Inside:
- Food service and racial integration
- Jesus in the temple
- Outside the box

October 2013

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

Lois Gunden, righteous Gentile
Thanks for the nice coverage of Lois Gunden Clemens in your September issue. You mention she was “perhaps the only Mennonite named by Yad Vashem.” She was not the only such. Alle Hoekema, a Dutch Mennonite pastor and historian, spoke at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., last summer. He mentioned a Dutch Mennonite pastor, Lenie Leignes Bakhoven, who was named as Righteous Among the Nations posthumously in 2000. He tells the story of “Dutch Mennonites and German Jewish Refugee Children, 1938-1945” in the April issue of Mennonite Quarterly Review.

Many Dutch were active in the resistance to the German occupation and its treatment of the Jews. This witness by many Dutch Christians is an important part of modern church history. —John A. Lapp, Goshen, Ind.

Thank you for the information about Lois Gunden Clemens. John Lapp informed me about her and her work on behalf of Jewish people in France. We still have not found all the names of Dutch Mennonites who have been recognized by the Yad Vashem organization, partly because not all of them did their work in a clear Mennonite context. However, I know the names of some of them: pastor Lenie Leignes Bakhoven, Mrs. Nieuwenhuizen, pastor S. Mesdag and his wife, pastor A.H van Drooge, Johanna Schipper-Kuiper and Mrs. Stien Warner-Swartz.

I will have to search the Yad Vashem commemoration book to find out if other Dutch Mennonites are on the list (not so easy, since their names are not typically “Mennonite” names).—Alle Hoekema, Haarlem, Netherlands

Like a man?
I hadn’t read The Mennonite for years but decided to pick up a copy from the back of our church. How surprised and pleased I was to find an article about same-sex attraction within the magazine’s pages (September). I’m thankful to be part of the Mennonite church as we continue on our journey to seek truth, forgo judgement, have compassion and deepen our faith.

My heart and tears go out to the writer. I will remember him in my prayers and ask for his prayers as we all strive to gain clarity on the many issues facing our world. I appreciated his vulnerability, honesty and for sharing his convictions. His congregation is lucky to have him as a member. No matter how his struggle unfolds, I support him as a human being who has great integrity. May the God of love continue to bless him on his journey.

—Pam Piper-Ruth, Boise, Idaho

I would like to thank the author of the article “Like a Man?” for sharing his hopes and struggles. His perspective and convictions stand confronting the overwhelming momentum of our culture’s sexual revolution. In the face of our society’s profound sexual ethic shifts of recent decades, it is tempting to simply shrug our shoulders and go with the flow. We can clearly see where our culture at large is heading in regards to sexual principles and understandings of marriage, but what is God calling us to as his church? I, for one, resonate with this author’s call to walk a “loving, gentle, middle path,” recognizing our need for “grace and truth … compassion and principles.”—David Lehman, Toano, Va.
Thanks to you and the author for sharing the article “Like a Man?” by Anonymous. I experienced it as a beautiful, authentic witness of one who has embraced a costly discipleship that has resulted in a continual growing relationship of intimacy with our Lord. —Harold L. Mast, Converse, Ind.

We enjoyed and affirm the article “Like a Man?” His conclusion, “I have come to believe that same-sex attraction is in itself not a sin, but acting out of that temptation is a sin. ... Since the tendency to live outside biblical boundaries is common to us all, let’s surround one another with love and accountability.” Well said.

Can and should we as disciples of Jesus Christ really love ourselves and others if we bless a sinful lifestyle? Will we be held accountable if we fail to teach and live out the whole truth as Christ taught? —Paul and Lois King, Sarasota, Fla.

Thank you so much for printing “Like a Man?” I applaud the courage of this person to share so openly of his ongoing pain and struggle with same-sex attraction, to be vulnerable to a community of faith that has tended to polarize at opposing ends of the spectrum and to present the unpopular third way of sacrificial obedience. This is the kind of person that serves as a model of applied faith, submission and confidence to a living God who stands by his word, lovingly walks with his children in unpopular places and will reward costly obedience. Hopefully this is the kind of person the church will honor, encourage, support and to and for whom it will be accountable. Thanks again.—Doris Diener, Sarasota, Fla.

I want to send a deep, heartfelt thanks for printing my article “Like a Man?” I pray that others who experience unwanted same-sex attraction—and who are living in almost-complete secrecy, as I did for many years—will have the courage to step forward and seek help. Blessings on your continued work and ministry.—Anonymous

**Edgy Mennonite blogs**

The article about “edgy Mennonite blogs” (September) includes at least two blogs that are contrary to the doctrinal positions of the confession of faith of Mennonite Church USA. I am concerned that the magazine of the denomination would be promoting these blogs. While I can understand hearing from various voices, I believe it is important that agreed-upon doctrinal stances of the denomination as well as biblical standards be encouraged through the voice of the denomination.

The original Anabaptists were truly “radical” in the fullest sense of the word—meaning “returning to the root.” They were seeking to return to the teachings of the Christ, the church and biblical standards. They were not “edgy” for the sake of pushing the boundaries.—Scott Franciscus, Lansdale, Pa.

I enjoyed reading Anna Groff’s compilation of websites by fellow Mennonites and would like to add another to the list:

- Kingdom of God flag
- kingdomofgodflag.info
- Launch year: 2008
- Who started it: Scott Smith
- Purpose: Originally created to propose a flag to represent the kingdom of God, it has evolved into an apologetic for Christian pacifism, a critique of patriotism/nationalism and a commentary on the “Christian nation” debate.
- Audience: The intended audience is Christian patriots/militarists as well as pacifist Christians who face questions from the previous group.

*(Continued on page 54)*
Plans underway for KC2015 convention

ELKHART, Ind.—Buoyed by the spirit of prayer that marked the end of the Mennonite Church USA convention in Phoenix in July—when thousands of Mennonites participated in a prayer walk—convention planners are setting their sights on Kansas City, Mo., the location of the next biennial convention, to be held June 30–July 5, 2015.

With the 16th Mennonite World Conference Assembly occurring later in July 2015 in Harrisburg, Pa., convention planners say they want to celebrate the international character of the Mennonite church and highlight global connections during the gathering in Kansas City, which they anticipate will draw Mennonites and Anabaptist-minded people from across the country and around the world.

“We’ll be working closely with Mennonite Mission Network to make it possible for international partners and friends to join in worship and work at convention,” says Glen Guyton, director of finance and convention planning for Mennonite Church USA. “There will also be learning experiences devoted to learning from and with our international guests.”

Hannah Heinzekehr, director of communications for Mennonite Church USA, notes that offsite learning experiences—as well as servant projects in collaboration with local organizations—will give convention participants a taste of the rich history and culture of Kansas City (pop. 459,787, according to the 2010 census).

In preparation for KC2015, Guyton invites members of Mennonite Church USA congregations to dig into the convention week’s theme text—the entire chapter of Luke 24—over the next two years.—Mennonite Church USA

Everence and Praxis commit $2 million to new World Bank Green Bond

GOSHEN, Ind.—Everence Association and the Praxis Intermediate Income Fund have committed $2 million (or $1 million each) in the latest Green Bond offering from the World Bank.

In total, 17 investors—including Everence and Praxis—have invested in this latest Green Bond offering. Proceeds from the Green Bond will be used to provide global solutions to climate change as well as economic opportunities and higher standards of living for people in developing countries. Examples of these opportunities supported by these bonds include off-grid solar and wind installations, greater efficiency in transportation, waste management, energy efficient housing construction, carbon reduction through reforestation and deforestation prevention, protection against floods through reforestation, food security improvement and stress-resilient crops.

The World Bank has issued approximately $4 billion in Green Bonds since their introduction in 2008. The World Bank is a global development cooperative owned by 186 member countries whose goal is to help overcome poverty and improve standards of living for people worldwide.—Everence

Willis Horst, long-time mission worker, dies

GOSHEN, Ind.—Willis Gabriel Horst, 74, died at home on Sept. 1 in Goshen.

His 38 years of ministry with his wife, Byrda Lee, are characterized by a willingness to be a guest and learner as he lived and worked alongside the Toba Qom, Pilagá and Moque people of Argentina.

In 1971, the Horsts arrived in the Chaco region of northern Argentina to serve with Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. The existing ministry work in the area aimed to strengthen ethnic identity and encourage truly indigenous expressions of church life.
The Horsts gave leadership to the Mennonite ministry as it expanded to become an international and interdenominational team. The team members related to indigenous congregations as equals walking together and finding Jesus in each other’s stories. They did not plant Mennonite churches but supported indigenous churches as they discovered gifts, unique worship styles and theology.

Horst was born July 4, 1939, to Susie I. (Good) and Clarence K. Horst near Seville, Ohio. He studied at Goshen College and Goshen Biblical Seminary. On July 4, 1964, Horst married Byrdalene Wyse of Archbold, Ohio.

Beginning in 1964, the Horsts spent three years working on a Navajo reservation. Then, after two summers of linguistics training and one year of Spanish language study in Costa Rica, they left for Argentina in 1971 and served there until they retired to the United States in 2009.—Mennonite Mission Network

**EMU achieves record enrollment for fall**

**HARRISONBURG, Va.**—Enrollment increased this fall by 8 percent over the previous fall at Eastern Mennonite University, counting all students enrolled in for-credit coursework. The numbers rose from 1,519 to 1,640, a record enrollment for EMU.

In traditional undergraduate population, there was a 2 percent increase, from 912 to 929 students, based on head counts in early September 2012 and 2013.

The older-adult group was heavily concentrated in graduate education outside the seminary, with the total number of students in six master’s programs increasing by 27 percent, from 271 to 343 students.

Two new master’s degree programs—in nursing (online) and in biomedicine—contributed heavily to the increase, with the former accounting for 61 students, 74 percent more than the previous year, and the latter accounting for 22 students, three times more than were enrolled the previous year, its first year of operation.—**EMU**

**AMBS alumni honored for ministries of peace**

**ELKHART, Ind.**—Kathy Bergen, recently of Ramallah in Israel-Palestine, and Marty Troyer, a pastor in Houston, share a breadth of ministries related to peace as Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) honors them this month with this year’s Alumni Min-

**Working together**

Jason (left) and Mennonite Disaster Service volunteer Leonard Penner fit wall boards to the frame of Jason’s house in Cloquet, Minn. Jason’s family lost their house twice—one after a flash flood in June 2012 flooded the basement and the resulting mold left the home uninhabitable, and again in March when a fire burned the house to the ground. Six congregations in Goshen, Ind., helped build Jason’s family’s home.—**MDS**

**Diversity in denominational leadership**

During a joint meeting of the Executive Board and Governance Council on Sept. 17 at Camp Deerpark in upstate New York, Mennonite Church USA moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht asked all people of color to stand to recognize “how far we have come” in developing racial and ethnic diversity in denominational leadership. Seven of 18 Executive Board members are leaders of color.—**Everett J. Thomas**
Tell me a story

I wonder how many of us still get this request from children in an age of games and TV-on-demand and virtual reality. Yet telling stories is an essential part of human culture and the foundation of our faith, in the form of Scripture, testimony and teaching.

Even tech-saturated youth long to tell their stories—the everyday and the “epic”—if not to their parents and caregivers at the end of the school day, then to their friends via text messages or to their mentors over coffee.

October is storytelling month, according to my 2013 wall calendar, and I’m pondering how to celebrate. I’m not very good at making up stories, so retelling Bible stories may be a fine place to begin the celebration.

We’ve got two creation stories, the great flood, Hagar’s tribulations, the angels’ visit to Abraham and Sarah, the adventures and misadventures of David, Samuel’s nighttime calling, and I haven’t even gotten halfway through the Hebrew Bible, let alone to the New Testament stories.

Sacred and complex stories from Scripture aren’t the only way to celebrate. Aesop’s fables and family memories and, “You won’t believe what happened to me today” stories count, too.

“Stories, no matter how simple, can be vehicles of truth,” writes Madeleine L’Engle in Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art. L’Engle was one of my favorite authors as a child, so I take her views on storytelling seriously now as an adult. “It’s no coincidence that Jesus taught almost entirely by telling stories, simple stories dealing with the stuff of life familiar to the Jews of his day” she writes.

Jesus mostly made up stories to help people understand his teachings: He told the story of the sower to illustrate how God’s word is spread and (sometimes) bears fruit. He told the story of the Good Samaritan when a lawyer asked, “And who is my neighbor?” He told stories about seeds and trees and yeast to describe the kingdom of God. He told the story of the wicked tenants to point out the treachery of the religious leaders of his day.

Jesus told stories, and he also was the story. The Gospel of John begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” From this passage in John, I imagine the Spirit of God in Genesis longing to tell a story through words that created all: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

L’Engle writes: “Stories are able to help us become more whole, to become Named. And Naming is one of the impulses behind all art; to give a name to the cosmos we see despite all the chaos.”

Exactly. In Genesis 1, God names the cosmos into being out of the chaos. And in Genesis 2, the earthling is privileged to name “every animal of the field and every bird of the air” as God creates them. From the beginning, God and humankind spoke to create meaning.

We need to tell stories, our own as well as those that help us make sense of the world around us. Book clubs, Bible study groups and open mic nights help us “become Named” and “make some small sense of the confusions and complications of life,” as L’Engle wrote back in 1972.

L’Engle couldn’t have predicted the proliferation of memoirs we have today, but she understood that good stories are essential—and by good here I mean true and deep and beautiful. We need to tell and hear good stories in order to become as fully human as Jesus was.

But what happens when a story is stuck within or censored from without?

“There is no agony like having an untold story inside you.” This quote attributed to African-American author Zora Neale Hurston tops each page of the Web site ourstoriesuntold.com, a site that addresses sexual violence in the Mennonite church. The Divine’s desire for incarnation is also the artist’s desire for expression and the abuse survivor’s desire for sharing stories of violation and healing.

Mary Pellauer says in God’s Fierce Whimsy, “If there’s anything worth calling theology, it is listening to people’s stories—listening to them and honoring and cherishing them, and asking them to become even more brightly beautiful than they already are.”

So tell me a story, and I’ll tell you one, too. Tell me your life story, the joyful parts and the sorrowful parts, and we’ll honor and cherish them together.

This is a story full of love,
a song to set us free,
of God, the Wisdom and the Word,
the Keystone and the Key.
(Hymnal: A Worship Book, #315)
A model of daily, faithful service

I had been planning the trip to the Philippines and India for several months, eagerly anticipating a firsthand encounter with people and churches that I knew only through impressions gleaned from books, articles and emails. As it turned out, however, local realities disrupted my international plans. Two days before my scheduled departure it became clear that my mother-in-law, Mattie Miller, was in her final stages of her life.

In the week that followed I thought a lot about the global church through the lens of the grief associated with Mattie’s death and the disappointment of a cancelled trip. A primary goal of the trip had been to meet with two people: Regina Monde, a peace worker with the Integrated Mennonite Churches of the Philippines, and C.S. Joel, a teacher at the Mennonite Brethren Church seminary in Shamsabad, India. Both had been appointed by their national churches as research associates for the Mennonite World Conference “Global Anabaptist Profile,” but their visa requests to attend a planning conference in the United States had been denied. So the trip was a chance to discuss their role in a major research project while also giving me a firsthand introduction to their churches and cultural context.

By most standards, Mattie had almost nothing in common with Regina Monde, C.S. Joel or the global church. Born into an Amish family in Holmes County, Ohio, at the height of the First World War, she completed her formal education at grade eight and lived her entire life within a 15-mile radius of her childhood home. She died on Aug. 18 at the age of 95, and the friends and family who gathered a week later to celebrate her long life remembered the delight she took in the local and the particular: sharing produce from her bountiful garden, serving in her local congregation, stitching quilts for the Ohio Relief Sale and spending years of faithful service at the local MCC Save & Serve store.

Yet even though her feet were firmly planted in the soil of Holmes County, Mattie’s heart was open to the world. Her perspective was never limited by geography. Mattie recognized the divine image of God in everyone she encountered, and she embraced them with open arms. A vast network of folks from the wrong side of town remember her warm generosity; a Japanese exchange student from Malone knew he was welcome into her home; an African-American teenager from Pittsburgh found deep love and acceptance under her roof. Mattie owned a passport. And if a family member serving the church in some distant land worked out the details, she was open to travel: to Haiti, Puerto Rico, Germany, Mexico, Costa Rica.

In her long and rich life, Mattie bore witness to one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith: the God we worship—the Creator of the universe who exceeds all our feeble efforts to describe in words or concepts—was made visible in a local and particular form. Indeed, in the person of Jesus, who spent most of his life in a tiny country at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, serving within a 20- or 30-mile radius of his hometown, we have seen the character of God.

Mattie was not perfect. But because she loved Jesus—because the life and teachings of Jesus were so much at the center of her life—the small, daily, humble acts of her ordinary life offered a glimpse to those around her of the vast and extraordinary nature of God.

I have often asked myself and others what it means to be part of a global church. Surely it includes face-to-face visits with people like Regina Monde and C.S. Joel. I still hope to visit the Philippines and India sometime. But at a deeper level, it probably has less to do with intercontinental travel and more to do with a way of being in the world wherever we are. Mattie was one face of the global church—firmly rooted in the particularity of time, place and culture yet eager to see the presence of God in everyone she met.

Where have you seen the face of the global church? 

The small, daily, humble acts of her ordinary life offered a glimpse to those around her of the vast and extraordinary nature of God.
What some linguists are up to

Linguists, for those who may be interested, are people who study language. This takes many forms. We may be familiar with Bible translators, but linguists use their expertise to study many different means of communication.

One new field of study may surprise you. Many linguists are now studying tweets—not the tweets of birds but those on Twitter. And Twitter, you may not realize, is a popular form of communication in the social media world. In fact, there are about 500 million messages, each 140 characters or fewer, sent each day on Twitter.

In an article in the Sept. 9 issue of Time, Katy Steinmetz considers some of the research happening around these millions of tweets.

In the past, linguists had to interview people in a lab or go to where they live to gain insights into language use. Now, “Twitter is providing the most enormous stream of data [linguists] have ever had at their disposal,” writes Steinmetz.

What can linguists possibly derive from all these tweets? You’d be surprised. “Hidden in tweets are insights about how we portray our identity in a few short sentences,” writes Steinmetz. Among other things, we can learn about how slang spreads.

Here are some of the interesting things linguists are learning:
- women are more likely to use first-person terms (like I and my) and exclamation points, especially repeated ones;
- men typically share more links and use more technology-related words;
- a female who follows and tweets to a largely male audience is more likely to use features, like numbers, associated with boys, and vice versa for men;
- older tweeters tend to use emoticons with noses—:-) instead of :)—an action tied to their preference for conventional language;
- youthful, “no-noise” tweeters tend to use more swear words;
- young tweeters are more apt to type all-capital words and to use expressive lengthening, like writing “miiciicce” instead of “nice”;
- the older crowd is more apt to tweet well-wishing phrases like good morning and take care, to send longer tweets and to use more prepositions.

Tweets may also reveal information about geography, income and race. For example, writes Steinmetz, “the term suttin (a variant of something) has been associated with Boston-area tweets, while the acronym iker (an expression meaning ‘I know, right?’) is popular in the Detroit area.” Tweets using awesome more likely come from wealthy neighborhoods, and “emoticons often appear in tweets sent from areas with a large Hispanic population.”

So what? you ask. As with much science, observation and study precede applications. But already, advertisers and campaign managers are interested in this research.

Some linguists are using Twitter to construct “subway maps around the United States showing where words tend to move.” Others are investigating how rumors and urban legends change as they’re passed from person to person.

There are limitations. Although there are more than 200 million Twitter users, most tend to be young and urban. And people can lie about themselves.

As with other fields of linguistic study, these researchers encounter new forms of language. “People write on Twitter in ways they never have before,” writes Steinmetz. For example, ima serves as a subject, verb and preposition to convey “I am going to.”

The whole social media world may seem like a foreign country to many. But as Twitter grows, study of it will become ever more useful.

Others, like me, who got my B.A. in linguistics many years ago, find such study sooooo cool.—Gordon Houser
“Any idiot can find God alone in the sunset. It takes a certain maturity to find God in the person sitting next to you who not only voted for the wrong political party but has a baby who is crying while you’re trying to listen to the sermon.”
—Author Lillian Daniel

YouVersion app changing reading of the Bible
For millions of readers around the world, a wildly successful free Bible app, YouVersion, is changing how, where and when they read the Bible.

Built by LifeChurch.tv, one of the nation’s largest and most technologically advanced evangelical churches, YouVersion is part of what the church calls its “digital missions.” They include a platform for online church services and prepackaged worship videos that the church distributes free. A digital tithing system and an interactive children’s Bible are in the works.

It’s all part of the church’s aspiration to be a kind of I.T. department for churches everywhere. YouVersion, with over 600 Bible translations in more than 400 languages, is by far the church’s biggest success. The app is nondenominational, including versions embraced by Catholics, Russian Orthodox and Messianic Jews. This month, the app reached 100 million downloads, placing it in the company of technology start-ups like Instagram and Dropbox.

The church was founded in 1996 by a team consisting mostly of former business executives. It is affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church, a wider association of 850 congregations, which gives its members wide latitude in their operations. It has 50,000 weekly attendees in 16 locations.—New York Times

Do highly educated people have lousy financial discipline?
A study by Ohio State University has found that the more educated you are, the more likely you are to take on irresponsible levels of debt. And they aren’t talking about student loans but about buying widescreen TVs on your ninth credit card because that 0 percent teaser rate was just irresistible.—Pacific Standard

Worker quits over 666 on tax form
Walter Slonopas said he quit his job last week in order to save his soul. Slonopas, 52, resigned as a maintenance worker at Contech Casting LLC in Clarksville after his W-2 tax form was stamped with the number 666.—Religion News Service

Lutherans, Catholics mark Reformation
Lutherans and Catholics have pledged to celebrate together the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017, with both sides agreeing to set aside centuries of hostility and prejudice. The Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation released a joint document, “From Conflict to Communion,” in Geneva on June 17 that said there’s little purpose in dredging up centuries-old conflicts.—Religion News Service

It’s time to reassess your relationship with your computer when …
1. You wake up at 4 o’clock in the morning to go to the bathroom and stop at the computer to check your email on the way back to bed.
2. You turn off your computer and get an awful empty feeling, as if you just pulled the plug on a loved one.
3. You decide to stay in college for an additional year or two, just for the free Internet access.
4. You start using smileys :-) in your snail mail.
5. When you hand-write a note and think … SPELL CHECKER!
6. You can’t correspond with your mother because she doesn’t have a computer.
7. When your computer’s e-mail box shows “no new messages” and you feel really depressed.
8. You don’t know the gender of your three closest friends because they have non-descriptive screen names and you never bothered to ask.
9. In real-life conversations, you don’t laugh, you just say “LOL, LOL.”
10. If your computer’s Internet connection goes down, you cannot think of other things to do.—Bits and Bytes

443,000
Americans die each year as a result of smoking cigarettes, according to the Center for Disease Control. That’s more than die from HIV, drugs and alcohol, car accidents, suicides and murders combined.
—Pacific Standard
Gilberto Flores carries Jesus’ light into pain and darkness.

A man of peace

As two soldiers with guns came knocking at the door, Gilberto Flores—a former pastor in Guatemala whose ministry in Christ-centered peace and justice angered the corrupt government—quickly led his wife, Rosa, and three children into the kitchen.

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

Gilberto Flores. Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson
When he came back into the living room, the soldiers butted him with rifles.

His heart and mind raced.

He remembered his boyhood in El Salvador in the 1950s. That’s when his parents chose to continue their free-church ministry in the face of persecution in the heavily Catholic region. He remembered when he baptized a man who later became president of Guatemala during the violence-ridden 1980s.

“We have come to kill you,” the soldiers said.

“Everything that God will allow you to do, you will do,” Flores replied. “But you can’t do anything that God doesn’t allow. … If you touch me, that will be the last thing you will do. God will judge you severely, because I am a man of peace.”

The soldiers looked at each other and left without saying a word.

This was only one of many times God’s mysterious intervention allowed Flores to walk away from death in Central America to share Christ’s life in North America. In the early 1990s, Flores left Guatemala to serve in the wider Mennonite church in the United States. It’s where in a variety of roles he’s helped the church more fully realize its missional calling to join God’s work in the world.

In an interview last spring, Flores, associate conference minister for Western District Conference (WDC) and former denominational minister for Mennonite Church USA, said he doesn’t want the earlier drama to overshadow the ongoing story of how Christ’s light has guided him forward. And yet, he hopes the story inspires others to risk taking Jesus’ light into the pain and darkness of their own communities.

“I grew up hearing my parents saying that if we will die, we are ready, but we will not stop doing what we are doing,” Flores said. “As a boy, my heart was marked with the belief that we are called to serve God, and if that costs us our life, we can’t control that. I grew up with a sense that our life is in God’s hands, and only God decides how we live it and how we lose it.”

Persevering family passes on passionate faith

God has shaped Flores, 67, from boyhood on, into a prophet who passionately prods people to take Christ out of the sanctuary and into the street. He was born on Nov. 25, 1945, in the small city of Santa Ana, El Salvador, the sixth of 10 children belonging to Pioquinto and Maria Cristina (Campos) Flores.

As a son of a Protestant pastor, his life at school was difficult, as prejudiced teachers and peers taunted him. But because of the modeling of his family, he absorbed these hardships into a backdrop of persevering faith.

“Every week, when we had choir rehearsal in our home, my father opened up the windows and doors so the strains of the hymns would waft out into the streets,” Flores said. “People from the community threw stones at our house. Even though my father had to clean up the mess and repair the roof, the next time he’d open even more of the doors and windows.”

I grew up with a sense that our life is in God’s hands, and only God decides how we live it and how we lose it.—Gilberto Flores

Flores also remembers being told stories of the Christian martyrs who were persecuted for their faith and how in the 1930s his father was jailed 15 times for refusing to stop his ministry. Once he was beaten and left for dead.

“My parents went to minister in a little village, where a group destroyed the sanctuary and beat up my father,” he said. “My father lay there without help for two days. But when some people from a city church brought two caskets to bury my mother and father, they found Mother alive and Father still breathing.”

Like father, like son

This passion for ministry became Flores’ own. At 14, he witnessed about Jesus in school. At 16,
he became a youth pastor and a deacon. At 18, he was licensed as a Christian education minister for 10 churches in El Salvador. At 24, he became a pastor of his first congregation as he finished seminary.

In 1972, at the age of 27, he met and married Rosa Herrera and was ordained pastor of a congregation in southern Guatemala. It was there that the first seeds of his peace and justice focus sprouted when he discovered how cotton farmers were being exploited with low wages.

“That pastorate was a turning point for me,” he said. “I was preaching and doing pastoral duties, but one day, I had an ‘ah-ha’ moment and realized I needed to approach the community from a more peace-and-justice angle. That was my first step into the messiness.”

Flores’ missional-infused ministry incited conflict with government leaders. They recoiled from his bold stance in the pulpit and elsewhere, including a national day of prayer and fasting he organized in 1982.

The two kingdoms clashed one Sunday morning in mid-1982. That’s when the president of Guatemala, who began his Christian journey under Gilberto’s ministry in 1979, came to the Casa Horeb church to worship with a huge entourage of armed guards.

“I announced that he must take his people armed with weapons out of the sanctuary,” Flores said. “I said that this is holy, peaceful ground and that because of that he had to do as I requested. He said he wanted to be an obedient servant and so took out all his army helpers.

“After the service, I told him that he needed to stop doing unjust things and engaging in criminal actions, such as killing the poor. He later told me he could longer be my friend after all the disrespect I had shown him that day in church. It was a very sad and painful moment for both of us.”

**Transitioning from Latin America to North America**

His pain and betrayal ran deep, and Rosa’s health deteriorated due to anxiety and stress. But deeper still was their bond to Christ, and so they continued to move forward. For example, Flores became academic dean of the Mennonite seminary SEMILLA in Guatemala City and helped to launch the Association of Evangelical Churches in Guatemala.

The scope of their ministry made another seismic shift in 1990. The couple received a call from Eastern Mennonite Missions to become church planters in Caracas, Venezuela. After one year there, they returned to Guatemala. And, in 1992, Rosedale Mennonite Missions (Conservative Mennonite Conference) asked them to help plant a church in San Antonio, where they remained from March 1993 until 1996.

As they prepared to move to Houston to take a new church-planting assignment with Rosedale Mennonite Missions, they received a call from Lois Barrett, then executive secretary of the former Commission on Home Ministries (CHM) for the former General Conference Mennonite Church. (It merged with the Mennonite Church in 2002 to become Mennonite Church USA.) She invited Flores to apply as the director of CHM’s Hispanic Ministries.

“At first, I was resistant to the idea,” he said. “It seemed God, through the opportunity to pastor a
local congregation in Houston, was answering my prayers for not having so many responsibilities and the heavy emotional drain.”

But in the end, because of the encouragement of Rosa and others, he accepted the role. In June 1996, he and Rosa moved to Newton, Kan. It’s where he began his sojourn with what became Mennonite Church USA. And it’s where Rosa, also seminary trained and gifted in many ways, helped plant a new Hispanic congregation, Casa Betania.

In the next 13 years, Flores served Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership and Mennonite Mission Network in several roles: as director of Instituto Bíblico Anabautista (IBA), as denominational minister for Mennonite Church USA and as director of missional church advancement. In 2009, he left denominational work to nurture WDC’s Hispanic leaders and congregations.

**Prophetic gifts till soil of church in transition**

His prophetic ministry is a gift for a church seeking to be more multicultural and more missional, says Barrett, director of the Great Plains Extension of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and Jim Schrag, former executive director of Mennonite Church USA.

“He was a good fit for CHM for so many reasons,” Barrett says. “He was a pastor, he was theologically trained and he knew immigrant Hispanic culture in North America, and because of that, he knew what was needed. Plus, Latin America was focusing on the missional church long before we were. The scope of Flores’ missional understanding was formational and foundational for us.

“And his work with IBA has been a very important tool in developing Hispanic Mennonite congregations, because it educated folks theologically and connected them with the wider Mennonite church.”

Schrag says: “Gilberto often said to me, ‘Jim, you need to take risks. Being missional is all about taking risks and stepping outside the box. And congregations need to be active in this process for it to be effective.’ He was so interested in the persons in the pew and was well aware of the mental and cultural barriers that made it difficult for Mennonites to do these things.”

Schrag admires Flores greatly. He says: “He has tackled his challenges with the English language and culture and has become proficient and profound within them. He has lived in a bilingual world and yet has not played Anglos and Latinos against one another. And he has remained faithful to a church and its people even when he perceived they were moving too slowly.”

**Daring the church to step over the threshold**

Flores believes his challenges to the church were disorienting. He has prodged an oft-cautious denomination to embrace the liminal—the initial
laws in Arizona as they pertained to our 2013 churchwide assembly in Phoenix, he said.
“...is to finish creating a mission-oriented and multicultural conference and to see
that we are putting WDC into the world and not outside it,” he said. “This is my hope before
retirement.”

**Slowing down, savoring God and family**

The Flores’ ministry has led the couple, often
at breakneck speed, down many dangerous and
bumpy roads. So the couple is looking forward to
retirement, although they are not sure how it will
unfold, they said. They dream of going “home” to
Guatemala. They talk of enjoying their four chil-
dren—Keren, Gilberto Jr., Fabiola and Pablo—and
their seven grandchildren. They relish resting in
their love of God and family and to be grateful for
four decades of marriage. After seasons of going
to bed not knowing if they would wake up alive
the next day, they hope to enjoy more together-
ness and joy.

In his personal time with God, Flores always
says thank you to God for God’s sense of humor
in his life and the life of his family, he said. He
often senses God saying that it doesn’t matter
what happens in life, that there is always grace
and a laugh at the end of the road.

“At the hardest times in our lives, when people
were rejecting us, Rosa and I kissed each other
goodnight and feared that may be our last kiss.

—Gilberto Flores

His overarching passion is tending the growth of
missional theology and practices. And yet, tending
multicultural issues are inherent in that focus, he
said. His WDC work with Hispanic leaders and
congregations gives him ample opportunity.

Even with all the hard work Mennonite Church
USA has done in being a more multicultural de-
nomination, the church still face challenges in
opening doors to other cultures and dealing with
tough issues such as immigration, he said. But he
believes the church has made headway, especially
its discussions regarding the anti-immigration
**QUESTIONS TO women leaders**

**Joy Sutter** has held a variety church leadership positions, including elder, church board member, conference worker, member of a Mennonite school board, and she is just beginning on the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board. Professionally, she has been in various leadership positions across the continuum of health care. Most of her leadership experience has been in an academic medical center, and she is serving as the associate administrator of the Cancer Service Line in the Abramson Cancer Center at the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

**Do/did you have a woman leader as mentor? If so, how does/did she help you?**
No, I did not have a specific female leader as a mentor for most of my leadership journey. I have strategically sought out female colleagues to learn from their successes and failures in both my church and professional worlds. Professionally, I have a female leader/ boss/mentor who is a wonderful role model by allowing me to lead by focusing on my strengths.

**Are you mentoring a young woman who may be a potential church leader?**
Yes, I am in contact with several women who may be potential church leaders. I encourage them to step up or speak up, which sometimes means going outside their comfort zones. I intentionally tap for leadership positions women who have great potential to serve the church.

**If so, how is her experience the same/different from yours?**
One major difference from my experience is that today there are more leadership opportunities for women in the church and more women to act as mentors. As a young adult, I was tapped by my pastor for church leadership, and today’s church environment enables those in other leadership positions to encourage women to accept the leadership call.

**What impediments have you faced in becoming a leader?**
Learning how to embrace a nonanxious leadership presence and not react to highly charged situations.

**When you face challenges as a leader, what encourages you?**
When I see others overcome obstacles and grow and develop as leaders, it makes me a better leader. I am also encouraged when I observe individuals working harmoniously in teams to find solutions to problems that contribute to organizational success.

As a young adult, I was tapped by my pastor for church leadership.
—Joy Sutter
The Archives, a ministry of Mennonite Church USA’s Executive Board, are located in North Newton, Kan., in the Bethel College library, and in Goshen, Ind., in Newcomer Center at Goshen College.

Each year, the Archives hosts several hundred researchers in person and answers about 1,000 reference questions for in-person and remote researchers. In the past year, the Archives’ approximately 5,400 photographs available online have received more than 750,000 views. Among the researchers are students, historians, theologians, pastors, documentary researchers, genealogists, former mission workers and people whose lives have been touched by Mennonites.

The following stories of two grassroots initiatives from the mid-20th century—the Partly Dave Coffee House in Elkhart, Ind., and the Guest House and Cafeteria in Newton, Kan.—give us a glimpse of the rich history contained in our Mennonite archives.

To learn more, visit: www.mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/archives.
Elkhart’s Partly Dave Coffee House ministry, 1966-1975

Only the righteous are served at the [traditional church] supper, but all manner of sinners find their way to the coffee house. This situation is distressing to those who have forgotten that they, too, are sinners, essentially no different from the coffee house customers. The theoretical goal of all coffee house programming is to raise questions, rather than give answers.—John D. Perry Jr., The Coffee House Ministry (John Knox Press, 1966)

In the mid-1960s, when Americans of all backgrounds were publicly challenging widely held beliefs about racial segregation, consumer society, the Vietnam War and women’s rights, changes were also taking place within the two largest Mennonite denominations: the (old) Mennonite Church (MC) and the General Conference (GC) Mennonite Church. Many Mennonite youth were beginning to question church teachings about forms of service and personal expression.

Also during this decade, a Christian coffee house in Washington, D.C., named The Potter’s House was sparking a wave of imitators across the nation. In 1965, the National Council of Churches hired John D. Perry Jr. to survey the phenomenon, and his report—The Coffee House Ministry—sparked even greater interest in the coffee house as mission. Eighty coffee houses had opened in the previous five years, and there would be 100 more by the end of the year. This was a time when many Christians felt that the non-church setting of a coffee house provided an informal, neutral ground in which to bridge the cultural chasms that existed in America.

In the winter of 1966, Professor Leland Harder led a Mennonite Biblical Seminary (MBS) class in Elkhart, Ind., using Perry’s study as a text. Harder’s students wanted to give the coffee house ministry model a try. They took part in discussions with representatives from several other churches and organizations in the community to assess the viability of such a venture. By May, this planning group filed to form an independent nonprofit organization—Elkhart Coffee House, Inc.—and in September they opened the Partly Dave Coffee House at 128 West Franklin Street in Elkhart.
Dialogue was the main goal of the early Partly Dave.

**A setting for dialogue**

An Oct. 3, 1966, article in the *Elkhart Truth* reported, “Folk singers and actors barely found room to perform at the first opening weekend of Partly Dave Coffee House as the more than 300 teenagers and young adults crowded into the small café.”

The coffee house took its name from a 1964 short story by John Lennon: “Partly Dave” from *In His Own Write*.

“One way to think about it is that it’s Partly Dave, and partly you,” said Faye (last name not given), a Partly Dave staff attendant (*Elkhart Truth* article, May 20, 1967).

The adverb “partly” came to represent the multifaceted goals for the enterprise. The introductory brochure described Partly Dave as, “Partly a place ... where friends meet ... where questions are asked ... where opinions are heard ... where God’s love is witnessed ... where troubles are unloaded” and “where help is needed.”

“The primary purpose of the Coffee House,” began Partly Dave’s statement of purpose, “is to provide a relaxed, noncommercial setting for interpersonal dialogue about vital current and ultimate issues of life.”

Dialogue was the main goal of the early Partly Dave, facilitated by volunteer mediators who both listened and spoke from their own beliefs. Volunteers met for an hour before the evening’s program to prepare themselves to engage with anyone and everyone who showed up. Food and beverages were for sale, and there was usually a presentation, often music. Performances, however, were always curtailed to allow for discussions at 10-person tables.

In 1971, students in Leland Harder’s Methods of Social Research course at Goshen College conducted a study of Partly Dave based on responses to a questionnaire to identify the demographics of the coffee house’s patrons and their attendance patterns. When asked their main reason for attending Partly Dave, 31.6 percent of patrons answered “to rap with friends,” and only 5.2 percent cited scheduled entertainment. On this evidence, the students concluded that Partly Dave was succeeding in its effort to create a space for dialogue.

**Congregations offer marginal support**

The coffee house, operating on a shoestring budget, got most of its funding from the sales of
Manager Peter Stucky wrote in his April 20, 1971, Annual Report that “each quarter required some 30-40 volunteers for the coffeehouse, poster shop [and] boutique.”

**Evolving needs bring changes**

Partly Dave was forced to vacate rental properties twice—in August 1969 to 114 South Main Street and in January 1973 to 201 South Main Street. Both relocations brought opportunities for new uses of space and different surroundings and a re-evaluation of the coffee house’s purpose.

For example, in 1970, Partly Dave’s board of directors added a live-in manager to provide administrative streamlining and to embrace a more around-the-clock presence. Partly Dave became a place where people in need could go, and the managers’ work with drug users, runaways and transients would grow to become a bigger facet of the ministry’s mission. With more volunteer and staff time devoted to rehabilitating individuals to function in mainstream society, some of the countercultural nature of Partly Dave was set aside.

“Is Partly Dave’s function to simply prepare persons to fit into American society more smoothly?” asked manager Peter Stucky. “The answer is no.”

Instead, Stucky felt “a need for some kind of ongoing contact between the values” of the volunteers and the patrons. “But [Partly Dave] has no congregation with which patrons can identify and continue their search and growth as persons,” he

Partly Dave’s work with marginalized people, particularly drug users, may have affected the coffee house’s standing in the community.

**Thelma Farrell and Peter Stucky at Partly Dave’s boutique in 1973. Photo courtesy of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary**

Coffee and snacks. Although congregations were invited to become institutional partners of Partly Dave for an annual contribution of $300, they were slow to back the ministry. After the initial round of recruitment, only four congregations signed on in any year before 1973: First Presbyterian, Hively Avenue Mennonite (a GC congregation), Fellowship of Hope (MC) and Southside Fellowship (MC-GC). Those who did so later offered perhaps too little, too late.

“One of the most disillusioning facts about this ministry,” wrote Howard Palmatier, president of the board, in 1968, “has been the inability of the majority of the churches to see this as mission.”

John Kampen, manager of Partly Dave from 1968 to 1970, thought he knew why churches were reluctant to participate fully. After only one area congregation responded to a proposal for collaboration, he wrote, “Possibly the churches are not confident enough of themselves to enter into dialogue with those outside their walls, or they are so busy with internal programs that they do not have time to dialogue with the outside world.”

Partly Dave began to diversify to better engage a more varied clientele and to raise its own funds. A gift boutique, which began as a shelf inside Partly Dave, sold crafts made by patrons or brought from other countries by donors and friends of Partly Dave. Other initiatives over the years included an annual art fair, a poster shop for youth under age 16 (who were not allowed into the coffee house), the Peace Frog [Used-LP] Record Co-op and a food co-op.

**Participants in Partly Dave’s 1973 move to the 201 S. Main Street location. Photo courtesy of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary**
observed. While a few congregations were willing to donate money to Partly Dave’s cause, none was willing to integrate Partly Dave patrons into their congregation.

Partly Dave’s work with marginalized people, particularly drug users, may have affected the coffee house’s standing in the community.

“There are people in Elkhart who do not understand our program and are frightened by what they do know,” said Kampen. Over the years, however, Partly Dave’s volunteers and resident staff nurtured valuable connections with other area agencies, such as a crisis hotline and Oaklawn, a Mennonite-administered mental health facility in Goshen, Ind. (When the board looked at closing Partly Dave in 1975, the hotline sent a petition of support for its continuance.)

“Looking at the records of Partly Dave, it seems that the organization was constantly re-examining itself to better determine how [it] could carry out [its] mission and meet the needs of a rapidly changing community,” said Matthew Schulz, Elkhart County Historical Museum Manager, in introducing the museum’s current exhibit on Partly Dave.

‘A self-feeding cycle’

In January 1973, with a wave of donations and a $16,000 loan from Church Extension Services, Inc., of the General Conference Mennonite Church, a permanent home for Partly Dave was purchased at 201 South Main Street.

Financial concerns stemming from the move loomed over Partly Dave, however, and the cultural context surrounding its ministry was changing drastically.

 “[There has been] a shift of attitudes away from a self-conscious and focused alienation toward society and its values and toward a listless, self-centered alienation [within the youth culture],” wrote Manager Bob Charles in his 1973–74 report.

Decreased demand for Partly Dave led to financial collapse. Whereas weekend programs in 1970 had averaged 125 patrons, in 1974 the average was 40. Door fees totaled more than $4,000 in 1972 but dropped to $1,822 in 1973 and to $1,434 a year later.

Charles cited the questionnaire of four years earlier when reflecting on the decrease in attendance. “If persons come to be among people and rap with friends,” he wrote, “then the increasing absence of people and friends means a lack of motivation for coming. The cycle would seem to be a self-feeding one.”

On July 8, 1975, the board voted to shut down the ministry by a vote of six to one. Partly Dave’s mission had come to an end.

Though Partly Dave existed far longer than most coffee house ministries, many of which lasted mere months, it became a casualty of the very kinds of social upheaval that had brought it into being. It was put succinctly on the pro-con list to decide whether to shut down: “We have become an institution, and we never intended to last forever.”

Echoing how they had marked the coffee house’s 1973 move, the people of Partly Dave ended their ministry with a liturgy:

“The Partly Dave Coffee House opened its doors in September 1966 at 128 West Franklin,
And that was good.
There was not and never had been a place like Partly Dave in Elkhart. It was unique and exciting,
And that was good.
It was a people more than a building,
And that was good.
Partly Dave didn’t always know what it was doing but it had a direction it was heading,
And that was good.
And now Partly Dave is closing the doors of its last building; the city of Elkhart has been touched;
the lives of hundreds of people have been touched,
And that is good.
Partly Dave will now live on in our lives.
We will continue to grow and experience; we will care and we will share; WE WILL LOVE!”

The Partly Dave exhibit is on display at the Elkhart County Historical Museum at 304 W. Vistula (SR 120) in Bristol, Ind., through September 2014. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. There is no charge for admission; donations are accepted. See www.elkhartcountyhistory.org. The exhibit is a result of collaboration among the Elkhart County Historical Museum, the Mennonite Church USA Archives, the Elkhart County Parks Department, the Elkhart County Historical Society and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Ted Maust is serving with Mennonite Voluntary Service at the Wisconsin State Historical Society Press in Madison. The information supplied for this article comes from Partly Dave Coffeehouse Records, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and from an Elkhart County Historical Museum exhibit with the same name as the title of this article.
Bethel College professor J. Winfield Fretz put into practice the ethics he taught by opening a restaurant in 1953.

Food service and racial integration

by Melanie Zuercher

In the spring of 2012, workers renovating a building in the 600 block of downtown Newton, Kan., pulled off an awning to reveal a visual blast from the past. A sign painted above the doors of Peace Connections, a community peace center, and a florist business read, “Guest House” and “Self Service,” along with most of the letters of “Cafeteria.”

The Guest House and Cafeteria, a Newton social hub in the 1950s, closed in 1972. Its modest appearance belied its historic importance, ranging from its then-innovative way of doing food service to its role in pioneering racial integration.

Around 1953, J. Winfield Fretz, a professor of sociology at Bethel College in North Newton, became a partner in a Newton restaurant located a few doors down from 612 North Main. His reasons were to supplement his income so that, as he said, he could “afford to continue teaching,” and to see whether the business ethics he taught in the classroom could be applied to real life.

Later, Fretz had the opportunity to be sole owner of the business. He took the chance, at the same time converting it to something new—what we would today most likely call a buffet or smorgasbord.

When it opened as the Guest House and Cafeteria, the restaurant was the first in Newton—and one of only three in the state—to operate as self-service. (There was one in Wichita that had sown the idea for the Guest House.) It was likely also among the first to include a salad bar, offering a dozen or more choices of cold salads, pickles and relishes.

When the sign resurfaced in 2012, community people who remembered...
patronizing the Guest House frequently recalled the fried chicken and cinnamon rolls, as well as specific foods served on specific days, such as roast turkey on Thursday and seafood on Friday. Overall, the menu was distinguished by its homestyle food. When Peace Connections director Myrna Krehbiel gathered a group in late July to share memories of the Guest House, one person compared its food offerings to “a really good church potluck.”

Another unusual aspect that Fretz introduced was the self-service honor system coffee break. Between 9 and 11 a.m. and 2 and 5 p.m., employees set out the coffee urn, creamer, pastries and pie, along with about $10 in change in a cup. Customers served themselves, on their honor to pay and make their own change.

“We cannot check to the penny whether we are long or short,” Fretz wrote in Christian Living in May 1958, “but … we have been satisfied repeatedly that there is very little discrepancy in the daily cash receipts from the coffee breaks.”

**Fretz called integrating the Guest House the source of ‘perhaps the greatest spiritual satisfaction’ gained from his business venture.**

James D. Rutschman was a part of the Guest House from its beginning. He first applied for the position of cook, but Fretz quickly made him the manager and offered him a partnership in 1955. This coincided with the decision to move the Guest House from its original location.

In 1957, the partners decided to integrate the restaurant, several years ahead of the national curve of desegregation in eating establishments.

At first, the customer base stayed primarily white. Then African-American railroad porters—Newton is a historic railroad town with a passenger station that still serves Amtrak—found out there was a place just a few blocks from the station where they could sit down for a meal.

Roger Rutschman, James’ son, had his first job working in the Guest House, waiting tables.

“Dad would tell a story of seeing several porters walk by, several times,” Rutschman says. “He asked, ‘Can I help you fellas?’”

The porters told James they had heard the Guest House was open to everyone, but they were hesitant to enter because they saw no people of color inside. James told them to “come right in and get a bite to eat.”

“From that point on, we had a good following of railroad workers,” Roger Rutschman says.

His father reaped an unexpected benefit from this action, he adds. When James traveled to Chicago for the first time—to attend a trade show—he got off the train with no idea how to find either the show venue or his hotel.

As he was looking around the station, trying to figure things out, a railroad porter approached him. The man recognized him from the Guest House.

“That porter took Dad home, fed Dad and helped Dad find his hotel and trade show,” Roger says. “It was a really nice gesture. The porter was just appreciative to have a place to eat [in Newton].”

Fretz called integrating the Guest House the source of “perhaps the greatest spiritual satisfaction” gained from his business venture.

“As far as I know, ours is the only place in our town of 15,000 people where all races are treated exactly alike and have identical privileges,” Fretz wrote in Christian Living. “Businessmen have for years justified their own discrimination on the ground that customers wouldn’t stand for racial equality. Our own experience has proven this a pure myth.

“During the five years of operation, not over a half-dozen customers have even hinted at unhappiness because we served Negroes, while literally hundreds have expressed congratulations for our willingness to do so.

“How many customers we have lost due to the fact that Negroes, Mexicans, Indians and Orientals are served indiscriminately, I do not know; but whatever the losses, they cannot outweigh the satisfaction that has come from feeling one is doing right in the sight of God and his own fellow men.”

**Melanie Zuercher is the writer and editor for institutional communications at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan.**
Our peacemaking needs to include other creatures.

Jesus in the temple

by Andy Alexis-Baker

In his painting “Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple” (1626), Rembrandt depicted an angry, scowling Jesus with a raised whip. The whip winds into the background, becoming fuzzy from rapid movement as Jesus prepares to strike. In the foreground, an old woman scampers out of his way while some “money changers” try to protect their faces from Jesus’ lash. “Zeal” consumed Jesus, and zeal translates into uncontrolled violence. Rembrandt’s painting illustrates the dominant way this incident from Jesus’ life has been used in Christian history. From just war to the Crusades to executing heretics, the story of Jesus’ action in the temple has fueled violence and killing. Fear, intimidation and the threat of bodily harm are acceptable for Christians so long as it serves a righteous cause.
Yet portrayals of Jesus raging through the temple haven’t always held sway. For example, in the late fourth century, bishops debated about the passage during a synod at Constantinople. A bishop named Rabulla had to answer for hitting priests. In his own defense, Rabulla said that Jesus had hit people in the temple. In response, Theodore of Mopsuestia denied that Jesus hit any person according to the text in John 2, stating, “Our Lord did not do that; he only spoke words to the people, saying, ‘Take that from here,’ and overturned the tables. But he drove out the bulls and sheep with the blows of his whip” (Cause de

If Jesus’ action was a nonviolent protest against the sacrificial system and economic abuses, those to whom he first gives respite are nonhuman animals.

A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals, edited by Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker (Cascade, 2012, $23), includes 14 essays addressing biblical and theological questions Christians may have about care for animals, such as about animal sacrifice. Jesus eating meat, the idea of humanity’s dominion over animals and vegetarianism as a Christian spiritual practice. The book abounds with interesting insights. Carol J. Adams writes that “the first image of God in the Bible is of a brooding female bird.” Malinda Elizabeth Berry points out that in his resurrection Jesus “overcomes the personal, structural and predatory violence of his death.” And John Berkman writes that “factory farming contributes more to global warming than all our motor vehicles combined.” The writers span denominational lines, though several are Mennonite. And, as Alexis-Baker points out in his introduction, “more than half of the essays are written by women, three of whom are women of color.” — Gordon Houser

limits. Indeed the Greek syntax undeniably states that Jesus used the whip to drive out both the sheep and the oxen and rules out that he used his whip on any human. Modern translations like the New Revised Standard Version correctly translate the passage: “Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle” (John 2:15). However, this clarification is cold comfort to the nonhuman animals in this scene, especially if we imagine Jesus’ whip to have been a weapon designed to harm others, as Rembrandt’s painting suggests.

Instead of a tool fashioned to inflict suffering, the narrative suggests that Jesus made a makeshift instrument for moving the animals. The materials he had available would have been the reeds on which the animals lay and the cords with which they were tied. This implies that his whip was more like a broom than a slaughter-house cattle prod. Additionally, many scholars have noted that Jesus’ action was one of liberation, not violence, as he literally spares the sheep and oxen, at least temporarily, from their gruesome fate. Jesuit peacemaker John Dear states that “with such spectacular nonviolence, one cannot imagine Jesus even striking the poor animals. Indeed, he was liberating them from their impending execution” (“Didn’t Jesus Overturn Tables and Chase People Out of the Temple?” in A Faith Not Worth Fighting For: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Nonviolence, edited by Tripp York and Justin Barringer, Cascade Books, 2012).

Ultimately, Jesus’ own death later in the story ends animal sacrifice. If there is one creature Jesus stands for in the Gospel narratives it is the nonhuman animals that would have been put to death during ritual sacrifice. So if Jesus’ action was a nonviolent protest against the sacrificial system and economic abuses, those to whom he first gives respite are nonhuman animals.

The strongest challenge to the idea that Jesus threw an unrestrained tantrum, however, is how he treats the doves. The Gospel of John says that after fashioning his broom to get the animals moving out the door, Jesus began turning over tables and pouring out the vendor’s money purses. But suddenly Jesus stopped and told the dove-sellers to take their caged birds out of the temple. A person who was blind with rage and who did not much care for nonhuman creatures would have knocked the caged birds over like the tables and money jars. If the birds didn’t matter any more than metal coins or wooden tables, then Jesus
would have overturned their cages, sending them fluttering in panic while banging against a falling cage. Here Jesus takes deliberate care not to overturn the bird cages. He does not put them through further distress but protects them. He pauses in the middle of his nonviolent demonstration to act graciously toward these little creatures.

What lessons can we modern readers draw from this temple story if we pay attention to the way Jesus treated the nonhuman animals? First, Christian pacifists need to expand our view of what nonviolence means. The most influential pacifist commentators on the passage, such as Yoder, have drawn numerous lessons against war, policing and other forms of human-on-human violence. That we don’t need to stop injustice with a greater force of arms seems to be the general pacifist consensus based on the passage. But Jesus’ action had implications for the other creatures in the story as well.

War, for instance, kills humans and other animals alike. War is an ecological disaster, a threat to all life, including humans. The U.S. military kills and tortures hundreds of thousands of primates, dogs, cats, goats, pigs and other animals each year in weapons tests. Armies across the globe often hunker down in dense forests and jungles, threatening endangered species like the mountain gorillas in the Congo.

The merchants in this story bred and raised the nonhuman creatures for their monetary value. The animals were mere commodities. They were meat. They were sacrificial victims. They were not God’s good creatures with whom we have a covenantal relationship and obligation to serve and help flourish. What would happen if we started naming other creatures in ways that does not see them as merchandise but as God’s beloved creations? How would our relationship to them change if we saw them as fellow creatures, kinfolk and friends on this journey of life, rather than instruments for our disposal?

**What if our nonviolent actions** took into account other creatures? In the past century, nonviolent direct action has caused empires to crumble, unjust regimes to change course and given new meaning to Christian discipleship. Across the denominational divides, peacemaking has taken hold as a respectable and essential activity for Christians. Yet rarely have we noticed that some of the most influential nonviolent activists have held a different relationship to nonhuman animals from the dominant culture. Catholic farm worker activist Cesar Chavez, for example, expanded his nonviolence to include all animals and refused to eat them. Chavez’s descendants, Christine Chavez and Julie Chavez Rodriguez, continue their grandfather’s work organizing migrant workers and also see animal activism as an essential part of nonviolence. Likewise, Martin Luther King Jr.’s son, Dexter Scott King, who is president of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, said that becoming vegan is the logical extension of his father’s nonviolent view. Coretta Scott King agreed, becoming vegan for the final decade of her life. Father John Dear has also done work on behalf of other animals, not only becoming vegetarian but writing on their behalf as well.

Jesus deliberately went into the temple to stage a symbolic action of protest against the institutional forces that not only exploited people’s religious sensibilities and economic status but killed thousands of creatures every year. He saved their lives and made sure he did not harm them in the process of working for peace and justice. When Mennonites think of imitating Jesus, we might think about how to pause and consider the creatures that too often go unnoticed.

When Mennonites think of imitating Jesus, we might think about how to pause and consider the creatures that too often go unnoticed.

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An Anabaptist seeker finds alternative forms of community.

Outside the box

by Becca J.R. Lachman

How long can a Mennonite survive without community? As definitions for both “community” and “Mennonite” evolve, I hear this question surfacing more often and experience its echo in my own life.

Growing up, I could knock on the front doors of three Mennonite churches within minutes of each other. I assumed that no matter where I ended up later in life, access to a broad Mennonite community would be available. Even while attending a non-Mennonite college and serving with Mennonite Voluntary Service in a major city, a Mennonite congregation was only ever a city bus ride away. But my adult vocation has me at a vibrant state college town in Ohio’s Appalachian foothills, 80 miles from the nearest Mennonite Church USA congregation.

Looking back on almost a decade since I moved to the place I now call home, I’m finally able to recognize that I muddled through all the major stages of grief after feeling like I’d simultaneously abandoned my faith tradition and that it had also, in many ways, abandoned me. I’d convinced myself that in order to live where I did and to become the person I felt called to be (a creative writer, a leader, a feminist, an advocate for the arts), I needed to ignore or even cleanse myself from being Mennonite. But I eventually concluded that stepping outside my ethnic Mennonite culture would allow me to embrace a new life as an Anabaptist-by-choice.

The distinction between Mennonite and Anabaptist has become important to my post-college journey toward Jesus and my interactions with others. As someone born into a denomination, I feel that sometimes Mennonite refers to culture more than living out beliefs. When I pine for hymn-sings, my family’s 1840s farm or even my Grandma’s recipes, I’m really missing interaction with my Swiss-German culture. But when I pine for everyday reconciliation or question my nation’s addictions to power through violence and wealth, I’m partly acting out of a deep homesickness for the kingdom of God—according to the Gospels, a vastly different existence from most norms in American society.

If this “upside-down kingdom” is so different, shouldn’t today’s Christ-inspired lives also reflect a deliberate choice to be unusual? For American Anabaptists today, perhaps recommitting ourselves to living simply, welcoming the oppressed as equals and refusing to support war in any form may be the most important acts of nonviolence we can commit to in our lifetimes. But how do we change and inspire as a faith family from the inside out?

When I help teach a popular undergraduate course called Difficult Dialogues: Women and Religion, I’m asked to share my own faith experience, followed by facilitated small-group discussions. I’ve found that after I debunk popular myths and
exaggerations portrayed in mainstream media about Anabaptists, the 100 or so college students react most visibly to two things: the Anabaptists’ history and continued practice of nonviolence and the fact that even though I still have deep concerns about my faith as a woman and artist, years of critical thinking and higher education have brought me back to my denomination, instead of driving me further away. In my lecture, I don’t claim that the Anabaptists were or are without fault. And I try to stress that when anyone really follows the teachings of Jesus, our bigger world often reacts with anger or dismay. Yet when I tell these students about the “third way,” describing such things as the Sermon on the Mount, Ted and Company Theatreworks, relief sales, fair trade, Christian Peacemaker Teams or the Peace Tax Fund, our small group discussions are abuzz with family stories and tough questions. Usually, a few students ask if they can come with me to church sometime, or others want online sources about alternative service in a region of Ohio where, for more and more students, only the military offers a realistic chance for college or a steady job.

Such a high-energy reaction gives me hope in the future of Anabaptism in America. And while I can be Anabaptist salt no matter where I go to church (through grad school and the first few years of marriage, I was an Anabaptist Quaker and an Anabaptist Episcopalian), I also need the mentorship of other Anabaptists.

For years, I’ve mostly found these mentorships outside any traditional church building. In fact, I’ve discovered some of the most unabashedly Anabaptist communities thriving “at the edges” of our denomination. A hodgepodge of Anabaptist-affiliated books, sermon podcasts, blogs, writing conferences, magazines and artist gatherings feed my faith journey on Sunday mornings and into the week. Spiritually fed, I go out into my workweek and interact mostly with non-Anabaptists.

Though I’ve now joined the Mennonite Church USA congregation 80 miles from my house and try to attend once a month, virtual and temporary Anabaptist communities continue to lead me like bread crumbs back to a personal relationship with the Jesus of the Gospels, the Holy Spirit left to nudge us, and a fully realized goodness in the world I may never see.

Living and working so far from an in-person faith family isn’t simple or easy. I know that nothing can replace face-to-face fellowship and dialogue. But as someone dedicated to promoting and practicing the arts, I’ve also learned that choosing to live at the edges of society—even a national church family—can be part of healthy spiritual and social growth.

Though I don’t attend a traditional church service every Sunday, I feel more Anabaptist today than at any other point in my life.

Becca J.R. Lachman teaches and tutors writing at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, and is a member of Columb,
A fool for Mennonite education

I often describe myself as a “product of Mennonite education” because I am an alumna of Bethany Christian Schools in Goshen, Ind., Goshen College and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. While my educational pedigree translates into power and privilege, as a woman of color, I believe strongly in using my power and privilege for everyone’s good, not just my own.

What does this mean in the context of my work with Mennonite Education Agency (MEA)? I have a responsibility to reflect on my educational experiences and take the foundational principles of Anabaptist-Mennonite pedagogy and make them available to everyone, everywhere. This may sound idealistic, and you may call me a fool for Mennonite education. So be it.

Here are three big ideas I am advocating for in my leadership of the MEA board of directors.

1. There is still a place for a denominationally connected school system, but not for the reasons many schools were first opened. Whether we like it or not, those of us who are part of families that have been Mennonite and faithfully attended Mennonite schools for generations have to admit that our alma maters were often established to preserve our communities’ ethnic identity and heritage. That itself is not a bad thing, but when preservation, however subtle, becomes an end in itself, we have ignored the call to invite others to join our communities and share our interpretation of the Christian faith. At the same time, simply putting aside a tradition of preserving a way of life, faith and education because of the excesses of ethnocentrism is not the answer.

We have invested ourselves in becoming missional, but we have some work to do to articulate how our Mennonite school system is also part of Mennonite Church USA’s missional identity. The more we make the education-mission connection, the less ethnocentric and more creative we will become as we focus on why and how we teach Jesus’ way of peace as central to the gospel’s meaning.

2. When we think about education as part of our denomination’s mission, then we can see that the work of Mennonite education is not limited to a specific set of teachers and faculty on elementary, secondary, college, university or seminary campuses because it takes place wherever a member of Mennonite Church USA is building a learning community. In other words, if the only ones who count as “Mennonite educators” are those who teach (other Mennonites) on Mennonite campuses, then we neglect the resource Mennonite education has in our body’s members who bring a commitment to Christian community and nonviolence to the campuses where they fulfill their vocation. I hope that along with our Youth Census, MEA will be able to initiate an Educators Census to identify and connect with all the teachers in Mennonite Church USA because they are also part of our school system.

3. Building learning communities can be an exercise in nonconformity, which in turn contributes to the renewal of our denomination and even the Christian church as a whole. This last big idea comes from the well-known cultural critic Bell Hooks’ writings about “engaged pedagogy.” This is a way of teaching that holds the practice of freedom at the center of the learning and teaching processes. Hooks’ view of freedom is not based on a concern for individualism but community. She writes: “In the last 20 years I have encountered many folks who say they are committed to freedom and justice for all, even though the way they live, the values and habits of being they institutionalize daily, in public and private rituals, help maintain the culture of domination, help create an unfree world,” adding, “we live in chaos, uncertain about the possibility of building and sustaining real community.”

Expanding on Paul’s letter to the Romans, Hooks calls on all of us—professional educators and others—to “renew our minds” so we can participate in the transformation of schools, faith communities and broader society “so that the way we live, teach and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice and our love of freedom.” This is the freedom of Jesus the Christ. We find this freedom through our engagement with his gospel, which grounds our theological and ethical understandings of peace, nonviolence and social justice. This faith heritage puts us at odds with some parts of our society, making us nonconformists, historically speaking.

I hope my foolishness will lead us to new sources of wisdom. I hope the wisdom we seek at MEA will be a source of renewal for the church and the communities where we live, teach and learn.
Follow Jesus’ example and spirit, not rules

H arold Miller’s article “Membership Guidelines Allow Conversation” (February) is a great step forward in openness and dialogue on homosexuality. However, even a friendly discussion about homosexuality can be painful and draining for a homosexual person, since it involves defending their personal views, actions and beliefs. It’s far easier to advocate patience and give a measured response when not having your way of life called into question. While not homosexual myself, I have been criticized about some of my views on sexuality, showing me how painful this subject can be for homosexuals. Additionally, key aspects of our theology and Jesus’ example are often left out in this conversation.

Many young adults won’t go anywhere near a church because of its views on homosexuality or because they’d be judged for living together with a committed partner before marriage. People outside the church believe the church’s teachings on sexuality are not true or complete. The church would do itself and the world a favor by figuring out what’s really important and what’s not when it comes to ethical and spiritual considerations about sexuality.

**Struggle, disagreement and hurt feelings** are a part of life; Jesus says the truth divides. But even nuanced, modest statements like, “our church’s teaching on sexuality is our best human understanding of God’s way” need exploration. What happens if our best human understanding is wrong and needlessly causes suffering, alienation and drives away people earnestly searching for God or trying to walk Jesus’ path? Jesus is much harder on those who commit this sin of “shutting the door of the kingdom” than other sins.

One of Jesus’ biggest criticisms of the Pharisees is that they put their rules and interpretations ahead of God’s priority of justice and mercy—the things that really matter in day-to-day life and in loving one’s neighbor as oneself. Is it not possible that the church’s teachings on homosexuality and sexuality shut the door of the kingdom on others? Yes, sexuality can be destructive, shallow or manipulative but not when genuine love between two people is the focus.

Jesus said nothing about homosexuality, and this is important because Anabaptists believe he’s the clearest revelation of God and God’s motivations—the principles, reasoning and spirit behind the rules. He said that before, it was like people had a slave or servant relationship to God. Who shares their inner workings, thoughts or secrets with mere slaves? Jesus said that now we are heirs and good friends of God, to whom secrets, inner understandings and motivations are shared.

This means it’s our responsibility and privilege to know the hows and whys of any rules we hold and to make sure they mesh with practical, moral issues and the fruit they bear. Jesus questioned the accepted religious rules, yet we often prefer the status quo to searching and knocking. If we want to be true to Jesus, we also have to question and focus on lasting values, ethics and wisdom.

A **2009 Gallup poll** shows a strong link between people’s views on homosexuality and whether or not they know a homosexual person well. This leads me to think that some lack of understanding or fear may be involved, even if on an unconscious level. Jesus went out of his way to know and understand people not accepted by the religious majority. Furthermore, biblical scholarship reveals that homosexual acts or relationships in the Bible may have been strictly abusive or drastically unequal in power or age, a vast difference from issues of homosexual marriage and church membership discussed today.

Anabaptism came about because people questioned and searched the Bible for its meaning, relevance and transformational power. Anabaptists emphasized the ability of each person and small community to engage and interpret the Scriptures, experiencing the Spirit as revealing an inner, permanent, lasting truth.

We need to keep the spirit of Anabaptism alive by continuing to question Scripture and focusing on Jesus’ example and spirit. We need to make sure we emphasize issues that truly matter without shutting the door to the kingdom in the faces of those who are searching and trying to enter. This requires looking to and understanding criticism of dominant Christian views on sexuality from both the outside and the inside.

Jesus said that only God judges, and with the measure we judge others, we will be judged. God is love, love is above all, and when two people love each other—regardless of their gender or orientation—it is special. The church should focus on helping people love one another better, not telling them their love is an abomination.

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**Is it not possible that the church’s teachings on homosexuality and sexuality shut the door of the kingdom on others?**

The views expressed do not necessarily represent the official positions of Mennonite Church USA, The Mennonite or the board for The Mennonite, Inc.
Board will seek an interim editor

Search process set for a new person to lead The Mennonite

The board of directors of The Mennonite, Inc., has decided to launch a search process for an interim editor for The Mennonite, the denominational publication of Mennonite Church USA, and its related web and social media channels.

According Barth Hague, board chair, the interim editor will function as the organization’s CEO, overseeing administration, giving leadership to staff and editorial content, maintaining close working relationships with denominational leaders and continuing to guide the transition of the magazine into the digital age.

The Mennonite’s current editor and CEO, Everett J. Thomas, sent a letter of resignation on Aug. 1 with an effective date of Jan. 31, 2014; he has served since November 2000. Board policy stipulates that the editor give six months’ notice when resigning.

According to Hague, Thomas is leaving the organization in good fiscal and operational health. During Thomas’ tenure as editor, Hague says, “The Mennonite has grown from a print magazine to a content distribution system for Mennonite Church USA.” Readership for the magazine, its two e-zines, website and Facebook page has grown to more than 37,000.

Hague and the board anticipate a strong transition to new leadership.

“This transition comes at a time when the board is grappling with the challenges of information distribution in light of new digital technologies,” he says. “Our new interim editor will bring significant influence to that process and will be instrumental in helping The Mennonite chart a course for the future.”

According to a classified ad (page 51), the board is looking for a seasoned editor and leader, with broad experience in writing for publication, supervising staff and creative personnel, managing financial affairs and strategic planning. According to the ad, he or she will possess a strong familiarity with Mennonite Church USA, its structure, congregations and history, and will have hands-on experience using the web and social media to meet organizational goals.

The assignment will be for up to two years, a timeline established by the board. The interim editor could also be a candidate for the editor role.

The search committee is comprised of Marty Lehman, Mennonite Church USA’s associate executive director for churchwide operations, and four board officers: Hague, who is from Newton, Kan., Gerald Mast, vice chair, Bluffton, Ohio; Steve Edwards, treasurer, Goshen, Ind.; and Sheri Wenger, secretary, Lancaster, Pa. Hague chairs the search committee.

On Sept. 9, the board voted by email to set a search schedule that has the committee beginning to review applicants and interview candidates on Nov. 11 and the full board meeting via conference call in December to approve the final candidate. Mennonite Church USA bylaws stipulate that the Executive Board also approve the appointment. The committee plans to accept applications until the position is filled.

The job description can be found on the Mennonite Church USA website. Applicants are directed to send a cover letter and résumé to Marty Lehman, Mennonite Church USA, martyl@mennoniteusa.org, by Nov. 11. Candidates selected for consideration will be asked to supply references and writing samples.

The Mennonite, Inc., is an Indiana not-for-profit corporation responsible for publishing The Mennonite. Mennonite Church USA bylaws require the corporation to be a “self-supporting entity,” and it receives no funding through the Mennonite Church USA firstfruits system.—Joanna Shenk for Mennonite Church USA
Discernment group begins work

Will examine John Howard Yoder sexual abuse, church’s response

On Aug. 27, Mennonite Church USA executive director Ervin Stutzman announced that he and Sara Wenger Shenk, president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., were forming “a discernment group to guide a process that we hope will contribute to healing for victims of John Howard Yoder’s abuse as well as others deeply hurt by his harmful behavior.”

In addition to Stutzman and Shenk, the committee includes Linda Gehman Peachey, who served as director of women’s advocacy for Mennonite Central Committee U.S. in Akron, Pa.; Chuck Neufeld, who is conference minister for Illinois Mennonite Conference; Ted Koontz, professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and former colleague of Yoder; Regina Shands Stoltzfus, a professor at Goshen (Ind.) College.

Carolyn Holderread Heggen will serve as an advisor to the group. She is the author of Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches.

The discernment group met for the first time on Sept. 4 and 5 in Goshen, Ind. According to Stutzman, Holderread Heggen called together additional people to serve as a reference group for her as she serves in an advisory role. The three members are victims of sexual abuse.

On Sept. 16, Stutzman reported to the Executive Board about the group’s work.

“These are the outcomes we’ve identified in a preliminary way,” Stutzman said. “We anticipate sharing these outcomes with the Constituency Leaders Council—a gathering of conference ministers, moderators and representatives who meet twice a year. We welcome their counsel and shared ownership of the outcomes for this discernment process.”

The following outcomes named by the discernment committee were subsequently approved by the Executive Board:

• In light of the reality that many and varied assumptions are being voiced about what occurred, we will design a process to fairly and accurately document the scope of Yoder’s sexual abuse and the church’s response to it after a careful review of the evidence. We will report this documentation for both a popular audience and a scholarly audience in separate venues. Since a full rendering of a report may take months to compile, we will soon report what we already know from earlier published evidence.

• We will publicly thank the women who tenaciously persisted over many years to bring Yoder’s abuse to light to prevent further victimizations and to seek healing, those who valiantly care for victims of sexual abuse whether by Yoder or by other abusers, and those who’ve done the hard personal work to transcend their abuse with a readiness to work for the healing of their communities. We will also thank those in church leadership who worked hard to hold Yoder accountable with a desire for his restoration.

• We will cultivate a system-wide preparedness through conference leaders and links on the denominational website to provide resources for people who come forward seeking support for dealing with sexual abuse in their own experience. We will encourage denominational and conference leaders to provide educational experiences to better prepare pastors/leaders to care for victims of sexual abuse.

• We anticipate that in a large church gathering, most likely our next biennial convention, there will be a public service of lament, repentance and healing. Our hope is that the whole church will experience the grace of God together, including victims of sexual abuse, family members of Yoder, church leaders responsible for disciplinary processes, and all whose lives are touched by these relationships.

• We will explore the possibility of a denominational statement addressing a variety of dimensions of sexual abuse.—Everett J. Thomas

SCHOOL FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING

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With Ruth Haley Barton and Ervin Stutzman
Ohio youth participate in leadership program

First-ever retreat for high schoolers based on Values-Based Leadership Program

Participants play the game, “helium,” in which the hula hoop must be lowered to the ground with everyone’s finger touching the hoop. Clockwise from lower left: Cathy Harms, Rowen Miller, Micah Raber, Austin Zuercher, Julia Herbold, Bob Wenger, Nicole Chupp.

Ten youth and their mentors gathered Aug. 16-17 at Camp Luz in Orrville, Ohio, for the first-ever Youth Leadership Project—a partnership of Ohio Mennonite Conference, Central Christian School and Camp Luz.

This project is based on the Values-Based Leadership Program, a leadership training for adults rooted in an Anabaptist perspective that occurs annually in a two-session format at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pa.

Jeremy Kauffman, executive director of Walnut Hills Retirement Community in Walnut Creek, Ohio, and Bethany Shue Nussbaum, advancement director of Central Christian School, also in Kidron, Ohio, planned and co-facilitated the August retreat. Kauffman and Nussbaum graduated from the Values-Based Leadership Program in 2008.

They wanted to help youth see the leadership opportunities already around them at their school, church and even a part-time job.

“Leadership is not a destination or something you arrive at from a title or position,” says Nussbaum. “It’s a privilege that anyone can choose to embrace throughout life, regardless of age or position.”

Kauffman adds, “We wanted the youth to know that leadership skills can be learned and to be able to say, ‘I can be a proactive person.’”

At the same time, both Kauffman and Nussbaum stressed that personalities develop over time. “With youth in particular, this is just a snapshot of where they are right then,” says Kauffman. “[Youth] will continue to learn and grow.”

Nicole Chupp, a junior at Dalton (Ohio) High School, says she appreciated the results from the DiSC personality assessment that she and the participants took during the retreat.

“It made us realize how we all have our strengths and weaknesses,” Chupp says. She attends Chestnut Ridge Mennonite Church in Baughman, Ohio.

The youth will meet for a follow-up retreat Feb. 7-8, 2014. In between the two retreats, the youth will select a project that is a new initiative or change to an existing ministry in their church or school.

After approval from their lead pastor, the youth will work with their mentors and others in the congregation or school to plan the project. The ideas include a service trip, worship leading series, teaching Sunday school, redesigning the church website and more.

Micah Raber, a senior at Central Christian and a participant, plans to lead a program for local students on how to support international students at Central.

“[We can] include them and show God’s love to them, even if they aren’t Christians themselves,” he says. He will work with Central’s campus ministries team and his mentor.

Ohio Conference helped fund the retreat. Youth participants each paid $350, which covered each mentor also. Each youth participant who completes the program will receive a $500 scholarship from Ohio Conference toward post high school service or Mennonite education.—Anna Groff

Participants model their “special glasses” to practice the discipline of looking through lenses of other personality types, as part of their session on understanding others.
Intercultural, interfaith school kit blitz

Park View Mennonite Church produces more than 1,500 MCC school kits.

A lot of congregations put school kits together for distribution by Mennonite Central Committee. But how many produce more than 1,500? That was Park View Mennonite Church’s experience on Aug. 18 in Harrisonburg, Va., when nearly 100 assembly-line volunteers packed a total of 1,562 kits.

The blitz was the result of tireless organizing by Dorothy Logan, who along with her small group first promoted the idea of an MCC School Kit blitz in 2008. Each year since on “Blitz Day,” Park View’s foyer and library area have been transformed into a production room.

This year was an international gathering including adults and children from the Islamic Association of the Shenandoah Valley, from the Center for Interfaith Engagement at Eastern Mennonite University, and from “Hilos en Comon” (Common Threads).

The latter group gathers Hispanic women from the Harrisonburg Community who meet weekly to work with fabrics and share life. On blitz day, they displayed their stories through individual wall hangings mounted in the fellowship room.—Gordon Zook and Ervin Stutzman

Children of the women from the Hilos en Comon group help with the school kit blitz at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

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Seminary alum ministers to soldiers in Afghanistan

Johns visits 750 members of his battalion during his 10-month tour of duty.

John Jacobs Jr., the only chaplain in his U.S. Army battalion, stood on a blood-soaked plywood board as he conducted a worship service for soldiers at a tiny combat outpost in the mountains of Afghanistan. Many wounded soldiers had been brought to this spot for transport back to a base hospital.

This lonely outpost was one of numerous stops for Jacobs as he traveled 5,000 miles—mostly by helicopter—to visit the 750 members of his battalion during his 10-month tour of duty in 2009.

Jacobs, who graduated from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., in 2004 with a Master of Divinity degree, planned to return to EMS this fall to enroll in Clinical Pastoral Education.

The intensive hospital-based program would prepare him for chaplaincy work among veterans and in hospitals and hospices. But he recently received notice that he is being called up in early 2014 for a 9- to 12-month deployment to the Middle East, to be stationed in Qatar.

Meanwhile, other military chaplains have enrolled at EMS this fall.

“Several new students this school year have expressed interest in being chaplains at veterans’ hospitals or with active-duty personnel,” says Laura Lehman Amstutz, the seminary’s admissions director and communications coordinator. “The EMS focus on chaplain ministry and peace-and-justice theology is a valuable mix to these students who are sorting out how to care for those who have experienced war and military service firsthand.”

Jacobs is part of the Virginia National Guard, so he must be ready for duty at any time—at home or abroad. Stateside duty includes accompanying a senior officer to notify parents that their son or daughter has been killed.

In a war zone, a chaplain’s duty is to nurture the living, comfort the wounded and honor the dead. In addition to leading Christian services and performing various sacraments, Jacobs prayed with wounded soldiers from the battlefield and accompanied them to the operating room.

“In general, we are supposed to bring the presence of God,” he says.

Jacobs also did a lot of marriage counseling for the many soldiers who were separated from their spouses.

Since Jacobs is a Protestant chaplain, he was also responsible for making sure that members of his battalion who were not Protestant had access to Catholic or other appropriate members of the clergy.

Jacobs loves people—all kinds of people. He enjoys the diversity he finds in the Army and the variety of people he met in Afghanistan. He learned to understand the motivation of the Taliban and enjoyed interacting with Muslims.

One man, using the Muslim word for clergyman, called Jacobs his “American imam.”

The seed for military chaplaincy was planted in Jacobs’ mind after he completed nearly 13 years of active duty in the U.S. Army. First he had to finish an undergraduate degree and then find a seminary to attend. He picked EMS, arriving with his wife and three children in 2001.

“EMS offered me a safe place to be myself and bare my soul,” he says. “They didn’t make me feel like I had to be a perfect person.”

While in seminary he took part-time jobs, making sure that he was able to interact with “common people,” which he figured would help him in future ministry. In fact, ministry started for him on the job. “I talked about faith with people who would never come to church,” he said.

Jacobs and his wife, Diana Patterson, are both from Lancaster County, Pa. John was raised Presbyterian and Diana was Mennonite. They were married when he enlisted in the Army at age 21. His first Army career took them to Alaska, South Korea, Pennsylvania and Colorado.

Since his seminary days, the Jacobs family has been based in nearby Broadway, Va.

He hopes that a future job in hospital chaplaincy will bring more stability to his life and more focus to his career.—Steve Shenk for Eastern Mennonite Seminary
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“Both authors are masters of the North American story, and have charted a fresh journey through remarkably diverse experiences.”
— Historians John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder
Members walk, bike, ride to church in Oklahoma

Event raises over $1,000 for Mennonite Central Committee Global Family Fund.

More than 20 individuals rode four-wheelers to Turpin (Okla.) Mennonite Church on Aug. 11.

People came to Turpin (Okla.) Mennonite Church in some unusual ways on Aug. 11.

One person walked two miles to church. Another bicycled four miles to church. Four people rode horses four miles to church. One farmer drove his Volvo front loader tractor to church. One 78-year-old great-grandmother rode on the back of the pastor’s motorcycle to church. Several drove antique pickups to church. More than 20 people rode four-wheelers to church.

Why? To raise money to help children in Bangladesh to get a better education and hope for a better life.

The idea originated with John Stoesz, the retiring regional director of Mennonite Central Committee.

He decided to do a farewell bike ride to 50 churches in central Kansas during May to thank them for their support of MCC.

He invited churches to plan a Bike to Church Sunday and use it as a fund-raiser to support MCC’s Global Family Educational projects in places such as Bangladesh, Tanzania, Serbia, Honduras and Syria.

Not many Turpin Mennonite members cycle, so they broadened the idea of biking to church by including a variety of forms of alternate transportation to church.

The money raised, almost $1,100, will go for educational projects in Bangladesh.—Terry Rediger

Enjoying New Endeavors

“...and fulfilling retirement including some new endeavors like Pathways Institute® classes and water volleyball.”

—Neil and Karen Musselman

More than 20 individuals rode four-wheelers to Turpin (Okla.) Mennonite Church on Aug. 11.

Four people rode horses to the church.
Is fair trade the best answer?

Fair-trade cooperatives out of reach for the most marginalized coffee farmers

Fair trade may not be the panacea for coffee farmers that its proponents want it to be, according to Chris D. Gingrich, economics professor at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., and former student Emily J. King. Based on research, they found that the fair-trade system for marketing coffee—under which farmers receive a minimum price for their product regardless of the market price—provides limited benefits to a tiny minority of farmers worldwide, despite the premium that consumers pay.


“By comparison, projects that aim to improve coffee farmers’ production, processing and marketing skills show the potential to provide benefits at a lower cost and also reach a broader clientele.”

Gingrich and King say when coffee prices are low, fair trade does benefit participating farmers, offering each producer as much as $100 per year on the average. But when market prices for coffee are relatively high, the annual benefits from fair trade fall to $35 per participating farmer.

“Those in the fair-trade system are doing fairly well,” Gingrich says. “But, in order to join a fair-trade cooperative, farmers usually have to be land owners, which means that fair-trade cooperatives are out of reach for the most economically disadvantaged and marginalized farmers.”

Proponents of fair trade argue that the true benefits of fair trade “extend beyond higher prices for coffee farmers,” benefits that Gingrich and King acknowledge. “Fair-trade farmers receive access to credit and technical information,” they say, as well as social benefits, such as increased women’s leadership and community development programs.

Nevertheless, in their article they tentatively concluded that “fair trade may not be the most cost-effective method of benefiting coffee producers.”

They suggested that general development projects, such as quality improvements focused on productivity, may be able to reach more of the most disadvantaged producers, including those who do not own the land they farm or who are not cooperative members for other reasons.—Kara Lofton and Bonnie Price Lofton of EMU
Mennonites, Muslims eat *halal* meal together

More than 100 individuals participate in the Abraham Project’s first meal.

The Abraham Project launched its first event Sept. 6-7. The project is an initiative among Lancaster (Pa.) district Mennonite churches and leaders of the Islamic Community Center of Lancaster who are working to create a space for Muslims and Christians to come together and share stories to build peace.

More than 100 joined a *halal* meal hosted by James Street Mennonite Church on Sept. 6. *Halal* describes food that Muslims are allowed to eat or drink under Islamic Shari’ah.

Brian Miller, pastor of Sunnyside Mennonite Church, says the attendance at the meal was about 75 percent Mennonite and 25 percent Muslim, with a wide range of ages represented. The previous night was a screening of the documentary *Waging Peace*, followed by discussion.

Miller says his congregation sponsored a Turkish and Iraqi family—both of whom were Muslim. Getting to know these families “stirred the energy for intentionally building bridges with the Muslim community,” he says.

Through Eastern Mennonite Missions’ connections with the Islamic Community Center, Miller began meeting regularly with Ibrahim Qaisi and other Islamic leaders.

Qaisi also spoke at the meal. Miller says the next steps include finding ways to participate in joint Christian-Muslim service projects.—*Anna Groff*

RaeDella Wenger (left) of James Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa., serves food to Nimo Dalal.

The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies congratulates

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Planting a church, one connection at a time

Mennonite Mission Network helps make 2,000 miles of connections.

Independently, the San Lucas, Mexico, church-planting efforts could go far. But through 2,000 miles of connections, the group is building a church with help from partners: North Goshen (Ind.) Mennonite Church, the Mexican Mennonite Anabaptist Evangelical Church Conference’s (CIEAMM) pastors and Mennonite Mission Network’s connections.

It was also a long time coming.

At North Goshen Mennonite Church, José Tellez was restless in a church pew. Inspired by Bible studies in his church, José wanted to give the same opportunity for spiritual growth to his family in San Martín, Mexico, which is about an hour outside Mexico City.

From its beginning in 1936, North Goshen has reached out to its community. As an extension of their North Goshen tradition, the Tellez family reached out to their community in San Martín. “It grew from a personal vision to a formal project of the congregation,” says Mark Schloenger, the pastor at North Goshen.

In Mexico City, CIEAMM was also planting churches. They had a similar vision and challenge: planting churches to inspire a living faith. How do you introduce Anabaptism in a culture that is marinated in a “state religion” (as José Elizalde describes it)? Elizalde grew up in Mexico, attends North Goshen Mennonite Church and is the liaison to the church plant.

Five years ago, people from North Goshen contacted Linda Shelly, director for Latin America at Mennonite Mission Network. They needed help nourishing the local ministry in San Lucas, envisioned the value of a local partner and asked for contact information for Mexican Mennonites in that region. When they contacted CIEAMM, their separate visions combined. They now collaborate on their church-planting efforts as equal partners.

In the beginning stages, CIEAMM supplied the church planters. César Marín led Bible studies, and eventually, CIEAMM sent the current pastor, Mario Lopez Martinez, and his wife, Carmen Reyes Hernandez.

Its Bible studies and children’s ministries are one reason why the church plant already has 30 attendees. Yet more important than what the Lopez Martinez family does is who they are.

The Lopez Martinez family members were driving along the road one day when they saw a boy, his face bloody from a street fight. The final destination was forgotten. The family stopped, cared for the boy and drove him home. “Mario and Carmen reach out to people right in their midst, instead of asking people to join them,” says Schloenger.

Partnering in ministry has its challenges. As the Mexican church leaders began talking about more church plants, Mission Network was contacted once again, and this led to a joint visit in May. Each partner has their own vision, so we needed to learn to trust each other, says Schloenger. “Working with Linda, we were able to develop trust,” he says. “That was key to developing trust [among] the other partners.”

Inspiring others to be involved in the ministry despite the language barrier is a real challenge, says Elizalde. North Goshen Mennonite Church translates its worship service into Spanish, but not everyone is bilingual or can reach out to their southern neighbors.

However, connections between North Goshen and the San Lucas church are growing. From the beginning, a handful of North Goshen’s congregation originated from San Lucas’ community. Yet the church plant became real to North Goshen when one of its members returned to the San Lucas community in September 2012. Elizalde and Schloenger could tell that the North Goshen congregation’s commitment increased as they reported about their visit to the church plant. In the background, photos scrolled. But one face jumped out at the congregation: the man who had returned. They knew his face, his history and his wife and children who were sitting across the room. Elizalde hopes to build on these relationships to create “friends of San Lucas” instead of mere fund-raisers. “It’s about more than asking for funds [for the church plant]; it’s about partnership,” he says.—Kelsey Hochstetter of Mennonite Mission Network
K’ekchi’ women develop musical talent

Women practice three times a week for eight months to prepare for retreat.

A group of K’ekchi’ women play their instruments together in worship in Guatemala.

K’ekchi’ Mennonite women in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, played musical instruments and led worship during their annual two-day women’s retreat in June for the first time in the retreat’s history.

In the past, musical instruments in K’ekchi’ Mennonite churches have been played only by men.

The church is not theologially opposed to women playing musical instruments in church, but because K’ekchi’ men have the money to purchase instruments and often have more schooling than women, they have typically been the worship leaders in the churches.

At last year’s women’s retreat, Maria Chub, the newly elected president of the K’ekchi’ Mennonite Women’s Association, was sad to see no worship band accompanying the women. Chub began to dream of empowering women from her church to organize a worship band.

Chub talked with her pastor about her vision for teaching women to play musical instruments, and he agreed it was a good idea. Together they asked the men in the worship band at their church if they would give permission for women to practice with their equipment. Tomas Bok, a deacon gifted at playing the guitar, agreed to teach the women.

When the church invited women to learn to play instruments, eight women responded.

Each of the women committed herself to two-hour practice sessions held three times a week for eight months in order to prepare for the 2013 women’s retreat.

The Chiyaxut church took offerings to purchase guitars for each of the women, and later the women’s group in the church took special offerings to pay for the women’s transportation to the retreat.

Bok took time off from his work to accompany and support them during the two-day retreat.

Ninety-six women from 23 different churches attended the retreat. Some traveled over three hours from their home communities in order to attend.

The group of women leading worship at the retreat delighted the participants, many of whom had never seen women playing musical instruments in a church setting.

During the retreat, the women discussed how to help community members who have few financial resources, such as widows and families with ongoing illnesses that drain the family’s resources.

They received an offering for Amalia, a district leader in the K’ekchi’ Mennonite Church who needed to have two of her toes removed after developing gangrene in her foot, which caused unexpected financial losses for her family.

Since the retreat, the women have continued to use their new skills.

The women now lead worship occasionally for the Sunday morning services at their church in Chiyaxut. Two other congregations have also begun instrument lessons for women in their communities.—Chris Fretz and Phyllis Groff of Eastern Mennonite Missions
Price told the John Howard Yoder story

As religion reporter at *The Elkhart Truth*, he interviewed three victims.

In 1992, secular newspaper reporter Tom Price reported on allegations of sexual abuse against John Howard Yoder, a former professor at then Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. Price’s reportage included six articles from June 29-July 16 (see the list in the September issue). To our knowledge, these were the first published revelations of the behaviors for which Yoder would eventually be disciplined. Our editorial team crafted the following questions for Price.—Everett J. Thomas

Q. How did you first learn of the situation?

A: Sometime in late summer 1985 or early fall, after I had completed my on-campus work for a master’s degree in journalism at Indiana University in Bloomington, I was home looking for work and spending part of my spare time studying theology with the pastor of the American Baptist congregation I attended in Chicago. He also taught an introductory theology course at a Chicago-area seminary, and we met a couple of times per week to discuss the books we were reading. During those discussions, John Howard Yoder’s name came up. Neither of us was Mennonite.

At the time, I didn’t know any Mennonites other than a former youth pastor from that congregation who later attended then Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., and became a Mennonite pastor. I had read The Politics of Jesus in the early 1980s in college and was very influenced by it as well as by Ron Sider’s Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger and Tom Sine’s The Mustard Seed Conspiracy, so I was clearly emerging theologically as an Anabaptist. My pastor/seminary adjunct friend mentioned to me, “Did you hear that John Howard Yoder was asked to leave the seminary where he was president because of allegations of sexual misconduct?” This was seven years before my articles were published, six to eight months before I moved to Elkhart and joined The Elkhart Truth as a reporter, and about three years before I became the newspaper’s first full-time religion writer.

In the spring of 1992, when I learned that Bethel College, in North Newton, Kan., had decided to “dis-invite” Yoder from a scheduled speech, I realized the matter was not settled and began trying to discover what really happened, what was going on and why.

How often did you speak directly with Yoder?

I first spoke with him in the late 1980s, when he was part of an “Ethics and Economics” lecture series at the Elkhart Public Library. He was a very engaging lecturer but was extremely awkward in personal interactions afterward. I did an extensive interview with him about politics, the 1990 midterm elections and The Politics of Jesus for a religion section feature in November 1990. The picture I took of him as part of that feature ended up accompanying the articles published in June and July 1992. After learning of the incident at Bethel, I telephoned him and spoke extensively with him about what happened with the college. I obviously took notes of that conversation (I typed and printed out all phone interviews in that era, and I usually got a highly accurate transcript), but I do not have the notes from that phone conversation. What I remember—not knowing whether this idea originated with him or me—was going away with the feeling that I needed to investigate this matter because there was an outside chance that his actions were being misinterpreted, he was being blackmailed, that his livelihood was being threatened.

We spoke a few more times by telephone. I let him know at some point that I was doing my own research into what was happening. I spoke with him after some initial drafts were written, and I spoke with him before the initial article and the subsequent series were published. He did not want to say much on the record. He clearly was not willing to respond to the list of allegations I compiled from my interviews with the women or to address on the record what he had written in unpublished works. I no longer have the notes of what was said off the record.

Who was the primary staff person at Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference with whom you spoke?

I spoke with Harold Bauman, whom I had not met before. I also spoke with David Helmuth, who was then chair of the Church Life Commission and pastor of First Mennonite of Middlebury, Ind., whom I also had not met previously. Keep in mind there were two investigations, also the task force at Prairie Street Mennonite Church. For that, I spoke with pastors Harold and Ruth Yoder, usually Harold (no relation).

I also spoke off the record (or not for attribution) with several people who were either part of the task force, part of the Church Life Commission or privy to their findings. This led to my first conflict with the Church Life Commission. I was ready to go into print with an article—citing anonymous sources close to the investigation and confirmed by a commission member—that the commission had reached a decision to suspend John Howard Yoder’s ministerial credentials.
When I spoke to a member of the commission asking for a formal comment/response for the record, that person told me the commission’s alleged action was not an action until it publicly said it was an action and that if I published an article saying it had reached a decision, it would be untrue and I would be subject to potential repercussions.

They also began trying to discover where the leaks were and at one point called me back, claiming to have found out who it was. It was then, in consultation with my editors, that we decided we were not going to be subject to the commission’s decision and action one way or the other. I would write articles that would tell the story as discovered through my interviews and reporting, and the newspaper would publish it when those stories were ready, whether the commission had reached a decision or not.

I happened to be working our Saturday night police and breaking news shift for Sunday’s newspaper when a representative of the commission came in with a two-page press release addressed to “Elkhart Truth, Mennonite Institutions, Mennonite Colleges and Seminaries, Mennonite Conferences, Mennonite Press, Prairie Street Task Force” (in that order). We were close to publishing my articles, and what I recall is that the person had a grin as if to say, “We’re getting this out first.”

**Why did the victims want to remain anonymous?**

Fear of retaliation by John Howard Yoder or by others within the church—for fear they’d face discrimination within the church or by church institutions or they might be ostracized. Then there’s simply the shame and embarrassment associated with any sexual assault. Newspapers didn’t publish the names of assault victims, and it was common to grant interview subjects anonymity for a variety of reasons.

As I was investigating the story, I put out word in many circles that I was looking for women who were willing to talk on the record and that I/my newspaper would be willing to grant anonymity. (Just to be clear, I knew their identities.) With these three women, who were part of the eight women who came forward, it was a highly unusual situation in that they were known to the Church Life Commission and the Prairie Street Task Force.

**Describe the internal editorial processes employed by The Elkhart Truth.**

By 1992, I had been working for The Elkhart Truth for seven years. I had a lot of freedom as a reporter. At the time, it was the smallest-circulation newspaper in the nation to devote full-time resources to a religion writer. After the “dis-invitation” incident, I began talking to sources, doing research and interviewing sources and potential sources. I spent a lot of time in the AMBS library and other libraries, going through records and documents—especially at first as I tried to identify potential sources. I did all this in addition to my usual writing/reporting responsibilities. As I said before, I at least had this idea at the outset when I began my work that there was a chance that John Howard Yoder could have been targeted almost punitively.

Having widely put out word that I was interested in speaking with subjects, they initially contacted me. I didn’t speak with them all at once because they surfaced separately. When I did interview the women, I usually conducted the interviews by phone from home, producing typewritten (on a computer) transcripts of our conversations. The first drafts of my stories were even written at home, where my wife and I were experiencing the first four months of my oldest daughter’s life.

I quickly was convinced that the women were eminently credible—not only by their stories and the details but by who they were because of their positions within the church and/or society. I tried to convey that in my articles as much as possible without putting in details that could identify them. With each of the women’s stories, when I reached my final draft, I read back their quotes to them as well as my paraphrases of the alleged incidents.

I continued to pursue other potential sources without success.

I put out word in many circles that I was looking for women who were willing to talk on the record and that I/my newspaper would be willing to grant anonymity.

I knew I had more content than could be used in even a lengthy article, so my primary editor encouraged me to think of a multipart series. Each article was read and edited by multiple editors (at least five or six)—at least two of whom were women—as well as our managing editor and our publisher. They were even reviewed by a lawyer, but I don’t know which lawyer reviewed them. I don’t recall any changes after the lawyer’s review. For the published series, the most changes were to the second segment featuring the women’s stories, which I tried to treat delicately. They were further sanitized in the editing process. We all agreed that, after all, The Elkhart Truth was a family newspaper.

There was potentially a delay between release of the Church Life Commission press release on June 27 and the publication of the first article in Monday afternoon’s newspaper, June 29. I can’t recall for certain today whether the delay was for me to talk to John Howard Yoder and/or other sources one more time or because of what transpired next.

In theory I knew that if I had a statement in hand by 9 p.m. Saturday, there was at least three hours in which the story eventually published on June 29 could have been ready for Sunday’s newspaper.

After the first article was published, the debate arose among our editors about whether anything else would be published. I had articles ready to go that pretty closely re-
sembled at least most of the segments of the five-part series that was eventually published.

But one editor in particular insisted the articles were “just too much” about somebody “nobody ever heard of.” I shot back that such a statement said more about this particular editor’s lack of knowledge. I was already upset with him because of something that happened once the first article was published.

The Associated Press’ Indiana Bureau at the time called at least the major newspapers each day to ask if they had anything for the wire. From there, stories would likely go on the national wire. When the AP editor called that day, that editor said our newspaper had nothing for AP that day. Our managing editor tried to mediate our disagreements, and my desk editor was just as shocked about the reluctance as I was.

It was a long two weeks in which I stewed and went through usual daily assignments as I considered my options. I was strongly considering whether I would quit if they didn’t publish the articles. But with a 4-month-old daughter at home, I didn’t know if I could follow through. I brainstormed possible options, including my thought of giving the articles to another publication just so they’d be published. In the end, the managing editor decided we would publish. I completed interviews with several theologians around the country, getting their reaction to the initial report (in part as a response to the one editor’s comment that John Howard Yoder was somebody “nobody ever heard of”).

Did any men say they were also victims?

No men told me they were victims; neither do I ever remember hearing of any man described as a victim.

Did the local Mennonite community respond to your reporting?

As a reporter who frequently got calls (even at home) from readers, I was prepared for a thunderstorm of response. What I was not prepared for was the lack of response that occurred. Our newspaper received two letters: one for publication and another whose writer requested that it not be published. The predominant mood in the community seemed to be one of silence.

I sensed a distance from some former sources in the Mennonite community. Others did speak privately with me about the articles. The most common response was what I heard from one man, who said something along the lines of, “I hated to read all that you had written about what was happening with a prominent member of our church, but I was glad that it finally came out in the way that it did.”

In these days before the Internet, the news seemed to trickle out. Every few weeks, I would get a call from some publication—secular newspapers and religious periodicals—that would ask me to fax them a copy of the articles. (I had a long list of Mennonite publications and editors who had requested that I fax them the articles on the day of publication. I knew word was filtering out.) My mom was surprised to be reading the Chicago Tribune one morning in late August and come across my name in the newspaper with a reference to the articles.

There was one other response that was significant. In 1996, after our son Christopher was born with congenital defects and died after 21 minutes of life, my wife and I wrote about how our congregation (Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend, Ind.) cared for us through the experience in a piece that was published in Gospel Herald. I received a very gracious and caring card from Annie Yoder, John’s wife, and immediately responded with a card of my own. For me, that was a very healing experience.

To your knowledge, did Yoder ever apologize for what he did?

He had not at the time of the articles. I left The Elkhart Truth in November 1995, before the process had concluded. I was not aware of what happened later.

How do you feel about how the Mennonite press handled this story?

The Mennonite press responded to the allegations in a similar fashion to the rest of the church institutions. In an ideal world, perhaps the church press would have been more vigorous and independent.

One of my closest friends was forced to resign as editor in 2002 from another denomination’s church publication after writing an article about a pastor accused in court documents of having sexual intercourse with two minor girls. The organization’s interim executive director said my friend needed to find a “hard-hitting journalism” position that didn’t require “the same high degree of spiritual sensitivity.” Perhaps Mennonite editors felt similar constraints, whether direct or indirect.

Did you follow up with victims after the Church Life Commission’s decision? How did they respond?

I followed up with them after the initial article was published on the suspension. They seemed pleased the church had heard their voices, but they were also interested in seeing their stories made public and a little unnerved about what was going on for almost two weeks at my newspaper.

I saw two victims one or two months later and heard about some of the hostile reaction they were getting or hearing indirectly from the church. In some quarters, they were being called “Allegators” who “ate the reputations of godly men.”

By the time the process was judged by Indiana-Michigan Conference to have reached a successful outcome, I was no longer in contact with them to know whether they, too, felt it was successful.—Tom Price lives in South Bend, Ind. He is a writer and communications consultant, formerly having served as director of communications for Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Board of Missions after leaving his position with The Elkhart Truth.
CALENDAR

University Mennonite Church in State College, Pa., is celebrating our 50th anniversary on Oct. 19-20. For details on joining us for the weekend call 814-234-2039 or email mcbru2@verizon.net.

Clinton Frame Mennonite Church will reminisce, fellowship and give thanks while celebrating 150 years together as a congregation. All the festivities will be held Oct. 12-13 at the church located at 63846 County Road 35, Goshen, Ind. For more information, see the church website at www.clintonframe.org or phone the church office at 574-642-3165.

Helping worship leaders discover the best new songs is the goal of New Songs for Worship, to be held Sat., Nov. 2, 9:30 a.m. -12:15 p.m. at CMU’s Chapel, 600 Shaftesbury Boulevard in Winnipeg. For more information, or to register, contact clonghurst@cmu.ca or call 204-487-3300. A second New Songs for Worship workshop is planned for Jan. 25, 2014, in Winkler, Manitoba.

Cultivating Solutions: Harvesting Hope: Plan now to join us in Wichita, Kan., Nov.7-10 for Mennonite Economic Development Associates’ (MEDA’s) annual convention – 4 days of inspiration, information, networking and fun! MEDA serves the working poor around the world, bringing dignity and joy by helping them grow sustainable, locally owned small businesses that are not dependent on charity for survival. Plenary sessions feature Robert Thompson (global food issues), David Haskell (social entrepreneurship), and MEDA’s own Marion Good, plus the MEDA Year in Review and a celebration of MEDA’s 60th anniversary. Go to www.medaconvention.org for full descriptions of plenary sessions, seminars, tours and online registration, or call 800-665-7026 for more information.

WORKERS

Driediger, Penny, was ordained for chaplaincy and CPE supervisory ministry at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., on Aug. 25 at Crossroads Mennonite Church.

Kauffman, Aaron M., was licensed as Global Ministries Director of Virginia Mennonite Missions, Harrisonburg, Va., on Aug. 18 at Zion Mennonite Church.

Nisley Stauffer, Amy, was installed as associate pastor of congregational life at Hesston Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kan., on July 14.

OBITUARIES

Barnard, Randall Eugene, 73, Springs, Pa., died Sept. 19. Spouse: Rose Marie Holland. Barnard. Parents: Carlton and Roberta Richter Barnard. Children: Christopher, Pamela Brant, Lisa Brant; eight grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren. A private funeral service will be held in Grantsville, Md.


Erb, Fern Irene Troyer, 92, Harrisonburg, Va., died May 2. Spouse: J. Frederick Erb (deceased). Parents: Miles and Mary Reiff Troyer. Children: Paul Frederick Erb, Mary Erb Nitsche, Rachel Erb Beckler; seven grandchildren; one great-granddaughter. Funeral: May 11 at Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.


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@ThMennonite.org; fax 316-283-0454; 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, IN 46517.

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Books from the editors

Present Tense: A Mennonite Spirituality

Present Tense: A Mennonite Spirituality by Gordon Houser explores the heart of Mennonite spirituality and how Mennonite spiritual practices may succeed or fall short.

$16.95

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

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

—Valerie Weaver-Zercher, contributing editor of Sojourners

Johann

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

$8.95

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

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

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

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

—Rokando Santiago, executive director, Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society

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- Polar Bear Express (Oct 16-25/2014)
- Antarctica (Jan 3-15/2015)

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- Churches & Safaris in Ethiopia & Tanzania (Oct 10-21/2014)
- Vietnam & Singapore (Nov 1024/2014)
- Cuba (Jan 9-18/2015)
- Australia & New Zealand (Jan 30-Feb 19/2015)
- Churches & Safaris in Kenya & Tanzania (Feb 6-18/2015)
- Japan & Korea (Oct 16-29/2015)

**CUSTOM TOURS**
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- Holy Land Tour with Pastor Daniel Toews (Oct 19-28/2014)
- From Nazareth to Rome with Pastor Jim Brown (Nov 3-15/2014)
- Explore the World of Paul with Tom Yoder Neufeld (May 6-23/2015)

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- Amish European Heritage Tour with John Ruth (July 6-28/2014)
- Poland & Ukraine: The Mennonite Story (Sept 19-Oct 1/2014)
- Russia & Ukraine: The Mennonite Story (May 19-June 6/2015)
- European Heritage with John Ruth (June 10-23/2015)
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Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation filed Oct. 1, 2013, for The Mennonite, publication no. 22-3140, published once-per-month (12 issues in preceding 12 months) at 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 4, Elkhart, Elkhart County, IN 46517. Phone: 574-343-1332. Annual subscription price: $46.00. Publisher, The Mennonite Magazine Board; editor, Everett J. Thomas, at above address. Owned and published by The Mennonite, Inc., Goshen, Ind. (above mailing address), a church-related non-profit organization, tax exempt under code section 501(c)(3). Stockholders owning 1 percent or more of total stock, none. (No stock issued.) Known bondholders, etc., none. The purpose, function and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months.

Extent and Nature of Circulation
A. Avg. total number of copies (net press run) each issue during preceding 12 months, 7,736. B. Avg. paid and/or requested circulation: (1) Avg. paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541, 7,741. C. Avg. total paid and/or requested circulation, 7,741. F. Avg. total distribution, 7,881. G. Copies not distributed, 95. H. Avg. total copies, 7,976. I. Avg. percent paid and/or requested circulation, 98.
A. Total number of copies (net press run) each issue during preceding 12 months, 7,180. B. Paid and/or requested circulation: (1) Paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541, 7,232. C. Total paid and/or requested circulation, 7,232. F. Total distribution, 7,372. G. Copies not distributed 50. H. Total copies, 7,422. I. Percent paid and/or requested circulation, 98.

I certify that all information furnished in this is true and complete.

Everett J. Thomas, Editor
The healing power of nonresistance

I have come to a point in my life where the daily in-and-outs have clouded and delayed my journey into living in abundance, and thankfully they’ve led me to having a strong desire for something big to change. Adrenal fatigue, digestive issues and stress-related illnesses all point to not being grounded and centered, not living from my Source—specifically, accepting beliefs that are not in alignment with our God.

At its worst, I experienced inexplicable exhaustion, and I know many young adults who are simply tired and worn-out by the pressures we’ve come to accept as normal. And when you look around, many people are in the same boat. We are simply done.

While our society makes important decisions about interventions into other countries, I see the Spirit calling us to an inward intervention into the beliefs we’ve embraced that do not serve us. As I share three of mine that revolve around resistance, control and negativity, maybe they’ll resonate with others. Now that I’ve begun this work, I can feel my body release the stress, reducing dramatically the headaches and giving me more energy. I’m a firm believer that all our diseases begin with our thoughts and emotions.

Mennonites were the first to introduce me to nonresistance, nonviolence and the active work of peacemaking in response to conflict. The concepts were attractive, and I was easily convinced that the gospel convinces us to such an alternative response. I could envision it in historical movements and potentially in a personal assault, but what does nonresistance look like in my daily life? Could it be healing and an answer to our personal or societal ills?

I’ve begun to understand that our emotions say much more about what’s going on all around us, and when undesirable, it’s in part because we’re attached to an idea or a story. What if we dropped the story and stopped resisting the present moment and let go of our fight for our own way, ideas and expectations? This is the nonresistance I’m committing to. Accepting all things as they are without exception.

As a parent to four young children, I see within me and most parents I know the ragged juggling of personal life, work, home and relationships. While doing self-reflection, I recognized a belief that made my life difficult. Parents have embraced without question one of the most powerful myths I’ve observed: We can have the outcome we expect for our children, and the way to get there is through planning, order, obedience and control—parent and child doing everything right.

We’re so busy checking the boxes and researching the best that we’ve lost the point, and worse, in the end, our illusion of control is revealed when despite our best intentions, our children choose a path of resistance to us.

In my effort to find joy and harmony in the home, I’m committing to releasing my control (i.e. arbitrary rules on family to teach them a lesson, manipulation of resources to get my outcome and my need to please others outside my family at their expense). I’m welcoming trust and acceptance for whatever is present in the moment.

Lastly, I’m done with the incessant need to share personal stories that speak of my lack, my disappointments, my failures, my broken relationships. Is it possible I was a co-creator of the grief I’d experienced and giving my attention today would only create more of the same? I’ve committed myself to being careful about what I say about myself and others. I want to hold each thought captive so that when I do speak, and when appropriate, my words and stories can be used as a salve—medicine to all who hear. Today, I’m ready to spin new stories of what is true about who I am and leave the past behind.

The heavy weight we carry begins with how we view this life. Listening to the emotions is a great place to begin awareness. In our honesty, let’s ask our Good Shepherd to guide the rest of the way—letting go of the resistance, surrendering the control and transforming the story.
Access and assess

Democratization” of the news is a heavy reality for print journalists. Information and news is now disseminated in seconds on personal blogs, websites and social media. Fewer and fewer people are willing to pay for news to arrive in print in their mailboxes. So what is the role of traditional reporting and editing?

I sometimes think of our roles as editors as curators of the news. We receive far more news releases than we can include in print, and we also sometimes receive releases that we consider inappropriate to print. Consequently, we are aware of the trust our readers put in our ability to assess what is important to publish.

But access is what the democratization process is bringing to news reporting. It is changing the way people receive information and news. There are fewer and fewer editors screening the information for accuracy, libel and slander before it reaches readers.

In our September issue, Anna Groff published an article describing some of the “edgy” Mennonite blogs and websites that may be of interest to Mennonite Church USA members. But some of the sites carry content that we would not publish in this magazine. One reader objected to the inclusion of several blogs and said, “As the magazine of the denomination, I am concerned that The Mennonite would be promoting these blogs” (see page 5).

Such a criticism implies that the reader disagreed with our assessment of what to publish, even though anyone with an Internet connection has access to those same blogs. It is this access that is changing print reporting. Here is another example:

Barbra Graber, a reader, was angry about Gordon Houser’s assessment (in this column) of a new John Howard Yoder book. She first wrote a letter to the editor expressing her anger, then posted a long piece on her Facebook page.

At the same time, I was aware that Mennonite Church USA executive director Ervin Stutzman was planning to form a committee to re-examine the Yoder case. I also arranged to meet Sara Wenger Shenk, president of Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., to discuss how we could best partner with AMBS in talking about this history. However, within days, Graber’s Facebook post went viral. Suddenly there were links to it from other sites. Anyone could have access to the information.

Fortunately, the AMBS faculty had done extensive work on how to teach Yoder, and Shenk was able to both blog about that work as well as publish the AMBS faculty statement crafted last year. But I doubt either would now be public without the speed and access of the blogs, websites and social media. The democratization of news and opinion spurred access to the information.

What does this mean for the church when it has official periodicals like this one? Or, to borrow from some of the header at the top of this column, What is the effect of such media and “citizen journalism” on our faith?

Just as is happening in the secular press, news and information about developments in Mennonite Church USA congregations, conferences, agencies and institutions is increasingly spread by individuals through their blogs, Facebook pages and other social media. It is a reality for periodicals like ours, and we use the new media by having our own bloggers, Facebook page and other social media. Our hope is that in these new access points you will continue to trust the way we assess what is important for the church.
(Continued from page 5)
Traffic: Unknown
This is not a commercial site. There are no solicitations for any sales.
—Scott Smith, Greensboro, N.C.

Not a doctrinal statement
Having served with the Mennonite Board of Missions in Hokkaido, Japan, for eight years, I was delighted to see Ken Shenk’s translation of the confession of faith that the 17 churches recently agreed upon (September). It is precisely the kind of statement that is needed to introduce the essence of Christian commitment, and I am grateful to our Japanese brothers and sisters for this grass-roots statement.

However, the confession is not a statement of “core principles,” as the reporter suggests. It is a statement of identity—those committed to Jesus as the true Word of God—not about agreed-upon, disputed theological doctrine. It locates the Bible as the church’s book of instruction under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Jesus. It defines the church as those who take Jesus seriously—they “listen” and obey.

In a culture that knows Christianity only as a western cultural phenomenon and knows little or nothing of the philosophical and moral assumptions underlying its doctrinal disputes, this kind of an identity statement is far superior to a doctrinal statement.

Whether we in the traditionally Christian cultures approve or not, it is the visible identity and not the doctrinal or moral “principles” that attract people to the church. Where there is a community of hope and healing, of trustworthy relationships and nonviolent respect for others, people are attracted to Jesus as the true word about God.

One could wish that the Mennonite World Conference statement was more oriented in this direction.—C. Norman Kraus, Harrisonburg, Va.

Dialogue’s demands, discoveries
I very much enjoyed reading the article by Leroy Bechler entitled “Dialogue’s Demands and Discoveries” (September). I got to know him at Hesston (Kan.) College in the 1940s and was encouraged and stimulated by his ministry in the black churches.

When we began working with James and Rowena Lark in West Fresno, Calif., he gave us more encouragement as we visited Leroy and Irene in the Watts, Calif., area Mennonite Church. Bechler’s article reveals well his commitment to working with the black community and integration.—John Bergey, Hesston, Kan.

Name misspelled twice
Thanks for asking me to participate in “Questions to Women Leaders” (September). When my contributor’s copy came, I was surprised to learn that I now have two new names: “Marsha” Yoder-Schrock in the Table of Contents and “Martha” Yoder-Schrock on page 17. I’m certain that our emails and the article I submitted have the name “Marcia” Yoder-Schrock, which is my given name and the one I prefer.

I make these kinds of errors in church bulletins from time to time, and I always appreciate when people call them to my attention so I do not repeat them. Hopefully, calling attention to this will ensure more careful editing before other people’s names go to print. “Spell checkers” don’t catch everything.—Marcia Yoder-Schrock, Donnellson, Iowa

Form panel for victims
Forgiveness is beautifully—almost poetically and correctly—analyzed, described and encouraged by the column from Patricia Shelly, moderator-elect of the Mennonite Church USA (Leadership, September). The editors appropriately placed the Shelly article before the news analysis on page 44, “Unfinished Business with John Howard Yoder.” May we look at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary faculty statement through forgiveness-colored glasses and not as an attempt to prosecute and control academia.

Hoping for forgiveness, however, may I not deny the possible feelings and emotions of some. If the difficulties are as extreme as alleged, let us focus on healing so that forgiveness may come for all.

Could not the church establish a panel to provide on an anonymous, voluntary basis help needed by women hurt in the past by men in leadership and hurting now? The panel could receive requests, study circumstances and recommend group or professional help to heal. Such a panel could be led by known experts such as David Augsburger or Howard Zehr and include an objective and independent church person, a mental health professional, women representation for sure, a lawyer/conciliator and a secular civil rights advocate. The church could provide the funding for recommended care.

All of us can work to eliminate sexism and its potential consequences from our hearts and actions.—Caryl M. Guth, Slidell, La.

Use subscript, not superscript
I appreciated Danile Martens’ column about loving the world God so loved (August). I would agree that Mennonites have much to offer. We do it in small ways, and I hope we can find greater ways to address our responsibility for creation.

I also respectfully request that when you use the chemical formula for a compound (as in cee-oh-2) for carbon dioxide, that you make the numeral a subscript, not a superscript. The math and chemistry teacher in me thanks you.—Elaine Kaufman, Mountain Lake, Minn.
God sighting at the school kit blitz

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.—2 Corinthians 5:18

Park View Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., reached a big goal on Sunday afternoon, Aug. 18. I wish I could have been there to help my home congregation pack 1,562 schools kits for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in a “blitz” (see page 35).

On one level, it was the result of tireless organizing by Dorothy Logan, who first promoted the idea of an MCC School Kit blitz five years ago. Each year since, on “blitz day,” Park View’s foyer and library area have been transformed into a production room for adults and children. People form assembly lines to fill colorful drawstring bags with the classroom basics—notebooks, pencils, a ruler and an eraser. The kit bags are constructed from fabrics donated to and stitched by members of Mennonite Women.

MCC sends them to any of 15 countries where children cannot afford the basics for school.

This year, the blitz took on an intercultural and international flavor when a number of guest workers helped assemble the kits. The guests—both adults and children—came from three different groups: the Islamic Association of the Shenandoah Valley, the Center for Interfaith Engagement at Eastern Mennonite University, and “Hilos en Comon” (Common Threads). The last group is made up of a Park View member, her neighbor and Hispanic women from the community who meet weekly to work with fabrics and share about their lives. On blitz day, the women displayed their stories through individual wall hangings mounted in the fellowship room.

The blitz began in midafternoon with a litany led by pastor Barbara Moyer Lehman and two guests. Cindy Byler, who with Daryl, her husband, served for six years as MCC Country Representatives for Iran, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine, spoke about the children who will be receiving the kits. Amir A. Krami, a visiting Muslim scholar from Iran, offered a prayer of dedication for the day’s project before the assembly began. An Iraqi refugee family sponsored by our church joined the assembly line with particular enthusiasm, knowing that some of the bags will likely be sent to Iraq. It took less than an hour to complete all the kits, and then the workers were served ice cream and peaches.

Because the blitz took such an unusual turn, I looked for ways God may have worked to bring it about. Organizer Dorothy Logan enthusiastically addressed this question. She told me about a man from the Islamic Association who took photos of their members working in the assembly line. He plans to post the photos on their website and newsletter. He told Dorothy, “We are small at the mosque; to do something like this, we need to ‘tag’ you.”

“It felt like a bundle of trust and bonding dropped straight down from heaven,” she said, “when I had just met him for the first time.”

Dorothy also saw God at work behind the animated conversations, intermingling and sharing of hospitality. Seeing Muslim and Hispanic women gather around quilt frames with women from Park View to knot blankets to be sent to MCC for displaced people and then eating together felt to her like a drama and/or dream with lines taken from parts of the Sermon on the Mount. It was “definitely a God happening, where God’s people worked together in sharing his love.”

It felt like a bundle of trust and bonding dropped straight down from heaven.—Dorothy Logan

From yet another perspective, what happened at Park View on Aug. 18 was a result of a patient cultivation of relationships by MCC between Mennonites and the people of Iraq and Iran for well over a decade. At a time when tensions between the United States and Muslim nations are high, this, too, points toward the hand of God, working behind the scenes to reconcile all things to himself through Christ.

Thanks be to God.


**From the Editor**

**Read it, study it, pray it, live it**

*Oh, how I love your law!*  
*It is my meditation all day long.*  
—Psalm 119:97

We come to the Bible, if we come at all, from different perspectives. But do we come with love? Do we let its perspective shape us—individually and as a church? What does shape us? What is our meditation all day long?

The title above comes from the Year of the Bible Network (yearofthebiblenetwork.org), a ministry of Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA that calls people to focus on the Scriptures for a year.

I attended a launch Aug. 1-2 for this focus (see our September issue, page 33) and came away energized, even inspired, by how important it is to let the Scriptures shape us.

**All kinds of influences shape us:** our genes, our families, our education, our socioeconomic level, where we live, the media we absorb. Why would we want an ancient text that includes murmurs, betrayals, subjection of women and inscrutable laws to shape us?

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective says, “We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit for instruction in salvation and training in righteousness.” As Helmut Harder writes, the Bible answers two basic questions: “What shall we believe? and How shall we live?”

But the Bible is a complex book, really a collection of books (66 in the Protestant version). It includes narrative, poetry, genealogy, parable, letters, apocalyptic, prophecy and more. It is not a simple list of rules to follow.

Instead, the Bible helps shape our understanding of God and how God is active in our world. It shows how we may participate in God’s story.

We gradually absorb this story as we read it. And as Malinda Berry writes in the book *A Faith Embracing All Creatures*: “When we read the Bible today, we have the chance to revive ancient teachings by bringing new insights to the table, namely, a renewed vision of God’s love and care for us as a community of creatures.”

As Loren Johns noted at the August event, our Anabaptist forebears emphasized studying the Bible together, something I don’t see many Mennonites doing. This acknowledges the presence of the Spirit among us and how limited our individual perspective is.

**Beyond reading and studying Scripture,** said Patricia Shelly at the same event, we are to ingest and digest God’s Word. The Psalmist loves God’s “torah” (“law” is an inaccurate translation), which means teaching or guidance and applies to all of life, not just so-called religious activities.

Praying the Scriptures is an ancient spiritual practice that involves entering imaginatively into a biblical story and encountering God there. Another helpful practice is “lectio divina,” which involves listening to a Scripture several times and noting which word or phrase speaks to us.

We live the Scripture by participating in God’s mission of bringing shalom (wholeness, health, reconciliation) to all of creation. We worship God the Creator, who is our ruler, and we proclaim that reign in word and deed.

As we read, study, pray and live the Bible, that magnificent, mysterious text shapes us through the Spirit into a people who reflect God’s love in and for the world. —gH