Walls will fail
Stories and photos from Phoenix 2013
Blush
A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World
By Shirley Hershey Showalter
Due out: 9/19/13
Paper. 300 pages. $15.99
ON SALE until 10/20/13

Can a plain-dressed, barefoot, rosy-cheeked farm girl dare to dream big?"

This childhood memoir tells the story of a Mennonite girl who might have left the church but found another way.

For God and Country (In That Order)
By Logan Mehl-Laituri
Due Out: 11/1/13
ON SALE until 11/11/13

How can Christians be responsible citizens who obey the government and love their country and yet worship a God who loves all people, including enemies? Throughout history, Christians have responded in various ways—some renouncing violence and military participation, others seeking military service in a godly way. In this field manual filled with compelling stories and photos, Iraq war veteran Logan Mehl-Laituri creates an almanac of soldier saints and patriot pacifists from the front lines of church history.

Revolutionary Christian Citizenship
By John Howard Yoder
Edited by John C. Nugent, Andy Alexis-Baker, and Branson Parler
Due Out: 9/13/13
Paper. 150 pages. $15.99
ON SALE until 10/20/13

Down-to-earth and original, theologian John Howard Yoder challenges traditional understanding of politics and reconsiders Christian citizenship in three parts: the witness of Jesus, the witness of the church, and witness in action.

More accessible and practical than most of Yoder’s works, Revolutionary Christian Citizenship bridges the gap between faith and politics, equipping us to faithfully represent Christ in society and wage peace in a world of war.

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

Must fight for unity
Regarding Elizabeth Soto Albrecht’s challenge in “A New Journey” (July): “No more shunning, no more violence. It’s a call for discernment in difficult issues. We must lead it. We must learn how to fight for unity.” This is for the whole denomination, not just our congregation. We support this challenge and work at it every day. We are praying for Elizabeth in her leadership role and are trusting God to use her in a mighty way to bring Mennonite Church USA to closer participation with God’s kingdom agenda.—Sharon Williams, Norristown, Pa.

God the Father is missing
I read with interest Ken Gingerich’s article “Walking With the Trinity” (July). He says the doctrine of the Trinity did not make sense to second-century Jews or eighth-century Muslims. He might also have mentioned that it did not make sense to some 16th-century Anabaptists, such as the followers of Adam Pastor and the Polish Brethren.

Even though our current confession of faith affirms trinitarianism, it is interesting that the confession has an article for God followed by an article for Jesus and one for the Holy Spirit. If all three persons of the Trinity are equally God, you would think there would be a separate article for the Father as well. The confession reflects the fact that most Christians are referring to the Father when they speak of God.

There are a few denominations that affirm “biblical unitarianism,” such as the Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith. Biblical unitarians usually believe that the Father is the one true God, Jesus is his son and the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit is not a person but a spiritual force that emanates from God. This is what I believe, since I find it to be more scriptural than trinitarianism.

It amazes me that many Christians, including some who seem to think the Old Testament is a book of mythology, insist that the only position on the Godhead open to Christians is the belief that God is literally three distinct persons and that Jesus is literally God incarnate. If we ever rewrite the current confession of faith, I’d like to see the Father, Son and Holy Spirit explained in a way that makes sense to both trinitarians and nontrinitarians.—Jerry C. Stanaway, Villa Park, Ill.

The ‘other’ holds the key
In Richard Rohr’s daily meditation, he writes about the sin of exclusion: “Those at the edge of any system and those excluded from any system irrationally and invariably hold the secret for the conversion and wholeness of that very group.” He suggests that when we receive “those who don’t play our game our way, we discover not only the hidden, feared and hated parts of our souls but the fullness of Jesus himself.” Jesus repeatedly showed us how to minister to the marginalized people he encountered. What does this mean for Mennonite Church USA? I am suggesting that by replacing fear and rejection with God’s love and acceptance, we will renew our faith. God’s healing and hope will flow through us to our sisters and brothers who are immigrants, all sexual orientations and any we view as “other.”—Joyce Hosteller, Goshen, Ind.

Thanks for article
Thanks for Ronald Holland’s timely article, “Blessed are the Peacemakers” (July) with all of the very relevant statistics.—Wilma Shank, Goshen, Ind.
John Howard Yoder
Editor’s note: In his June Mennonite column, associate editor Gordon Houser reviewed a recent book of John Howard Yoder’s writings and a book about his theology. Barbra Graber, in the July Letters section, criticized Houser for the reviews, and we published Houser’s response immediately after Graber’s letter. The following three letters are arranged in the order they were received.

Regarding John Howard Yoder: I have found helpful an account by Stanley Hauerwas in his memoir Hannah’s Child. On pages 242-247 he reviews the discipline process briefly and reports that after four years of committee work, “On the last Sunday in December 1997, John and Annie were warmly reunited in worship at Prairie Street Mennonite Church. John died on December 30, 1997.” It may be that more needs to be said, but I find a kind of closure in this account.—Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pa.

Regarding Gordon Houser’s response to Barbra Graber: How sad that Houser couldn’t have just stopped after his first sentence. His “but” [nevertheless], suggests — whether he finds it true or not — that academia carries more weight than Christlike behavior. Sometimes an acknowledgement is all that is needed, and less is more.—Carol Wenger, New Holland, Pa.

Gordon Houser’s defensive response to Barbra Graber’s letter is symptomatic of Mennonite institutional disregard for John Howard Yoder’s victims. Houser deflects attention from John Howard Yoder’s abusive behavior and prefers to emphasize his “insights as a scholar.” Houser does not address Graber’s call for justice for Yoder’s victims.

Barbra Graber criticizes Mennonite institutions, one of which is The Mennonite, for neglecting Yoder’s victims. She points out that “women who endured his assaults … have yet to receive any kind of official apology or recompense from the church … while the church conducted its well-organized coverup.” She has the courage to demand an appropriate response to “Yoder’s chronic sexually abusive and violent behavior toward women all over the world for many years” — a part of our history that many would prefer simply to forget.

A pacifist theology is a “sham” unless we are willing to (1) hear the cries of those who feel abused and call for justice, (2) honestly consider the issue and (3) address the issue.

In the case of John Howard Yoder, this response should, at the very least, continue for the duration of the victims’ lives and in perpetuity at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.—Ruth Anne Abraham, Austin, Texas

More about Claire DeBerg
In response to Curt Weaver’s letter (July) asking to hear about Timbrel editor Claire DeBerg’s vision for the magazine and dreams for making a difference for young women growing up in a rapidly changing world, we bring more of her story:

DeBerg’s desire to live out her Anabaptist faith through serving women of the Mennonite church is uppermost in her career goals. She says, “All facets of Mennonite Women USA’s mission inspire me, especially in this time of technological advancements.” DeBerg’s background includes a master’s degree in writing, website project manager work and teaching at the University of Northern Iowa.

In a blog post for the Women in Leadership Project, DeBerg shared her goal for women to be liberated from systems that discourage authenticity: (Continued on page 54)

IN THIS ISSUE

Mennonite Church USA’s biennial convention held July 1-5 and called Phoenix 2013 is the primary subject of this issue. Our coverage includes 63 photos, 16 articles and an editorial. Because the 4,681 participants represent less than a quarter of our magazine’s readership, this extensive coverage is our effort to share the experience with as many people as possible.

Unlike other conventions, less time was given at Phoenix 2013 for delegate sessions, and more time was scheduled for learning activities and tours — mostly with a focus on U.S. immigration issues. This also meant delegates could take part in activities that are not usually available to them because they need to be in delegate sessions.

In “Was Phoenix Worth It?” the editorial describes the “good-hearted lightness that prevailed during the week” (page 56).

We encourage pastors to purchase extra copies of this issue for those who do not regularly subscribe. See the advertisement on page 54.

There is other important news, however. Lynda Hollinger-Janzen tells the story of Jean-Richard Muteba Wa Mbuyi, who left occult rituals and amulets when he became a Christian and is now part of the pastoral team at the Sanglayi Evangelical Mennonite Church in the Congo (page 42).

On page 43 is a delightful story of Ethiopians in Lancaster, PA., who honored 65 mission workers for their efforts to bring the gospel to Ethiopia beginning in the 1950s.

In this month’s News Analysis (page 44), researcher Julie Putman Hart describes her findings when she asked former military veterans why they became pacifist. She identifies four catalysts for the change: combat, betrayal, religious conviction and education.—Editor
Executive Board meets before convention
PHOENIX—During a four-hour Executive Board meeting on July 1, the binational MennoMedia board asked for a bylaw change that would allow it to expand from eight to 11 members.

“We heard from MennoMedia that they want to strengthen their board by adding a few more members,” said Dick Thomas, Mennonite Church USA moderator, during the meeting.

The board approved the change unanimously, as did the Mennonite Church USA delegate assembly on July 5, when it made other revisions to the Mennonite Church USA Bylaws. Mennonite Church Canada’s Christian Formation Council, at the behest of its General Board, had approved the board expansion earlier.

In other action, the Executive Board formed its executive committee for the 2013-2015 biennium: David Sutter, David Boshart and Nancy Heisey will join new moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht and moderator-elect Patricia Shelly.—Everett J. Thomas

MW USA hosts annual dinner at Phoenix 2013

Carolyn Heggen, co-presenter of MW USA’s Sister Care seminars, spoke about the ways God is moving mightily in this ministry bringing Sister Care to an international level.

Jennifer Davis Sensenig, pastor at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., spoke on “Rahab: Faith on the Border.” She looked at the implications of Rahab’s choices and how they instruct and inspire followers of Jesus to make both extraordinary decisions and critical requests in the name of God. She challenged everyone to pay attention to the ways God is speaking into moments where our faith is on the border.—MW USA

Byler leads church class discussion about mental health in the Bible
NEWTON, Kan.—Jason Byler, a licensed clinical social worker with Prairie View in Newton, has led adult Sunday school classes at Heston (Kan.) Mennonite Church in discussing common mental health problems. He also addresses what the teachings of Jesus say about mental health.

One in five Americans experienced some form of mental illness in 2010. “The challenge for churches is to open up the discussion without judging, without assuming mental illness to be the result of a troubled relationship with our God,” says Byler.

“The Bible has endless stories about God’s people who lived with mental illness,” Byler said.

Byler covers topics like epilepsy, referred to in Mark 17, where Jesus heals a boy who has likely experienced a grand mal seizure. He talks about Bible characters like Cain, Jacob, Saul or David, whose words and actions show symptoms of depression. And Byler links mental health experiences from the Bible with the church today.

Prairie View is a faith-based mental health organization that was founded by Mennonites in 1954.—Prairie View

Horsing around at Phoenix 2013
Spencer Yoder, Alec Mast and Cole Reynolds from Martin’s Creek Mennonite Church in Millersburg, Ohio, remain silent in the exhibit hall at the Phoenix 2013 convention.—Everett J. Thomas

Registrations from Phoenix 2013
Adults: 1,529
Junior youth and sponsors: 85
Youth and youth sponsors: 2,751
Children: 110
Infant/Toddlers: 16
Preschool: 23
K-5: 71
Volunteers: 206

Young Anabaptists prepare for Global Youth Summit in 2015
AKRON, Pa.—Preparations for the 2015 Global Youth Summit and transitions within the committee marked the annual meeting of the Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee held here May 23-28.

The committee welcomed Lani
Prunés of the United States as the new North American representative, replacing Kristina Toews of Canada, who is now serving as the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) web communications worker in Bogotá, Colombia.

Toews, the outgoing chair, will continue to be available as a consultant to the YABs Committee.

Rodrigo Pedrosa García of Mexico, YABs Latin American representative, was affirmed as the new YABs Committee chair by the Executive Committee, though he was unable to get his visa in time to attend the meeting. They communicated with Pedrosa frequently via Skype.

The committee decided that the third Global Youth Summit will be held July 17-19, 2015, right before the MWC Assembly, scheduled for July 21-26. The theme will be “Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts.”

Other members of the committee are Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle of Ethiopia, Sumana Basumata of India, mentor Ayub Omondi of Kenya and Marc Pasqué of Spain.—MWC

**Corinthian Plan is viable while administrators navigate reform**

ELKHART, Ind.—The Corinthian Plan will continue through 2014 and as long as it serves the church effectively while administrators assess the impact of health-care reform, said Keith Harder, the plan’s director, at the Phoenix 2013 convention.

Mennonite Church USA, along with third-party administrator and church agency Everence, are investigating the effect of reform on the overall plan, participating congregations and pastors. They expect more details about practical implications by this fall.

Administrators are also waiting for federal guidance regarding tax credit eligibility for church health plans and their members.—The Corinthian Plan

**Everence Federal Credit Union awards grants**

LANCASTER, Pa.—Everence Federal Credit Union has donated $14,000 from its Rebate for Missions™ program to the global agencies of Mennonite Disaster Service and Mennonite Mission Network.

Mennonite Disaster Service involves more than 3,000 Mennonite, Amish and Brethren in Christ churches and districts whose members volunteer to clean up, repair and rebuild homes after hurricanes, tornadoes and other disasters in the United States and Canada.

Mennonite Mission Network joins partners around the world to train leaders, support local ministry and spread the gospel of Jesus. The mission agency of Mennonite Church USA supports workers and ministries in more than 50 countries.

The credit union tithes to church and mission work 10 percent of the income generated from merchants through the use of Visa cards.

Since the Rebate for Missions™ program began in 1995, Everence Federal Credit Union has provided more than $300,000 in grants.—Everence

**CPT launches new logo**

CHICAGO—Flowing from a three-and-a-half year mission and presentation revisioning process that included representation from all parts of Christian Peacemaker Teams, graphic artist Nekeisha Alexis-Baker has created a new logo for CPT.

The CPT visual identity, as Alexis-Baker articulates it, “focuses on the organization’s new mission statement, “Building partnerships to transform violence and oppression.” Each element of the logo, works together to suggest movement from division and strife toward renewal and restoration.”—CPT

**MCC projects in Syria help during Ramadan**

WINNIPEG, Manitoba—Ramadan began July 9, and Muslims around the world are fasting during daylight hours to mark their holy month. Two Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) projects help make this time a little easier for families in need of relief, displaced by the conflict in Syria.

In Syria, an MCC emergency food program in the Qalamoun area has been extended for another six months. Five thousand families will receive monthly baskets of food, purchased locally with MCC funds. The baskets contain staples such as rice, oil, sugar, canned meat and tea.

More than 13,000 families seek food assistance in Qalamoun, and the numbers continue to rise as people are displaced by violence in other regions.—MCC

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**Honoring pastors**

Basil Marin (left) and Bj Leichty are two of hundreds of pastors and conference ministers honored by youth and adult conventions in a shared worship on July 3 at Phoenix 2013.

—Gordon Houser
The earth is the Lord’s

For the past four years, every Thursday morning of Holy Week, a few of us from our Mennonite community have gathered with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers, among other Christians, for a foot-washing worship service. We set up two chairs at the gate of the local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center—the gate through which federal officers escort members of our community who are arrested for not having the paperwork that would authorize their presence in the United States, members of our churches and neighborhoods who are undocumented residents.

In front of the detention center, we worship; we pray and sing and read from the Bible.

“Do not put your trust in princes, in whom there is no help,” we hear as someone reads from Psalm 146. “The Lord sets the prisoners free ... The Lord watches over the foreigners.”

Another person takes her Bible and reads from Isaiah 61; we focus our hope on the promises of the Word of God as we “proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners,” the promises of “the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God.”

Before we wash feet, I explain why we use one chair and leave another vacant.

Year after year, presidents and police impose a strategy of deportation that tears apart families by banishing mothers and fathers from their households.

“This chair here will remain empty as a sign of all the people that law enforcement agents tear away from our communities and churches and families,” I say, “a sign of absence, of missing bodies.”

With the empty chair, we remember the wives and husbands, the mothers and fathers, the sisters and brothers of some of the people who gather with us for worship, for protest, for crying out to God. We make the pain visible.

We’ve been saying the same words in the same place with some of the same people for the past four years, and nothing seems to change. Year after year, political leaders ignore God’s call to set these captives free. Year after year, presidents and police impose a strategy of deportation that tears apart families by banishing mothers and fathers from their households. “We must put border security first,” the politicians say, as the rest of us are left to console children in grief and to sustain neighbors who live in fear—to suffer with those who suffer.

In this country I’ve found a home in the Mennonite church, in the Anabaptist tradition, where we reach back to the wisdom of communities who have endured exile and arrest, immigration and deportation—people who remember the violence of princes who claimed to own the earth, people who remember political leaders who claimed the right to police borders established by bloodshed.

Anabaptists and Mennonites have offered words of worship and protest from Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”

As the Mennonite historian John D. Roth explains, for the early Anabaptists “the claim that the earth is the Lord’s was a form of resistance, especially to the political rulers of their day ... the appeal to Psalm 24:1 was a powerful statement of a different allegiance and loyalty.”

To worship the God of the Psalmist involves a protest against political authorities that try to usurp God’s dominion over the earth.

“Nobody should take what is God’s,” wrote Peter Walpot, a 16th-century Anabaptist who lived in the context of the Christianized powers of Europe as kings and bishops divided up the globe by inventing borders on their maps of “the Americas,” which they claimed as their property.

Today we live with the legacy of their maps; we live under the dominion of colonialism’s borders. Arguments about U.S. immigration policy and border security assume the legitimacy of a geography invented by colonialism, a world invented by rulers who craved divine power over creation.

Since these borders won’t go away anytime soon, we will plan on gathering again at the ICE detention center on Thursday during Holy Week next year. We will worship and protest, joining our voices to the Anabaptists and Mennonites who have proclaimed the good news of Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”

Isaac Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Church.
The global church is young

The road was thick with fog in the Nicaraguan mountains high above Managua on Sunday morning as we made our way to church in the tiny village of El Crucero. In fact, we heard the enthusiastic singing of the Ebenezer Mennonite congregation before we actually saw the church. The building itself, home to a congregation of about 30 members, was under construction. A new roof spanned walls still awaiting windows and doors. But as my wife and I stepped inside, the thing we noticed first was not the sod floor or the plastic chairs. Rather, it was the children—nearly 50 smiling faces encircling the adults like a choir of angels.

Several years ago, the Ebenezer congregation began serving a meal each Saturday to the children of the neighborhood, followed by singing and Bible school activities. Gradually, some of the children attended church. Today, the small congregation can expect to host anywhere from 40 to 60 children on a Sunday morning. During the sermon, sounds of their Sunday school program filtered in through the open windows. Afterward, they enjoyed a snack, stacked their chairs and played outside.

Though the story behind the Ebenezer congregation’s outreach to children may be unique, its experience points to a larger reality in the global church: in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the church is young. The Multi-Nation Anabaptist Profile—a 2010 survey of 12 church conferences affiliated with Eastern Mennonite Missions—provides some startling statistics. Whereas the average age of members in Lancaster Mennonite Conference churches is 53, in eight of the other churches the average age is 38 or younger. And in the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia, the largest Mennonite national church, the average age is only 32. In 11 of the 12 churches surveyed, two-thirds or more of the members are still within childbearing age (18-45), suggesting that children are going to be a central part of their ministry in the coming decades.

The consequences for Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and the global church are clear. First, the need for Christian education has never been more urgent. Traditionally, our mission agencies focused their attention primarily on Bible schools and seminaries. In the meantime, however, many Mennonite churches around the world have begun to establish primary and secondary schools for their youth. As they seek help with curriculum and pedagogy, several fundamentalist Christian organizations have been quick to offer accreditation, with the expectation that the schools will formally adopt their curriculum and their confession of faith.

While it may be tempting for those of us who care about Anabaptist-Mennonite pedagogy to be critical from afar, the pressing question remains: What alternative do we have to offer? Could we imagine a global curriculum for Mennonite primary and secondary schools, shaped around the MWC Shared Convictions?

The need for Christian education has never been more urgent.

Alongside the challenge of Christian education, the youthful demographic of the global church also suggests new opportunities. Throughout the history of the Christian church, renewal movements have almost always been led by young people—emerging leaders who have caught a vision of the inherited tradition but are moved to recast the forms to better fit the context of their day. To be sure, the spirits of renewal need to be continually tested and discerned. But a church that desires a future must entrust its young people with positions of responsibility and leadership, knowing that living traditions are always renewed at the cusp of generational transitions.

Following the service at Ebenezer, I spent some time in conversation with several children and young people. Why, I asked Benito, did he attend the congregation? His response was simple. “I like to sing,” he said. “I like the stories at Sunday school and I feel safe here. Here the people are good to me.” Eventually, no doubt, Benito will discover even more reasons to be part of the people of God. But for now his answer seems like a good foundation to build on.

If he and the children in our congregations around the world continue to see their church as a place that enjoys singing, shares good stories from Scripture and provides a haven of safety and love, then the future of the church will be in good hands for the next generation.
Many agree that the United States has an obesity problem. And it goes beyond this country. “The percentage of obese humans globally has doubled in the past 28 years,” writes Robert H. Lustig in his book *Fat Chance: Beating the Odds Against Sugar, Processed Food, Obesity and Disease* (Hudson Street Press, 2012, $25.95). But not everyone agrees about how to address the problem.

In her review of the book in the June 26 *Christian Century*, LaVonne Neff writes that “Lustig’s number one concern is health, not weight.” Getting bigger is not the problem, he says. Many people who are obese are metabolically healthy and have normal life spans. But the increase of obesity has been accompanied by an increase in “type 2 diabetes, lipid disorders, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, hypertension, polycystic ovarian disease, heart disease, cancer and possibly dementia,” writes Neff.

**What ties these diseases together?** Most are associated with “the body’s response to the flood of insulin released to deal with the excess sugars most of us imbibe,” writes Neff.

Lustig argues that many of our health problems today “can be traced to the inordinate amount of fructose—fruit sugar—we consume.” Much of that comes from high-fructose corn syrup, which the U.S. government subsidizes. It’s a cheap sweetener “used in everything from soft drinks to pasta sauce to whole grain bread,” writes Neff. It’s also in concentrated fruit sweeteners.

Actual fruit is good for us; this stuff isn’t. Lustig writes: “Our current fructose consumption has increased fivefold compared to 100 years ago, and has more than doubled in the last 30 years.”

Why the increase? Lustig blames the government and the food industry, and he doesn’t hold out much hope for changing either one. Neff writes: “Makers of convenience foods stuff them with sugar to lengthen shelf life and attract consumers, especially children. Soft drinks and junk foods are readily available in schools and in corner stores pandering to the after-school trade.”

Lustig writes that “there are no government-imposed bans on the marketing of high-sugar-content products to children in the United States.” In May 2012, Chile became the first nation to ban junk food marketing to children.

The Sugar Association, corn growers and many others lobby Congress to keep such bans from happening.

Last year, Mayor Bloomberg of New York tried to ban large containers of soft drinks and was ridiculed by many citizens, who cried out for their freedom to harm themselves.

I have several friends who simply by stopping a daily practice of drinking soft drinks lost a significant number of pounds and—more importantly—felt healthier.

**Eliminating fructose from our diet** is no easy task, but perhaps we can reduce the amount we use and look for its presence in the food we buy. And if you’re buying something other than fresh fruit and vegetables, it’s likely there in some form.

Despite his pessimistic title, Lustig ends his book on a hopeful note, writes Neff, as he calls on people to make noise. After all, change has happened, such as “bans on smoking in public, the use of designated drivers, airbags in cars, and condom dispensers in public bathrooms. All unfathomable 30 years ago.”

Neff ends her review with a theological reflection: “We can eat real (not processed) food. We can exercise. We can join with others to demand accountability from the kings and merchants. We can hope for the time when the fruit is restored and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

Our faith calls us to care for our own health and the health of others.—*Gordon Houser*
It’s very annoying following this person of Christ around, because he’s very demanding of your life.—Bono in an interview on Focus on the Family

Talk to your child, not on your cell phone
Linguist Deborah Fallows writes that research on the effects of adult-child conversation makes a strong case for putting cell phones away when you’re around children. A 2009 study published in Pediatrics showed that “children exposed to more conversational give-and-take with adults scored higher at every stage of language proficiency.” This and two other studies suggest, Fallows writes, that social interaction is important to early language learning. She finds it ironic that “in this era when child-rearing is the focus of unprecedented imagination, invention, sophistication and expense, something as simple and pleasurable as conversing with our children can be overlooked.”—The Atlantic

Eat more insects, says U.N. agency
The United Nations is promoting edible insects as a low-fat, high-protein food for people, pets and livestock. According to the U.N., they come with appetizing side benefits: Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and livestock pollution, creating jobs in developing countries and feeding the millions of hungry people in the world.

Two billion people eat insects, largely in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the Rome-based U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said May 13 as it issued a report exploring edible insect potential. Beetles and caterpillars are the most common meals among the more than 1,900 edible insect species that people eat.

Scientists who have studied the nutritional value of edible insects have found that red ants, small grasshoppers and some water beetles pack (gram-per-gram or ounce-per-ounce) enough protein to rank with lean ground beef while having less fat per gram. Edible insects also contain useful minerals, such as iron, magnesium, phosphorous, selenium and zinc. Insects on average can convert 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of feed into 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of edible meat. In comparison, cattle require 8 kilograms (17.6 pounds) of feed to produce a kilogram of meat. Most insects raised for food are likely to produce fewer environmentally harmful greenhouse gases than livestock, the U.N. agency says.—Associated Press

Moral Mondays
Every Monday, the Rev. William J. Barber II, president of the state’s NAACP chapter, leads demonstrators who gather outside the North Carolina Statehouse before marching two by two into the legislative building to be handcuffed by police and arrested for failing to obey orders to disperse. Since assuming the state presidency eight years ago, Barber has waged numerous battles challenging local and state governments to extend educational opportunities, broaden the voting base, provide health care and more generally lift up the poor.—Religion News Service

Americans love Bible but don’t read it
More than half of Americans think the Bible has too little influence on a culture they see in moral decline, yet only one in five Americans read the Bible on a regular basis, according to a new survey.—Religion News Service

Restrictions on religion increase
A new study finds that the already high level of restrictions on religion in the Middle East and North Africa—whether resulting from government policies or from social hostilities—continued to increase in 2011, when most of the political uprisings known as the Arab Spring occurred. The findings run contrary to expectations expressed by many world leaders that the uprisings would lead to greater freedoms for the people of the region, including fewer restrictions on religious beliefs and practices.—Pew Research Center

Numbers to ponder

- Percentage of religious people in five Arab countries who believe women should have the right to initiate divorce: 69
- Percentage of nonreligious people in those countries who believe women should have the right to initiate divorce: 46
- Points scored for “quixotry,” the highest scoring word in Scrabble history: 365
- Pounds of toilet paper the average Chinese used in 2008: 0.5
- Pounds the average European used: 17
- Pounds the average American used: 50
- Sheets of toilet paper the average American used per day: 57
—Yes! Magazine
Speakers call convention-goers to be faithful citizens of God’s kingdom while overcoming barriers to God’s grace.

During the opening worship service, convention-goers poured different colored sand into jars to create a beautiful mixture that symbolizes the body of Christ. Photo by Everett J. Thomas

Citizens beyond walls of separation

by Gordon Houser

After a long period of deciding whether or not to come to Phoenix for Mennonite Church USA’s biennial convention July 1-5, more than 4,600 came to celebrate being “Citizens of God’s Kingdom: Healed in Hope,” the convention’s theme.
At the opening adult worship service on July 1, Tina Begay, a Navajo and a member of the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA, welcomed people to the Southwest, where Apaches, Arapahos, Navajos, Hopis, Pueblos, Zunis and other tribes reside.

Iris de León-Hartshorn, Carol Roth and Erica Littlewolf paid tribute to Richard Twiss, a Native leader who was to be the opening speaker but who died in February. Roth said that Twiss encouraged Native Christians to embrace their own culture while also following Jesus Christ.

Cheryl Bear, who took his place as speaker, sang a song she wrote in honor of Twiss, accompanying herself on a drum. She then presented bad news and good news.

The good news is that God sent Jesus to bring life, not to destroy Native culture.—Cheryl Bear

She recounted some of the history of Native peoples’ encounter with Europeans in North America. “Evangelism and assimilation went hand in hand,” she said.

Assimilation meant that Native culture was considered invalid. The doctrine of discovery taught that the land was empty, ignoring the fact that more than 1,000 Native tribes inhabited North America.

One of the most destructive acts of whites toward Natives was removing Native children from their homes and placing them in boarding schools, where the teachers sought to “kill the Indian within,” not allowing them to speak their language or dress in Native clothes.

Bear, who is a member of NADLEH Whut’en, a tribe in northern British Columbia, talked about four foundations of the Native worldview: Creator, creation, community and culture. The good news, she said, is that God sent Jesus to bring life, not to destroy Native culture.

Native Christians have learned to do re-evangelism, telling the gospel in a Native way. For example, some have presented Jesus as the cleansing ceremony.

She invited people to adopt a posture of humility as we welcome others to faith. She concluded with the image of Jesus offshore in a canoe, waiting for our sign of welcome.

The July 2 adult worship service focused on the plight of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

After showing a video about undocumented young adults, Iris de León-Hartshorn asked for support for a DREAMERs fund. The money will be placed in a fund to help undocumented Mennonite youth, called DREAMERs, pay for the cost of applying for U.S. Citizenship.

The morning’s speaker, Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño of the United Methodist Church, called on the audience to stand with immigrants, whose suffering grows each day.

She has been amazed, she said, at the opposition of Christians to immigration reform.

Some of the comments she has heard have been “nasty and vile.”

One church member reacted to her call to care for immigrant children suffering in the desert by shoving the Communion wafer back at her during a worship service Carcaño led.

Worship leaders Sue Park-Hur (left) and Michelle Armister note the empty chair, representing Iglesia Menonita Hispana, which decided not to come to Phoenix, and immigrants who do not feel free to travel in Arizona. Photo by Everett J. Thomas
Welcoming the stranger ... is a mandate from God’s own heart.—Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño

This man then asked the church’s pastor to kick her out. The pastor said he couldn’t because, he said, “She is the bishop; the pulpit is hers.”

Carcño expressed concern that sometimes the church lets others define us and miss who we are. “We sojourn in the world, but we are not of the world,” she said.

She looked at various Scriptures and said that “welcoming the stranger ... is a mandate from God’s own heart.”

She carried out a correspondence with a Christian who finally wrote that he “longed for the day when the church would defend U.S. democracy.”

But that is not our task, she said. We are to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and “though we are citizens of various countries, above all we are citizens of God’s kingdom.”

The service concluded with an offering for the DREAMERs fund. This, plus the offering from the youth worship, brought in more than $25,000.

**During the shared worship services on July 3.**

Mennonite Church USA denominational ministers Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffman invited all pastors and conference ministers to stand along the front of the auditorium.

Shue and Kauffman expressed thanks for their following the call to serve as pastors and prayed a prayer of blessing.

Representatives from each agency of Mennonite Church USA and *The Mennonite* gave the hundreds of pastors and conference ministers ribbons that said, “I said yes” (drawn from Numbers) to attach to their name tags.

These gave them a $25 discount on items at the MennoMedia bookstore at the convention. The agencies and *The Mennonite* provided the funds to cover these discounts.

As the pastors walked back to their seats, people applauded. In one of the worship services, youth formed an arch with their hands for the pastors to walk through.

In his address to both worship sessions, staggered because of space limitations, Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, called on worshipers to commit all they have to Jesus because all our possessions belong to him anyway.

He compared entering the kingdom of God to going through airport security, “except when you get inside you can’t find where your stuff is.” He held out his watch, wallet, cell phone and keys and pointed out how these represent parts of our lives that are on loan from Jesus.

Stutzman said, “We are called to live as faithful citizens of the kingdom of God while also being citizens of, say, the United States.”

He closed by inviting people to come forward to commit themselves to God’s kingdom.

All our possessions belong to Jesus.
—Ervin Stutzman

**In the July 4 evening adult worship service.**

Meghan Good, pastor of Albany (Ore.) Mennonite Church, recounted the Bible’s tradition of God refusing to be held captive by walls. She went on to challenge the church not to work against God’s mission of breaking down the walls we build.

Using humorous, poetic language, Good told of Israel’s repeated attempts to build a temple where God dwelt, only to have it torn down. She noted that “it’s easy for us to read Israel’s mind [because] we need only read our own.”

We tend to believe, she said, that “barbed wire and stone walls are a small price to pay for the future of our children.”

The church knows this logic every bit as much as the nation. Even our architecture shows our theology, Good said. Our church buildings tend to have high walls and frosted glass windows that prevent us from looking outward. And we have developed subtle ways of keeping others away.

“We live in an age when walls are crumbling at an alarming rate,” Good said. And it seems that no matter how much the church builds up its programs, fewer people join us.

We have made border patrol our mission, she said, and in doing so “we have lined ourselves up against God [because] Jesus lives to tear walls down.”

This is not new news, Good said. It’s been this way from the beginning. God has been turning our
The borders we die to hold, Jesus died to tear down.
—Meghan Good

holy systems into holy rubble. God’s mission is bigger than simple preservation, she said. “[God] is building a world where truth is not a possession, … where holiness is not what we avoid but what we embrace.”

We join God’s mission when we loosen our grip and let the walls we’ve built fall down.

“The borders we die to hold, Jesus died to tear down.” Our choice is either to fight God and fail or join God in making holy rubble.

Lives have been shattered in the defense of walls, Good said. Meanwhile, “we’ve neglected the triumph of the truth and celebrated our grasp of it.”

Good closed by inviting people to come forward and wash their hands as a symbolic way of repenting of our sins of wall-building and being cleansed by God’s grace.

Good closed by inviting people to come forward and wash their hands as a symbolic way of repenting of our sins of wall-building and being cleansed by God’s grace.

On July 5, following the adult worship service in the evening, between 1,500 and 2,000 convention-goers took to the streets on a 1.5-mile walk through downtown Phoenix to pray and sing.

Evening speaker and new moderator of Mennonite Church USA Elizabeth Soto Albrecht led the procession. Many wore or held light sticks handed out during the worship.

Local police blocked off the route for the crowd, which sang and prayed while passing “places of suffering and hope.” The group walked past hotels and prayed for restaurant and hotel workers, passed a county jail and detention facility and prayed for detainees, prisoners, guards and their families, and passed the offices of Wells Fargo and prayed about banks and the for-profit detention system.

At Civic Space Park, the crowd gathered in small groups to pray for their local communities, and the larger group sang several songs and prayed the Lord’s Prayer in English and Spanish. They were joined by some who chose a shorter, half-mile route.

Others had the option to stay in the convention center and pray there. Given the triple-digit heat, some chose not to walk.

In her sermon, Soto Albrecht emphasized that “we are connected.” We included herself with immigrants who came to the United States “not with the American dream but with God’s dream.” They came because they had no job.

We walk for immigrants who cannot walk the streets of Phoenix.
—Elizabeth Soto Albrecht

She called on hearers to share the light God has given. “Don’t let the darkness keep you from showing the light of God in your life,” she said.

She introduced the prayer walk by noting that “we walk for immigrants who cannot walk the streets of Phoenix.”

Natalie Francisco (left) and Chuck Neufeld were part of the band in the adult worship sessions. Photo by Everett J. Thomas
Delegates focus on immigration

by Everett J. Thomas

Delegates seldom give a speaker a standing ovation during Mennonite Church USA conventions. But Denver Seminary professor of Old Testament Danny Carroll was so eloquent, inspiring and entertaining, the Phoenix 2013 delegates did just that at the end of his 90-minute presentation and question-and-answer period on July 2 (see page 18).

We … resolve to … embody a fuller expression of God’s love, justice and grace to undocumented and undocumentable immigrants.—Resolutions Committee statement adopted by delegate assembly

Framing the Old Testament accounts of Abram, Joseph and Ruth as immigration stories, Carroll challenged Mennonite Church USA to think about U.S. immigration issues as Christians rather than as U.S. citizens.

“The challenge for you,” Carroll said, “is, How do Mennonites think of immigration? Begin with Romans 12—don’t be conformed to the world, don’t be conformed to political ideologies. Romans 13 is the government. The Christians are Romans 12. The Christian position is the Word of God and Jesus on the cross.”

The primary focus of the 2013 delegate sessions was current U.S. immigration dynamics and whether to revise the statement on immigration adopted by the delegates in 2003. However, it
began clear during the July 5 discussion on the immigration resolution, that more conversation will be needed before settling on new language.

Randall Justice, a delegate from the Akron (Pa.) Mennonite Church, said that the 2003 statement had “a lot of implicit political language” representing the politics of a decade ago.

Roberta Cabezas, a delegate from James Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pa., asked that the word “undocumented” be included in the resolution.

“People don’t know how hard it is to get documents,” Cabezas said.

Ron Copeland, delegate from Early Church in Harrisonburg, Va., asked that the new resolution use language consistently.

“A word of caution about demonizing the [U.S. immigration] system,” Copeland said. “It’s not one big, monolithic system out to hurt people.”

Margie Caraballo, a delegate from Templo Alabanza Menonita in Moline, Ill., said that the 2003 statement had “us versus them language” and had “no responsibility placed on current immigrants or Hispanic congregations.”

In the end, the resolutions committee adopted a statement that affirmed the 2003 resolution while calling for more refinement of the 10-year-old resolution, using feedback from the table groups, additional Constituency Leaders Council processing in the future and a final proposal from the Executive Board.

“We recognize that our witness to God’s embrace of the stranger in our midst is not complete,” said the statement. “Therefore, we reaffirm and resolve to update our churchwide commitments in light of delegate feedback in order to embody a fuller expression of God’s love, justice and grace to undocumented and undocumented immigrants.”

The 2013 delegate assembly began with several housekeeping actions on July 2, and Mennonite Church USA’s Leadership Discernment Committee presented its ballot of new members to be elected to various Mennonite Church USA boards by affirmation (see page 36). Those ballots were collected in the first afternoon session, with the results announced in the second session. Ninety-four percent checked the “select all” box.

In the second session on July 2, Mennonite Church USA moderator Dick Thomas announced that the first of two offerings to be taken during the week totaled nearly $25,000, with the adults giving $13,851 and the youth giving $11,028. (The total eventually came to $25,047.28.) The funds will be used to help the DREAMERs fund, which provides financial assistance for undocumented youth and young adults who want to initiate the process of becoming citizens.

This session focused on the churchwide goal of Christian formation. Getting special focus was the Shine Sunday school curriculum being created by MennoMedia and Western District Conference’s leadership in the Year of the Bible initiative.

Other sessions during the week focused on additional churchwide priorities, including Christian community, holistic Christian witness, stewardship, leadership development and undoing racism and advancing intercultural transformation.

The 627 delegates also quietly adopted several resolutions that mark major changes in the church. The most significant: embracing Mennonite Health Services Alliance as the fifth agency of Mennonite Church USA. Rick Stiffney, MHS Alliance’s CEO, had been shepherding the process along for nearly a decade. (See page 32.)

By becoming an agency, the 74 MHS Alliance member organizations—including retirement com-

Studies show that if we don’t give constant attention to how institutions relate to their church, the institutions will drift away from the church.—Rick Stiffney

During the July 4 delegate session, youth from the Walnut Hill Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., report on their trip to the U.S.-Mexico border. Speaking for the group are (from left) Alicia Thomas, Tyrel Baldrige and Katja Norton. “Our eyes were really opened,” Norton said. “Border patrol people and the people trying to cross are doing [what they do] for their families.”
The delegate session ended on July 5 with the installation of Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, Lancaster, Pa., as the new moderator and Patricia Shelly, Newton, Kan., as the new moderator-elect (see photo below).

**Pink Mennos:** Over a period of about 30 minutes on July 5, some 60 Pink Menno activists and their allies walked silently into the midst of the delegate assembly and stood waiting. Some displayed photos of LGBTQ friends or family members they supported. Others carried signs. One young man carried an empty chair to replicate the empty chair on stage for Hispanic Mennonites and their supporters who elected to skip the Phoenix convention because of Arizona’s immigration laws and the risk of deportation. When all the Pink Mennos were in place, moderator Dick Thomas suspended the discussion of resolutions addressing creation care and protections for children and youth. He then invited Pink Menno leader Katie Hochstedler to read a statement from Pink Menno. Hochstedler is a delegate from Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis.

“Today we bring before you our faces, our yearnings, our bodies, our dreams, our faith and declare that we refuse to be strangers to one another,” the statement said. “As followers of Jesus, we cannot and will not rest until the Mennonite church abandons its exclusionary impulses and embraces the width and breadth of God’s welcome, so that all may participate fully and God’s kingdom (sic) is made whole.”

Thomas asked the assembly to pause in silence and then offered a prayer. The delegate assembly then resumed discussion of the resolutions on creation care and protecting children.

‘Mennonite Church USA, are you ready for two women to lead you?’

This was the question moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht (left) asked the delegate assembly after she and moderator-elect Patricia Shelly were installed on July 5. Shelly’s rejoinder: “Ready or not, here we come.”
Scenes from delegate assembly at Phoenix 2013

**The Mennonite Game:** Illinois Mennonite Conference leader Chuck Neufeld put all surnames in his conference on a poster to illustrate that all are “good Mennonite names.”

**Pink Mennonos:** Katie Hochstedler read a statement from the group during the July 5 delegate session. See the story on page 18.

**Table talk:** Most delegate sessions had time for table discussions and then some opportunity to report to the assembly from those discussions. Several tables, including this one, were for delegates wishing to speak in Spanish.
Speakers call youth to engage immigration rights and offer lessons on identity and unity in Christ.

Youth respond to calls for healing and hope

Near the end of the convention in Phoenix, the youth responded in large numbers to the anointing service. Approximately 2,750 youth attended Phoenix 2013 July 1-5.

by Anna Groff
After actor Ingrid De Sanctis presented her emotional message on July 4, hundreds of youth went forward to share with a pastor, pray and receive anointing—returning to their seats in tearful silence.

The lines were so long that Glen Guyton had to ask extra pastors and leaders in the audience to step in to help with the anointing.

“We ran out of oil,” said Guyton, director of finance and convention planning for Mennonite Church USA.

Throughout the week, youth heard from speakers who provided testimonies and confessions, information and encouragement on how to engage immigration rights and lessons on identity and unity in Christ.

God dreams it, Jesus announced it, John saw it, and we get to live it.
—Hal Shrader

July 1 evening: Hal Shrader

Hal Shrader, pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz., addressed the youth in the opening worship.

He began with a video of himself re-enacting a humorous and dramatic dream in which he thought he almost missed his scheduled speaking time.

He started his speech by describing the different ways people dream in their sleep and talked about the importance of dreams in the Bible, especially in the book of Genesis.

Then he discussed the way we discuss dreams as what we aspire to be.

“When we’re young we have all sorts of people telling us to follow our dreams—and you should follow your dreams,” he said.

Even better, he said, is that not only do we dream, but God dreams of a better future for the world.

“God dreams it, Jesus announced it, John saw it, and we get to live it,” he said in closing.

After Shrader’s message, worship leaders Stephen “Tig” Intagliata, Bluffton (Ohio) University campus pastor, and Andrea Fernanda De Avila, a student at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., explained the purpose of the three empty chairs in worship to the youth.

The chairs recognize those from the following groups who are not attending Phoenix 2013—Iglesia Menonita Hispana, Mennonite immigrants of all nationalities and those standing in solidarity with IMH.

Immigration rights are human rights.
—Isabel Castillo

July 2 morning: Isabel Castillo

Isabel Castillo, immigration activist, encouraged the youth gathered at Phoenix 2013 to advocate for immigration rights.

“Immigration rights are human rights,” she said, adding that Scripture calls us to “welcome the stranger.”

Castillo, 28, provided tangible ways to get involved, such as signing petitions, calling upon government officials to pass the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) or starting a local group in one’s church or school.

She told the youth that they may be close to someone who is undocumented and not even know it. It could be “your best friend, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, someone from your church,” she said.

The youth worship band leads the youth in worship. Photo by Lowell Brown

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However, through her college experiences and travels, her worldview expanded. She also no longer longed for sameness but for newness and diversity. “This picky eater fell in love with sushi... I started to see marriage and family not as a mandate but a choice. I learned to listen, which I desperately needed to do,” she said.

Using several props, she outlined the three main areas of our identity: our difference, our past and our sameness. However, through God you can “love your identity just as you are,” she said. “You’re given an opportunity to believe your Creator and say, ‘I’m enough,’” she said. “I’m going to assume that you wish you were something more. Stop wishing.”

By leaving her comfort zone and pushing herself to work hard in college, she also let go of her identity as “less than.”

“I found other ways of finding value in myself,” she said. “Through a lot of hard work, through commitment and many occasions of swallowing my pride, I can stand before you today, a Ph.D. student—something I thought I could never do.”

Swartzendruber Miller closed by telling the youth, “You are beloved, put your ID in that.” She is vice president of admissions at Hesston (Kan.) College and former director of convention planning for Mennonite Church USA.

**July 4 evening: Ingrid De Sanctis**

Ingrid De Sanctis’ honest speech about growing up as a Pentecostal pastor’s daughter in New Jersey moved the youth to respond. She described her childhood in the 1970s during the age of hippies and the Jesus Movement.

“I remember our father casting a demon out of some hippie on our front porch,” De Sanctis said. “I was the preacher’s daughter. It was my identity.”

But inside her home was trouble. There is a story about “Dad the preacher and Dad the human.” When she was age 13, many women left her father’s church due to inappropriate actions by her father.
“My family just split in half,” she told the youth. “I understand broken stuff.”

When she was 22, her father went into a coma after health problems and died. About eight years later, she went back to New Jersey to visit the people who used to attend her father’s church. She felt scared of what they would think of her and her father.

“One by one these people I had not seen in 16 years … would squeeze me and hold me tight and say, ‘Ingy, we loved your father. He brought us to Jesus. We forgive him,’” she said.

De Sanctis ended with, “Church—it is not perfect. That’s OK. … It is about the people—messy and broken—working out and trying to follow this beautiful Jesus.”

**July 5 morning: Luke Hartman**

On July 5, Luke Hartman encouraged the youth to avoid the pressures of society. Hartman is vice president for enrollment at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.

He shared a story about how he bullied another student to fit in during his freshman year.

At lunch, the popular boys in his class flicked pennies and watched a boy with developmental disabilities chase after them. They called him “Penny Boy.”

One day, Hartman suggested they superglue a penny to the ground to see what would happen. He immediately felt intense guilt.

“Righteousness isn’t about rules and regulations,” he told the youth. “Righteousness is about ‘right relatedness’ and being in relationship with people you might not want to be in relationship with.”

Hartman went on to describe his struggles growing up as adopted into a Mennonite family and the conflicts he felt as a person of color in the church.

“God is at work in your life even in the midst of trials and tribulations,” he said. “He chooses you.”

**Love God, believe in his gift of Jesus Christ and love his people.**

—Glen Guyton

The Bible repeats these three messages over and over, he said. Guyton is director of finance and convention planning for Mennonite Church USA.

“If you do these three, the rest will take care of itself, he said. “I’m not saying your life will be perfect, but it will put everything into perspective.”

He then read through a litany of Mennonite groups—women, men, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, urban, rural, Birkenstock-wearing, Nike-wearing, LGBTQ, creation care, pink, blue, rich, poor and more.

His daughter joined him onstage and flipped through cards with these descriptions on them, and the youth cheered throughout.

“However you define yourself, don’t forget to focus on Jesus,” he said.

There are two questions to answer, he told the youth. The first one, God, is my life pleasing to you? The second is, Where are you leading me next?

“If you can answer those questions, who cares what anyone else thinks?” Guyton asked in his closing.
A highlight for the junior youth convention at Phoenix 2013 was playing the “Anabaptist game.” Children in grades six through eight took part as a way to learn about the persecution Anabaptists faced in the 16th century.

Organized by Michele Hershberger, who teaches Bible at Hesston (Kan.) College, the game includes actors who play the parts of 16th-century Anabaptists and tell their stories to the youth in eight “safe houses.”

High school youth acted as guards arrested other students as well as some unsuspecting adults. They took their captives to a “state church” courthouse, where they were tried for their beliefs, including not baptizing infants. Guards took those condemned to a “dungeon.” Some were tied up, and guards pretended to flog them. Some ended up in stocks (see photo above).

The junior youth also worshiped together each day and heard from speakers Marissa King, who teaches education at Hesston College; Bonita Garber, a graduate of Hesston College; Dustin Galyon, men’s basketball coach at Hesston College; and Hal Shrader, lead pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz. Their talks were entitled “What Mirror Are You Using?,” “Who Is My Neighbor?” and “Healing and Hope: Dream It.”

The youth also enjoyed the antics of John Bromels, an actor, writer, teacher and fund-raiser from Cincinnati, Ohio, and Ken Rogers, a musician from Hesston College (see photo at left). They use songs, humor and improvisation and include the youth in their improv.

Kathryn Lehman Harsha, a sponsor, said she came with several youth from her congregation, North Baltimore Mennonite Church. The youth were divided into groups of 12 or so, and two sponsors stayed with each group through the week. One of these groups consisted of youth from Phoenix.

The junior youth also took up an offering to support the DREAMERs fund, which provides financial assistance for undocumented youth and young adults who want to initiate the process of becoming citizens. The offering brought in $2,410.43.—Gordon Houser
Almost 70 children participated in the children’s convention at Phoenix 2013, according to director Amy Nissley Stauffer, who has just begun as associate pastor of congregational life at Hesston (Kan.) Mennonite Church. The children, having just completed kindergarten through grade five, learned about prayer during their week together. They learned different prayers, including table graces and the Lord’s Prayer.

They also spent time praying for the delegates and made prayer leaves and bookmarks, which they delivered to the delegate assembly on July 5. The delegates also prayed for them.

Each day the children visited the exhibit hall, where the various agencies and schools led them in activities.


The children made a daylong trip to the Arizona Science Center. Representatives from Mennonite Mission Network and the Lion and Lamb Peace Center visited them.

Jenna Boettger Boring and Darla Schrock led the children in music.

Stauffer said that the time with the children was exciting and that “the kids were able to connect with the denomination and to interact with the biblical stories.” —Gordon Houser
Youth do servant projects despite the heat

Despite temperatures as high as 116 degrees, 2,130 participants from the junior high, youth and adult conventions took part in servant projects during Phoenix 2013. Participants washed cars and windows, painted, picked up trash and, given the heat, drank plenty of water. Photos by Lowell Brown
Film festival explores immigration, antiracism

by Gordon Houser

Among the many “learning experiences” offered at Phoenix 2013 on July 3-4 was a film festival sponsored by Everence. The festival included feature-length films and documentaries that explore issues of immigration and antiracism.

Four of the five films shown were documentaries, and all are worth seeing. You may want to look for them on Netflix or other source for films on DVD.

**Mad Hot Ballroom** is a delightful documentary about schools in New York City that teach 11-year-olds ballroom dancing. It includes candid interviews with the kids and shows their growing interest in and ability to perform ballroom dancing. The film follows several kids from three public schools as they learn the merengue, rumba, tango, foxtrot and swing while preparing for a citywide competition.

Those participating in the learning experience had time to discuss the film after viewing it. We talked about the different cultures shown in the film. Many of the kids were Dominican; a few were Asian.

We observed forms of oppression the kids experienced or mentioned: drugs, lack of economic opportunity, lack of safety for girls, that most of the teachers were white, that the male leads each dance.

Some noted ways the kids overcame such oppression: friendship, role models, empathy, common goals. Some said the film challenges our stereotypes about inner-city kids while also showing typical middle school problems.

**The Visitor** is the one feature film shown. It is outstanding (it was No. 2 on my list of 10 from 2008). Briefly, it tells the story of Walter, a professor who is bored with his life and is trying to learn to play the piano. Scheduled to attend a conference in New York City, he arrives at his apartment and finds Tarek Khalil, a Syrian musician, and Zainab, a Senegalese street vendor, living there. He lets these undocumented immigrants stay, and a bond forms. Tarek teaches Walter to play the drum. After an incident on the subway, Tarek is arrested and sent to a detention center for illegal immigrants.

The discussion focused on encountering the other. People mentioned the sense of powerlessness, how innocent people are treated like criminals. One person said it juxtaposed personal transformation and an unchanging system. One said that “visitor” has multiple meanings. Another said it showed the irony of America being “the land of the free.”

**Well-Founded Fear** is a documentary about U.S. government workers who interview people seeking asylum in the United States. In the late 1990s, when the film was made, only about 1 percent of applicants were accepted. Today, after 9/11, the percentage is even lower. The workers look for inconsistencies in the applicants’ stories.

Facilitator Alicia Horst pointed out during the discussion afterward that INS is gone, and everything is under Homeland Security. She also said that lawyers for applicants can be disciplined if a claim is ruled frivolous.

We learned from the film the importance of translation. Getting accepted has as much to do with which worker you get as to your claim. Also, one’s presentation is key. And the people who apply have no rights.

**No Man’s Land** is a short documentary that covers the plight of the 100,000 unaccompanied minors who enter the United States. The film tells the heartrending story of 13-year-old Maria De Jesus and her cousin Rene, 12, who are arrested trying to cross from Mexico into the United States. Maria’s mother is in Chicago and hasn’t seen her daughter for seven years.

We divided into small groups and talked about the people portrayed. We discussed issues of human trafficking and drug smuggling.

**Lost Boys of Sudan** is a documentary that follows two teenage Sudanese refugees who make their way to America. Once there, they struggle with extreme cultural differences.

Because it ran concurrently with **No Man’s Land**, I did not attend this film.
This page, clockwise from top: Mennonite Church USA moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht (third from right) and executive director Ervin Stutzman (second from right) lead a prayer walk through downtown Phoenix on July 5. Many Mennonites at Phoenix 2013 learned salsa dancing. Monty Graber, North Newton, Kan., holds his son Nikolas.

All photos by Lowell Brown
This page, clockwise from top: Christian rapper Sean Slaughter performs. Youth with light sticks at worship on July 5. Peace Tea was sold at the convention. Youth enjoy a game of fusbol. Various ages found cool water in the triple-digit heat. Dave Wert accompanies a prayer vigil outside the Central Court Building for those who have died trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. All photos by Lowell Brown.
Plays, music, dancing

Monkey Butler performs improv comedy shows and trains new students. It is part of Mosaic church, a Christian congregation in Los Angeles that believes creativity is the natural result of spirituality. Photo by Lowell Brown

A scene from *No Roosters in the Desert*, which is based on interviews by Anna Ochoa O’Leary. It follows four women who trek across the desert toward the American dream. On their way, they push the limits of their physical and emotional endurance as they establish connections through the magical storytelling of the youngest, an indigenous woman from Chiapas. Photo by Lowell Brown

Hillary Harder leaps during a scene in *Heavenly Voices*, which shares the stories of Mennonite women of color across the Mennonite church in North America. The actors play multiple roles. Photo by Lowell Brown
Below: Amy Schunn of Phoenix poses during the third Trash Fashion Show, which was held July 4 at Phoenix 2013. Photo by Lowell Brown

Above: Salsa Lessons! was a popular learning experience at Phoenix 2013. Photo by Lowell Brown

The Kansas Bible Company, an 11-man band from Nashville, Tenn., performs. Photo by Lowell Brown
wasn’t born in a Mennonite/Anabaptist milieu but chose the Mennonite faith later. As a student at Goshen (Ind.) College, I was captured by a view of Christian faith that integrated word and deed. It seemed audacious but profound. Followers of Jesus should seek to live as Jesus in a troubled world as he taught.

I have been working with Anabaptist/Mennonite-related institutions for all my professional career: as teacher, pastor and later executive staff with the former Mennonite Board of Missions. I served for nearly a decade with Greencroft, a Mennonite-sponsored senior-care provider in Goshen. For the last 15 years, I have served with Mennonite Health Services (MHS) Alliance.

Holistic witness is at the heart of mission
The integration of word and deed—holistic witness—is a priority for Mennonite Church USA. Why? Jesus taught that following him meant paying attention to human need and responding. Luke 4 sums it up: Feed the hungry, care for the widow, clothe the naked and release the captive. A commitment to service has been a dominant theme in the Anabaptist faith.

Long history of engagement in responding to need
In the late 19th century, Anabaptist individuals and groups in North America reached out in holistic witness, establishing many types of missions here and around the world. Frederick Living, Frederick, Pa., and Bethesda Home, Goessel, Kan., trace their roots to the late 1800s. This same expression of holistic witness continues today in the form of new ministries, such as the Center for Healing and Hope in Goshen and Elkhart, Ind., which provides urgent-care clinics for people without health insurance.

MHS Alliance and its 74 member ministries represent this rich history of the church’s engagement in holistic witness.

A period of disaffiliation
During the last 30 years, institutional ministries of health and human services have taken a back seat in the Mennonite church. Why?

First, in the 1980s, many denominations created firewalls between their denominational structures and their health and human services institutions out of concern for a perceived risk of liability for the denominations. For Mennonite ministries founded at the national level, the responsibility was shifted an arms-length away to Mennonite Health Services, which had no formal relationship with the denomination.

Second, many sensed that the church’s mission practice had moved too far toward service at the expense of evangelism and church planting.

Third, many of these institutions have become large and successful, with capable boards and staff. They didn’t need the church in the same ways as before and appeared too complex and professionalized to be governed by the church.

This shift produced unanticipated results. On the upside, the institutions have grown closer to each other and represent a strong network today. On the downside, the firewall accelerated the disaffiliation of church and institution. Health ministries were not part of how the denomination conceptualized mission. They were not at the table. This seemed ironic to me for an Anabaptist tradition that seeks to be holistic in its witness.

Reclaiming health and human service ministry
At last month’s convention in Phoenix, the Mennonite Church USA delegate body took action to embrace MHS Alliance as a fifth agency of the church. Why is this important? I’d like to believe it’s the church’s desire to strengthen its integration of word and deed.

Together, the members of MHS Alliance represent over $1 billion of ministry each year. They serve tens of thousands of clients, residents and families and employ thousands of staff.

And our 74 members are only part of the story. There are many congregationally based organizations that carry forward the mission of the church through human service programs.

These ministries face immense challenges. The role of the private and government sectors continue to change. The Affordable Care Act promises to extend health care to more Americans but also introduces great uncertainty. Withdrawal is not a missional church response. But neither is it faithful to get co-opted by government to do the work, with constraints that make bearing witness impossible.

As the broader church reclaims its engagement in health care, the institutions need the grounding in faith and hope represented in the life of the church. Together we strengthen the integration of word and deed in holistic witness.
Do we love the world that God loves?

And God put them in the garden to serve and preserve it.—Genesis 2:15 paraphrased

The beginning of the growing season in northern Indiana was difficult last year. An extremely warm March led to early fruit tree blossoming. We watched the weather anxiously, wondering whether we dreaded more a killing frost that would devastate the harvest or prolonged unseasonable warmth. We got both, then an extended drought. The last significant rain of spring fell in early April. Nothing more came until mid-July. By dint of hard work we kept vegetable plants and berries alive through June and July, but the early blooming followed by a killing frost ensured that tree fruits and grapes were sparse. The many fruit farmers of lower Michigan had a terrible year; some, for the first time in their lives, had no harvest at all.

Last November, we watched the aftermath of superstorm Sandy on the North Atlantic coast. Climatologists told us the Atlantic ocean did not have time to cool down over the unseasonably warm winter. Hurricanes move north across the Atlantic, and the warm ocean contributed energy to the storm system, preventing it from dissipating as it crossed.

When I wonder about the truth of any global event I often turn to the church’s feet on the ground. The stories coming from Mennonites who work around the world in hot war zones and where the cold wars of poverty and injustice take place often differ from what I see and hear from the New York Times, CNN, NPR and USA Today about these countries. When stories diverge, I know that the disinvested volunteer workers of our mission agencies and Mennonite Economic Development Associates have nothing to gain or hide by their involvement in these situations, and I trust their stories.

So it is with distress that I consider that my church does not have a story about climate change. Though many Mennonites care a lot about the health of the planet, we have not yet grappled as a body with our God-given responsibility to be stewards of the earth in light of climate change.

Here is an irony: On this issue I look outside the church for solidarity. While waiting for the necessary policy changes needed to address climate change, secular community and national organizations are making a difference, responding in a myriad of ways; through advocacy, raising awareness, reducing consumption, smart energy use, relocation and rebuilding interdependence, they are tapping many creative ideas that can help us. Many people are working to build a sustainable future with creativity and ingenuity. I’m glad to collaborate with them, and they ignite my passion. But for the most part they are not people I can sing and pray with. They are not people with whom I can share my deepest hopes for the world.

I remember how important it was to me on Sept. 11, 2001, to gather with members of my community for prayer. Participation in the community at prayer gave me courage I did not have alone. Fear and dread gave way to hope and a sense of God’s presence. When we are afraid, we need to feel God’s presence through the care and support of those we love.

God so loved the world that he gave his son to save it. God gave us responsibility for creation and for the least ones. It is clear that something is up with the weather, and scientists who study climate are urging us to take immediate action to reduce CO₂ emissions. So does love of the world mean taking care that we do not lose half the remaining species on earth to extreme climate and weather changes? Do we believe that loving the world is our work, too?

Mennonites would be so good at addressing climate change: We are creative and have a history of hard work and service. We understand the elegance of simplicity and the strange arithmetic of collaboration. We have skills as scientists and inventors, technicians and artists, theologians and farmers, economists and homemakers and businessmen. To these practical gifts we can add our hope in God’s love that ensures that the turning of the world is not altogether mechanical, in which grace often changes the game. However true it is that we live in a world of cause and effect, God also blesses our good efforts beyond our imagining.

Do we love the world that God loves well enough be instruments of its healing?
Convention participants cross into Mexico

156 Mennonites join Borderlinks delegations to learn about immigration issues.

One group of Mennonites visits the border wall in Nogales, Ariz., on July 3 during Phoenix 2013.

During the first five days of July, 156 Mennonites traveled to the U.S.-Mexico border through a Borderlinks educational delegation. Two-thirds of them went to Mexico.

Borderlinks is a Tucson, Ariz., organization that arranges delegations into the Arizona-Sonoran region. The participants traveled together from the Phoenix Convention Center.

On July 3, one group witnessed the Operation Streamline process at a courthouse in Tucson, where they saw 70 individuals handcuffed, with ankles and waists heavily chained. Operation Streamline aims to process per day 100 undocumented entrants with misdemeanors and deport them.

That day, the judge called seven individuals to the bench at a time and sentenced them to between 30 and 175 days in a detention center. The majority that morning had re-entered the United States without permission, which is a felony.

Joanna Harader, a participant from Lawrence, Kan., said that observing the “dehumanizing and tragic” process brought her to tears. Others in her group cried as well.

“They are criminalizing migration,” she said. The lawyer she spoke with mentioned that allowing the U.S. government to “herd” these individuals through the legal process opens up the possibility for this kind of legal treatment in other situations not related to immigration.

Another group that day spoke with a retired couple who volunteers with Tucson Samaritans, a humanitarian organization that assists migrants in the desert. Legally, the volunteers can offer water, food and on-site medical assistance to migrants, but they are not allowed to give out maps, compasses or provide any kind of transportation.

The group that went into Mexico on July 3 first visited Grupos Beta, an agency funded by the Mexican government that offers basic services to migrants deported into Mexico. During the visit, they heard five men speak about their migration experiences—many of whom have spouses and children in the United States.

One man described the dangers of border-crossing in the desert. These include snakes and other animals, dehydration and rugged terrain. A cactus punctured the water bottle of his fellow migrant, who lost all his water. The others shared their water with him but were later discovered by a border control helicopter and captured. The group also heard that most migrants crossing the border in this way hire “coyotes” who often lie about the length of the trek to the United States. Their main intention is to profit off migrants, not assist their migration.

Another man said that after he was caught for re-entering, he was detained in a privately run detention center, where he cleaned and served food for an extremely low wage. He said the facility was profiting from his labor.

Others shared about the abuses they experienced in detention centers: not enough food or water, overcrowded conditions and disrespectful security.

That group also visited HEPAC, a Borderlinks sister organization and community center in Nogales, Sonora. Pastor Tito Bojórquez and volunteer Elias Suasnnavart gave a tour of the facility. Suasnnavart explained that the community needs child care and meal services, as most fathers migrated to the United States and most mothers work long, 10-hour days in the Nogales factories, so young children are often left alone at home.

HEPAC also provides adult classes, workshops and a computer lab. The school focuses mostly on technological training to equip students for factory work, Bojórquez said. “[The schools] are not giving people a place to think and reflect,” he said.

When Bojórquez arrived in Nogales in 1992, the fence between Mexico and the United States in Nogales was a short chain-link fence that children tossed balls over.

Now it is a 14-foot steel wall built from reused landing strip material left over from the first Gulf War. He faults the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement for the division in the Nogales region, the destruction of ecology and the unfair treatment of factory laborers.—Anna Groff
Ohio group meets with Sheriff Arpaio

Two pastors offer an apology after learning of the hurt caused by the visit.

Horst initiated the meeting with Arpaio. Craig Strasbaugh, youth pastor at Kidron (Ohio) Mennonite Church, also joined the group with youth from his church.

“[Arpaio] gave a general story of his background,” Strasbaugh said on July 3, “and the controversies that built up around him. ... There was a lot that felt like PR.”

Strasbaugh said he “didn’t grow so much as a person [through the conversation but learned] to have hard conversations with people I don’t agree with.”

Horst said he could not integrate what he hears from the church and what he hears from Arpaio.

“There’s not much meeting point or integration,” Horst said. “I came away feeling like … a messenger [between] two people who ought to be talking to each other. The church would be well-served by talking with him. ... Sometimes the church views him with disdain in spite of asking us to accept all people.”

Within a day after Arpaio’s staff posted the photos of the Mennonite group, Executive Board staff members began getting complaints. Iris de León-Hartshorn, director of transformative peacemaking, said the group was oblivious to the hurt the visit and photos was causing Mennonite Hispanics who had elected not to attend the Phoenix convention.

Horst and Strasbaugh met with Glen Guyton on July 4 for further conversation. Guyton is director of finance and convention planning for Mennonite Church USA.

“I did not get the sense they were ‘pro Sheriff Joe,’” Guyton said. “As people of privilege, they were thinking they could simply meet with Sheriff Joe and that would be the end of it. Sheriff Joe is shrewd, cunning and obviously took advantage of the naiveté of this group to further his personal and political agenda.”

During the first delegate session on July 5, moderator-elect Elizabeth Soto Albrecht reported that she had talked to people on her trek to Phoenix who were hurt by the news of the youth group’s visit. Immediately after the session, the pastors of the two congregations, Randy Murray of Martins Mennonite Church and Carl Wiebe of Kidron Mennonite Church, met with Soto Albrecht and read an apology.

“In anticipation of the immigration agenda at the Phoenix convention,” they said, “the youth group leaders … were encouraged to help their youth collect information on the topic. The meeting was for the purpose of information and not for affirmation. ... We are now profoundly aware of how this meeting was perceived. We express our deep regret and ask forgiveness for how this meeting has greatly offended many persons, especially our Hispanic brothers and sisters. We open ourselves up to further conversation as this may be helpful to those we have offended.” —Everett J. Thomas

Roger Horst, left, is a youth group sponsor for Martins Mennonite Church in Orrville, Ohio. Craig Strasbaugh is the youth pastor at Kidron (Ohio) Mennonite Church.

Two Ohio youth groups and their leaders, while attending Mennonite Church USA’s July 1-5 convention in Phoenix, met with Maricopa County, Ariz., sheriff Joe Arpaio on July 2. Afterward, they were unaware that Arpaio’s public relations staff had immediately posted five photos of the visit on the sheriff’s Facebook page showing the smiling group gathered around the sheriff. The photo album quickly went viral, and convention staff began hearing complaints about the group’s meeting with Arpaio and the hurt it was causing.

On July 5, the pastors of the two congregations offered an apology to moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht for the visit.

On May 24, a federal judge ruled that Arpaio, self-described as “America’s toughest sheriff,” was guilty of racial profiling Latinos through his department’s immigration patrols. The court also ruled that Arpaio’s deputies prolonged the detentions of people who were pulled over.

In January, leaders from the group asked for a room in the convention center where they could host the sheriff. Their request was denied. Executive Board staff member André Gingerich Stoner corresponded with one of the leaders.

“While we could not stop the youth group from making this visit,” Gingerich Stoner said on July 17, “we discouraged it and counseled against it.”

The Mennonite group met with Arpaio on July 2 to learn about immigration issues. Instead, they mostly talked about Arpaio’s national notoriety and not much about immigration issues. Seven members of the contingent agreed to be interviewed on July 3 about the visit.

“We went to find out whether Sheriff Joe was everything we’ve heard,” said Roger Horst, a youth group sponsor for Martins Mennonite Church in Orrville, Ohio. “We found out he’s everything he’s made out to be. But he still is a creation of God.”
Eight set for first terms

Delegates at Phoenix convention elect moderator-elect, board members.

Members of churchwide boards of directors are chosen in one of three ways: elected by the delegate assembly, appointed by the Executive Board or co-opted by the board on which they serve. On July 2 at the delegate session in Phoenix, seven people were elected to serve for a first term on the following boards: Executive Board, Everence, Mennonite Education Agency, Mennonite Mission Network and The Mennonite, Inc. The delegates also approve the selection of moderator-elect.

Moderator-elect: Patricia Shelly is professor of Bible and religion at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., and a core adjunct faculty member in Bible at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary—Great Plains, also in North Newton. She has completed eight years on the Executive Board.

Executive Board: Yvonne Diaz, Terlingua, Texas, is a member of Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Vida, San Antonio, Texas. She is the former executive director of Iglesia Menonita Hispana. She was nominated by the Iglesia Menonita Hispana to represent the group on the board.

Executive Board: Joy Sutter, East Norristown, Pa., is a member of the Salford (Pa.) Mennonite Church. Joy is a hospital administrator.

Executive Board: Isaac Villegas, Durham, N.C., is pastor of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Church.

Everence: Karen Lehman, Furlong, Pa., is a member of Plains Mennonite Church. Karen is CEO of Rockhill Mennonite Community in Sellersville, Pa.

Mennonite Mission Network: Barry Bartel, Golden, Colo., is a member of Glennon Heights Mennonite Church. Barry is an attorney who served in Haiti and Bolivia through Mennonite Central Committee.

The Mennonite, Inc.: Elaine Maust, Meridian, Miss., is co-pastor of Jubilee Mennonite Church and works for Maust Woodworking.

Mennonite Education Agency: Judy Miller (no photo), Othello, Wash., is a member of Warden (Wash.) Mennonite Church. Judy is a retired professor.

The names of candidates for churchwide boards are nominated by the Leadership Discernment Committee. LDC members include Duncan Smith from Beaverton, Ore., and a member of Portland Mennonite Church, chair; Paula Brunk Kuhns, Colorado Springs, Colo., and a member of Beth-El Mennonite Church; Horace McMillon, Jackson, Miss., and a bivocational pastor serving Open Door Mennonite Church; Kim Vu Friesen, Minneapolis, and a member of Emmanuel Mennonite Church; Dionicio Acosta, Lancaster, Pa., and a member of New Holland Spanish Mennonite Church; Edie Landis, Telford, Pa., and a member of Zion Mennonite Church; George Stoltzfus, Lititz, Pa., and a member of Landisville Mennonite Church; and Louise Wideman, Bluffton, Ohio, and associate pastor at First Mennonite Church of Bluffton.—Everett Thomas
Phoenix 2013, held July 1-5, included Conversation Rooms launched at Pittsburgh 2011. The process provides a deliberate, facilitated space where people are invited to engage in discussion on topics from differing perspectives.

The goal of these sessions was not to persuade others or make decisions but to listen deeply and speak from one’s own perspective.

The rooms offered these topics: climate change, human sexuality, Israel and Palestine, racism, immigration, biblical interpretation and authority, and sexual orientation. Sessions ranged in size from around 20 to one packed room of 120, when many had to be turned away.

After we introduced the process and its purpose in the Conversation Room, we invited people to spend a few moments centering themselves, relaxing and reflecting in silence on certain questions. After establishing ground rules called a Respect Agreement, including a commitment to stay for the full 90 minutes, we invited one person to briefly share his or her perspective on the topic for the large group. Before others shared, another person volunteered to summarize what the person said. Once the person was confident that the person summarizing understood, another person shared, another summarized, and then a third pair did the same. Then the room continued that process in their groups of five, utilizing a talking piece to designate who was speaking and that others were listening. In small circles, once a person’s perspective was summarized adequately by the person to their left, the talking piece was passed to that person to share. This continued for about 40 minutes. Then the entire group was invited to reflect on the experience.

Participants expressed appreciation for the process. Some acknowledged initial reluctance as the process was being described but then expressed affirmation in seeing how it actually worked. Over half the participants in the session on biblical interpretation said they heard a perspective they had never heard before. While only a dozen or so participants said they normally feel understood when they discuss sexual orientation, by show of hands it appeared that all 120 participants in that session felt they had been listened to and heard in their small group.—Barry Bartel, an attorney in Denver, co-facilitated the Conversation Rooms.
Parents describe sexual abuse of their daughter

A local youth pastor abused a high school girl; she told her parents in college.

A local youth pastor sexually abused Michael and Angela’s daughter during her high school career. The abuser began grooming her (taking action to lower the child’s inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child) during her freshman year. The perpetrator was not a member of their church.

Michael and Angela shared their horrific story at Phoenix 2013 in a seminar on childhood sexual abuse and gave advice on how to prevent abuse in communities and churches.

When their daughter went off to college, they said, they received a call from her one week later. She told them everything, and they believed her. That spring they prosecuted the youth pastor.

“Victims know that the likelihood of being believed is low,” said Michael. “When society does talk about it, there are usually people saying it’s made up or [the victim’s] fault.”

Perpetrators are “masters of deceit,” Angela said. They manipulate their victim by isolating the victim from friends and family, brainwashing through statements like, “God has a special plan for us,” and through threats like, “God wouldn’t want you to ruin [my] ministry.”

“In retrospect, we can see that the signs were there, but not the signs we thought to look for,” said Michael. When they saw her acting withdrawn or anxious, “we thought she was just being a teenager,” Angela said.

If you have an intuition that an adult is paying too much attention to your child, act on it, said Michael. Always trust your instincts. For example, neighbors saw the abuser jogging alone with a high school girl and thought it was strange but didn’t know what they could do.

Angela recommended that parents monitor their children’s cell phone use and urged that adults, such as youth leaders or sponsors, contact children through landlines to maintain openness. She also encouraged those in the seminar to rethink their ideas of mentorship in churches to avoid one-on-one time between adults and children.

Michael and Angela live in a small town and attend a Mennonite church. They emphasized that youth are not safer in small towns or church settings, as perpetrators gravitate to those areas. Youth are also taught to trust and respect elders, and, traditionally, men had more authority than women.

 “[A child] should not have to wonder why a youth minister is being too nice to her,” Michael said.

“The trauma affects every aspect of her life and ours,” Angela said. “When you go through something like this, you find out who your true friends are.”—Anna Groff  *Not their real names

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**Misconceptions about child sexual abuse**

**Mistake 1:** Sex offenders are usually strangers.

**Fact:** It is estimated that 85 percent of all reported cases of child sexual abuse involved an offender known to the child and the child’s family.

**Mistake 2:** It’s easy to spot a sex offender. They give off creepy vibes.

**Fact:** Sex offenders use strategies that allow them to gain access to children without raising red flags to others. They are skilled at hiding their behavior.—OneWithCourage.org

**Mistake 3:** It doesn’t happen here (in my home, church, community).

**Fact:** Sexual abuse happens in the Mennonite church. One Quaker study showed rates of sexualized violence are higher than average in communities with a specific commitment to peace.—Rita Nakashima Brock

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Harrisonburg, Va.
Bethel student performs to packed house

Parents of slain activist Rachel Corrie attend Phoenix 2013 for performance

About two-and-a-half years ago, Renee Reimer, Bethel College senior from Sioux Falls, S.D., came back from a journey through Israel and Palestine profoundly changed. Reimer was part of a January 2011 interterm group that included other Bethel students as well as local pastors and community members. Bethel College is in North Newton, Kan.

After returning to campus, Reimer’s theater professor, Megan Upton-Tyner, handed her the script for “My Name is Rachel Corrie.” Two years later, Reimer performed the play to an audience at Phoenix 2013.

“My Name is Rachel Corrie” is a one-woman play based on the journals and email messages of an American college student who, in early 2003, left her hometown of Olympia, Wash., to join the International Solidarity Movement in the Gaza Strip. On March 16, 2003, she died in Rafah after being run over by an armored bulldozer operated by the Israeli Defense Force.

This past February, two years after her visit to Israel-Palestine, Reimer performed “My Name is Rachel Corrie” as an independent study project at Bethel College, which, as it turned out, was only the beginning. One of Reimer’s fellow travelers in 2011 had been Tom Harder, co-pastor of Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church in Wichita, Kan. Harder encouraged his congregation’s peace committee to become a chapter of Friends of Sabeel, North American supporters of the international peace movement initiated by Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land.

Harder began communicating with Joy Lapp, former chair of Friends of Sabeel and a Mennonite who now teaches Bible and religion at Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Lorraine Avenue’s peace committee joined Friends of Sabeel, the first church group to do so. Harder and Lapp’s conversations eventually expanded to include André Gingerich Stoner, director of holistic witness and interchurch relations for Mennonite Church USA, and Jason Boone, who directs Mennonite Church USA’s Peace and Justice Support Network. With their support, Boone, Harder and Lapp launched a new organization, Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network, or Menno-PIN, at Phoenix 2013.

The launch event took place on July 4 at the convention, after Reimer had performed “My Name is Rachel Corrie” to a packed house that morning.

Lapp’s connections brought two special audience members to Phoenix—Rachel’s parents, Craig and Cindy Corrie, who still live in Olympia. The Corries started the Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice after their daughter’s death and have traveled widely, in the United States and across the world, speaking out for peace in Israel-Palestine and justice for Palestinians, as they believe Rachel would have wanted.—Melanie Zuercher of Bethel College

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Renee Reimer, center, with her parents, Ray Reimer, left, and Rosie Epp, right, along with Rachel Corrie’s parents, Craig and Cindy, who are flanking Renee.
Sister Care crosses borders in Mexico

Olga Piedrasanta and Ofelia García now serve as facilitators in Chihuahua.

Five months had passed since the assassination of Diana Sandova’s pastor, Josefina (Chepina) Rempening Díaz, in Cuauhtémoc, Mexico. But Diana’s insecurity remained. Not until attending a workshop called Cuidándonos entre mujeres (Sister Care) did she experience release. The Sister Care workshop series in Latin America is a joint project of the Movement of Latin American Anabaptist Women Theologians (MTAL) and Mennonite Women USA, with support from additional churches and agencies. At each location of the traveling workshop, participants’ experiences give a particular focus on the sessions.

On May 24-26 in Chihuahua, which is in northern Mexico, the sessions about losses touched the women deeply, many said. They said they felt both the loss of a pastor and the loss of their sense of security. The women came from various conferences and cultures, including Hispanic, Germanic and the indigenous Tarahumara. They found sisterly similarities and mutual support.

Rosy Guillen, mission worker in Chihuahua, Mexico, did a dramatization of the Samaritan woman with an emphasis on how Jesus helps women remove their masks. In groups, participants responded to the questions, What is the mask that I wear, and what do I hide behind it? Then, one by one, each woman removed her mask and was affirmed by the group. Rosario García was thankful both for the helpful exercise and for God’s transformative power.

In February 2013, two of the coordinators, Olga Piedrasanta of Guatemala and Ofelia García of Mexico, participated in the first Latin American workshop in Guatemala led by Sister Care presenters Carolyn Heggen and Rhoda Keener. Following their participation in the Sister Care seminar, Keener and Heggen provided individualized training for Piedrasanta and García to prepare them to serve as facilitators in Chihuahua. Rebeca González of Mexico City, who coordinates the MTAL day of prayer, also attended this seminar to prepare to share the workshop with other Mexican women. Women who participated in Chihuahua are leaders in their churches or conventions and anticipate reproducing the workshop. Sonia Bojórquez de Dyck said, “I thank God for MTAL. This teaching is deep, and I’m glad that it has reached us. Extending the workshop will be a first step.”—Linda Shelly of Mennonite Mission Network

Photo provided

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Quilt raffle will fund at least one scholarship

Mennonite Women USA event raised more than $800 at Phoenix convention.

On July 5, Lauralee Kauffman (right), from Iowa City, Iowa, won a quilt raffled off by Mennonite Women USA. The quilt was made by the board’s secretary, Maria Harnish (left) as a fund-raiser.

Rhoda Keener, Mennonite Women USA’s co-director, from Shippenburg, Pa., bought lots of tickets in a quilt raffle during the organization’s exhibit at the Phoenix 2013 convention. More than $800 worth of tickets were purchased by women and men who visited the Mennonite Women USA booth during the Phoenix 2013 convention.

Kauffman, a self-professed collector of quilts and a quilter in her own right, said she is dreaming of creative ways to display the quilt in her own church, East Union Mennonite of Kalona, Iowa, as well as other churches in her community.

The quilt was assembled by Marie Harnish, Indianapolis. Harnish was inspired to create the quilt in response to a discussion at the Mennonite Women USA board meeting in 2012. Harnish serves as the secretary on the Mennonite Women USA board of directors.

What is a Mennonite woman? was the question.

The answers are multifaceted.

Harnish’s vision was further inspired by searching for T-shirts at local thrift stores, where she found many T-shirts with images of women, Scripture and slogans by and about women.

From the colorful backing fabric, which was donated by Fanni Birky of Goshen, Ind., to each T-shirt, there is significance in all aspects of the quilt.

The proceeds from the quilt will go toward the various ministries of Mennonite Women USA, including scholarships for women studying theology around the world, Sister Care seminars, locally and internationally, Timbrel magazine and the annual Bible study guide.

Co-director Rhoda Keener said that the income from the raffle tickets will fund at least one scholarship for theological study.—Ruth Guengerich for Mennonite Women USA
Delivering water to parched prisoners

Muteba left occult rituals, amulets and returned to his church; now he’s a pastor.

Jean-Richard Muteba Wa Mbuyi, a Mennonite pastor in Democratic Republic of Congo, spends a lot of time ministering inside La Prison Centrale de Mbuji Mayi. So one day in March, while walking by the prison, strains of a song gripped his attention.

“We are dying of thirst. No water for days,” wove through the razor-wire overhead.

Muteba, ordained in July 2012 during the 50th anniversary celebration of his denomination Communauté Evangélique Mennonite au Congo (Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo), laid aside all other responsibilities and entered the prison gates. Since the guards knew him well, Muteba was granted access to the rooms where approximately 800 people were held, waiting for their trial dates.

In Congo, people accused of a crime are guilty until proven innocent. They can wait several years for a judge to review their cases. During this time, prisoners struggle to survive, often packed by the hundreds into small concrete-block rooms. Though their families are expected to provide food for them, the prison normally assures enough water to sustain life—except for the week preceding the desperate song in March when the water shortage in the city was more severe than usual.

Muteba carried the news of the thirsty prisoners to the Sangilayi Evangelical Mennonite Church, where he is part of the pastoral team. The church leaders decided to disburse some of the funds that Henry De Leeuw, a surgeon and member of Yellow Creek Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., gives for prison ministry. De Leeuw began to share in this way when he visited Mbuji Mayi three years ago.

This city of 3 million inhabitants has no piped water. The delivery system consists of men and boys going to streams with as many as six 50-gallon jugs strapped to their bicycles. Muteba paid for several loads of water to be taken to the prison with some of these prison ministry funds.

Muteba visits the prison weekly. He hears from people who have been locked up for years on false charges and others who are starving because they have no family members in Mbuji Mayi to bring them food. Some people have been acquitted in a long-awaited trial but remain in prison because they have no money for the exit fee.

Muteba is part of the congregational committee that prepares a monthly meal for all of the prison occupants. Sometimes prison ministry funds also pay the exit fee. Many of the prisoners join the Sangilayi church when they are freed. One of them, Daniel Kasongo, is now part of the pastoral team.

Being Jesus’ hands and feet among captives was not always the path Muteba saw for himself. Though he was born into the Mennonite church, Muteba rebelled against religion in his youth. He believed violence was his best means of survival, envisioning a military career and working toward his black belt in karate.

“I had no intention of serving God in my life,” Muteba said. “I thought having many protective amulets would assure success and protect me from all danger.”

He purchased amulets to make himself invincible and to protect his wife, Adel Kanjinga, and their six children. He performed rituals that he now says were “hard and ridiculous.” However, despite his heroic efforts in the occult domain, his oldest son died, and his other children were frequently ill.

In 1990, at age 20, Muteba realized the dark powers were not providing the good life he desired and decided to return to the church of his childhood.

“I felt a call from God,” Muteba said. “When I followed the ways of this world, I didn’t have a single happiness. Today, I am a very happy man.”

Muteba said his journey is a source of hope for the prisoners he visits, and rarely does Muteba enter the prison without hearing thanks for the water he his church provided when the prisoners were desperately thirsty, water that increases the fruitfulness of the gospel seeds he plants.

Mennonite Mission Network partners with the three Mennonite denominations in Congo, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission and Mennonite Church Canada through the Partnership Council in Congo.—Lynda Hollinger-Janzen of Mennonite Mission Network
Lancaster, Pa., Ethiopians thank EMM missionaries

65 former missionaries and children represent more than 500 combined years.

Fikre Bekele, representing the congregation of Light of the World Evangelical Church in Rohrerstown, Pa., greets Esther Becker, who served with EMM as a teacher in Ethiopia from 1954 to 1990.

The happy sounds of illitas—or joy cries—and songs in Amharic filled the Evangelical Ethiopian Church of Lancaster (EECL), Pa., during a celebration held June 16 to honor Eastern Mennonite Missions workers who shared the good news of Jesus many years ago in Ethiopia.

Demeke W. Getahun, pastor of EECL, said, “We are the fruit of their labors. The missionaries who came to Ethiopia impacted thousands of lives. The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) was established through their service.”

Sixty-five former missionaries and their children, who represented more than 500 combined years of mission work, attended the missionary appreciation event.

MKC began in the 1950s with the first Mennonite church in Ethiopia. When MKC had to go underground (1982-1991) during the Marxist reign, it grew tenfold. Today MKC has more than 500 churches with a membership of more than 350,000.

Stories and testimonies were shared by three former missionaries: Chester Wenger, Sharon Kraybill, and Paul Gingrich. Pastor Demeke, Gemechu Gebre (representing New Life Ethiopian Church of Lancaster), and Fikre Bekele (representing Light of the World Evangelical Church in Rohrerstown) gave short speeches.

Pastor Demeke said he and his congregation had been thinking of having such a day for a long time. EECL is a congregation of approximately 60-70 people. It is the oldest church in the area that worships in Amharic.—Linda Moffett of Eastern Mennonite Missions

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Why military veterans become pacifists

Julie Putnam Hart draws conclusions after interviewing 115 former soldiers.

When I joined the peace community in the 1980s and the Mennonite Church in the 1990s, I was exposed to miraculous stories of transformation from prowar soldiers to antirwar veterans. As a professor and social-psychologist who studies human behavior in groups, I sought to understand the dynamics of this dramatic transformation. From 2005 to 2009, I interviewed 115 former military personnel about their childhoods, their military experiences, the period of change in their thinking and where they stand today politically, religiously and socially. What I discovered was that this transformation was not just a simple attitude change about issues of peace and war but a more holistic change of one’s core identity. Christians may call this a rebirth, a conversion experience or metanoia—a Greek word meaning a change of heart and mind much like the Apostle Paul experienced on the road to Damascus.

Among the veterans interviewed, I found four primary catalysts or life experiences that challenged the veterans’ conceptions of war, the enemy, the United States or the military. These conceptions undergirded their identities as patriotic prowar Americans or as good Christians fighting evil around the world. The four dominant experiences or catalysts are combat, betrayal, religious conviction and education. In this article, I will describe these catalysts, share examples of veterans’ stories from each catalyst group and then draw some conclusions important to the antirwar and pacifist Christian communities.

My 115 interviewees were solicited from an announcement on the following organizations’ websites: Veterans for Peace, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Iraq Veterans against the War. In addition, I contacted a list of veterans who were members of a Mennonite church. Subjects were selected based on their accounts of changing perspectives on war over the life course. Each phone interview lasted from one to three hours and included a set of 17 questions. Those I interviewed ranged in age from 22 to 82 and had served in wars from World War II to Iraq II. The majority are male Vietnam War veterans.

The actual attitude of the subject on war was first determined with an open-ended question about what they believed at age 18 about the appropriate use of war. This was followed by what they believe today. I then read an eight-point scale from militaristic to pacifistic, and the subject identified the points on the scale that they were closest to at age 18 and currently. This information informed the initial attitude or identity for each subject and the current attitude or identity related to war. It also determined the degree of attitude change for each subject. For example, a subject may have identified #1, “It is appropriate for the nation/state to respond to offense or injustice anywhere in the world in any way it sees fit,” as his or her belief about the appropriate use of war at age 18. If his or her belief about war today was identified as #7, “Neither the Christian nor the person of conscience nor the nation/state should engage in war because all human life is sacred,” or #8, “I believe that there are nonviolent means to resolve conflict peacefully without recourse to war,” their attitude change would be scored as significant on the scale.

I found that all participants in the study verbalized some change in their attitude regarding peace and war over time; no one remained stagnant. For the vast majority, the change was dramatic from a militaristic perspective with few limits on the use of war to a belief either in strict restrictions on the use of war (just war theory) or some level of pacifism based either on humanitarian or religious grounds. The majority of participants shared a number of additional characteristics suggesting that this was a more holistic change of identity.

First, they primarily moved to the left politically. The participants with the broadest change in thinking also changed jobs or careers, choosing an area that demonstrated their new commitments and worldview. For some this meant going to seminary or law school. For others, this was demonstrated by entering the helping professions or teaching. Others spent their spare time in social activism or healing work. These changes led to a sense of peace, doing the right thing or feeling whole and healthy in a way they had not previously.

Many of the participants, when asked if there were other changes in their lives as a result of their peace/war shift, mentioned increased political awareness and a decline in prejudice against homosexuals and other disenfranchised groups. Many said their faith changed when they experienced the horror of combat. A 30-year-old Navy veteran saw significant changes: My friends all changed. I lost my conservative evangelical friends. Politically, I identify as a Democrat now. My idea of good public policy is different. … I have more
compassion and faith. I am an environmentalist. My faith has moved to be more liberal and peace and justice oriented. I am more into process-oriented dialogue. I don’t disrespect the military today, but I don’t consider it an asset. #115

Combat as a catalyst for identity change: The first catalyst, “combat,” represents veterans that frame the experience of combat and war as the most pivotal component of their changing stance on war. This is the largest group of veterans (37 percent). When placed in war, the reality of combat, of the enemy or of their comrades was so different from their expectation that upon reflection they felt wrong, confused, ashamed or unable to live with themselves and their actions during combat. Participants in this category often described the horror of war as being beyond description. One veteran was shocked by the valor of the enemy and the contrast in firepower between the United States and the North Vietnamese in 1967. He experienced shame due to the behavior of his comrades in the fight. He clearly expected the United States was in Vietnam to protect women and children and discovered that his fellow soldiers were not: The most important event was just seeing real war. We walked endlessly and waited for someone to shoot us. Our unit started out with 160 men and got down to 60. ... There is no morality in war. We didn’t even help orphans. ... The first event was when we got hit by our own artillery, and two guys were killed. The medics would pop morphine pills in the mouths of the wounded. I tried to carry one guy back for help, and he died. It’s so bad (combat), you can’t imagine how bad it really is. I can’t even explain it. ... #135

Betrayal as a catalyst for change: The second largest group (23 percent) is termed “betrayal.” The source of identity conflict for this group began with a profound sense of betrayal by the U.S. government, U.S. military or a particular U.S. leader. In many cases, the foundation of the existing belief system was based on the moral superiority of the U.S. government, U.S. leaders’ high ethical standards and the honesty of the U.S. military and necessity of U.S. intervention around the world. When these views were challenged by experience or trusted new information, the veteran sought a different way to understand historical events, the United States and issues of peace and war. This group differed from the other catalyst groups as they expressed their sense of betrayal emotionally and viscerally—as if the betrayal had caused a physical assault on their body, mind or spirit. It seemed to shake their belief in U.S. morality. As their belief system was challenged, their identity as a “patriotic American” or “proud veteran” also had to shift.

This Army veteran served in the United States but felt shocked after learning through Army friends and texts about U.S. military involvement around the world:

I enlisted in the Army from 1963-66 and served in the U.S. I was a damn good soldier but wanted out after three years. I worked and then went to college. Letters from my buddies who stayed in after 1966 and went to Vietnam began to change my mind. ... They said everyone in Vietnam hates the U.S. ... I began to study the historical situation of the region, and I trusted the literature as it jived with what my buddies said from Vietnam. I was shocked, angry and confused to learn about the U.S. oppression. ... I felt like I was psychologically raped (to learn the truth). This shook me to my bones. #71

Religious conviction as a catalyst for change: A third largest catalyst group is termed “Religious Conviction” (21 percent). Members of this group understand their change as occurring only after being introduced to religious ideas or spiritual experiences that caused them to question previous conceptions of killing in war and the possibilities of nonviolent social change and/or responses to injustice. In contrast to the combat and betrayal groups, religious conviction veterans identify religious intellectual enlightenment as a source of identity conflict. These experiences from seminary to college to church, exposed them to alternative conceptions of God, war, Christianity and/or ethics of human dignity that led them to question the soldier identity. One soldier notes: In 1979, after graduating from seminary, I joined the Army and was put in chaplaincy training. In 1982, my Home Mission Board called me for active duty in the Army as a Chaplain. I was assigned to a battalion with 1,000-1,500 soldiers. ... It was here that I learned how violent the Army could be. ... Later I was selected to go to study more to be a staff officer. We studied kill ratios and a cold calculated approach to war. I decided afterward that I wasn’t going to study war anymore. Then I was selected to be an instructor at the chaplain’s school ... while studying pastoral psychology. I took a course on Catholic moral theology, and Professor Stanley Hauerwas encouraged me to study just war theory and John Howard Yoder’s The Politics of Jesus. At the end of my major paper for the course, I was a pacifist. I decided it was crazy for Christians to be in the Army, but as a chaplain, I could do it. ... One of my co-workers said to me one day, ... you are a conscientious objector, and you don’t even know it. I took the C.O. regulations home with me that weekend, filled out the papers and turned them in Monday. Rather than grant me the C.O. discharge, they honorably discharged me after 10 years of active duty. #12

Education as a catalyst for change: The fourth and
final catalyst group is termed “Education.” These veterans share the experience of becoming more critical in their thinking about their military experience and the world. Through higher education or readings critical of a war or the United States, this group adopts a new personal identity of “critical thinker” and in this identity begins to question previous assumptions about the United States and the world.

In order to tolerate or even enjoy the military experience, it is easier to set aside other important identities, as they are not verified by those in the military. For example, the student identity often includes thinking critically and creatively, questioning theory and research, basing one’s truth on scientific or carefully researched data, taking initiative and participating in respectful dialogue with authority figures. These are different standards from the military. In order to excel in the university setting, new norms and identities become important and the commitments of the individual to the soldier identity may change. This experience of higher education was the catalyst for 19 percent of the subjects in the study. One veteran explains:

My first three years in the Air Force (1963-66), I didn’t consider the antiwar arguments (Vietnam) and went along with the President. I liked the macho culture and the espiri de corps and thought that I should go to Vietnam to prove my manhood. When I left Vietnam, I immediately entered an MBA program and got married and started college coaching. It wasn’t wise because I didn’t take time to think about the war for 15-20 years.

... In 1980, I met and married my current wife, and we moved and became involved in our local community. In 1985, I began to read Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, and this led to others. I also began involvement with Veterans for Peace. #112

We must partner with groups like Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War and Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from this research. First, complex identity change is a holistic process that tends to affect many levels of identity, creates changes in group affiliations and affects the day-to-day activities of individuals. Second, once an individual experiences distress, they attempt to reduce that stress. Access to individuals, texts, websites, groups and belief systems that provide alternative perspectives are important to constructing new identities. Third, these changes in role and identity, once stabilized, lead to feelings of wholeness, peace and confidence.

The church, and specifically the peace church tradition, has an important role to play with veterans who are experiencing identity conflict or strain, especially combat vets with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). First, the church has and should continue to study and offer support to veterans who are in distress regarding their previous prowar identity. This support may be through easily accessible websites geared to veterans, veterans support groups near military bases, films interviewing antiwar veterans, texts that offer a coherent antiwar perspective without demonizing veterans and new scriptural interpretations on violence and war.

Second, the church must witness to the alternatives to war and violence that involve positive actions for peace and social justice. This is demonstrated in the church’s practice and involvement in trainings for restorative justice, conflict transformation, community organizing, nonviolent social change, human rights advocacy, anti-oppression, peace education in schools and churches as well as groups such as Christian Peacemaker Teams. The work of counter-recruiting, talking with young men and women about alternatives to the military is very important.

Third, the church must provide a nonjudgmental and compassionate outreach to veterans, their families and friends. Many are in turmoil. Suicide among veterans has reached epidemic proportions due to PTSD. Pacifists have much in common with many veterans. We share a love of country and an appreciation for our many freedoms and rights. We also share a desire to make the world a better place, where justice and peace prevail. We simply believe in different means of accomplishing these goals. We can reach out to these veterans as our neighbors, fellow college students and co-workers. We can walk with them, listen to their stories and provide support. One Christian group providing financial support to veterans who have fallen through the cracks is Centurions Guild (www.centurionsguild.org). It provides funding for medical and emotional support when the Veterans Administration is not able to help.

This outreach will be most effective through our commitment to spiritual practices of prayer, study, fasting and surrender to God. These practices open us to God so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world. This increases the chance that our outreach is peaceful, nondefensive, compassionate and well-informed.

Finally, we must partner with groups like Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. These groups hold tremendous legitimacy with the public that Christian pacifists lack in opposing war and promoting peaceful alternatives to war. They sponsor public events, advocate for legislative change and hold veteran support groups and educational conferences. We can learn much from these veterans, support their projects financially and share our faith—a faith that many veterans abandoned in their experience of war.—Julie Putnam Hart is an associate professor of sociology and peace and justice at Ohio Dominican University in Columbus, Ohio. Hart volunteers with Christian Peacemaker Teams each summer, doing human rights work in Israel/Palestine and currently Colombia.
**CALENDAR**

Nov. 7-10; *Cultivating Solutions: Harvesting Hope*, Mennonite Economic Development Associates’ (MEDA’s) annual convention, Wichita, Kan. Go to www.medaconvention.org or call 800-665-7026.

**Eighth Street Mennonite Church,**
Goshen, Ind., invites friends and former attendees to help celebrate its centennial year throughout 2013. A Body That Lives serves as a theme for the stories of people with vision and courage who influenced and guided the church’s ministry through its 100 years to the present time. Centennial themes began in February, will culminate during August and end in November with worship and a congregational meal. Aug. 2, 5-9 p.m.: A Celebration of Art and Visual Creativity. Aug. 9, 7 p.m.: Stories Past and Present. Aug. 10, 7 p.m.: Celebration of Music. Please check the website at www.8thstmennonite.org for additional information.

**48th annual Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale,** Aug. 2 and 3. New indoor location: Buckeye Event Center, Dalton, Ohio. Auction items can be previewed online about one month prior to the sale at www.OhioMCCReliefSale.org. Brochures, registration information, etc., are also available online. Admission and parking are free. Handicap parking and wheelchairs are available.

**WORKERS**

**Horst, Carmen,** was ordained as associate pastor at James Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa., on June 23.

**Kanagy, Audrey,** was ordained as associate pastor at Living Light Mennonite Church, Washington Boro, Pa., on June 2.

**Krebs, Matthew,** was licensed as lead pastor at Hershey Mennonite Church, Kinzers, Pa., on June 16.

**Moore, Kenneth,** was ordained as pastor at Benders Mennonite Church, Pen Argyl, Pa., on June 23.

**Weaver, Darrel,** was licensed for church development in Germany at Weaverland Mennonite Church, East Earl, Pa., on June 16.

**OBITUARIES**


**Boshart, Don Wyse,** 78, Wayland, Iowa, died June 22, of cancer. Spouse: Eldora Marie Roth Boshart. Parents: Elon Martin and Eldora Mae Wyse Boshart. Children: Mark, Jan Shelmen; seven grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren. Funeral: June 29 at Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland.


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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.


**Harder, Irma Fast**, 95, Hesston, Kan., passed away on May 27 at Schowalter Villa Health Care in Hesston. Irma was born on May 20, 1918, to Katherine Schultz Janzen Fast and John N. Fast in Mountain Lake, Minn. She was a member of the Bethel Mennonite Church. Irma graduated from Mt. Lake High school in 1936, and then attended the University of Minnesota, studying home economics and business. She worked for Northwestern Bell before she returned to Mt. Lake to marry Clarence W. Harder on Aug. 7, 1949. After he passed away suddenly in 1962, Irma completed the building of a Standard Oil Station, which was to be the family business. Soon after she began as the Public Librarian, and eventually led the way for a new library building to be constructed. She was also instrumental in developing the Heritage Village Museum as a way of preserving buildings, artifacts, and history for future generations. Irma served her community and church in a variety of ways: historian, church librarian, quilter, gardener, and good neighbor. Irma was known for her ready smile and gracious presence and she will be deeply missed. Preceding her in death were her parents, husband Clarence, infant daughter Deborah, sisters Leone Fast and Kay Johnson. Cherishing her memory are her daughters Becky Harder (Doug) of Monument, Colo., Marlene Harder Bogard (Mike) of Newton, Kan.; four grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. A Celebration of Life service was held at the Schowalter Villa Chapel, Hesston, on June 22.


Schmucker, Clifford, 58, Lebanon, Ohio, died May 26, of injuries sustained in a skydiving accident. Companion: Karen Dean. Parents: Earl and Dorothy Yoder Schmucker. Children: Nathan, Adam. Funeral: June 1 at Beech Mennonite Church, Louisville, Ohio.


RESOURCES

Blessings of the Burden: Reflections and Lessons in Helping the Homeless by Alan R. Burt (Eerdmans, 2013, $26) covers Burt’s own journey from apathy to advocacy, an interview with a formerly homeless man who is now the director of an organization that fights homelessness in Cape Cod, Burt’s analysis of the 12 main reasons why homelessness is such a massive problem in America and an example of how one community developed an innovative and cost-effective approach to helping the homeless among them.

Christianophobia: A Faith Under Attack by Rupert Shortt (Eerdmans, 2013, $26) investigates the shocking treatment of Christians on several continents and exposes the extent of official collusion. Shortt demonstrates how belief is the canary in the mine for freedom in general.

Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ by Eugene H. Peterson (Eerdmans, 2013, $17) is the fifth and final book in Peterson’s series of “conversations” in spiritual theology. He brings the voice of Scripture—especially Paul’s letter to the Ephesians—and the voice of the contemporary Christian congregation together to unpack what it means to fully grow up “to the stature of Christ.”

The Amish by Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner and Steven M. Nolt (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, $29.95) is the companion book to the American Experience documentary on PBS. It is the first comprehensive study of Amish life across North America since 1963. Drawing on archival material, participant observation and hundreds of interviews, the authors provide an authoritative, in-depth exploration of Amish life in America.

In the Kingdom of the Ditch by Todd Davis (Michigan State University Press, 2013, $19.95) is the Mennonite poet’s latest collection. The poems address Davis’ father’s diagnosis with pancreatic cancer, his death and its effect on Davis’ family; his sons’ childhoods and approaching entrance into manhood; his marriage of 25 years; the honest struggles of faith.

Notes from the House of the Dead: A New Translation by Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Boris Jakim (Eerdmans, 2013, $24), is an account of the horrific conditions in Siberian labor camps. First published in 1861, the novel is based on Dostoevsky’s experience as a political prisoner.

The Names of Our Tears: An Amish-Country Mystery by P.L. Gaus (Plume, 2013, $15) is the latest in Gaus’ series of murder mysteries. When a dangerous drug ring destroys the life of a young woman, it threatens to infiltrate the Amish community.
Advertising space in *The Mennonite* is available to congregations, conferences, businesses and churchwide boards and agencies of Mennonite Church USA. Cost for one-time classified placement is $1.30 per word, minimum of $30. Display space is also available. To place an ad in *The Mennonite*, call 800-790-2498 and ask for Rebecca Helmuth, or email advertising@themennonite.org.

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**Home and 22 acre farm** 15 minutes from EMU, Harrisonburg, Va. See ad on For Sale by Owner #23947450, Linville, Va.

**Immanuel Mennonite Church**, a small, multicultural congregation in Harrisonburg, Va., with the motto “real people following Jesus’ radical call to love and service,” seeks *half-time pastor*. Submit résumé and cover letter to Rebekah Charles rebekahgood-charles@gmail.com. Salary in accordance with MC USA guidelines.

**College Mennonite Church**, Goshen, Ind., is looking for a *full-time administrative pastor*. Potential candidates can contact Search Committee Chair Bruce Stahly via email at b.stahly@frontier.com. For job description visit www.collegemennonite.org.

**Virginia Mennonite Missions** seeks to fill the full-time position of *President/CEO*, who is responsible for the overall mission program. Qualifications include: devoted Anabaptist follower of Christ; commitment to Virginia Mennonite Conference leadership and congregations; significant cross-cultural experiences; strong administrative, fiscal and budget management gifts; skills in advancement, communications and personal relationships. Available to begin Dec. 1, 2013. See vmmissions.org website for more details. Send résumé to: lois.maust@vmmissions.org

**Bethel College**, North Newton, Kan., is currently accepting applications for the position of *vice president for college advancement*. The VPCA is the chief development officer for Bethel College, a member of the President’s Cabinet and reports directly to the President. The VPCA has primary responsibility for leading and managing all aspects of the college’s comprehensive advancement program. The VPCA provides staff support to the Advancement Advocacy Committee and the Directors Committee of the Bethel College Board of Directors. For details visit http://www.bethelks.edu/bc/careers/openings.php. Professional vitae, three letters of reference and letter of application may be sent to Rosa Barrera, Assistant to the President, Bethel College, 300 E. 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67117 or email rbarrera@bethelks.edu. Applications taken until position is filled. AA/EOE

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**DEAN**

We invite nominations and applications of articulate, passionate, and excellent leaders for the position of *Dean of Conrad Grebel University College*, to begin July 2014. The successful candidate will support Conrad Grebel faculty and inspire them to be strong leaders in their field. The Dean will join a healthy institution, with additional prospects to nurture and secure new partnerships and commitments for innovative educational opportunities; mentor many new faculty in the next decade to collectively extend a vibrant identity of the College; offer bold vision about how to grow a “state of the art” centre for peace advancement; lead the College in articulating a new academic plan; and continue to provide sound administrative direction that has led to a healthy academic bottom line, two signature graduate programs, steady enrollment growth, above 4000 students, and academic salaries commensurate with the University of Waterloo. Review of applications begins **October 1, 2013** and continues until the position is successfully filled.

Founded in 1963 by Ontario Mennonites, Conrad Grebel University College is a rigorous and vibrant Christian liberal arts college affiliated with the world-class University of Waterloo. The College offers academic and residential programs to some of the most talented students in Canada.

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Giving and receiving

Falling from the bleachers at a high school baseball game is embarrassing. Falling from the bleachers on top of your toddler daughter while trying to protect your pregnant belly (apparently) leads to pain (sprained ankle) and inconvenience (bed rest).

As with many experiences in my life, it didn’t take long for some “gifts from God” (also known as opportunities to grow in faith) to rise to the surface.

In a recent spiritual direction session, as I was unpacking what was going on within me as I was anticipating the major transition of adding a family member, I was challenged to reflect on being a receiver. No better time to put that into practice than through the forced dependence of bed rest.

Service and community are two of the prominent hallmarks of Anabaptist Mennonite witness. Many are drawn into the church because of the Christian community they find there. Many of us have given significant resources (our time, talent or finances) to service in both long- and short-term settings. While we know the realities of community life are challenging, in many ways participating in both community and service gives us a personal sense of satisfaction.

So often we find ourselves in the position of giving. And that feels good. But what is community if others cannot serve us? What does it say about our faith and commitment to the church family if we cannot be gracious receivers as well as givers?

Most of us have found ourselves, at some point in time, in need of support and assistance. Or we have journeyed with someone through a serious illness or trial that has required ongoing support from the community. We may chide these people for not eagerly receiving all that is being offered—the church genuinely wants to demonstrate love. But when you find yourself in the position of need, when you must allow others to do for you, the realization hits that in church we are not often taught how to be gracious receivers.

In his book The Circle Maker, Mark Batterson makes the point that we Christians love miracles. We love to see them happen in our communities, to be able to testify to God’s activity. However, we don’t love having circumstances in our lives that require God to intervene miraculously.

Aren’t the ethics of service and community much the same? We love to help others. We are grateful for a church community that supports, nurtures and cares, but we’re not so thankful for the circumstances we find ourselves in that require us to depend on God through the service of our Christian community.

Graciously receiving is hard work. I thought it would be great to have an excuse to lie on the couch, watch television, read and have my husband take care of our daughter and the house for a few days. But it was difficult to be confined, unable to do the smallest of tasks for myself, constantly weighing if it was worth asking someone else to bring me what I needed or if I could put off certain tasks until the time I’d be able to do it (the right way) myself.

The more I have reflected on this experience, the questions from my spiritual director and other times in my life when I have received, I’m challenged by what it takes to be a gracious receiver. Receiving requires the following:

• Space: There must be room for the gift in our lives. We are forced to give up something that would have normally filled the time when we would have been busy. Sometimes it’s a choice to make space. Sometimes we are forced.

• Release of expectations: Can we allow others to do things for us, even if it’s not how we would have accomplished the task? Releasing our own expectations and time frames is hard but necessary work if we truly are to receive the gift from another.

• Trust: Do we believe others will follow through? Can we rest in the comfort and presence of the community’s provision?

This act of gracious receiving is not limited to having our needs met in times of hardship by our community but also has application in our spiritual journey. Do we open our hearts and minds to God? Do we acknowledge our areas of weakness and need? Are we willing, eager even, to receive from God? Or instead is our pride in self-sufficiency so great that we also reject what God may want us to receive? Do we make space, release our expectations and trust that God will provide in our time of greatest need?
FILM REVIEW

The East (PG-13) follows an operative for a private intelligence firm who infiltrates an anarchist group called The East that carries out covert attacks on major corporations. However, as she befriends the members of the group, she questions her mission. This is a rare film that addresses social justice issues without taking clear sides. It also includes some fine acting.
—Gordon Houser

DVD REVIEW

The House I Live In (NR) is an outstanding documentary that shows how the war on drugs is really a war on the poor. It delves into the U.S. prison industrial complex and how it subsidizes thousands of jobs and locks up millions of innocent people. This important film shows the consequences of this “war” for all of us.—gh

BOOK REVIEWS

For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought by Peter C. Blum (Herald Press, 2013, $21.99) combines Anabaptist writers such as Yoder and postmodern intellectuals such as Foucault and Derrida to talk about knowledge, meaning, commitments and action. Despite the heady topic, Blum’s writing is mostly accessible and has helpful insights, like his characterizing Anabaptist-Mennonite as “a certain Christocentric ‘will-to-community’ that we do not yet know how to hold in the same embrace with our liberal individualism.”—gh

Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, 2013, $19.95) argues that the search for our true self requires a dying to our false self. “Resurrection,” he writes, “is not a miracle to be proven; it is a manifestation of the wholeness that we are all meant to experience, even in this world.” The title comes from a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem and likens the true self to a diamond buried deep within us. This book will challenge and inspire many readers.—gh

Graphic images in media

Should U.S. media publish graphic images of war, abortion or car accidents? Or do such images do more harm than good?

Conor Friedersdorf raises such questions in “The Gutless Press” (The Atlantic, July/August). He discusses coverage of the trial of Dr. Kermit Gosnell, the abortionist convicted of delivering babies alive and then murdering them. This coverage included descriptions of what Gosnell called “fetal demise” far more graphic than anything normally found in the media.

Friedersdorf points out that “members of the pro-life movement have long believed that they can win converts by confronting Americans with what abortion really is” in the most graphic terms possible.”

On the other hand, critics of U.S. drone strikes wish “more Americans saw graphic photos of the results: the charred corpses, the severed arms and legs, the bloodied children.”

While many pro-life activists charge the U.S. media with a pro-choice bias, the fact is, writes Friedersdorf, “the American media sanitize almost all death. He adds, “During the Iraq War, an American could watch hours of TV coverage without ever seeing the dead body of a U.S. soldier.”

While the news media have grown less likely to publish explicitly violent images in recent decades, portrayals of violence in film and video games have intensified.

Why the change? Friedersdorf believes it’s about not offending the audience. “And because consumers do not want grisly images, neither do advertisers,” he writes. At the same time, the military has clamped down on access to combat scenes.

Friedersdorf notes that “other countries’ media do not contrive such a bloodless world.” He cites a study that shows that foreign media are generally more willing to show graphic images.

Susan Sontag, among others, has argued that showing graphic images might lead to other responses than “shocking people of conscience into action.” They may, in fact, inure us to horror.

Graphic images of war certainly haven’t stopped violent killings, Friedersdorf notes. But that doesn’t mean they haven’t had an impact on public thinking. He cites certain images from the Vietnam War and the photos of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison as examples.

Friedersdorf goes on to point out that “images in media determine not just what we see but how journalists describe the world, and thus what we know about it and how we talk about it.” It might be harder for the government to talk about “collateral damage,” for example, “if an article or TV footage included the image of a bloody corpse,” he writes.

Likewise, he adds, “it is difficult to discuss ‘fetal demise’ abstractly when the accompanying images show the little arms and legs that were dismembered.”

Without doubt, images are powerful. Think about artwork depicting scenes from Scripture (no photos are available): David holding Goliath’s severed head, soldiers killing infants on Herod’s orders, Jesus’ crucifixion. We may read these stories without fully appreciating their horror.

Friedersdorf concludes that “the case for publishing graphic images of killing has less to do with the merits of a specific policy view than with photography’s power to keep us from evading a subject entirely.”

We need to face what’s going on in our world, and images can help us do that.

Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.
(Continued from page 5)
“MW USA is working to unshackle those deep roots of stagnancy in regards to recognizing the power of women.” We deeply appreciate the authenticity, integrity and skills of editor DeBerg and are inspired by her spiritual calling. She is in a unique position to influence young and not-so-young readers to explore their faith through a variety of media.

We found it surprising that this first in-depth article about an editor focused on an avocational interest while only mentioning her work with Timbrel. We encourage The Mennonite to follow Curt Weaver’s recommendation for a follow-up article about how Claire hopes to share her faith through her work with MW USA. —Ruth Lapp Guengerich, Goshen, Ind., and Rhoda Keener, Shippsburg, Pa., Mennonite Women USA co-directors

Concern about Gettysburg
We are hearing so much about the huge amounts of money that are being spent to revive the Gettysburg (Pa.) Park, site of a terrible Civil War battle. It seems that a peace-loving church should speak against it, even though they say no governmental funds are used. Isn’t it really a slam on African-Americans today and in praise of war?—Winifred Paul, Scottsdale, Pa.

This is an NRA nation
Thanks to Ronald E. Holland (“Blessed Are the Peacemakers,” July) for bringing out some numbers. The National Rifle Association membership is between 1 and 1.5 percent of the population of the United States, yet they get more publicity than seven denominations that have more members each than the NRA.

The NRA is in “control (of) half the U.S. Senate, the majority of the U.S. Congress and majorities in the legislatures of the red states.”

Some call us a Christian nation (people are Christian, not a nation), but it sounds more like an NRA nation. I call for Christians to boldly stand for Christ. Are NRA members afraid of being known as such? But they are not our examples.

Let us do what Jesus commanded: “Go and make disciples, … baptizing … teaching them to obey everything.” The reward is that Jesus will be with us always.

Some evidence of that happening is in other fine articles in the July issue. —Carl Smeltzer, Harrisonburg, Va.

Thank you for image with article
Thank you for publishing my article, “Entertaining Angels” (July). I am writing to congratulate whoever chose the image for the title page. It is the “angel of independence” monument from Mexico City. It couldn’t be a more perfect image. Not only is it from Mexico City, but it also has the angel motif. Please pass on my thanks to the person responsible for choosing this image. —Don Clymer, Harrisonburg, Va.
God sighting in a dinner guest

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.—Jesus in John 12:32

A few weeks ago, I watched the Holy Spirit draw a dinner guest to God as a new follower of Jesus. (Because our guest hailed from a country that suppresses Christian witness and this story could keep others from obtaining visas to the United States, I have altered some names and left out some details in this account).

One Sunday, the worship service in a nearby church drew a foreign guest—a professor of philosophy from a large university in Asia. He was in the country for just a few weeks, joining Mei, his wife, who was completing a term as a visiting scholar at a nearby university.

On the first Sunday that professor Xu Zhang visited the church, he was intrigued by the title of the International Sunday School lesson for that day, printed in the church bulletin: “Preparing with Plans After Death.”

The visitor wanted to learn more about death, so he came to the class. It so happened that Bonnie, my wife, was a guest teacher that day. The professor of philosophy told the class that his father, a Buddhist, fears death but that his mother, a Christian, does not. Xu grew up in the countryside and was the first person from his village to go to college. His mother, the only Christian in the village, walked many miles every month to meet with other Christians.

Xu came back the following Sunday with more questions. Because of his deep interest in Christian faith, Bonnie and I invited Xu and his spouse Mei into our home for a meal, along with another couple from the Sunday school class. We spent much of the evening learning about life in Asia, where both Xu and Mei teach in a university. We learned, too, about the extreme deprivation that Xu’s family experienced during a time of revolution and upheaval in his nation. As our guest shared about his spiritual doubts and fears, I sensed that God’s Spirit was at work in him, gently tugging him toward belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Three times as Xu talked that evening, his wife Mei commented that she had never heard him speak that way before. We all watched with awe as he clarified his desire to become a follower of Jesus Christ. In response, I shared with him the Four Spiritual Truths, written by J. Nelson Kraybill.

While Mei is not a Christian and was not ready to make a similar commitment to Christ, she seemed eager to help Xu find peace in his life. So he prayed a prayer to receive Christ and spoke of the joy he was feeling inside. A week later, he stood before the entire congregation and gave testimony to his new life in Christ.

Xu has since become an enthusiastic student of Scripture, guided in his study and Christian walk by John, a member of the Sunday school class.

A week after his new birth in Christ, he asked us to help find a biblical name with a significant meaning that he could adopt. After looking at several choices, he changed his first name to Joseph.

Although professor Zhang and his wife soon returned to Asia, he has stayed in touch with John, his new friend, who is discipling him in the way of Christ.

As I reflect on this joy-filled event, I see the Spirit of God at work in many different ways to lead this guest to faith in Jesus Christ. I see the faithfulness of God in the life of his mother, a Christian who persevered in prayer. I see God at work in the Sunday school class, showing hospitality to a total stranger who showed up in class one day. And I thank the Spirit of God, who orchestrated it all.

Ervin Stutzman is executive director of Mennonite Church USA.
Was Phoenix worth it?

The decision to hold Mennonite Church USA’s biennial convention in Phoenix in 2013 generated calls over the past two years for it to be held elsewhere. Arizona’s draconian immigration laws were the reason many people did not want the convention there and the reason some stayed away.

So was it worth it? Yes. But the experience leaves some long-range consequences.

The first consequence may be a financial loss that this smaller gathering will hand the Executive Board. But it will be some time before that number is known (see box).

A second consequence is the relational damage lingering among many Hispanic Mennonites for what they felt was indifference to the ways the U.S. immigration system criminalizes undocumented residents.

A third consequence may be that we’ll not see a convention on or near the West Coast for a generation. A decision has already been made to hold the 2015 and 2019 conventions in Kansas City, Mo.

Conventions remind us that the church of today, with all its joys and sorrows, is a microcosm of the gathered people of God.

But the Phoenix convention appeared to be surprisingly positive for most participants. Here is what one pastor blogged from Phoenix to his congregation back home:

_Planners of gatherings like this are not known for being gutsy, making waves and courting controversy, … But so it is here. By focusing heavily on immigration as a biblical, theological, ecclesiological and spiritual issue, our leaders give us something substantial to discuss in the delegate sessions, hallways and on the steaming sidewalks._

Indeed, immigration was the main focus of the convention, and the setting was an integral, even an essential context for the experience. Many people traveled into northern Mexico and visited with people deported from the United States. Others visited detention centers and courts where undocumented people were herded in groups before the judge and summarily sentenced. Others learned of the way private detention centers make big money for private investors and the significant economy growing up around an “immigration industrial complex.”

How the church should respond to the broken U.S. immigration system, however, is not a settled matter (see page 16). The delegates reviewed a 2003 resolution but could not simply reaffirm it without more processing. In the end, they adopted a statement supporting the decade-old resolution and asking that more time be given to refine it.

In spite of the heat, in spite of the travel distances for most people and in spite of the tensions around the decision to hold the convention in Arizona, a good-hearted lightness prevailed during the week. This may be attributed to the provocative speakers and evocative worship services. They demonstrated why we hold such events: Conventions remind us that the church of today, with all its joys and sorrows, is a microcosm of the gathered people of God.—_ejt_

Phoenix convention finances

“Revenue is $490,000 less than what we originally budgeted for,” Glen Guyton, Mennonite Church USA’s convention coordinator, said on July 15. “This refers only to registration numbers. Of course, we reduced expenses due to the lower than budgeted revenue.”

Guyton said he will have actual numbers in several weeks.—_Everett J. Thomas_