbor in Phoenix?

Pastor Good says, “I have people in my congregation who listen to Rush Limbaugh and others who listen to NPR. But I tell you, if anyone in my church has a neighbor who is hungry, they’ll feed them.”

Phoenix congregations that belong to Mennonite Church USA through Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference are Christ Life Chapel, First Mennonite Church of Phoenix, Koinonia Mennonite Church (Chandler), Life House Community (Surprise), Sunnyslope Mennonite Church and Trinity Mennonite Church (Glendale).—Hilary J. Scarsella of Mennonite Church USA
God at work: kidneys healed, life restored

Mission Network worker in Colombia experiences ‘miraculous healing.’

Amanda Falla at her home in mid-March.

Amanda Falla believes miracles are considered uncommon because people don’t share about them. But Falla cannot keep quiet.

Falla was diagnosed with kidney failure in June 2012. She remembers lying on a hospital bed in Armenia, Colombia, as her blood flowed from one arm to a white machine—about the size of a mini refrigerator—filtering waste before it returned from the machine to the other arm. As a Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) worker in Colombia, Falla’s arms were often outstretched, reaching out to neighbors. But this time, Amanda’s arms were reaching toward a cold, metal dialysis machine. Amanda and Gamaliel Falla are seasoned church planters. They spent the last 10 years developing and sending church planters in Miami and along Colombia’s north coast. Because of their work, there are now five churches and church plants in the city of Barranquilla and one each in Riohacha and Sahagun. The month that Amanda Falla was diagnosed, the couple had moved to Armenia with the plan to serve from a central location as coordinators of pastoral accompaniment with the Colombia Mennonite Church.

Falla’s diagnosis meant that her kidneys were not extracting the necessary fluid from her body. Her hands and feet were swollen, and fluid had entered her lungs. At that point, the doctors, Amanda, Gamaliel and their three children decided that Amanda should move to live with her children near Chicago. Amanda received medical attention from specialists and was near her three grandchildren, ages 16, 10 and 2.

After a few months, Amanda, accompanied by a doctor and their son, David, was transferred to Eduard Hospital in Naperville, Ill. Gamaliel soon followed.

As citizens of the United States, Amanda and Gamaliel did not have a problem with visas. Even so, it was no small miracle that the Fallas were able to find a doctor who could assist in transferring Amanda so seamlessly to Chicago, only 15 minutes away from her children.

It was only when Amanda Falla arrived at the hospital and was swarmed with a team of medics that she realized her life was at stake. Yet in a sterile hospital environment and a different culture, with an uncertain future, she continually reminded herself that she was in the hands of God.

When Falla was assigned to a kidney specialist in Chicago, another small miracle happened: The kidney specialist was a fellow Colombian. This was another small reminder that God was with her.

Doctors discovered the cause behind Falla’s kidney failure—multiple myeloma, a dangerous form of cancer that starts in the bone marrow. Three times per week, for the next three months, Falla underwent chemotherapy. And each time she had treatment, she prayed for a miracle—if not for physical healing, then perhaps emotional healing. She also continued dialysis for her kidneys.

After three months of treatment, she faced a bone marrow transplant. “God, you have given us all these resources,” she prayed during the transplant. “I’ll accept whatever happens.”

Following the bone marrow transplant, Falla was exhausted but in surprisingly good spirits. She didn’t feel the severe pain that often accompanies the operation—only a lack of appetite, another small miracle.

“Her willingness to follow the doctors’ advice while praying to God for healing gave a strong testimony of being collaborators with God; doing our part and believing in God’s
Everence purchases Church Extension Services

CES’s mission to be strengthened, expanded through new annuity program

At its March 14 meeting, the Church Extension Services board of directors approved the sale of all Church Extension Services to the Everence Association. (Also see sidebar on page 32). The sale comes as part of an overarching plan to fully integrate CES into Everence, the stewardship agency of Mennonite Church USA.

“The financial mission and ministry of Everence is the right fit for the denomination’s missional loan program,” says Marty Lehman, Mennonite Church USA’s associate executive director for churchwide operations.

Established by the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1958, CES provided loans to congregations and initiatives that have difficulty qualifying through traditional lending institutions, such as urban, new church plants and new immigrant congregations. The fund was supported by the sale of investment securities to mission-driven investors.

Moving the CES program to Everence began in early 2011, when the two organizations’ boards of directors were aligned. In April 2012, core CES functions were transferred from Newton, Kan., to the Everence headquarters in Goshen, Ind.

“One of the goals was to grow Church Extension Services into a larger program,” says Mark Regier, Everence director of stewardship investing and president of CES.

“Everence is able to do that, with its national network of financial professionals. We now are able to help even more congregations and organizations.”

With the sale, however, comes a change in the way individuals can participate in the program. The mission of CES will now be carried out through the new Everence Advantage Select High Impact Annuity. Up to 50 percent of the annuity premium dollars will be made available for loans to emerging and socially engaged congregations, nonprofit organizations making environmentally friendly improvements, and community development needs in underserved areas. Church Extension Services investment certificates were liquidated on April 12, and note holders were to receive a check for the principal and accrued interest. Individuals holding a CES certificate may continue their support of emerging congregations by purchasing the Advantage Select High Impact Annuity from Everence. Organizational certificate holders can participate in the OneWorld Community Investment Program.—Everence

God at work (continued from page 34)

sovereignty,” says Linda Shelly, director of Latin America mission work with Mennonite Mission Network.

In the next weeks, Falla faced another bout of chemotherapy and an intestinal infection. But she continued her mission work, exchanging prayers for her friends in Colombia, Chicago and Miami, as they prayed for her healing.

Throughout her recovery from the chemotherapy, Falla continued to believe that God would heal her. But even she was not prepared for the news she was about to hear.

When she heard the results of her latest biopsy, she learned that her cancer had gone into remission. “The Lord is good,” she said.

As Falla was enduring months of dialysis, the nephrologist, or kidney specialist, encouraged Falla to consider a kidney transplant.

Falla said she would not accept a transplant. “I have faith that God will heal me,” she said.

However, Falla changed her mind when she was told that if she wanted to have kidneys that operate properly, she would need to be connected to a dialysis machine for 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“With [everything we have gone through],” Gamaliel wrote in a prayer letter, “we always see God’s hand [at work].”

When Amanda Falla heard the doctor’s next words, she knew beyond a doubt that God was in control.

“Amanda,” he said. “Your kidneys are functioning as normal.” Falla didn’t need dialysis, a kidney transplant or even medication.

The doctor told Falla that in his many years of professional practice, he had never seen a kidney recover fully.

Falla said she doesn’t have words to express how grateful she and her whole family and community are for her recovery. She’s uncertain why God chose to heal her, but she knows that God still has work for her to do.

Amanda stressed the importance of sharing the miracles that are experienced. “We don’t hear of miracles because we’re too quiet about them,” she says.

So what does Amanda Falla plan to do now?

“Live for today, give glory to God and share” about her miraculous healing, she says.—Kelsey Hochstetter of Mennonite Mission Network
Acting for peace through investments

‘Israel-Palestine Investment Screen’ will guide decisions.

The board of directors of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. unanimously decided that MCC U.S. will not knowingly invest in companies that benefit from products or services used to perpetrate acts of violence against Palestinians, Israelis and other people groups.

The action, taken at the board’s March 16 meeting in Akron, Pa., grew from a call from partners in Palestine and Israel, including churches there, and follows a discernment process with leaders of the denominations that sponsor MCC U.S.

MCC staff in the Middle East delivered the message from churches and other partners in a letter shared about a year ago. MCC has worked with partners in Palestine and Israel for more than 60 years and more than 40 years, respectively.

The board agreed that “all reasonable measures” are to be applied immediately not to support violence in the Palestine and Israel conflict and also that staff should explore “similar actions in support of partners in other parts of the world.”

The action means that MCC U.S. will not invest direct holdings in companies on the American Friends Service Committee “Israel/Palestine Investment Screen” list, will choose to invest in mutual funds that limit exposure to companies on the list and will join efforts to encourage the mutual funds that it holds to adopt similar screens.

Staff also will aim to align MCC U.S.’s purchasing patterns with these investment principles.

J. Ron Byler, MCC U.S. executive director, said that while the list names only companies that support Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, perpetrating acts of violence against Israelis is already illegal for Europe- and U.S.-based companies.

“We will take action if we become aware of offenders against Israel,” said Byler, “But our government ensures we do no harm to Israel while there is no such care for Palestinians. With our partners, we desire peace, justice and reconciliation for all.”

MCC U.S. investments traditionally have mirrored the organization’s core Christian values, using vehicles such as socially responsible funds.

We will take action if we become aware of offenders against Israel, but our government ensures we do no harm to Israel, while there is no such care for Palestinians.

Byler said another aspect of the action included participating with sponsoring denominations’ peacemaking and justice-seeking efforts as invited.

He said opportunities for this exist now with sponsoring denomination Mennonite Church USA.—Cheryl Zehr Walker of Mennonite Central Committee
New children’s curriculum coming in fall 2014

**Shine** co-published by MennoMedia and Brethren Press, logo now set

Development of a new Sunday school curriculum called **Shine** is underway by publishers MennoMedia and Brethren Press. In April, writers began work on the first quarter of **Shine: Living in God’s Light**, which will be available for use in fall 2014.

The two publishing houses, longtime collaborators, began more than 18 months ago to prepare a successor to their current Sunday school curriculum, **Gather ’Round: Hearing and Sharing God’s Good News**. For congregations using **Gather ’Round**, the transition to **Shine** will be seamless. **Gather ’Round** was designed to run for eight years, with summer 2014 as the final quarter.

“We’re very excited about **Shine**’s emphasis on God’s light shining through us,” says Rose Stutzman, project director. “As you read the Bible, you notice that the theme of light is pervasive. God’s light shines through the darkness—for God’s people both then and now.”

**Shine**’s foundational Scriptures include Isaiah 9:2 and Matthew 5:14-16. “Jesus told us, ‘You are the light of the world,’” says Rebecca Seiling, project developer. “**Shine**’s materials take this seriously. They serve to inspire children and their families to be that light in the world around them.”

Designed for children ages 3 through grade eight, **Shine** will incorporate the latest understandings of the ways children learn. The material is based on a three-year overview of the Bible, with a separate Bible outline for early childhood (ages 3 to 5).

Sessions include an emphasis on teaching prayer and other spiritual practices and will also highlight peace themes in the Scriptures.

Primary and middler children will read from a hardcover Bible storybook for use at church and at home. Junior youth will read the stories directly from the Bible. The flexible multimedia resource serves congregations with a small number of children of different ages.—MennoMedia staff
Site of May 2011 tornado now closed

125 cleanups, nine new builds by 3,300 Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers

Near two years after an EF-5 tornado struck Joplin, Mo., Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) closed its project site in Joplin.

On May 22, 2011, the tornado, over a mile wide, cut through the center of Joplin. More than 7,000 homes were completely destroyed, and the town’s infrastructure was heavily damaged, including the hospital and school. In addition to the loss of property, 159 lives were lost during the storm, making this disaster the second deadliest tornado in all of U.S. history.

Local MDS volunteers responded to the news of the tornado immediately. Within 24 hours, volunteers were helping clear access roads and were working with local farmers to help move animals to safety. In the weeks to follow, thousands of volunteers poured into the area to begin the job of cleaning up. Weeks later, the first repairs began.

MDS volunteers from Arkansas, Iowa and Missouri traveled back to Joplin to mark the end of MDS’s response in Joplin and to celebrate getting families back home.

Kevin King, MDS executive director, joined Larry Hostetler, Missouri Unit chair, and Al and Jan Kroeker, MDS Region III directors, at an evening of celebration and closure. Representatives from partner agencies, including Rebuild Joplin, Fuller Center for Housing, Samaritan’s Purse, Joplin Family Worship Center and several families who received a rebuilt home also attended the ceremony and dinner.

This was King’s fourth trip to visit the project in Joplin. He says: “I entered [the] town and saw the famous cross at one of the street corners that one of our volunteers carved out of a tree stump. It is now weathered and cracked from the drying sun—proclaiming the injury of the past.”

Renee White, chair of the long term recovery committee in Joplin, praised MDS’s work, saying, “MDS was integral to the rebuilding here in Joplin. MDS showed us a work ethic. You showed us what humility looks like. You are known not for the quality structures you build but the spirits that you lifted as well. We are a better and richer community now because of MDS. Thank you.”

In the two years that MDS worked in Joplin, more than 3,300 volunteers served, completing 125 cleanups, 23 minor repairs, 25 major repairs and nine new builds.—MDS

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STAR is a program of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University.
Indy small group has a taste of charity

Potlucks feature foods that relate to agencies and locations.

Around the table, members of the Indianapolis small group enjoy ethnic foods, tell personal stories, learn about a charitable organization and share a prayer of blessing.

Among the myriad of agencies asking for money these days, which are the dependable charitable organizations that members of our congregation support?

This question prompted the making of a small group at First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis.

Established and led by J.B. Miller, the group, committing to each other for one year, meets monthly at Miller’s home for fellowship and study.

“We are learning more about charitable organizations that are part of our congregational life,” says Miller.

At each meeting, one member tells what she or he has learned about the mission, the work and the impact of the organization.

Included among the agencies are ministries of Mennonite Church USA, such as Mennonite Mission Network, ecumenical ministries such as Witness for Peace, and local charities such as Wheeler Mission, which provides food and housing for homeless people.

From the beginning, potluck food has been part of each meeting. Members are encouraged to buy ingredients locally and prepare a dish that complements the location where the featured agency is active.

For example, on the day the group learned about Mennonite Disaster Service, the menu featured a southern Christmas meal. Besides this group, First Mennonite Church has 15 other small groups for members and visitors.

The group is intentionally diverse—marrieds and singles, young adults and people who are old enough to be their parents, longtime Mennonites and folks who have recently come from other denominations, and representatives of widely varied vocations, including finance, education, insurance, music, medicine, telephone technology, palliative care, social work and others.

“A highlight for me,” says Jen Christophel, “is becoming acquainted with people I normally don’t interact with on Sunday morning.” —J. Daniel Hess

Klaine Friend (center) eats after leading the prayer at meal time. Beside her is Sofia Christophel Lichti (left) and Kaden Friend.
1973 event opened pastorate to women


By telling the story of the ordination of Emma Sommers Richards, a new book from the Institute of Mennonite Studies aims to show that “all church members will share in the benefits and blessings that God will shower on faithful Anabaptist Mennonite congregations.”

The impact of this first ordination of a woman pastor in the former Mennonite Church is shared from a variety of perspectives in *According to the Grace Given to Her*, just released by IMS at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind. Richards was ordained on June 17, 1973.

Three editors, James E. Horsch, John D. Rempel and Eldon D. Nafziger, and nearly 20 contributors describe the influences and themes of Emma’s life that led to her ordination and reflect on what it meant in their lives and ministries.

The book begins with Miriam Book describing the setting of the call to women to serve in the Mennonite church. Then Elaine Sommers Rich, Emma’s sister, tells about influences in their family life. Arlene Mark describes other early influences through education and church involvement. Nancy V. Lee tells about the ministry of Emma and E. Joe Richards, her husband, as missionaries in Japan.

Following each of these and the additional chapters are testimonials from pastors for whom Emma was a mentor or source of inspiration, including Dan Schrock, John Gray, Rachel Fisher, David Sutter and Janice Yordy Sutter.

Emma Richards was ordained by the Illinois Mennonite Conference at the request of Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church, where she was serving on the pastoral team.

“It was an ordination that marked a breakthrough in North American Mennonites’ understanding that the Holy Spirit calls forth both women and men,” said Mary H. Schertz, director of IMS, at a Feb. 26 celebration of the book’s release. Also at this celebration, Gayle Gerber Koontz, AMBS professor of theology and ethics, emphasized the significance of this ordination for the church. By 1987, a little more than a decade after Emma’s ordination, in the General Conference Mennonite Church there were 44 women licensed or ordained in ministry positions—an estimated 10 percent of pastoral leadership.

“In what we used to call the Old Mennonite Church, by 1986, about 32 women were serving as licensed or ordained pastors, copastors, associate or assistant pastors,” Gerber Koontz said. “Two years later the number of women with credentials for pastoral ministry in the Old Mennonite Church jumped to 62. That decade after Emma was ordained was a huge shift.”—Mary E. Klassen of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

Frances Ringenberg, member of the pastoral team of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., greets Emma Sommers Richards and says, “You were the first woman pastor I ever saw.” Richards was pastor of Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church, where Ringenberg was a member.
Harder was passionate about the urban church

‘Harder-Kauffman Report’ provided important sociological data in the 1970s.

Leland Harder, a scholar of both Anabaptist history and Anabaptists of the late 1900s, died March 21 in North Newton, Kan. He was 86. Harder was a pastor, seminary professor and sociologist who combined all these areas to make significant contributions to the church during his lifetime of ministry.

In 1958, Harder and Bertha, his wife, joined the new faculty of Mennonite Biblical Seminary when it began on the Elkhart, Ind., campus. Over the next 25 years, he taught at the seminary and served briefly as associate director of the Institute of Mennonite Studies (IMS). In addition he was pastor of two congregations and served the church in many other ways.

Harder taught in the area of practical theology and directed field education, matching students and congregations for internships. A course Harder taught on urban evangelism provided the impetus for “Partly Dave,” a coffee house in downtown Elkhart. Coordinated with congregations in Elkhart, the coffee house provided a safe place for young people to gather and often was a venue for draft counseling during the Vietnam War.

From 1967 to 1969, Harder was one of a committee of seven Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary faculty members, called the Dean’s Seminar, that studied what form of leadership and ministry fits Mennonite congregations and how AMBS could fulfill its mission to prepare pastors. That study resulted in a model for theological education that guided the seminary for the next several decades.

Two areas of significant scholarly research serve as a lasting legacy of Harder’s work. One is the sociological research of church members, conducted by Harder and J. Howard Kauffman in the 1970s. Harder and Kauffman reported their findings in the book Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations (Herald Press, 1975). A second study, conducted in 1989 by Kauffman and Leo Driedger as an update, provided material for Harder’s book Doors to Lock and Doors to Open: The Discerning People of God (Herald Press, 1993). This volume interpreted the research in ways that would help congregational members enter more fully into decision-making in the church. The other area of Harder’s scholarly work is the book Sources of Swiss Anabaptism, (Herald Press, 1985), the fourth volume in the Classics of the Radical Reformation series coordinated by IMS.

Harder was born July 1, 1926, in Hillsboro, Kan., to Menno and Katherine Wiens Harder. He completed high school in Hillsboro, served in the Navy and then earned a bachelor’s degree at Bethel College, North Newton, in 1948. In 1950, he earned a master’s degree in sociology from Michigan State University. Soon after that he enrolled at Bethany Theological Seminary, then in Chicago. He married Bertha Fast, a student at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago, in 1951.

From 1952 to 1957, Harder was pastor of First Mennonite Church in Chicago, and from this experience grew his passion for the inner-city church. In 1958, with two young sons, the Harders moved to Elkhart to join the faculty of MBS. Harder earned a Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1962. Sabbatical experiences took them to Dublin, Ireland, and Richmond, Va., and during a 1978-1981 leave from AMBS he was pastor of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship.

In 1983, both Leland and Bertha retired from teaching at AMBS and moved to North Newton. For a brief time, Harder served as director of the Great Plains Seminary Education Program, a forerunner of the AMBS–Great Plains extension.—Mary E. Klassen of AMBS
Ethiopian church receives JoinHands grant

Mennonite Men grants Lancaster, Pa., congregation $40,000 for new facility.

Ken Martin (right), a Mennonite Men board member from Leola, Pa., presents a check for $40,000 to Pastor Berhanu Kebede.

Tinsae Kristos Evangelical Church in Lancaster, Pa., is the most recent congregation to receive a grant from JoinHands, the service component of Mennonite Men. Tinsae is a congregation of Ethiopian people located in the Manor District of Lancaster Mennonite Conference.

Ken Martin, a Mennonite Men board member from Leola, Pa., presented a check for $40,000 to Pastor Berhanu Kebede during the worship service at Tinsae Kristos on March 17.

The Tinsae Kristos congregation was organized in 1999. For a number of years, the congregation rented the meetinghouse at Eastern Mennonite Missions for Sunday worship services and used another church facility for choir practices and office space.

On Oct. 8, 2006, the congregation voted unanimously to purchase the former Bethel Mennonite Church building (Eastern District Conference), located in a suburban area of Lancaster. Early in 2007, the group moved into its new facility. Sam Thomas, a Lancaster Mennonite Conference bishop, provides oversight for the congregation and was present for the grant presentation.

Mennonite Men is a constituent group of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. Two JoinHands grants are given each year from money donated by interested people across the United States and Canada.—Don Yoder of Mennonite Men

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Romans 10:15

Going where the church is not... yet.
Two Mennonite leaders attend pope’s inauguration

Mennonite World Conference’s García wants dialogue with Catholic Church.

After the March 13 election of Argentinian Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio as Pope Francis, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) issued a letter of congratulations and sent two of its leaders to inaugural services in Rome March 19-20 (see also page 9).

In a March 14 letter to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU), César García, MWC general secretary, wrote, “Without a doubt the ministry of Francis as the first Latin American—and the first Jesuit—pope will bring new impetus to our relationships.”

García expressed his belief that the history of MWC dialogues with the Catholic Church “will create important spaces for our churches under the pontificate of Pope Francis.” García referred to the 1998-2003 Mennonite-Catholic dialogue that led to the joint report “Called to Be Peacemakers.” He also referred to the more recent trilateral dialogue on baptism—including Catholics, Mennonites and Lutherans—begun in December 2012.

“Please be assured of our love and prayers for your church in these days of momentous transition,” wrote García. He added, “Sharing in the same Latin American background, I was especially touched by Francis’ attitude when he bowed to the crowd after asking prayer from the many people that had come to receive him … his attitude of humility has been a special blessing for me as a Latin American.” Attending the inaugural services in Rome, at the invitation of the PCPCU, were Rainer Burkart of Germany and Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands. Burkart is a member of the MWC Faith and Life Commission, and Stenvers of the Deacons Commission. They had an opportunity to meet representatives of other Christian world communions and also greet the pope personally.

“Pope Francis seems to be a very friendly and humble person,” they wrote. “It was our impression that he will take steps to let the papal office appear in a different way.” They noted several important “small signs.” For example, “the chair of the pope during the audience [with ecumenical guests] was not standing on a podium but at the same level with everybody else. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, representing the Eastern Orthodox world, was given the exact same kind of chair as that of the pope.”

—Mennonite World Conference staff

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Harvey Yoder: Are we overlooking what the Bible teaches about unity?

Paul: I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. … Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Is not the cup of Thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

Jesus: My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

When I became a licensed pastor in Virginia Mennonite Conference in 1965, there were four different Anabaptist-related communions in the Harrisonburg-Rockingham (Va.) County area, three of these being Old Order groups at variance with each other. The main Virginia Conference congregation I joined at that time had experienced only one division since its beginning 130 years earlier, the Old Order one in 1900.

Today there are 12 different Mennonite subgroups in Rockingham County alone, and there are signs of even more church divorces to come.

As a committed Anabaptist-Mennonite and as teacher of James Madison University’s Lifelong Learning Class on “Mennonites in the Valley” for the past 15 years, I find this multiplicity of divisions beyond embarrassing. We are, after all, supposed to be a church that’s all about community, peace and getting along with each other.

In the past, our church splits were often accompanied by rancorous debates and hard feelings. But those days are largely behind us as we become ever more skilled at conflict evasion and less inclined to do conflict engagement. We tend to “divorce” amicably and continue to get along just fine, making every effort to remain nice to each other in a way that makes “no-fault” dividing seem OK.

What we lose as we politely agree to disagree and go our separate ways, however, are the kinds of church family connections that enhance learning and create a sense of needed accountability with each other. More homogeneous but separated groups tend not to experience the kind of healthy growth and maturity they might if they did the hard work of respectfully listening to each other and continuing to try to work things out.

Whether as citizens of a nation or members of organizations or congregations, we tend to feel uneasy about people with opposing opinions and may even see them as dangerous.

But why not see having a diversity of perspectives, in the context of a unity of purpose, as a potential blessing?

I grew up in an Amish family and community that placed a high value on unity and uniformity. In spite of this (or perhaps because of this) we frequently had people leaving our congregation to join another or leave another church to join ours. The assumption was that if you couldn’t agree to get along or go along, you pulled up stakes and went elsewhere—or started a new group of your own.

Years ago I heard Mennonite missionary and church planter Donald Jacobs present a version of the diagram below in a seminar on church growth he led at Eastern Mennonite University (then EMC).
Here are the main players in Jacobs’ model

Preservers: He stressed that all groups, including churches, need a stable group of members committed to preserving its core values. Around some issues, he said, any of us may find ourselves resisting change and working to preserve the “old order” of things. When these conservative-minded folks begin to feel their concerns are no longer heard or respected, they may feel strongly enough to leave as a group to form their own separate community.

Pioneers: Healthy groups also need innovators who advocate for change, lest a group become ingrown and stagnant. These folk tend to operate on the outer fringe of the community and at times are viewed with suspicion and fear. When these innovators no longer feel heard or respected, they may likewise form another group or simply drift off one by one.

In either case, when new groups form, they form alignments similar to the groups they have left, except now some of the more liberal pioneers may find themselves labeled as conservative preservers in the context of the new group.

Settlers: These folk are the more or less silent majority in the group in a given conflict and are not as strongly aligned with either the pioneers or preservers on a particular issue but may have varying degrees of sympathy for one or the other—or both.

Jacobs stressed that in a healthy group, individuals are able to change roles, depending on the issue. Let me speak personally. On some issues, such as advocating for more house churches instead of investing in ever more church real estate, I may be seen as a pioneer, whereas on other issues, such as preserving our Mennonite peace stance, I may be seen as a strong preserver. On certain other issues, as in what style of church music to use, I’m often in the middle, open to those of either camp. In the case of these examples, in some settings or in some periods of history, house

We tend to ’divorce’ amicably and continue to get along just fine, making every effort to remain nice to each other in a way that makes ’no-fault’ dividing seem OK.

churches will be seen as a decidedly conservative idea, whereas the advocacy of nonviolence will be seen as a very radical one. Depending on the issue and on the makeup of the group, we will find ourselves at different places—and therefore aligned with different people—which is as it should be. This kind of dynamic reshuffling has the effect of bonding us to a variety of different people and tends to have an interlacing quality that makes a group stronger and more division proof.

Mediators: Each of us, Jacobs reminded us, needs to serve in intermediary roles within the group whenever possible. Sometimes we may serve in the role of interpreter for the preservers, promoting good conversation between them and the pioneers and between them and the rank-and-file middle. At other times we may advocate for the innovators, to help make sure they are clearly understood and their ideas are being respectfully considered.

When we see differences as normal—as actually having potential for making our churches healthier and stronger—and when each member, and each congregation, feels valued and needed as a part of the larger body, the health and growth of the church is enhanced.

My modest proposal for us Mennonites is that we agree to an indefinite moratorium on breaking up by adopting the following:

In light of Jesus’ and the apostle’s teachings on church unity, we are committed to steadfastly maintaining a strong “unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace” as we seek to grow toward an ever greater “unity of the faith” until separated by death. We will practice redemptive forms of discipline for erring individuals, but we will never again separate as whole church families from one another.—Harvey Yoder, a licensed professional counselor at the Family Life Resource Center in Harrisonburg, Va., and pastor of Family of Hope, a house church in the Virginia Mennonite Conference
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Herald Press
CALENDAR
May 21-24, 2013. St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, quilt show. Door receipts, boutique sales, and overnight accommodation — all for MCC Relief. Part of Quilt & Fibre Art Festival, Waterloo Region — see www.stjacobs.com. For B&B contact de-johns@rogers.com or 519-664-3049.

Geez magazine launches contest for ‘30 More Sermons You’d Never Hear in Church’ Winnipeg, Manitoba. The social gospel is on an upswing, and the crowd-moving sermon deserves another chance. “We want to hear from those who wouldn’t normally fill the pulpit on a Sunday morning,” says Geez publisher Aiden Enns. “If the social gospel is going to be preached today, it will come from the margins, and it won’t sound like the Sunday mornings we’re used to.” The top sermon will receive $500, with $300 and $200 going to the second and third place winners. The winners, plus a selection of other entries, will be published in the Winter 2013 issue of Geez. Deadline for entries is Sept. 1, 2013. Word limit is 750. Enter at contest@geezmagazine.org. See www.geezmagazine.org/contest for full details and entry form. Geez is an ad-free quarterly magazine of spirit and social action.

HOLLOWELL, Hugh, was ordained at Raleigh Mennonite Church, Raleigh, N.C., for his ministry with the homeless as director of Love Wins Ministries in Raleigh, N.C., on March 24.

HORST, Stephen, and Bethany Tobin were licensed for overseas mission work at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., on Sunday, March 24. Steve and Bethany will be serving in Bangkok, Thailand, appointed by Virginia Mennonite Missions and as associate missionaries with Eastern Mennonite Missions.

OBITUARIES


For the Record is available to members of Mennonite Church USA. Births and marriages appear online at www.themennonite.org. Obituaries are also published in The Mennonite. Contact Rebecca Helmuth at 800-790-2498 for expanded memorial and photo insertion options. To submit information, log on to www.themennonite.org and use the “For the Record” button for online forms. You may also submit information by email, fax or mail: Editor@TheMennonite.org; fax 316-283-0454; 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517.


Kauffman, Tasha Lynn, 38, Lancaster, Pa., died Dec. 9, 2012. Parents: Glenn M. and Mary Schrag Kauffman. Sibling: Keri L. Kauffman. Tasha was an analyst in the Electronic Records Department at Lancaster General Hospital; a member of Mountville Mennonite Church where she was the worship leader; and a 1997 graduate of Eastern Mennonite University. Funeral: Dec. 15 at Mountville Mennonite Church, Mountville, Pa.


Kreider, Kay Sutter, died March 17, in Seattle, Wash., after a brief illness with lung cancer. She is survived by her husband Paul Kreider, daughter Kara Kreider and partner Nick Demopolus of Brooklyn, N.Y., daughter Alyssa Kreider and husband William Sunderland and grandsons Yuri and Gareth of Seattle, and foster son John Hammond (sons Jonathan and Derek) of Chatsworth, Ga.; also survived by her mother, Merna Sutter of Flanagan, Ill., siblings Don Sutter of Pontiac, Ill., Tom Sutter (Deb, and Aaron & Sarah) of Urbana, Ill., and, Jane Sutter and Mary Sutter of Sedona, Ariz. A private memorial gathering for the family with the Dayton Mennonite Fellowship is being planned in the Dayton, Ohio, area for July, 2013.


Swartzentruber, Mary M., 81, Springs, Pa., died March 15. Parents: Jacob B. and Fannie Kinsinger Swartzentruber. Funeral: March 17 at Springs Mennonite Church.


Eastern Mennonite Seminary Lancaster is seeking applicants for a part-time administrative assistant. The administrative assistant provides a range of support services for various programs of the EMS extension program in southeastern Pennsylvania. This role ensures that communication, academic record keeping and financial operations function smoothly for the EMS Lancaster programs. Bachelor’s degree preferred. Expertise with personal computers, word processing, spreadsheet, data processing and desktop publishing required. Administrative assistant must possess strong communication skills, ability to organize and maintain systems of information, and ability to plan and organize work with minimal direction. Submit application, resume and three references to: hr@emu.edu. For more information visit our website at www.emu.edu/humanresources. People who bring diversity are encouraged to apply. EOE.

Eastern Mennonite University is seeking qualified applicants for a program administrator position with the Washington Community Scholars’ Center in Washington, D.C. Responsibilities include daily administrative details of WCSC, assisting with recruitment, internship placement, event planning, managing databases and enrolling students in outside university classes. Bachelor’s degree preferred. Position is .75 FTE. Review of applications will begin immediately. Submit application, resume and contact information for three references to: hr@emu.edu. For more information visit our website: www.emu.edu/humanresources. EOE.

Virginia Mennonite Conference invites applications for the full-time position of conference minister. Applicants are expected to have significant theological training and leadership experience as well as administrative and interpersonal skills. Salary and benefits will be consistent with the MC USA guidelines. To view the full job description and access the application form, please go to: www.virginiaconference.org/jobopenings

Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, a vibrant multistaff congregation in Blooming Glen Pa., is seeking a full-time youth pastor. He or she will work with volunteer youth leaders to “invite every youth to commit to a personal relationship and lifelong journey with Jesus Christ, mentoring them toward wholeness within a supportive church family and empowering them to be disciples in the local and global community.” Information can be obtained by emailing the search committee at bloomingglenyouth@gmail.com.

North Danvers Mennonite Church of rural Danvers, Ill., is seeking a full-time pastor. A member of the Central District Conference, we have a Sunday morning all-ages attendance of about 80 and value discipleship, worship, service and fellowship. Would prefer a candidate with experience, seminary training, Anabaptist values and strong preaching and communication skills but will consider all applicants. Church website: Northdanverschurch.com. Search committee contact: marvel craig@yahoo.com.

Bethel College seeks an associate director of development. Responsibilities include identification, cultivation and solicitation of donor prospects and work with the college’s annual and capital funds. Qualifications: interpersonal, public presentation, organizational and technology skills; self-direction; willingness and ability to travel; familiarity with Bethel constituency; advocacy for Bethel; understanding of the values of the Mennonite faith; experience in or closely related to development; bachelor’s degree required. Submit resume, letter and three professional references to Sondra Koontz, Vice President for Advancement, Bethel College, 300 E. 27th, North Newton, KS 67117, or email skoontz@bethelks.edu. Review of applications begins immediately and will be accepted until the position is filled.

Crooked Creek Christian Camp, located near Washington, Iowa, is seeking a full-time camp administrator. Crooked Creek is situated on 300 acres of beautiful Iowa landscape. We are looking for someone who has a strong sense of calling for camp ministry and a personal commitment to Christ with an Anabaptist theology. Additional qualities desired are strong administrative skills with emphasis in financial management, fund-raising, public relations, staff oversight and a heart for hospitality. For further information or to submit a resume please contact the search committee at cccc.search@gmail.com.

Jubilee celebration: First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana, Ill., is planning a 50th-anniversary reunion weekend on July 26-28, 2013. All former attendees are warmly invited to return for a weekend of fellowship, worship, service and music. Check out information on www.fmc-cu.org/ or call the church at 217-367-5353.

Hinkletown Mennonite School is seeking applicants for the following positions: full-time facilities manager/custodian, full-time and part-time computer/technology support and middle school teachers in science, social studies, Spanish. Send resume to Dawn Landes, Administrator, at dlandes@hmsk8.org. Visit hmsk8.org for more information.


Johann, the first novel published by Everett J. Thomas, is available for $8.95 at Amazon.com. Copies may also be ordered from the Better World Books store, Goshen, Ind., at 574-534-1984 or from the Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Historical Society at lmhs.org.
RESOURCES

Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook, edited by James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris and Brian Schrag (William Carey Library Publishers, 2013, $44.99), offers theological reflection, case studies, practical tools and audiovisual resources to help the global church appreciate and generate culturally appropriate arts in worship and witness.

Creating Local Arts Together by James R. Krabill and Brian Schrag (William Carey Library Publishers, 2013, $34.99) is a manual designed to guide an individual or group into a local community’s efforts at integrating its arts with the values and purposes of God’s kingdom. The practical, playful text reduces experience-based scholarly insights gained from multiple decades of incarnational ministry around the world into a flexible seven-step process.

Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships by James V. Brownson (Eerdmans, 2013, $29) argues that Christians should reconsider whether or not the biblical strictures against same-sex relations as defined in the ancient world should apply to contemporary, committed same-sex relationships. Brownson analyzes each of the seven main texts that appear to address intimate same-sex relations.

Dissident for Life: Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia by Koenraad De Wolf (Eerdmans, 2013, $28) tells the story of Alexander Ogorodnikov, long-time Russian dissident, whose courage touched people from every walk of life, including famous world leaders such as Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Fully Awake and Truly Alive: Spiritual Practices to Nurture Your Soul by Jane E. Vennard (SkyLight Paths, 2013, $16.99) illustrates the joys and frustrations of spiritual practice, offers insights from various religious traditions and provides step-by-step exercises and meditations to practice community, hospitality, service and living gratefully.

Men Pray: Voices of Strength, Faith, Healing, Hope and Courage, edited by editors at SkyLight Paths (SkyLight Paths, 2013, $16.99), celebrates the variety of ways men around the world have called out to the Divine—with words of joy, praise, gratitude, wonder, petition and even anger—from the ancient world up to our day.


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Why don’t young adults go to church?

A discussion among us 30-something Mennonites has been heating up online. It’s a discussion that cuts to the heart of nearly everything the church worries about us. The discussion question is the first one you’d guess: Why don’t we go to church?

The discussion, to my knowledge, kicked off when Mennonite World Review reposted an entry from a blog entitled “Motley Mama” on its website. In it, Katie Baer, a fellow millennial, responds to a question from one of her readers. The reader asks Katie, an articulate, creative Mennonite writer, why she doesn’t go to church.

The question is posed as it often is these days. It’s asked carefully, as if the asker is anxious that the wrong words may chase us even further away. And it ends by indicating an almost-total devotion to making church work for young Mennonites: “Is there anything the rest of us can do to welcome [you] back?”

Katie’s response to this question is deeply honest. It also reflects some of my feelings, and those of many of my peers as well. She begins by admitting that church can feel boring and that it’s easier to stay home, eat blueberry pancakes and stream online TV shows instead.

She also goes on to specify what she feels we want: “We want a church less about church and more about community. We want a church with reached-out hands instead of clenched fists. We want real. We want relatable. We want compassionate and inclusive. We want to talk about things that matter now.”

I’m glad Katie was so honest. But her honesty, by itself, reflects an aspect of my generation that I’ve grown increasingly nervous about.

Our generation tends to be great with honest reflections. We were brought up to tell the truth and find our voices. Our love of blogging is a testament to that.

Unfortunately, though, we haven’t always been so great at allowing our honesty to be evaluated. We haven’t been great at this because we haven’t been sticking around to receive it. We casually inject our honesty from the outside and then move on. So even if we’re right, we’re not committed or vulnerable enough to be a part of actually making those concerns mean anything.

Right now, if I assess my generation’s honesty, I see this: a lot of sincere, valid, prophetic insight. But I also see a generation asking the church to bend over backward for them while lightheartedly hinting that they might still prefer to relax at home every Sunday even if the church does bend over backward. I see a generation saying seriously important things but without doing enough to deserve to be taken seriously.

Yet we are taken seriously. Our parents, our parents’ friends, our grandparents, our grandparents’ friends and so many Mennonites over the age of 40 have listened anyway. They’ve nodded, chosen their words ever more carefully and time and time again asked us if there was anything, anything at all, they could ever do to keep us. More and more, they’ve acted like people who know that the future of their church depends on us.

I see a generation saying seriously important things but without doing enough to deserve to be taken seriously.

They’ve acted like people willing to consider just about anything just to keep us.

I’m not saying the church hasn’t been frustratingly rigid sometimes. I’m just saying that much of that church is asking us to help them overcome that. They’re no longer asking us to be just like them. They’re no longer asking us to give up our ideals and our concerns. They’re no longer asking us to sit quietly in the pews in our Sunday best, pretending. They’re just asking us to come out and help them fix the problems we’ve told them about.

Lately, when I’ve been asked why I still go to church, my first answer tends to be this: Where else would I be required to build community with people I otherwise (and usually inaccurately) label too conservative, too sheltered, too naïve or too closed-minded? Where else would I be required to coexist with and learn from my elders? Where else would I learn the humility that my elders model every time they listen to me?

There may be a lot I want from church that I’m not getting yet. But, thankfully, it’s still providing even more of what I actually need. And the more we all choose what we need, the closer we all get to the inspiring, thriving church we want.
A possible spiritual classic

Christian Wiman, a well-known poet and until recently the editor of Poetry magazine, has written what may become a spiritual classic.

He opens his book My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013) with a four-line stanza from one of his uncompleted poems:

My God my bright abyss into which all my longing will not go once more I come to the edge of all I know and believing nothing believe in this:

He closes the book with the same four lines, with one exception: the colon after “this” becomes a period.

Thus he captures the paradoxical journey of faith he is on, at “the edge of all I know,” looking forward. Then, at the end, “believing nothing believe in this,” a sure but tentative faith.

In a preface, Wiman says he “wanted to write a book that might help someone who is at once as confused and certain about the source of life and consciousness as I am.”

Wiman’s language about faith is refreshing because it does not employ the usual insider phrases. He often contrasts faith and belief, noting that “faith in God is, in the deepest sense, faith in life—which means that even the staunchest life of faith is a life of great change.”

Belief, on the other hand, is more intellectual and superficial. “How astonishing it is,” he writes, “the fierceness with which we cling to beliefs that have made us miserable, or beliefs that prove to be so obviously inadequate when extreme suffering—or great joy—comes.”

Another theme under the rubric of paradox is the commingling of God’s presence and absence. Wiman writes: “If grace woke me to God’s presence in the world and in my heart, it also woke me to his absence. I never truly felt the pain of unbelief until I began to believe.”

In 2005, Wiman learned that he had an incurable cancer of the blood, which he calls “as rare as it is unpredictable, ‘smoldering’ in some people for decades, turning others to quick tender.” He wrote this book in sections over a period of years. Some parts are written during the early stages of cancer treatment, when he faced a more immediate chance of dying. He describes this with incisive feeling: “It is qualitatively different when death looms over to snuff you, when massive unmetaphorical pain goes crawling through your bones, when fear … ices your spine.”

One of Wiman’s recurring themes is the affinity of poetry and faith. He points to the importance of imagination in experiencing God: “Human imagination is not simply our means of reaching out to God but God’s means of manifesting himself to us.”

He says he is a Christian because of Jesus’ cry on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Christ’s suffering, he writes, “shatters the iron walls around individual human suffering,” and “Christ’s compassion makes extreme human compassion—to the point of death, even—possible.” And he is a Christian, he writes, “because I can feel God only through physical existence, can feel his love only in the love of other people.”

Wiman writes of his experiences of this love through his wife and his twin daughters, who have helped carry him through seven years of cancer.

In the end, he concludes that at the heart of faith is “acceptance of all the gifts that God, even in the midst of death, grants us.”

My Bright Abyss demands but also rewards careful reading and reflecting.

Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.
(Continued from page 5)
Balthasar Hubmaier “anarchists” using Linthicum’s first dictionary definition (a state of disorder due to absence or nonrecognition of authority) to de-
scribe how those first radical reformers thought about the authority of “the
church” of their time.—Jim Compton-
Schmidt, Reedley, Calif

This makes agreement harder
I appreciated J. Denny Weaver’s reflec-
tions on our uses of the Bible. As he in-
dicates, we all look at biblical texts through our own filters. These filters include childhood experiences in church, models provided by our par-
ents, courses taken in college and views of those whom we respect. As he men-
tions, certain biblical practices we now reject out of hand (stoning, slav-
ery, polygamy and others). Recognizing that we do this as a matter of practice should give us pause when we then turn around and attempt to use it as a rule book when disagreeing with other believers.

On the one hand, this is a liberating concept. The Bible is no longer a set of rules for all times and places un-
related to a given historical context. On the other hand, this makes our job harder, since we need to work on finding meaning and guidance from Script-
ture for our time and place in history. I suspect Weaver would find a role for people sharing their views, disagreeing and perhaps even coming to consensus in the setting of a community of believ-
ers.—David Schmidt, Great Bend, Kan.

Use of ‘welcoming’ is bias
The Mennonite appears to have adopted by headline the term “welcoming” as a term of art for those advocating acceptance of same-sex coupling (March). I question this. All congregations should be welcoming. Discussion can be shaped as much by co-oping terms as by formal resolutions. To use the term narrowly reflects favorable bias.

Our congregation wants to be wel-
coming of all, including those of homo-
sexual orientation. However, we
recently went in a slightly different di-
rection by removing the name of San Diego (Calif.) Mennonite Church from the list of Supportive Communities maintained by the Brethren Mennonite Council. We tried to do so in a manner that was not dismissive or hostile. Although motives in our small fellowship may have differed, the consensus was that we do not support same-sex mar-
riage or that this is a legal inevitability and that we do not want warmth to-
ard gay brothers and sisters to over-
whelm a Christian agenda of many dimensions.—Bruce Leichty, secretary of San Diego Mennonite Church

Rebuke of Murray is funny
Ron Adams’ and Isaac Villegas’ rebuke of Stuart Murray’s assumptions about post-Christendom (February) is a little bit funny, even if the issues are indeed serious. Funny because one way of reading the rebuke is this: The Anabap-
tists and we, their offshoots, have re-
jected the Christendom model throughout our history. But now, at the turn of the 21st century, we suddenly find ourselves culturally and theologi-
cally accepted. The media loves us, and theologians the world over take John Howard Yoder seriously. If the world will just hang onto the idea of Chris-
tians dominating society, it looks like we’ll get a chance to “speak truth to power.” And if we take that chance, well, at last, some of that power will be ours.

But here comes Stuart Murray
messing up that prospect by rejecting the whole paradigm.

Adams and Villegas seem to be speaking of church one way, Murray another. Murray started with “naked” discipleship—with following Jesus and letting consequences such as cultural influence come as they may. We may surely believe Adams and Villegas also intend to be Jesus’ followers, but their starting point—and their path until the very end of their piece—seems nonetheless to be cultivating the cul-
tural influence that Jesus’ followers can have and to be sure we don’t lose that
influence. Not polar opposite from
Murray, to be sure, but a mood some-
thing more like an advocacy group’s, somewhat less excited by Jesus’ an-
nouncement of God’s reign.—Theron F.
Schlabach, Goshen, Ind.

Letter misses point
I appreciate Gary Blosser taking the time to respond to my January piece on the Mennonite confession of faith and marriage. However, he seems to have missed my point. Blosser emphasizes the “one man and one woman” in article 19. But I show that the confession itself is emphasizing the “for life” (i.e., it is focusing on saying no to divorce and remarriage).

The confession (and present-day practice in Mennonite churches) points toward a way of emphasizing healing over legalism in relation to divorced and remarried people. Does Blosser believe this is wrong? If so, he should speak out against it. If not, what is the basis then for using the confession as grounds for denying welcome to same-
sex couples while welcoming couples in their second marriages?—Ted
Grimsrud, Harrisonburg, Va.

Wonderful Easter cover
When I saw the front cover of the April issue, my first glance was in quick passing and I thought, “Oh, [the staff at] The Mennonite has outdone them-
selves, and it is very fitting for the sea-
son.” It made me want to make sure I looked through the rest of the maga-
zine later. Then at dinner in the evening, I was looking at the cover again, and I immediately thought that it looked like Ken Gingerich’s work. I was right. It is eye-catching, beautiful and lifts one’s spirit. Thanks, Ken, for creating it. Thanks, [designer Dee
Birkey], for selecting it.—Nancy
Kaufmann, denominational minister,
Mennonite Church USA
God sightings: moments with Father

This then, is how you should pray: “Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”—Matthew 6:9-10 TNIV

Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”—John 5:19 TNIV

Jesus taught his disciples to address God as a loving father who gives directions to his children. We, too, are invited to address God in this way and to listen for God’s instructions.

One of my growing edges is to listen for God’s voice in prayer. As my friend Keith Yoder says, “Listening prayer is one practice that cultivates our ability to hear God. Listening prayer is part of the historic practice of solitude and silence before God. In this kind of prayer one does not make requests or vocalize praise and thanksgiving. Rather one simply quiets the noise within and without and listens.”

Because Keith regularly writes a column entitled “Moments with Father,” I asked him to tell me about his practice of listening for God. He noted that one “may begin by meditating on a particular Scripture passage and listening for additional thoughts and personal instruction, or we may ponder a question and wait with dependency and expectancy for God to direct our understanding.”

Keith acknowledges that what he writes are “impressions received while listening to God in prayer.” He tests these impressions with Scripture and the character of God’s Son, by which God has already spoken. He finds the Holy Spirit drawing his attention to passages that have the concept, the wording or both that come to him as he listens.

The following sentences are drawn from one of his meditations. They are written as though God were speaking:

Even as I wait upon you, I would have you wait upon me.

You may wait for a person or event. Wait with me for the coming of the Lord Jesus to catch away his church as a bride. You may wait by a person, to stay as a presence, support or advocate.

You may wait by a situation, taking a stand, keeping watch, seeking justice.

You may wait upon a responsibility, guarding a stewardship to which you have been appointed … at a time … to a place … for a purpose. You may wait upon a person, attending to their interests and needs as a servant like a waiter or waitress. Often such waiting involves patient continuance. Often you wait, gathered together with others in a common purpose and hope.

Waiting upon another, as I wait upon you, is to incline toward and accept others—to reach out to be near them, receive them and serve them. Waiting upon another is longing for their presence and strength—to know and be known by them. I long for you to wait upon me.

In essence, waiting is attentive and engaged. Attentive: with one’s eye upon others to know their interests, their needs, their nature. Engaged: ready to act on behalf of others, to move toward them. From waiting proceeds favor, mercy, strength and a godly heritage.

From waiting proceeds favor, mercy, strength and a godly heritage.

(“Confirming Scriptures”: Numbers 8:24-25; Psalm 123:2; 130:18; Isaiah 30:18; 40:31; John 15:4-8; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-2; James 5:7)

I am featuring Keith’s practice of listening prayer as a way to encourage us to notice God’s work in the world. Some who have been abused by an earthly father may not be comfortable addressing God in this way. Since I lost my father at a young age, I am comforted by such words of assurance and direction. May you, too, find comfort and hope through moments spent listening to God. [3]
The narcissism of small differences

In this month’s News Analysis (page 44), Harvey Yoder anguishs about divisions and church “divorces” among Mennonites.

“Today there are 12 different Mennonite sub-groups in Rockingham County (Va.) alone, and there are signs of even more church divorces to come,” Yoder writes. “... I find this multiplicity of divisions beyond embarrassing.”

Yoder goes on to say that what we lose—as we politely agree to disagree and go our separate ways—are important connections that enhance learning and create a sense of needed accountability with each other.

But why do we divide?

Mennonites living in close physical proximity to each other are separated on Sunday mornings because of divergent convictions and theologies.

I mentioned Yoder’s complaint in a recent Sunday school discussion. Afterward, a friend alerted me to Sigmund Freud’s contention that such divisions can sometimes be a form of excessive self-interest. Borrowing from an earlier scholar, Freud described it as “the narcissism of small differences.” He observed that communities with adjoining territories—and related to each other in other ways as well—engage in constant feuds and ridicule each other.

So the question is whether the differences over which we argue and divide are “small.” For some they are; for others they are not. And in most parts of this country there are varieties of Mennonites living in close physical proximity to each other but separated on Sunday mornings by divergent convictions and theologies.

But I have also seen signs that some of us are willing to do the hard work of listening to others whose perspectives and beliefs seem wrong. This hard work is being done mostly by area conferences. Here are two examples:

David Boshart, executive conference minister for Central Plains Mennonite Conference, published an article in the February issue of the conference newsletter entitled “Why I Have Hope for the Church.” In the article he describes a process leaders are using to give and receive counsel in relationship to a policy on marriage adopted by Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis. Each congregation was asked to send three people “full of wisdom and the Spirit” to regional discussions. Boshart observes that there was a high level of participation. He also says, “Participants ... embodied extraordinary wisdom, spiritual maturity, interpersonal sensitivity and open communication. ... This was a rare opportunity for our members to talk to one another about agreements and disagreements on matters of faith and life.”

In Allegheny Mennonite Conference, a different process is unfolding as the conference looks at its relationship with Hyattsville (Md.) Mennonite Church. AMC placed the congregation under discipline in 2005, which means the church’s members cannot vote or hold an office in the conference or in Mennonite Church USA. AMC has created a reconciliation discernment committee that will discern what reconciliation means in this relationship.

Most of the stories we read are published in conference newsletters. Invariably, the reports describe conference delegates in table group discussions that are lively and respectful. What is encouraging about this is that the issues being discussed are not “small details.” Those willing to participate do so because of their love for the church. Maybe the opposite of Freud’s phrase describes this new pattern: yieldedness in the face of major differences.—ejt