A shaper of Anabaptist faith

MARLENE HARDER BOGARD

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ON THE COVER: Photo by Ken Krehbiel for Mennonite Church USA
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

Why employers steal wages

I was thrilled to see Everett Thomas addressing wage theft in his September editorial. His article does a fine job of identifying the methods employers use to steal wages, including not paying overtime or the minimum wage and misclassifying employees as subcontractors.

It’s important to raise the awareness of this in our churches and among businesspeople. It’s equally important to understand why wage theft happens at all. Thomas rightly quotes Scripture to remind us of the immorality of stealing (the Bible’s abundance on this issue is apparent).

Why, then, do employers steal at all? From my five years of experience in working with victims of wage theft, here are several reasons:

1. Unfair businesses exert power and lobby influence to sway city councils and legislatures.

2. The labor climate in places like Texas is imbalanced toward employers; twisting “the right to work” into “workers have no rights.” Labor sectors with little or no union organizing are more susceptible to wage theft.

3. Lack of political will.

4. Silence of good citizens and the religious community, who have not made this issue their own by using their voices to raise consciousness.

5. Oftentimes, but not always, victims of wage theft are recent immigrants and people of color who may be disconnected from or fear the authorities. Employers use the fear of reprisals and false threats (i.e., “If you report this, I’ll report you to ICE.”) to ensure workers remain silent.

6. Many workers don’t know their rights, how employers steal wages, are afraid into silence by employers or don’t know who is or has access to help.

Thank you for raising our awareness on this and other issues that truly enable and call us to become what we long to be: an externally focused church. Peace.—Marty Troyer, Houston

Need theology of Christian Zionism

The Oct. 6 lesson in MennoMedia’s Adult Bible Study provided an opportunity to reflect on Christian Zionism, the ideology that supports control by the state of Israel of all the land “from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” and puts the secular government of that state at the center of God’s work in the world.

Four years ago, in “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth,” a group of Palestinian Christian leaders called upon the churches of the world to repent of “fundamentalist theological positions” that prop up the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. These leaders asked us “not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed on us.”

They asked for our support during their time of need and called on us “to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land.”

In response, and as reported to the delegates in Phoenix, the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board has encouraged congregations to discuss “the theology of Christian Zionism and its impact on Christian brothers and sisters” in Palestinian territories.

I’m grateful MennoMedia’s lesson prompted the discussion. Please help by publishing articles about “the theology of Christian Zionism” in The Mennonite—Berry Friesen, Lancaster, Pa.
**Article ignored collaboration**

While glad for an article on Ohio Conference’s first ever Youth Leadership Project (“Ohio Youth Participate in Leadership Program,” October), I was disappointed that it failed to report the origin of the idea or the full extent of the collaborative nature of the event. It emphasized the denominational portion of the event (Values-Based Leadership Program) while minimizing the conference and conference-based organizations that were centrally involved in the planning and implementation of this two-part event.

Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Ohio Conference’s coordinator of volunteers, originated the idea. She gathered a youth minister (Craig Strasbaugh, Kidron Mennonite) and Camp Luz personnel (Andrew Michaels and Lacey Holz) to give shape to the event, inviting Jeremy Kauffman and Bethany Shue Nussbaum to provide the input.

While we value partnering with other portions of the church, we do expect that partnership to be acknowledged in appropriate fashion. Only when all facets of the church are valued for their worth in the body of Christ, will the whole body thrive.—Tom Kauffman, conference minister, Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA

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**Need new website for dialogue**

Sara Dick’s “Tell Me a Story” (Grace and Truth, October) is helpful. I hope this theme can be pursued with greater depth as we consider what it means to “share the story.” It means much more than sharing our personal stories with each other.

Scholars have produced much on what it means for the church to “share the story,” and some are worried that the church has gotten too lackadaisical about sharing the story we’ve been given in the Bible. Scholar Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* (1988) challenges us with how every society in the world has been shaped by some story. Robert N. Bellah wrote about his concern that in America we were losing the power of the story given to us through the biblical word. In *Beyond Belief* (1970), he claims that “behind the civil religion at every point lie the biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, Sacrificial Death and Rebirth.”

Western District’s declaration of the Year of the Bible is crucial, recognizing that the church must reclaim its task of telling “the story” if there is to be any hope of the redemption of society and the world.—Melvin D. Schmidt, Hyattsville, Md.

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**‘Father’ is God’s name**

In his May column, Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, said Jesus taught his disciples to address God as a loving Father, and Ervin invites us also to address God as father.

The most frequently used name for God in the New Testament is “Father.” Father is a universally intimate family name. But “father” has not been an intimate name to all. Yet even to those God can be “a father to the fatherless,” says David in Psalm 68:5. Jesus was even more intimate by calling God “Abba Father” or “Papa Father” in Mark 14:36. I, too, called my father “Papa.” How insulting it would have been had I used a generic greeting like “hello, parent.” Try it, it just doesn’t fit.

Increasingly we are seeing family devastation when so many homes are absent a father. Homes need a father and mother to thrive. And they thrive best when both honor God.

The Apostle Paul usually opened his letters with, “Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” What an honor to be sons and daughters of God’s universal and loving family who are privileged to call God, “Father!”—Eugene K. Souder, Grottoes, Va.

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**LETTERS**

**Without our planning to do so, two themes emerged in this issue: dismantling racism in the church and care for creation. In fact, Timothy Seidel links the two in the News Analysis.**

“Our efforts at caring for creation can themselves become expressions of white privilege,” he says (page 44).

In his monthly column, Mennonite Church USA executive director Ervin Stutzman describes an organic food business that takes seriously its stewardship of the earth (page 55).

“I was surprised to learn,” Stutzman says, “that in the transportation of produce, the biggest carbon footprint of all is generally left by the customer driving to and from the store to buy groceries.”

Three articles in this issue also focus on dismantling racism in the church. On page 36, academician Wilma Bailey talks about white allies during her visit to the Mennonite offices in Elkhart, Ind. On page 43 we report on John Stoesz’ riding his recumbent tricycle through 40 counties to bring attention to “land justice” for the Dakota nation. The editorial revisits several claims about progress being made by underrepresented people of color in Mennonite Church USA (page 56).

“We have arrived at a critical mass,” Mennonite Church USA moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht says. “Can we now produce systemic changes?”

Mennonite Mission Network staff elected not to publish a mission month theme section this year. But Mission Network executive director Stanley Green addresses a current call for a moratorium on international missions (page 30).

On page 32 we announce the retirement of Everence president and CEO Larry D. Miller and the winners of this year’s Journey award from Everence.—*Editor*
Gerber named new youth leader for MC USA
ELKHART, Ind.—The Leadership Development team of Mennonite Church USA welcomes Rachel S. Gerber as the new half-time denominational minister for youth and young adults. She will begin this assignment Jan. 6, 2014, and work from her home in Bloomington, Ind.

In her new role, Gerber will provide resources for and facilitate connections between youth and young adult groups and ministries across the church. She will join the Youth Ministry Council, Mennonite Camping Association and Mennonite Church USA Convention Planning staff in working on churchwide priorities such as Christian formation and leadership development.

Gerber has a bachelor of arts degree in education from Goshen (Ind.) College and a master of divinity degree from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va. From 2000 to 2001, she served as interim minister of youth and young adults at College Mennonite Church in Goshen. From 2005 to 2008, she was minister of faith formation at First Mennonite Church in Denver, where she was ordained by Mountain States Mennonite Conference.

Gerber also served as summer program director at Amigo Centre, Sturgis, Mich.; a youth and young adult consultant at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.; worship planner/leader for the Mennonite convention at San José in 2007; and a youth curriculums writer for MennoMedia’s ‘Gather Round’ Sunday school curriculum. Her first book, Ordinary Miracles, a memoir on the ministry of parenthood, will be published by Herald Press next spring.

—Mennonite Church USA

Popular Hispanic program at risk
ELKHART, Ind.—A 25-year old program that has helped more than 1,000 people in its 42-credit-hour program faces financial problems so severe it may need to be scaled back significantly in January 2014.

The Hispanic Pastoral Leadership Education (HPLE) is sponsored by the Mennonite Education Agency but cannot continue without increased support, says MEA’s executive director, Ervin Stutzman.

“The impetus for this event comes support,” says Mennonite Church USA executive director Ervin Stutzman. “I have seen firsthand how this training has equipped Hispanic church leaders.”

MEA is sponsoring two events to celebrate HPLE’s 25-year anniversary and raise awareness and support: a benefit dinner Oct. 17 in Elkhart and a benefit dinner Nov. 22 in Newton.

Women’s theology conference set for February
ELKHART, Ind.—“All You Need Is Love: Honoring Diversity in Women’s Voices in Theology” is the theme of a conference to be held Feb. 20-22, 2014, and sponsored by the Women in Leadership Project (WLP) of Mennonite Church USA, along with Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

“The lioness is even more dangerous”
Mennonite women from across East Africa converged near Kisumu, Kenya, for a mission conference in early September. About 50 people participated in the conference, including women leaders from Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, two bishops, and several Eastern Mennonite Missions workers. One speaker told a story of a missionary wife in Turkey who led a revival meeting after the police had thrown her husband in jail. As she gave witness to the power of God, the police, horrified, said to each other, “We’ve locked up the lion, but the lioness is even more dangerous.” —EMM
from the gathering momentum of the WLP and is in keeping with the history of women’s conferences among Mennonites,” says Hilary J. Scarsella, WLP co-coordinator and associate for transformative peacemaking for Mennonite Church USA.

Scarsella notes that over the last couple of years, interest has grown in the idea of creating a space where Mennonite women could do theology together. About a year ago, staff from Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Central Committee U.S. met and decided to support this effort.

An intentionally intergenerational group consisting of pastors, activists, professors and employees of church agencies is leading the planning, so that the gathering will honor the various vocations from which theological work is done. According to the planning group, to “do theology” is to reflect on God in relation to our lives and can take many forms.

Registration opens Nov. 1. Go to www.mennoniteusa.org/women for information.—Mennonite Church USA

Program for youth helps seminary students confirm call to ministry

ELKHART, Ind.—As two Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary students led a program that encourages high school youth to consider ministry, their own call to ministry grew stronger.

Sara Erb and Eric Vandrick worked with !Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth when the participants were on campus July 9-24 for their group experience. !Explore gives high school youth opportunities to study their own theological questions, join in service with others, test gifts for ministry and consider their role in the church. As event pastors, Erb and Vandrick were hosts and guides through the 16 days the participants were together.

Erb had been a participant in !Explore, so her return to the program as a leader gave her a new opportunity to consider her own questions.

During the campus segment of the program, AMBS faculty work with the youth as they explore their theological questions, but the event pastors also teach some sessions. Vandrick focused his teaching on the importance of being connected to the area where each person lives and on caring for and valuing creation.—AMBS

U.S. Poet Laureate has maternal tie to Bluffton

BLUFFTON, Ohio—Fifty years after her mother, Gwendolyn Turnbough, finished her one year at then Bluffton College, Natasha Trethewey, the current Poet Laureate of the United States, spoke “On Poetry and History” in the Bluffton University’s annual Keeny Peace Lecture.

Telling Turnbough’s story as part of an Oct. 1 forum was Hannah Johnson, a junior from Goshen, Ind., and one of six students who assisted Perry Bush, a professor of history, in relating a mixed history of race and ethnicity at Bluffton.

From 1946 to 1976, Johnson said, Gulfport, Miss., was the site of a Mennonite Voluntary Service unit that built relationships between whites and blacks through involvement in community projects and religious programs.

In the late 1950s and early ’60s, she said, the General Conference Mennonite Church and its colleges—including Bluffton—made it possible for 10 African-American students from Gulfport to attend church colleges.

Two of those students came to Bluffton—Turnbough and Milton Lee, a 1960 graduate who went on to become a doctor in California.

She later married a white Canadian, Eric Trethewey, in Ohio— interracial marriages weren’t legal in many southern states—and settled in Gulfport, where they had Natasha.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning Native Guard is among the poetry collections by Trethewey, who was appointed U.S. Poet Laureate in June 2012.

Her visit is part of a year-long Bluffton focus on race and ethnicity in America.—Bluffton University

Bethel’s new student numbers up for 2013

NORTH NEWTON, Kan.—Bethel College enrollment is up slightly from fall 2012, but an even more important figure is the significantly higher number of new students (first-time freshmen and transfers).

“The class of 2017 is the largest class in recent memory,” says Todd Moore, vice president for admissions. “It has eclipsed the size of any class since the turn of the century.”

Bethel’s overall enrollment for fall 2013 is 482. First-time freshmen come from 18 states and number 123. The transfer students come from 15 states and number 74.

There are two additional students from Germany, from the Bergische Universität in Wuppertal, as part of the exchange program that has been in place since 1951.—Bethel College
The rule of love

My brother Jim was a fine human being. Full of joy and mischief. He was always up for an adventure. Everyone loved Jim, and he loved everyone. I miss him.

In 1989, at age 30, Jim ended his life. He’d been fighting depression for several years. He was on medication and in therapy. But none of that kept him alive.

After learning of Jim’s death, I flew to Texas to be with my family. My brother David collected me from the airport. He told me there was something I needed to know. My brother Jim was gay.

Of all us kids, Jim was the most devoutly Christian. In his final note, he told us that all he’d ever wanted to do was serve the Lord. He also said that it was impossible for him to do that because of who he was.

To be clear, what killed my brother was his depression, not his sexual orientation. As is true of the broader population, most gay folks are in good mental health. There is no inherent connection between Jim’s orientation and his depression. But there is a connection between his theology and his death.

The theology Jim and I grew up with was based on a literalistic reading of the Bible. There was no room for nuance or interpretation. The Bible said what it said. Looking back, I can fairly say that we worshiped the Bible. The Bible was our God. This meant that if the Bible appeared to condemn something or someone, then God condemned them, too.

Jim grew up being told by his church that he was damned. Not because he was especially unfaithful or had committed an unpardonable sin. He was damned because of who he was born to be. A gay man.

Jim internalized that theology and the feelings of condemnation and self-loathing it produced. Add that to a chronic depression and the result was lethal.

What troubles me most about our current debate about sexuality is how abstract we make it. We talk about it as if it were an issue or a theological debating point. Like the Pharisees, we talk as if the only thing at stake is our theological purity. In the process, we dehumanize our LGBT sisters and brothers. They are the others who must be purged if we are to remain good and righteous Christians.

My brother Jim was no abstraction. He was not an issue to be debated. He was a sweet, gentle and loving young man.

Denominational guidelines exist regarding the conduct of pastors. Those guidelines include consequences for pastors who bless Jesus-followers whose partners are of the same sex. I don’t expect that to change anytime soon.

But speaking as a pastor, if I am asked to choose between adhering to those guidelines and welcoming and blessing someone, anyone, seeking to follow Jesus, I will welcome and bless.

The story of Jesus reveals that the sin we religious folks are most prone to is that of placing the rule of law over the rule of love.
What and how we sing matters

I was almost 40 years old before I learned to clap my hands—in church, that is. I’m sure I learned “patty-cake” as an infant, and I had no problem applauding at sport events or concerts. But for much of my young adult life I found it almost impossible to participate when asked to clap along with the music of a worship service. I could use my body to shake hands, sing, stand or even kneel to pray. Clapping, however, seemed like an excessive display of public piety, best left to Pentecostals or those who wore their faith on their emotional sleeve. It didn’t help that I felt rhythmically challenged—keeping a beat while singing seemed to require more concentration than I was able to muster.

All that changed when our family spent a year in Costa Rica, where we worshipped every Sunday at the Comunidad Cristiana del Nuevo Pacto, a Mennonite church in the San José neighborhood of Moravia. Like many—perhaps most—Mennonite churches outside North America, the worship service at Nuevo Pacto began with a long period of singing, accompanied by guitars, drums and an electric organ. With the words projected onto a screen, the music started softly and reflectively, before slowly building to a crescendo of full-throated singing, vigorous clapping, raised hands and lots of physical movement. Sometimes the singing would dissolve into a loud chorus of spontaneous spoken prayers that included speaking in tongues and prophetic utterances.

After the first service, we returned home wide-eyed, wondering how we were going to survive. Yet the people at Nuevo Pacto were kind to us, the sermons were interesting and I was moved by the vulnerability people expressed in their sharing, confessions and prayers and by their evident love for each other. Over time, the opening hour of expressive music seemed less alienating, and I gradually joined in the clapping.

By the end of the year I was no more rhythmically adept, but I had shed most of my self-conscious inhibitions about praise music and found myself actually looking forward to that part of the service. Since then I have experienced similar forms of singing while worshipping in Amharic, Swahili, Indonesian and many other Spanish settings.

James R. Krabill, senior executive for global ministries at Mennonite Mission Network, has recently edited a remarkable collection of essays and resources called Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook (William Carey Library, 2013). Among the 150 contributions to this rich volume is an essay by Mary Oyer, longtime professor of music at Goshen (Ind.) College and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and perhaps the single most influential person in shaping the musical traditions of North American Mennonites during the second half of the 20th century. In the essay (see our June issue, page 22), Oyer describes her experience studying African music and arts during a sabbatical leave in 1972. Initially, the new tonalities, repetitive patterns and rhythmic intensity of the music she encountered in East Africa were alien to her training as a classical musician. Yet as she listened more carefully, participated in worship and learned to play several new instruments, Oyer experienced a kind of conversion—a new appreciation for the coherence and beauty of alternative forms of worship, especially among East African Mennonites who were creatively adapting hymns inherited from missionaries to align with their own cultural musical heritage.

In the decades since then, Mennonite hymnody in North America has been deeply enriched by her pioneering work. Along with Ken Naftziger and many others, Oyer has tirelessly encouraged Mennonite congregations in North America to expand their musical repertoire with songs from the global church. Thus, in 1992, Hymnal: A Worship Book incorporated several dozen such hymns, and we have come to learn many more in the subsequent hymnals, Sing the Journey and Sing the Story.

What and how we sing matters. Our theology is shaped at least as much by music as it is by sermons. Yet we sometimes forget that forms of worship are always living and dynamic. Indeed, the four-part harmony so central to the identity of many North American Mennonites today was once denounced as a prideful innovation.

I am grateful to our friends at Comunidad Cristiana del Nuevo Pacto who taught me that clapping could be a form of worship. And I am even more grateful to Mary Oyer, who spent a lifetime expanding our musical horizons to include new forms of worship beyond the familiar. Both are hints of the eschatological vision of St. John of a coming day when all nations, tribes and peoples will gather around the throne of God to lift their voices of praise (Revelation 7). Maranatha.

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

Our theology is shaped at least as much by music as it is by sermons.
Hundreds of close calls we never knew about

Back in the late 1970s and ’80s, I was involved in the antinuclear weapons movement. We tried to warn people about the danger of so many nuclear weapons—more than 50,000. One was too many, many of us felt, but we also tried to argue with such logic as, Why do we need to be able to blow up the world 50 times over? We also warned people about the risk of accidents and an inadvertent error leading to a suicidal nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Little did we know that we were actually understating the danger. Little did we know how many times we came dangerously close to a nuclear war.

Now, with the publication of Eric Schlosser’s book Command and Control (Penguin, 2013), we know much more about that history.

Louis Menand reviews the book in the Sept. 30 issue of The New Yorker. He includes summaries of some of the stories Scholler tells. For example, on Jan. 25, 1995, more than four years after the end of the Cold War, Russian leader Boris Yeltsin received news at 9:28 a.m. Moscow time that “a missile had been launched four minutes earlier from the vicinity of the Norwegian Sea, and that it appeared to be headed toward Moscow.” Yeltsin had the option of launching an immediate nuclear strike against targets around the world. He had 4,700 nuclear warheads ready to go.

It turned out the “missile” was a weather rocket launched from Norway to study the aurora borealis. “The Norwegians had, in fact, notified the Russians several weeks in advance of the launch,” Menand writes, but “whoever received the notice didn’t grasp the implications or simply forgot to forward it to military authorities.”

This was one of hundreds of incidents after 1945 when “accident, miscommunication, human error, mechanical malfunction or some combination of glitches nearly resulted in the detonation of nuclear weapons.”

Menand includes other stories. In 1958, “a B-47 bomber carrying a Mark 36 hydrogen bomb, one of the most powerful weapons in the American arsenal, caught fire while taxiing on a runway at an airbase in Morocco.” Fortunately, or luckily, and the word must be repeated many times, the explosives in the warhead did not detonate.

Only six weeks later, another Mark 6 landed in the back yard of a house in Mars Bluff, S.C. “It had fallen when a crewman had mistakenly grabbed the manual bomb-release lever.” Fortunately (there’s that word again), the nuclear core had not been inserted. The bomb left a 35-foot crater, killed a lot of chickens and sent family members to the hospital.

One study discovered that “between 1950 and 1968 at least 1,200 nuclear weapons had been involved in ‘significant’ accidents.” Even the bomb dropped on Nagasaki was a mile off target (and killed 40,000 people).

Perhaps the most harrowing incident occurred in 1980 at a Titan II missile silo in Arkansas, when a worker dropped a socket into the silo and left a hole in the missile.

The explosive force of a Titan II was three times the force of all the bombs dropped in World War II, including the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. If detonated, it would have wiped out most of the state of Arkansas.

Schlosser also discusses at length the insane strategy of the Cold War powers, which called for full-scale nuclear war in response to any attack. A general tells Schlosser that “we escaped the Cold War without a nuclear holocaust by some combination of skill, luck and divine intervention, and I suspect the latter in greatest proportion.” Indeed.

Today many smaller powers also have nuclear weapons, and the possibility of their use, by design or accident, is high.—Gordon Houser
**Al-Jazeera America unbiased**

A new study of cable news coverage of the Syria crisis found that Al-Jazeera America covered the fast-moving story of President Obama’s threat to strike the civil war-torn nation much the way its cable rivals did.

The report, released Sept. 16 by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, covers the period from Aug. 26, when Secretary of State John Kerry accused the Syrian government of using chemical weapons, until Aug. 31, when Obama said he would seek congressional approval for his plans to punish the forces of Syrian leader Bashar Assad.—Religion News Service

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**Cash royalties from fracking bring temptation to Amish**

In parts of Ohio and Pennsylvania, Amish communities are debating a new temptation—the large cash royalties that can come with the boom in oil and gas drilling.

In some ways, Amish attitudes toward hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, are as different from the outside world as their clothes and traditions. Instead of worries about air and water pollution, they’re focusing on people’s souls.

The stakes can be huge. While oil and gas wells have been common in parts of Ohio and Pennsylvania for more than 100 years, they typically didn’t lead to huge payments to landowners. But over the past few years, hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, has led to bigger wells that can generate hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of dollars in royalties for a property holder.

During fracking, large volumes of water, along with sand and hazardous chemicals, are injected underground to break rock apart and free the oil and gas.

The process has led to a boom in energy production in many states, but also concerns about air and water pollution.

Historian Donald B. Kraybill says that rules vary widely among Amish communities but that there is “considerable concern” among church leaders that drilling money could create huge income disparities within the same community.—Associated Press

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**Workers unite**

Henry Blodget, former equity research analyst, has had an antipathy toward unions. He has thought that unions led to a sense of entitlement, decreased corporate competitiveness and ultimately led to the transfer of jobs overseas. We now have a larger problem, Blodget says. While corporate profits are at an all-time high, wages as a percent of the economy are at an all-time low. Companies are so obsessed by short-term profits that they’re paying employees less and not investing in future growth, keeping the economy from recovery. Robust labor unions are needed again to increase workers’ compensation. Corporations won’t voluntarily do it.—Christian Century

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**First deaf Bible may come from Japan**

Translators in Japan are trying to create the world’s first complete sign-language Bible for the deaf. The ViBi project, which uses video-recorded Scriptures, has translated 13 of the Bible’s 66 books since starting in the early 1990s. The Japan Deaf Evangel Mission believes it can complete the remaining 53 books by 2023, given enough financial support.—Christianity Today

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**Israelis violate international law**

According to Defense for Children International, an independent nongovernmental organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, since the beginning of this year arrests of Palestinian children by the Israeli authorities have increased by 17 percent. Human rights groups say that particularly in Hebron violations of international law with regard to the detentions and arrest of children happen on a daily basis.—Christian Peacemaker Teams

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**Numbers to ponder**

- Percentage of discretionary spending devoted to defense in President Obama’s proposed 2014 budget: 57
- Percentage devoted to education: 6
- Rank of the United States, out of 29 developed countries, in overall child well-being: 26
- Rank of Greece: 25
- Rank of Lithuania: 27

—Yes! Magazine

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**Thank God the research didn’t find that novels increased tooth decay or blocked up your arteries.**

—Novelist Louise Erdrich on studies finding that after reading literary fiction people performed better on tests measuring empathy, social perception and emotional intelligence

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**The process has led to a boom in energy production in many states, but also concerns about air and water pollution.**

—Historian Donald B. Kraybill

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**M I S C E L L A N Y**

- **65** Percentage of Americans who support using drones to strike suspected terrorists on foreign soil.
- **25** Percentage of Americans who support using drones to strike suspected terrorists on domestic soil.
- **23** Percentage of Americans who support using drones to issue speeding tickets. —The Atlantic

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**First deaf Bible may come from Japan**

Translators in Japan are trying to create the world’s first complete sign-language Bible for the deaf. The ViBi project, which uses video-recorded Scriptures, has translated 13 of the Bible’s 66 books since starting in the early 1990s. The Japan Deaf Evangel Mission believes it can complete the remaining 53 books by 2023, given enough financial support.—Christianity Today

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**Israelis violate international law**

According to Defense for Children International, an independent nongovernmental organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, since the beginning of this year arrests of Palestinian children by the Israeli authorities have increased by 17 percent. Human rights groups say that particularly in Hebron violations of international law with regard to the detentions and arrest of children happen on a daily basis.—Christian Peacemaker Teams

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**Workers unite**

Henry Blodget, former equity research analyst, has had an antipathy toward unions. He has thought that unions led to a sense of entitlement, decreased corporate competitiveness and ultimately led to the transfer of jobs overseas. We now have a larger problem, Blodget says. While corporate profits are at an all-time high, wages as a percent of the economy are at an all-time low. Companies are so obsessed by short-term profits that they’re paying employees less and not investing in future growth, keeping the economy from recovery. Robust labor unions are needed again to increase workers’ compensation. Corporations won’t voluntarily do it.—Christian Century
Marlene Harder Bogard came to own her faith and now shares it with others.

A shaper of Anabaptist faith

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

While growing up in Mountain Lake, Minn., Marlene Harder Bogard, minister of Christian formation for Western District Conference (WDC), had everything a young person needed to form a strong Christian identity—a strong home, a strong church and strong role models. Except there was one catch: She had not yet owned the faith for herself.
So when her peers at Bethel Mennonite Church joined the catechism class leading to baptism, the 16-year-old declined to participate, she said during an August interview. As the class studied the Anabaptist faith, the fun-loving teenager who was often in the center of things was absent.

Instead, Marlene, the daughter of the late Clarence and Irma (Fast) Harder, visited other churches or sat alone at the lake on the outskirts of the small rural community settled by her German Mennonite ancestors. As she peered into the sunlight dancing off the lake, she reflected about what it meant to be a Christ follower in her own way, rather than joining the crowd.

In the midst of her dilemma, the Jesus movement of the 1970s came to town. She breathed in some of the air of the evangelical and free-spirited movement. And the soul of the vivacious teenager expanded with hope that she could connect with Christianity in ways she could name for herself.

“I stepped away from the pressure of the ‘cattle chute’ mentality,” said Marlene, who lives in rural Newton with her pastor husband, Michael Bogard. “I felt that just because one was 16 years old one should not be expected to take catechism. I felt that everyone’s faith journey was unique and different, and I wanted to own faith for myself rather simply being part of the group.”

But a fork in the road came the night of her junior prom. She was getting ready to go to a party when she had a conversation with a caring Youth for Christ leader that became a turnaround experience for her.

The teenager who once questioned the Anabaptist tenets of faith is the same woman who is now helping solidify those tenets through resources and education.
The next day was Sunday, when the members of catechism class were to be baptized,” Marlene said. “Because of the conversation the day before and my change of heart, I called up my pastor, the late Walter Gering, at 6 a.m. I told him my story and asked if I could be baptized with the class after all.”

He said yes. And Marlene, who for months had been watching the waves wash the shoreline, was sprinkled with the baptismal waters that symbolized rebirth. She stood before the 400-member congregation to give testimony to her commitment to Christ.

That moment was only one of many in the next several decades in which she was called publically to share faith with God’s people. Eventually, Marlene became part-time WDC Library director in 1990 and full-time WDC minister of Christian formation in 2002. She was ordained in April 2007.

Today, Marlene directs the WDC Library in North Newton, Kan., where she selects and manages the 12,000-book-and-DVD collection. The library provides faith-based resources for all ages across WDC, South Central Conference and Central Plains Mennonite Conference. She also provides workshops and seminars on topics ranging from engaging Christian formation in congregations to hospitality to developing policies for keeping children safe.

My mother had to find her livelihood and raise us by herself in the 1960s. That was not an easy task.—Marlene Harder Bogard

She plans WDC annual assemblies and convenes conferences such as the launch of WDC’s Year of the Bible (YOB). Mennonite Church USA has taken notice of her regional commitment to cutting-edge and creative resourcing with YOB. As a result, she is partnering with Terry Shue, Mennonite Church USA’s director of leadership development, to provide YOB materials for the denomination through the development of the website yearofthebiblenetwork.org.

Pathway to vocation has detours

Ironically, the teenager who once questioned the Anabaptist tenets of faith is the same woman who is now helping solidify those tenets through resources and education. But her path to her current vocation had its detours.

When she was 7, her father, Clarence, owner of the town’s Standard Oil Station, died suddenly, leaving Marlene, her mother, Irma, and her 10-year-old sister, Becky, to carry on.

“I experienced a very carefree childhood until my father died,” Marlene said. “That event set into motion a whole host of changes in my childhood and youth experience. My mother had to find her livelihood and raise us by herself in the 1960s. That was not an easy task.”

Marlene said her mother, who died at 95 in May, was a pillar of the church and community.

“I think about her every day and what she modeled for us,” Marlene said. “She had an entrepreneurial spirit and helped build a new public library and the community’s Heritage House Museum. I see myself trying to fit into some of the same roles she had, and I find a lot of satisfaction in following in her footsteps.”

Marlene’s parents were part of a mosaic of German Mennonites who immigrated to the United States from Russia in 1874 and helped establish Mountain Lake. A small extended family—in tandem with a nurturing church family—rooted Marlene in the love of God and others in a rural farming community (population 1,900).

“My faith formation as a child was very steady,” she said. “I loved to go to vacation Bible school and read the stories in the Herald Press booklets. We lived a half block from the church, and I went there all the time.”

Pathway to vocation has detours

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Marlene Bogard at the launch of Year of the Bible in August. Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson
“After I was baptized, I got involved in the Jesus movement,” she said. “I participated in parades where we shouted, ‘I am a fool for Jesus—whose fool are you?’ This involvement propelled me into a different mind-set, and for me it became all about being a Christian first, then a Mennonite.”

She went to Baptist-affiliated Bethel College in St. Paul, Minn., to set herself apart from her Mennonite upbringing, she said. But after a couple of years, she felt something was missing and realized it was the Anabaptist emphasis on peace and discipleship.

So after she and Mike met at Bethel and became engaged, they decided to live out an Anabaptist Mennonite expression of Christianity when they married after graduation in 1977. Soon after the wedding, they were hired as co-directors of Swan Lake Christian Camp in South Dakota.

In 1979, they moved to Elkhart, Ind., where Mike pursued seminary studies at what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. At that point, however, Marlene—with a college major in anthropology and linguistics—had no inkling of her own ministerial call.

“I never dreamed of going to seminary,” she said. “No one tapped me [on the shoulder] and said I should take a class, so I didn’t. I put Mike through school by working in a library and a greenhouse and began having babies. We had a tight budget and brought carrots to potluck, where we were so excited to have meat.”

Their first son, Ben, 32, was born in Goshen, Ind., and their other son, Josh, 30, was born in Freeman, S.D., where the couple moved in 1982 so that Mike could pursue several pastoral callings. Marlene became a librarian at Freeman Public Library and also worked at some other jobs.

A geographic change brings vocation change

In 1990, they moved to Newton, Kan., when Mike became WDC youth pastor. Marlene became part-time WDC Library director. The shoulder tapping began when Dorothy Nickel Friesen became WDC conference minister in 2002. Marlene’s role during Friesen’s tenure (through 2010) expanded into what eventually was titled minister of Christian formation. During this decade, Marlene earned a master’s degree in Christian ministry and was ordained.

“Even though we both grew up in Mountain Lake, she was off my radar until I moved to Kansas to become WDC conference minister,” Friesen said during a Sept. 16 interview. “It didn’t take me long to see what a treasure I had. I saw a multitude of gifts in her that were not being used, and those were the gifts I felt the church was calling for. In Marlene, we already had that person in place. “So we shifted her role into one of teaching and providing workshops, seminars and conferences. Rather than hoping people would come to the library to use our resources, Marlene took those resources into the congregations.”

WDC’s Resource Commission helps direct Marlene in her role. In an early September interview, Jeff Koller, commission chair, said Marlene’s joyful spirit and people skills enhance her many other gifts.

“Marlene knows how to interject fun at appropriate times but is able to flip instantly into a more serious mode when the deeper issues call for that,” he said. “She also helps everyone else to have a good time by interjecting humor and fun into any setting.

“And when there is controversy, she is usually able, without compromising her own beliefs, to stay neutral and respectful and to relate with everyone.”

Nurturing the church of today

Part of what brings the most joy to Marlene is her interaction with children and younger people, she said. That includes conducting library story hour for preschoolers, teaching youth ministry classes at Bethel College in North Newton, Kan., engaging young adults in the YOB and mentoring developing leaders.

“There is no need to be fearful about the church’s future,” she said. “As I listen to young adults talk about their faith and their questions, I hear how eager they are to become something more for God. We often say that young adults are the future of the church. They are the church right now.”
She added: “When we isolate ourselves from other generations, we fall short of what God intended. When we engage in these multigenerational relationships, we learn not only about history but also what may be our future. We learn about our current realities and using faith to maneuver those realities.”

One of Marlene’s mentees was Katherine Goerzen, who was ordained in October 2011 and is associate pastor at Grace Hill Mennonite Church near Whitewater, Kan.

“I loved Marlene’s energy and the joy that radiated from her,” Goerzen said during an early September interview. “It was empowering for me to relate to her and to see how gifted women leaders like her bring authority to their position.

“And now, since I live a block away from the Resource Library, I weekly bring my 17-month-old daughter to check out books. Marlene often gets down on the floor to play with her.”

**Bogard’s “bucket list” is long**

Marlene said these interactions are double gifts for her, given the geographical distance that lies between her and her sons, who live in the Pacific Northwest. Social networks and smart phones help them stay connected, but face-to-face conversations happen only a couple times each year. Soon the Bogards expect to hold their first grandchild, born to their son, Ben, and his wife, Jen.

The addition of a new generation sparks Marlene’s passion for preserving family bonds.

“I dream of writing family history tales for my children and grandchildren,” she said. “As our children move out of our communities, faith and family and history are more difficult to transfer when you don’t have those weekly come-over-for-soup moments.”

The challenges of fostering family bonds from afar figure deeply into her future, as do other challenges. At 58, Marlene said she is running out of time to do all the things she cares about. Her list is long.

“I want to help our denomination let go of things it once held dear in order that something new can emerge,” she said. “Sometimes those things exist side by side, but more often than not, we have to choose between letting go and moving forward. I see that as a real dilemma for the Mennonite church right now.

“I want to find more time to dream and reflect and have silence like I did on those Sunday mornings at the lake when I was 16. My mind gets so cluttered with media and noise and opportunities that it is hard to hear God’s voice.”

Marlene said that even though she is not a “Jesus freak” anymore, she wants to better fulfill her desire to follow Jesus in lifestyle choices.

“Mike and I want our lifestyle to represent our care for each other and our care for the Earth,” she said. This includes nurturing their five acres of land with its garden and fruit trees.

It also means harvesting more of the blessings of working with people. “I become alive when I am with people, and I count it a blessing to have gotten to know hundreds of people through the years,” she said. “What is most important to me is that I have been a positive influence in someone’s life and have encouraged someone. I really feel like my job is the best calling I could have.”

That is, until it comes time for her second career.

The former Campfire Girl who swam in cold lakes said she dreams of becoming a park ranger.

“That would allow me to be immersed with people in nature,” she said. “I could be a storyteller, a guide, a nurturer, a caretaker. I am all those things now, but I am stuck in an office without a window. I get really cranky when I don’t get my green fix.”

Laurie Oswald Robinson is a free-lance writer in Newton, Kan., and the author of Forever Family.

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From left: Ben Bogard and wife, Jennifer Sonntag, Marlene, Mike and son Josh.

Photo provided
Carolyn Holderread Heggen has served on the boards of Hesston (Kan.) College, Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Women. At Albuquerque (N.M.) Mennonite Church she was a pastoral elder. At Albany (Ore.) Mennonite Church she was congregational chair and discernment minister. She did writing and teaching for the church on issues of pastoral boundaries and prevention of and healing from sexual abuse and domestic violence. She helped design the Sister Care program and manual and co-led these workshops here and internationally.

Did you have a woman leader as mentor? How did she help you?
Lois Yake Kenagy took special interest in me when I was a young adult. Although we didn’t call it a mentoring relationship then, that is the role she has played in my life. At a time when the church was debating the appropriateness of women being pastors or teaching men, Lois urged me to get a Ph.D. in theology “because we need women helping us interpret the Bible.” Her encouragement helped me believe I had something to offer the church and a voice that needed to be heard.

Are you mentoring a young woman who may be a church leader?
There are several young women in the United States and abroad with whom I have a mentoring relationship.

If so, how is her experience the same/different from yours?
Young Mennonite women in North America today have more encouragement and opportunity to use their leadership gifts in the church, I find. They also have more role models of women ministers and leaders of our church institutions. However, they still have to discern their gifts and follow their call amid the sometimes confusing dictates of biblical injunctions and diverse understandings of appropriate roles for Christian women and family responsibilities.

What impediments have you faced in becoming a leader?
When called to positions of leadership that would have required a move for our family, there were subtle and not so subtle messages to me that it would be inappropriate and unbiblical to ask my husband to give up his job so that I could follow the call of God and the church. One church leader and friend said, “Giving up what I know you so much want to do and at which you would be so effective may be the most important lesson you ever give the church on gender relations.”

When you face challenges as leader, what encourages you?
I have a wise and loving group of friends who sustain me in times of despair, surround me with prayer and practical expressions of love in times of need and have helped me improvise a meaningful life, often around the “edges” of the church. I often reread the Gospels and focus on the way Jesus treated women, children and others without social power or respect. His tender regard and loving compassion for them re-energizes me and reminds me that healing work is godly work.—Carolyn Holderread Heggen

Jesus’ tender regard and loving compassion for women, children and others without social power or respect re-energizes me and reminds me that healing work is godly work.—Carolyn Holderread Heggen
A reflection on Mark 12:38-44

We are the mission

by Barry C. Bartel

I am a lawyer, or what’s called in the Bible one of the “teachers of the law.” Law may be the only profession for which it is socially acceptable for the punch line of the joke to be some form of, “I wish you were dead.” Could it be that Mark 12:38-44 is the origin of making lawyer jokes socially acceptable?
Most Bible translations label verses 38-40 something like, “Warning Against the Teachers of the Law.” And what a warning it is! In fact, this passage and the same story in Luke 20 are the only times in the Bible where Jesus directly proclaims that people will be punished.

Verses 41-44 are often labelled something like, “The Widow’s Offering.” This is significant because the widow gives her last two coins. But all seven of these verses do go together as one passage. If someone puts two coins in our offering at church, none of us knows if those are their last two coins. In fact, we will assume they are not their last two coins.

So how did Jesus and the others know that the widow had put her last two coins in the offering? They already knew something about this woman. She was not a stranger but was well known. She was one of the widows described in the previous verses, whose house the teachers of the law had “devoured.”

By giving those last two coins, this widow exposed the injustice of what the teachers of the law had done.

The widow’s offering underscores the first teaching of this passage: Actions matter. The teachers of the law acted in a way that was accepted in their culture but unacceptable to Jesus. They had power and used it to take the widow’s house and almost everything the widow owned. Jesus said that because of their actions, they deserved to be punished.

But the teachers of the law did not take those last two coins. The widow voluntarily placed them in the treasury. Jesus seems to praise the widow for giving out of her poverty. It seems Jesus is accepting her poverty. We might describe the widow as “resilient.”

Let me link this to my experience in Haiti. The Haitian people have experienced enormous hardship, but they have incredible pride. Africans were brought to Haiti as slaves, and they gained their freedom and independence in 1804, even before slavery was abolished in the United States. But generations of dictators, poverty and hurricanes made it seem even more cruel when the earthquake in January 2010 killed tens of thousands of people. Many Haitians have been reduced often to their last two coins, as was the widow in our story. Yet even through it all, the Haitian people are strong. I’ve been there twice since the earthquake. I know, and many people acknowledge it. Haitians are incredibly resilient.

So it struck me when a friend of mine whose work focuses on Haiti sent me a quote from a Haitian man who had grown tired of being called “resilient.” Ilio Durandis wrote this in an email to my friend shortly after the...
January 2010 earthquake: “There is nothing sexy about being a resilient people. On the contrary, everything about resiliency connotes misery, exploitation, acceptance, victimization and so on. After 206 years of independence, we would hope to have become a people of progress, determination, success. We must become tired of being resilient. … I do not wish to live my whole life being resilient.”

Couldn’t you see that widow who gave her last two coins saying the same thing? If she could speak this morning, wouldn’t she say, “I don’t want to be known for being resilient. I don’t want to be known for being generous out of my poverty, as though my poverty was acceptable. What I did was much more powerful,” the widow might say.

When the cloak means something, taking it off to wash another’s feet is more significant.

Until she gave those two coins, the actions of the teachers of the law were accepted. By giving those last two coins, this widow exposed the injustice of what the teachers of the law had done. That is why all seven of these verses must be read together.

Let’s put the widow’s offering in a broader context. We are all familiar with the passage in Matthew 5:38-42 (NIV):

You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

American theologian Walter Wink provides the best analysis of these verses and shows how Jesus is not suggesting weakness but strength.

Why does Jesus counsel people to turn the other cheek? Because this action robs the other of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, “Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me.”

Likewise, Walter Wink analyzes how handing over your coat or going the second mile transcends the ability of the oppressor to humiliate.

This widow has taken this teaching to a whole new level. The teachers of the law took her house and everything she owned except two coins. They liked to have “the most important seats in the synagogues” and probably watched as people gave their offerings. They had humiliated many, but this widow transcended their ability to humiliate her. She did more than turn the other cheek; she did more than give her coat; she did more than go the second mile. She exposed the injustice of what the teachers of the law had done when she gave her last two coins. And everyone knew it.

Actions matter. Jesus could have described what the teachers of the law did and condemned them without focusing on their attitude. But most of the passage focused on their arrogance. They wore long, flowing robes, liked to be greeted with respect and liked the most important seats at the synagogue and places of honor at banquets. Other passages also talk about robes or cloaks or gowns. The Greek word used in Mark 12 is “stole.” That is the origin of our English word “stole,” which can mean a long robe. “Stole” in English can also be a long band worn traditionally around the neck by bishops and priests and over the left shoulder by deacons. They may look something like the purple hood I wear with an academic robe to represent my law degree.

What can you do when you are dressed like this? You can hope you won’t need to go to the bathroom. You can’t bend over to tie your shoe. You can’t get your keys out of your pocket. Now imagine several rows of people dressed like this, and imagine their acrobatics when a cell phone goes off in the middle of a prayer. Wearing such a robe, you stand out, and it sets you apart in a group where others aren’t dressed the same. Whenever I had to wear this as president [of Bethel College in North Newton, Kan.], I took it off as soon as I could. But the teachers of the law in Mark 12 liked the status of wearing their robes around the synagogue.

The teachers of the law were not the only people who wore robes then. Jesus also wore one. Remember how the woman got close to Jesus to touch his robe because she thought that would heal her? When Jesus noticed, he made it clear that the robe itself did not have power but told the woman her faith had healed her (Mark 5:24-34).

That robe in Mark 5 was not the ceremonial “stole” the teachers of the law wore in Mark 12. There the Greek word is “himation.” It was probably more of a coat or cloak.
Do you remember another time Jesus wore this kind of coat? In John 13, Jesus washes his disciples’ feet. But before he could wash the disciples’ feet, he took off his outer clothing.

In New Testament times, people bathed before going to a banquet or dinner, such as for the evening meal described in John 13. Those arriving at the meal had on their outer clothing, and it was typical for the servant in the house to wash their feet when they arrived. That was the part of the body that was no longer clean after walking through the dusty streets to the dinner.

In that context it was significant that Jesus had to take off his cloak; had he been the servant of the house he would not have had a cloak on. When the cloak means something, taking it off to wash another’s feet is more significant. In Mark 12, the teachers of the law did not take off their robes. They enjoyed wearing them, walking around the marketplaces, being greeted with respect and seated at the places of honor at banquets. They thought they were showing what it meant to love God.

In John 13, however, Jesus shows what it means to love God and your neighbor. He shows that it requires something of each person. We witnessed that in our overseas assignments in Haiti and Bolivia. Education and strong résumés can create a sense of arrogance and separation, like wearing a ceremonial robe. I’ve seen it. For North Americans working in another country, education and strong résumés can create a sense of knowing the answers and being prepared to provide them or even impose them. That’s why it was always so refreshing to see a highly skilled, highly educated person enter a community with a sense of reverence for the people there. Entering a community with a commitment to listen and learn and show respect for local people did not diminish the skill and education of the outsider. Rather, it created an environment in which dignity and progress could join hands, where collaboration prevailed over polarities between us and them. It demonstrated taking off the robe or cloak to serve others.

There is another component of the cloak that is equally important. It is possible to wash another’s feet for altruistic reasons but without a sense of reverence. It is possible to serve your neighbor with selfish motivations. But washing another’s feet in response to Jesus’ call to love both God and your neighbor makes it an act of worship.

Turning back to the earthquake in January 2010, a Canadian friend of mine was in Haiti as the earth shook and the structures collapsed and the sky turned dark. She wrote of that experience:

“On the Friday afternoon before leaving Haiti, I asked to be driven downtown. I wanted to chronicle these images of Haiti. I wanted them to be part of my being. I wanted never to forget these days of my life. One image significantly affecting was that of a cross … the sole remnant of what was once a grand church. Throughout my 40 years (and four days) in Haiti, I have had many opportunities to meet people who come to Haiti who believe that they have been called to this mission … to save and fix and heal Haiti. We come … they say, to bring love and happiness. We come because we are blessed. Haiti is poor. Haiti needs us. However, time after time I have heard testimony as to how Haiti has in turn loved, healed, redeemed.

Washing another’s feet in response to Jesus’ call to love both God and your neighbor makes it an act of worship.

“Perhaps it is that Haiti is not the mission? Perhaps it is we who are the mission? Perhaps it is here, in this poor, devastated corner of the world that Christ lives and calls us to be forgiven? Perhaps that lonely naked and holy icon of the thorn-crowned Christ amid the rubble is the prophetic sign? Perhaps on that fateful day of Jan. 12 we became witness to the supreme sacrifice of Haiti? I pray that in the months and years to come, that it may not signify its last frontier of loss … that of our humanity.”

For that is what the teachers of the law had lost—their humanity. That is what we lose if we cling to our flowing robes, our status, and simply admire the resiliency of those less fortunate. May we always keep actions and attitude together, proclaiming by our lives that our faith in God cannot be separated from our service of others.

Barry C. Bartel is a member of Glennon Heights Mennonite Church, Lakewood, Colo., where he gave this sermon on Mission Sunday in November 2012.
How praying for the nation’s ‘enemies’ led to a loving connection years later

Through our prayers God weaves a web that connects us to others in surprising ways. Much of the time this web is invisible, but once in awhile we catch surprising glimpses of it. My Aunt Velma told me a story about such a glimpse, a story that drew me into new connections as well.

This photo of the author’s Aunt Velma Yoder was taken in March 1941, when she was 7 years and 9 months old. Photo provided
It was December 1941 in an Iowa farmhouse. Supper was over. Papa and Mama pulled up chairs to sit, one on either side of the radio, listening intently. Never did they sit there like this after supper. There were dishes to wash, food to put away, chores to complete. But not tonight. Ignoring the waiting work, they sat there. Both were crying. Velma knew something was wrong. She was not sure what, but her parents’ tears kept her in the room. Japanese planes had attacked American ships at Pearl Harbor, and President Roosevelt had declared war on Japan. Papa and Mama explained that war was terrible—many people would be killed, many more injured, homes and belongings would be destroyed.

During the following days the patriotic fervor at school stood in sharp contrast to Velma’s experience at home. Her schoolmates said that everyone should go home and look at their toys to see if any were made in Japan. If so, they should take them outside and smash them with a hammer on the sidewalk. Confused, Velma reported this to Mama.

“No, Velma,” Mama said in her quiet, firm way, “that’s not what we should do. We need to pray for the people of Japan.” Translating Mama’s response into her 8-year-old perspective, Velma decided to pray for the boys and girls of Japan. They were the ones with whom she could most closely identify. She tried to imagine what war would be like for them. She thought of her most valued possession, her dearly beloved doll. How devastating it would be to lose her. She tried to imagine it smashed to bits in the remains of a bombed-out house. It was hard to fathom such a loss.

So she prayed for the boys and girls of Japan. Every night she prayed for these children who lived half a world away, who looked different from her and spoke a language she couldn’t understand.

On the other side of the world, in Tokyo, lived Hiroshi, also 8. At first the war meant food lines and bomb shelters, but as the war progressed, the danger of bombing increased. Hiroshi’s family, except for his father, who continued his job, and his oldest sister, who was required to work in a war factory, went to stay with relatives in Akkeshi, Hokkaido. After Operation Meetinghouse, a massive bombing raid in March 1945 that destroyed much of Tokyo, Hiroshi’s father and sister decided to join the rest of the family in Hokkaido. They packed their belongings and took them to a train station for shipping, but that night another bombing raid destroyed both their house and the station. Everything they owned was gone. It took them days to get a train to Hokkaido to join their anxious family.

The family struggled in Hokkaido. Among other things, they were not used to bitterly cold winters. Hiroshi had to work after school, going to a lumberyard to gather shavings, chips and bark for fuel. He could not understand why life had to be so difficult when what he really wanted was to play like his friends. The winter after the war was even worse. The family was forced to search through garbage for potato peels and other food scraps. Hiroshi was so unhappy he thought of throwing himself off a cliff into the frigid sea.

The family moved to Obihiro. When Hiroshi was 18, he learned of an American missionary living there. He gathered up his anger-driven courage and went to a Sunday service, intending to let this American know how angry he was. However, the morning did not go as he planned. Instead of unburdening his anger he found himself listening. The missionary’s halting Japanese made it difficult for him to understand the sermon and prayers, but a Japanese person read from

Every night she prayed for these children who lived half a world away, who looked different from her and spoke a language she couldn’t understand.
Matthew 5, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” He heard those words clearly. They caught his attention forcefully and followed him home.

**Over the next months, surprise dawned** slowly for Hiroshi as he learned that this American, Carl Beck, and the other Mennonite missionaries did not hate him but were genuinely sorry for the devastation their country had caused in Japan. He was amazed there were Americans who not only believed in nonviolence but actually dedicated their lives to creating peace. While the missionaries introduced him to a new way of thinking about love and forgiveness, it was God’s loving welcome lived out by them that slowly began to dissolve the pain and anger that had shaped his growing up.

Back in Iowa, Velma married her high school sweetheart and started a family. She delighted in housekeeping and mothering and faithfully participated in her church community. She lived generously, always willing to help others. In 1962, she and Dean, her husband, moved to Missouri to support a small Mennonite congregation there.

Hiroshi became a Christian and attended Tokyo Christian College to train as a pastor. He returned to serve in the Obihiro church, where he met his wife, pastored the Asahikawa church, served as a missionary in Ecuador at radio station HCJB and then returned to Japan, where he served as pastor of the Nakashibetsu Mennonite Church until his retirement. In 1991, his son Kenji came to the United States to study at Hesston (Kan.) College.

Velma’s children grew up and married. Grandchildren came. The firstborn, Heather, completed high school and enrolled at Hesston College. When she came home with her Japanese boyfriend, Velma welcomed him warmly, as she did all newcomers. When Heather and Kenji married, her world expanded to include a Japanese family.

Kenji’s father came to Missouri to visit his son. One Sunday he spoke at church, telling about his difficult childhood and painful wartime experiences. He also told about meeting the Mennonite missionaries who introduced him to Christianity and how learning to know Christ had transformed his anger into love.

Velma was there. As she listened to Hiroshi’s story, she was startled to realize that they were the same age. His war experience triggered her memory of listening to the radio with her parents that somber, long-ago evening and her mother’s alternative response to the Japanese “enemies.” She remembered her prayers for the Japanese children. Chills ran up and down her spine. Standing here before her was one of the children for whom she had prayed all those years ago. Those prayers were a faint memory. She had never given thought to seeing any tangible results, certainly none that would connect with her life. Yet here in front of her stood Hiroshi, his life a testament to God’s power to heal and change. Without knowing him, she had prayed for him during some of the most difficult experiences of his life, and now he was here, not a nameless stranger but a member of her family.

She stood up, spine still tingling, and told her part of the story.

**Prayer is a mystery.** We often do not know what difference our individual prayers make. When they are about the specifics of our lives, we look for answers, but when our prayers are general we often let them go without specific expectation. Yet we pray, trusting that our prayers will make a difference.

Hiroshi might have met the Mennonite missionaries, and his son might have married Velma’s granddaughter even if she had never prayed for the “boys and girls of Japan.” On the other hand, these things might not have happened. Ultimately, I can’t determine cause and effect, but neither can I let this story go with a shrug; it is too powerful.

Sir William Temple observed, “When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don’t, they don’t.” I think he would see a connection between Velma’s prayer and the miracle of healing from the wounds of war that touched not only Hiroshi but many lives on several continents.

Our prayers are part of a vast web of human longing woven together by God’s amazing power. Velma, Hiroshi and their families are enveloped in this web that has brought life-changing gifts to their lives. That day in a small church in Missouri, the Iowa farm girl and the Japanese city boy touched a common strand of that invisible web and gave thanks for God’s astounding providence that connected them in such an amazing, “coincidental” way.

**Kathleen Weaver Kurtz** is a retired pastoral counselor ordained by the Virginia Mennonite Conference. She attends Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren.

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**We often do not know what difference our individual prayers make.**
Missions and phone bills

On how giving to missions is like paying your phone bill

by Wes Bergen

In the past few months, Deb, my wife, and I have been in the process of fund-raising. We are planning to go to Ghana
to work at the Good News Theological College and Seminary (gntcs.org). We are working under Mennonite Mission Network as part of the larger mission effort of the Mennonite church. Mission Network requires that money for our work is being raised by our Ministry Support Team, using the contacts of the team while reaching out to the larger church. So my interest in fund-raising has a specific goal.

In thinking about a metaphor and model for giving to missions, I have been drawn to the parallel between missions giving and our phone bill. Giving to missions should be more like the phone bill than like the electric bill or the cable bill. Here is why.

Everywhere the church does is part of its mission, and many things that happen outside the church are also part of the mission of the church.

The electric bill is part of our lives. I realize that some readers of The Mennonite live without electricity or without connection to commercial power companies, but for most of us, the electric bill is just part of life. We may wonder how to spend less on electricity, but we seldom think about whether to continue paying. We also do not need to choose between various power companies or choose the source of our electricity. This means that paying the electric bill is a fairly mindless process. It comes, we wince and then we pay.

Giving to missions is not and should not be like this. Missions giving should not be automatic or mindless. It is not best done resentfully or with a mind-set of trying to pay less. We can be aware of the many ways that missions is and can be done, then give thoughtfully and prayerfully. It is also not helpful to start with the question, How can we spend less on missions? So in many ways, giving to missions is not like paying the electric bill.

Giving to missions is also not like paying the cable television bill. Cable television has always been an option. No one needs cable. Many Mennonite readers are proud of their unwillingness to pay a cable bill, especially those who have no television. So cable is a luxury, benefits no one besides oneself or those in one’s household and is mostly about individual entertainment.

Obviously, giving to missions should not be like this. While it is an option, it is a positive one. The question is not, Will I spend money for this personal luxury? but instead is, Will I contribute to this good work? Yes, you can live without giving to missions, but less mission work will happen without your help. It can be a natural and joyful response to being part of the body of Christ rather than something we do for our personal entertainment.

Giving to missions is more like paying the phone bill. First, phones are everywhere and are just assumed by almost everyone. More people have phones than are connected to the electric grid. I know someone whose power was cut off, and she managed for a month or two until she could pay her bill. But when her phone got cut off, she acquired another one within a few days. This should be our approach to giving to mis-
The church has a mission. In fact, the church is its mission. Without a mission, the church is just a bunch of people getting together. Everything the church does is part of its mission, and many things that happen outside the church are also part of the mission of the church. Not giving to missions should be just as unimaginable as not having access to a phone, even more so.

This leads naturally to the next parallel between the phone bill and missions giving. There are many phone companies vying for your business. Each of these companies has various options and plans from which to choose. They all want to lock you into a long-term contract for regular contributions, but other companies are always trying to persuade you to change your mind. So you have ongoing commitments and ongoing decisions, trying to decide what is the best use for your money.

Giving to missions can also be like this. If I am serious about wanting you to contribute to our work in Ghana, I need to be able to explain to you why you should prefer to contribute to this mission rather than the hundreds of other organizations that are also doing God’s work. There are needy people in your town; why send money to Ghana? Your church budget could likely use the money, as well as hundreds of other organizations doing good and important work.

In some ways, I would prefer not to explain this over and over. I want to teach in Ghana rather than spend hours explaining to people what I do and how they can support it. I am good at teaching and bad at fund-raising. Why would I want to spend time doing something I’m bad at?

Yet I do need to be held accountable. You need to know that I am not just sitting in Ghana eating chocolate and relaxing on the beach. You have the right to know that this is not a church-funded vacation or an ego-driven attempt to “convert the poor heathen.” So, like the phone company, I need to be able to explain to you why this particular mission is worth your support.

Another parallel between missions giving and the phone bill is that both cost big money. As a family with multiple phones, our phone bill is much larger than any other utility bill. This is “normal” to the millennial generation but is shocking to those of us who are older. We used to spend $25 per month on our one phone. This was what most people paid, regardless of how many people were in the family. There was one phone company, and it was all really simple and straightforward.

The same was true of missions giving. Missions used to be done by missionaries sent out by the church who were paid out of the central budget of the larger church. We gave regularly to the church budget, and this was distributed by them to the various workers worldwide. It was also relatively inexpensive, as workers could live in Asia or Africa for a fraction of the cost of life in North America. Like the phone bill, $25 per month went a long way.

Today none of these things is true. Missions are done by a whole variety of agencies and individuals through many church and parachurch agencies. Even in Mennonite Church USA, there is no central budget for mission work. The price of sending workers is also much higher than most people expect. That $25 goes no farther in mission work than it does paying a cell phone bill for multiple people. We can bemoan all these changes, but they are real nonetheless.

Decide what percentage of your phone bill you want to give to missions, then do it on the same schedule.

For these and other reasons, mission work is more like the phone bill than it is like other utility bills. In response, I want to challenge you to connect the two things directly. Decide what percentage of your phone bill you want to give to missions, then do it on the same schedule. Further, decide what mission work best reflects your values, then contribute to this. Review these decisions regularly, whenever you review your phone plan.

Of course, the next step is even more important. Care. Care about and for the various missions of the church. Care can be done in various ways. Pray, ask questions, send notes, send cookies, talk to friends about the good things the church is doing. If people care, the money will take care of itself. If people care, the work will get done. Caring makes it your mission, part of what God is doing in and through you. Your phone company doesn’t want to be loved and cared for, but mission workers do. Join us in caring for the worldwide people of God.

Wes Bergen is a member of New Creation Fellowship Church in Newton, Kan. He and Deb blog at bergenbeats.wordpress.com.
It is still dark outside when I make my way down the block, keenly aware of the January frost that bites with every step. I arrive just after Hilary, dropped off by her husband on his way to work. Julia and Jennifer have the warmest commute: They only need to make their way from bedrooms to living room (sometimes basking in the luxury of pajamas).

After defrosting and a spate of heartfelt greetings, I sit in my usual spot while someone lights a candle and we divvy up who will read the prayers and who the Psalms.

Just as the first hints of morning slip through the blinds, we quiet and begin.

*Awake, my soul.*

*Awake, O harp and lyre.*

*I will awaken the dawn.*

We’ve been gathering like this, with varying layers of blankets and space heaters greeting us in the morning, since mid-fall. I had returned from a summer with the contemplative and ecumenical Sisters of Grandchamp, where I’d been formed in contemplative prayer, and before that had flirted with morning prayers in a few ways. Missing the rhythm and regularity of monastery life, I was delighted when Julia approached me and asked if I might have interest in gathering to pray in the mornings and then carpooling to Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Ekhart, Ind., together.

**On one level it was as much a practical** suggestion as a spiritual one. Too often we ended up...
following each other to school, which felt, at best, wasteful and, at worst, pretty stupid, since we lived a half-block from each other. The idea of forming a women’s morning prayer group had even more practical implications as we proposed it to Hilary, who needed a way to get to work at the Mennonite Church USA offices next door to our seminary. At least one of us (as yet unnamed) welcomed the motivation to stop sleeping in too often.

So we gathered, knowing that beyond the practical, there would indeed be certain spiritual grace, connection with God and with each other. In four months of regular meeting, this grace has emerged in varied ways, sometimes more clearly than others. Unquestionably, group morning prayer has been as much about cultivating the discipline of seeing each other daily—checking in, being authentic, griping if need be or sharing ecstatically the prior day’s joys—as the prayer itself. The act of gathering, even prior to Julia lighting the candle or Jen opening us with Scripture and silence, I find to be a prayer in itself. If prayer can mean “a request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God,” then our gathering is indeed an expression of thanks: for the faces and hugs of dear friends, for homes and hospitality, for community, for a new day.

What of the prayers themselves? From the beginning we’ve used a prayer book familiar to all of us from a class Marlene Kropf taught at AMBS: *Celtic Benediction* by J. Phillip Newell. The book allows for the kind of openness and silence that I craved after returning from the monastery. The prayers themselves, in the form of poetry, follow the movements of creation and are grounding in their earth imagery while challenging in their call to “dispel the confusions that cling close to our souls.” On Fridays, to connect with others who also practice morning prayers and to take advantage of the wonderful Anabaptist prayer book published by the Institute of Mennonite Studies, some of us migrate a block over to join a longstanding Friday morning prayer group of folks a little older than ourselves.

In a world where a thousand daily distractions, technological or otherwise, vie for our attention, the practice of interspersing prayers with silence is an important part of our morning discipline. For some of us, it is a natural way to connect with God, grounding ourselves in intimacy with our Creator through centering prayer. For others, it is about all we can muster at 7:30 a.m. And for others, the silence itself is a discipline that truly takes cultivation. Hilary freely admits: “Spending time in silence is a struggle. It doesn’t feel spiritually enlightening to me, but it does feel important. The fact that I don’t get immediate gratification from beginning my day this way has helped me develop an intentional commitment to the process of daily prayer and to the people.”

To begin the day with the tripartite gift of time with God, friends and a well-placed space heater is truly a practice that for us is orienting. In this same world of distractions, it becomes all too easy to forget my own “true North,” to forget amid seminary assignments, lunch meetings and too many appointments that I am here, on this earth, to enjoy friendship with God and with God’s people. Morning prayers, and all spiritual practices, are not the stuff of life itself, but they are the latticework, so to speak. Latticework may not be the focus of the rose garden, but ultimately makes it strong and possible. “It’s not like it’s magic,”

In this same world of distractions, it becomes all too easy to forget my own “true North.”

Hilary reminds me, “like now that I’m praying in the mornings, I find myself infinitely spiritually grounded, but it’s an acknowledgement that little things make a difference over the long haul.”

**Julia lights the candle this morning.** The stone candleholder is fittingly a depiction of friends holding hands around the light. Jen takes *Celtic Benediction* and opens to this morning’s prayers. Hilary chooses a Psalm to read aloud for us all to hear and meditate upon. I cuddle under a blanket, closing my eyes and taking my first truly deep breath of the day. It is a breath of gratitude: for this space, for these friends, for this time of prayer and for another day to appreciate all the little gifts that indeed make life rich and blessed over the long haul.

Awake, my soul.
Awake, O harp and lyre.
I will awaken the dawn.

Caitlin Michelle Desjardins
lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.
From a ‘crusading mind’ to a ‘crucified mind’

The phenomenal growth of the church outside Europe and North America and some regrettable facets in the history of mission have given rise to calls for a “moratorium” on mission from the West and focus on the local church and its context.

Almost any person reading these words can call to mind mission workers whose work was characterized by a commitment to advocacy for justice and respect for the human dignity of those among whom they live (including being strong champions in the antislavery movement). Yet no one can deny that mission has suffered greatly from its mostly uncritical alliance with Western imperialism. That a broad swathe of the missionary establishment has been in cahoots with the military and expansionist spirit of the colonizing West makes the accusation undeniable and shameful.

In an article entitled “Issues in Mission Today: Challenges for Reflection at Edinburgh 2010,” Stephen Bevans observes that for much of its history mission stood as a sign of world conquest. Missionaries were referred to as “soldiers,” as Christian “forces” who engaged their work with “a crusading mind” (Water Buffalo Theology by Kosuke Koyama).

As a consequence, mission has been scarred by a legacy of identification with rapacious neocolonialism that seemed intent on destroying non-Western cultures and using violence or bribes to coerce people to adopt a foreign religio-cultural identity. Mission was seen as aligned with imperialistic designs, and the message of mission was confused with the idea of the superiority of western culture and learning.

As Stephen Neill observes: “Missionaries in the 19th century had to some extent yielded to the colonial complex. Only Western man was man in the full sense of the word; he was wise and good, and members of other races, in so far as they became westernized, might share in this wisdom and goodness. But Western man was the leader, and would remain so for a very long time, perhaps forever” (A History of Christian Missions).

In January 2014, when the Council for International Anabaptist Missions (a coalition of about two dozen mission agencies/entities) meets in Chicago, these questions will be on the agenda.

Why are we (or should we be) involved in mission? Is it because we are driven by the need to extend the superiority of the culture we are a part of? Certainly not. Mission is first and foremost of the very essence of the Triune God. The whole biblical story is infused with the energy of God’s missionary purpose of creation and recreation. As a creation of the Spirit of God, the essence of the church’s being is mission. The church, in every place and in every time, is called to be involved in God’s mission, or, as a recent slogan, reaffirmed at the largest ecumenical gathering in the history of the Christian movement (Cape Town 2010), puts it: “The whole church bearing the whole gospel to the whole world.” This affirmation celebrates the fact that mission has migrated from its captivity as a unidirectional movement (“from the West to the rest”) to becoming multidirectional and polycentric.

The great new reality of our time is the shift from subject-object relations that have characterized missions in the last two centuries to a new era in which every church can embrace and live into its own identity as a subject of mission. This invites a recognition that every church is called to global mission as both a receiver of the gifts of others and a sharer of the gifts that have been entrusted to it. This dawning of a new era in mission that is truly global, where mission is from everywhere to everywhere, must advance on the presumption of continued mission involvement from the West, partnered with the missionary energies from every other part of the world.

What we need is not a moratorium. Rather than indulge a withdrawal syndrome, based on our sense of guilt because of past failures, what we need in Western mission is a continuing conversion from what Koyama calls a “crusading mind” to a “crucified mind.” We need a conversion from presuming that we are at the center of mission to a postcolonial mind-set that is vulnerable and committed to interdependence and mutuality.

What is needed from Western churches is not a disengagement from mission (a true aberration) or a reprehensible denial that continues to communicate superiority, paternalism, imperialism and the arrogance of the Western church. We need a commitment to participation in the global mission community in the spirit of servanthood, humility and relationships. As we like to describe it, “Third Way Mission”—or, simply put, mission in the way of Jesus.
Finding a way forward

About two years ago I decided to become a pescatarian, eating only fish and vegetables. I made that change not for ethical reasons but to improve my health. As a result, I lost weight and lowered my cholesterol.

There are some Christians, including most Seventh-day Adventists, who use the Bible to argue we should all be vegetarians. They point to God’s command to Adam in Genesis 1:29, “every seed bearing plant … and every tree that has fruit. They will be yours for food.” It isn’t until after the flood that God removes this dietary restriction, telling Noah, “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you” (Genesis 9:3). God later restricts the Jewish diet to Kosher foods.

Our culinary preferences are central to our cultural identity. Restaurants are named by nationality; Italian, Mexican etc. For someone to imply that the Bible says you should be a vegetarian goes to the heart of an individual’s identity. It is also something that cannot be changed easily.

If you love cheeseburgers, you may support your choice by saying, “God gave mankind incisors to rip meat” or noting that Old Testament dietary restrictions were superseded in Christ. And Jesus ate the Paschal lamb with his disciples.

Another, arguing for vegetarianism, could counter, Yes, but Paul contended that if eating meat (sacrificed to idols) offends your brother’s conscience (referring now to the 21st-century brother who thinks it immoral to kill animals for food) “then do not eat it” (1 Corinthians 10:28).

Many are familiar with the principles set forth in Mennonite Church USA’s Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love. Similarly, Mennonite Church Canada developed guidelines for corporate biblical discernment in a document titled Being a Faithful Church 4. It provides guidelines, developed by a broad cross-section of the church and penned by Robert J. Suderman to “test the spirits.” It provides 12 paths to follow in biblical interpretation and six ditches to avoid when using the Bible to make a point. Briefly stated they are as follows:

Paths to follow: (1) The life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus are central to our interpretation of Scripture. (2) Context makes a difference to our reading of the Bible. We need to consider both when the Scriptures were written and our time and place today. (3) Scripture interprets Scripture. (4) Jesus interprets Scripture. (5) Take the whole canon. (6) Scripture is a living Word in a world in need of redemption. (7) The Holy Spirit guides us. (8) We are part of a larger story. (9) Knowing is doing (i.e., we must change our behavior to reflect our knowledge of what God expects of us walking as disciples of Jesus Christ). (10) Scripture is a delight. (11) Be aware of other God followers. (12) God intends to bring wholeness to Creation.

Ditches to avoid: (1) Do not leave Jesus without a context. (2) Do not assume your context is either normal or unchanging. (3) Do not leave out the Old Testament. (4) Avoid proof-texting (i.e., taking a single passage out of context or quoting a text without considering its context and purpose). (5) Do not force God to fit your understanding. (6) Do not generalize.

These guidelines are helpful, but we can only find a way forward together if we do not insist ours is the only valid interpretation of Scripture. We seem to be able to disagree about many points in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Many congregations do not hold rigidly to Mennonite Church USA’s peace position but allow disagreement. Some even let people in the military join their church. Congregations take these actions, even though embracing Jesus’ life of peace is central to our understanding of what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian. I’ve heard that during World War II, as many as half the men in some congregations supported the U.S. war effort by joining the military. And for many years we have allowed area conferences to decide whether or not to ordain women to pastoral ministry.

In non-Amish families, we do not cut off relatives, even when they greatly offend us. We love them despite our differences and disagreements. My own extended family has made adjustments to accommodate my pescitarian preferences during holiday meals.

Yet in the church we find it difficult if not impossible to extend grace to some who interpret Scripture differently. In the April issue, pastor Harvey Yoder reminds us, “Disagreements are inevitable, divisions are optional.” I pray that when we disagree on biblical interpretation, we will find a way as a family of faith to remain committed to each other and to our common identity and mission. May God grant us grace to make it so.
Larry Miller to retire from Everence

**November Journey Award for Wienses**

Dr. Tim and Kathy Wiens have been named recipients of the 2013 Everence national Journey Award. The award recognizes the Wienses, of Newton, Kan., for their generosity in sharing their time and resources. The award will be presented Nov. 10 at First Mennonite Church in Newton. Everence president and CEO Larry D. Miller will present the award. Created in 2001, the Journey Award is a way for Everence to highlight what people of faith are doing as stewards of their God-given gifts.

“We at Everence are happy to honor Tim and Kathy for improving the lives of so many people,” said Andrea Unzicker, Everence Central Kansas Regional Director. “They have turned their concern for children and families in difficult situations into actions that we feel should be recognized as outstanding examples of stewardship.” — Everence
Fresh out of medical school, Dr. Kanchan Naik chose to work at a mission hospital where she could get a wide array of medical experience. Kanchan thought she’d work at Sewa Bhawan Hospital in Jagdeeshpur, India, for a few years, developing her skills as one of three doctors at the hospital, located in a remote area three hours from the nearest city, Raipur.

Sewa Bhawan Hospital is a 50-bed hospital that serves about 500,000 people. It was established in 1928 by mission workers from the Commission on Overseas Mission, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. The hospital is now run by Emmanuel Hospital Association, an organization started in 1970 to maintain the long-term stability of 13 Indian mission hospitals. Sewa Bhawan Hospital and two other hospitals started by Mennonite missionaries are part of this association that Mission Network supports with funds and medical workers.

Although young doctors usually leave mission hospitals in favor of higher paying jobs in the city, Kanchan, an Ob-Gyn doctor by training, relished the long hours and variety of cases and decided to commit her life to mission hospitals.

“I saw how people couldn’t go anywhere else,” says Kanchan. “I came to love the people.” After family members introduced her to Tushar Naik, a trained surgeon working as medical director at a Lutheran mission hospital, they married and started what is now 25 years of work together at mission hospitals.

Initially, they started at Tushar’s hospital. But in 1993, senior staff from Sewa Bhawan Hospital contacted the Naiks, asking them to serve in Jagdeeshpur. They wanted Tushar to be their medical director. The Naiks accepted the positions and have worked at Sewa Bhawan for 20 years while also raising their daughter, Aparajita, and son, Ronak.

In September, Kanchan spent several weeks traveling in North America to visit friends and bring her daughter to Goshen (Ind.) College. She shared her experience of service at Sewa Bhawan with several churches and other groups.

The Naiks need to work hard to keep doctors and nurses at the hospital. Young doctors will typically come for initial postings but are lured away by better facilities and urban environments.

“It’s a struggle,” says Kanchan. “They only come for short-term assignments. Often they go on to get government jobs that pay better than we can. We’ve also had many nurses come from the area, but few stay.”

The Naiks often collaborate with doctors from other hospitals to exchange services. For example, one day a month, Tushar will go to another hospital and perform general surgeries, since they do not have a general surgeon. In exchange, a doctor who specializes in eye surgeries will come from that hospital to perform cataract surgeries at Sewa Bhawan one day a month.

This partnership lets patients receive specialized care from the limited number of mission doctors in the area.

In order to bring more nurses to their hospital, the Naiks want to start a nursing college together with Champa Christian Hospital, a hospital that’s also part of the Emmanuel Hospital Association. The plans are still in the initial stages, but the hope is that nursing students trained in a rural hospital environment will choose to serve long-term at Sewa Bhawan or other mission hospitals. But even if they don’t, a steady stream of student interns would help the nursing staff of the hospital.

Despite the challenges of not enough staff and small budgets, the Naiks are dedicated to offering the best care to their patients. Committed doctors have been a godsend to Sewa Bhawan Hospital and other small mission hospitals. The Naiks continue to welcome service visits from North American doctors and other medical professionals. Because Sewa Bhawan is a general-treatment facility, they especially need generalist medical personnel. But they often have cases that sometimes require specific expertise. So Kanchan and Tushar are always seeking connections with other doctors and nurses to find the best care for cases that lie outside their competency. Despite the sacrifice it sometimes takes, the Naiks are exactly where they want to be: treating patients.

“I receive many blessings from the Lord treating patients who otherwise would have died at home,” says Kanchan. “I see lots of miracles.”—Sara Alvarez of Mission Network
Each day the Community Food Bank of South Arizona provides food for 62,800 meals. But the U.S. Congress’ cut of $40 billion from the food stamp program may change that. Without help from the food stamp program or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, food banks may be stretched to the limit. Hungry people will turn to food banks and food kitchens across America—where some of Mennonite Mission Network’s service program participants volunteer.

Each day, the Downtown Soup Kitchen in Anchorage, Alaska, serves at least 300 lunches. Marlene Allebach, a Service Adventure participant in Anchorage, spends her days making sandwiches and cutting up vegetables for the guests. To this food kitchen, the federal budget cuts could mean an influx of guests, which may make the already limited coffee, tea and serving ware even scarcer.

At the Community Food Bank of South Arizona, Anna Johnson, a Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) participant, is thankful that individuals can use food stamps to purchase local produce. It encourages families to eat locally and healthier, Johnson says.

At food distribution organizations like the Community Action Coalition, in Madison, Wis., Brian O’Leary, an MVS worker, picks up donations from Panera Bread, grocery stores and even the University of Wisconsin’s delis to deliver to food banks and food kitchens.

The Community Action Coalition has already streamlined its operations, but in order to continue, some programs will need to be cut drastically. O’Leary is afraid it will most affect their ability to provide fresh produce.

“Providing a healthy, local option to everyone regardless of income is something we pride ourselves on,” he says.

Although the cut will happen over 10 years, a $4 billion annual reduction worries Johnson.

“I am not sure how some individuals and families are going to put food on the table without support from programs that assist the hungry,” she says. “Many of the people these cuts will affect are members of the working poor or are women with infants or children who are already struggling to make ends meet.”

The cut to the food stamp program is just one more thing that makes life harder. According to O’Leary, housing and medical insurance bills affect food availability as well.

“All these issues are connected, and somebody who no longer has to worry about housing or paying all their income to insurance will inevitably have more money [for] food,” says O’Leary.

Together, Mennonite Mission Network service program participants suggest the following ways to help local food banks:

1. Volunteer.
2. Learn to grow food with others. Sharing knowledge about gardening is just as important as sharing food, says Johnson.
3. Let state representatives know how you feel about the budget cut.
4. Donate food or money.

“Most of our food at the soup kitchen is donated to us by local businesses, farmers and hunters,” says Allebach. “We are so blessed to have these donations. I think without these donations our fridges would be almost empty. Whether it’s volunteering or donating money, food or products, anything you can do would be amazing.”—Kelsey Hochstetler of Mennonite Mission Network
The Christmas Visitor by Linda Byler
240 pages, $14.95, hardcover with dustjacket

One moment, Ben Miller was high up in the rafters at his neighbor’s barn raising. In the next, his foot slipped and he plunged to his death, leaving behind, Ruth, a young wife, and six children—the youngest born four months after his death.

As Christmas approaches, Ruth knows that she can’t afford gifts for her children this year. But then banana boxes full of food, treats for the children, and even money begin to appear on her front porch. Who is leaving her these generous gifts?

An Amish Garden by Laura Anne Lapp
208 pages, $24.95, hardcover with dustjacket, 120 full-color photographs

An Amish Garden takes you to six working Amish gardens, from January through December.

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Scholar talks about white allies

Bailey visits denominational offices in Elkhart, Ind., in September.

Shoulder-tapping and sharing inside information will help Mennonite leadership more accurately reflect the diversity that is within the church, said Wilma Bailey, who specializes in Old Testament studies at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.

Bailey shared her insights during a Sept. 25 visit to the six Mennonite agencies located in the Elkhart offices. Bailey explained that true diversity and inclusion require the work of “white allies,” people of a dominant white culture who act in solidarity with people of color without assuming control of the struggle for human dignity. In doing so, white allies take responsibility to heal their own racism.

Bailey said that one of the best ways to be a white ally is to provide opportunities for people of color by affirming their gifts through shoulder-tapping and sharing the information usually only accessible to those within the inner circle of white privilege.

“When people of color come into an organization, they often don’t have the inside information to know how an organization really works,” Bailey said. “We need to make a real effort to identify young people of color who can be potential leaders.”

Because there are still few people of color holding leadership positions in Mennonite Church USA, the advance notice that often lands jobs before they are publically posted isn’t available to them. “Most leaders are white men, so when they think of a successor ... they just can’t imagine a black female being able to fill their shoes,” Bailey said.

There have been exceptions in Bailey’s life, and they have helped her become a much-sought-after scholar, professor, consultant and lecturer with three graduate degrees, including a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. She is currently teaching at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, where she specializes in Old Testament studies.

“Many times we don’t even know who our white allies are because they work behind the scenes,” Bailey said. “In my professional positions, it was usually someone who called me and asked me if I wanted a job.”

One of those times was after Bailey graduated with a M.Div. degree from what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart. A white church leader, John Paul Wenger, called and asked her to serve as assistant pastor of a Mennonite church in Saginaw, Mich. When Bailey began her ministry at Grace Chapel, she became the first woman to receive a ministerial credential from the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.—Mennonite Mission Network staff

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Gandhi Center honors Howard Zehr, Vida Huber

Zehr is a semiretired EMU faculty member, and Huber is a ‘61 EMU graduate.

Restorative justice expert Howard Zehr (left), chats with a former student he has mentored, Josh Bacon, who is James Madison University judicial affairs director.

Six years after conferring its first award for “global nonviolence” work on Desmond Tutu, followed by a second award in 2009 to Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence at James Madison University (JMU), Harrisonburg, Va., is inaugurating a new award to highlight individuals from the local community whose lives epitomize the promotion of “justice and nonviolence through education, scholarship and engagement.”

The first honorees of this new “community service” award are two people with close ties to Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg: (1) Howard Zehr, Ph.D., a semiretired faculty member, who is being recognized for his seminal role in the foundation and promotion of the field of restorative justice around the world, and (2) Vida Huber, Ph.D., a 1961 graduate of EMU who chaired EMU’s nursing program from 1967 to 1984 and then held leadership roles at JMU until her sudden death in 2005.

Zehr is co-directing, with EMU professor Carl Stauffer, the Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice at EMU, established in the fall of 2012.

Zehr began teaching restorative justice at EMU’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding in 1996 but recently stepped away from teaching. He served as the center’s co-director for five years, 2002-2007.

Zehr’s longevity in the field of restorative justice, global renown and early book on the subject (Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice, published in 1990) has caused him to be dubbed the “grandfather of restorative justice.” He is the author, co-author or editor of 22 books, plus the source of dozens of chapters, op-ed pieces, and other presentations.

In wide demand around the world, Zehr has given restorative justice presentations in 35 states and 25 countries.

As an example, Zehr has done eight speaking tours in New Zealand, a country that has restructured its juvenile justice system to put restorative conferences at its core, with remarkable results.

On the local level, JMU’s director of judicial affairs, Josh Bacon, Ph.D., is one who has been influenced by Zehr. In a blog posted on March 18, 2011, Bacon wrote: “I as well as many others who have practiced student discipline in the university setting thought we knew what restorative justice was. Well, after studying with the ‘grandfather’ of the field, Howard Zehr, I can say, ‘I was extremely wrong’ in my understanding of restorative justice.”

He continued: “Learning about the principles and practices of restorative justice has transformed my view of the potential of student discipline and re-energized my professional focus. I have seen restorative justice challenge our students in a new way and transform their view of conflict and relationships.”

At the time of her death, Vida Huber was an associate dean of JMU’s College of Integrated Science and Technology (CISAT). She was also director of JMU’s Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services and professor of nursing.

“Vida was very much committed and motivated to help bring about opportunities on this campus where individuals preparing to be professionals in various health and human services fields could learn to work together,” says JMU provost Jerry Benson, who was dean of CISAT at the time of Huber’s death.

The Mahatma Gandhi Center’s Global Nonviolence Community Service Award is conferred in recognition of “visionary leadership and enduring commitment to the creation of a more compassionate, equitable and caring community,” says Gary S. Race, director of the Gandhi Center. He anticipates that the community service award will be given every second year, alternating in the future with the center’s global nonviolence award, which has not been awarded since 2009.

The community service awards officially were conferred in a by-invitation ceremony at JMU on Oct. 2, a day that corresponded with the birthday of Gandhi. Vida’s husband, retired EMU staff member Harold E. Huber, accepted his wife’s posthumous award.—Bonnie Price Lofton for Eastern Mennonite University
This past summer, some 70 teens and their sponsors experienced a Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) project “plus.” The pluses included a taste of archaeology, exposure to significant Native American history and interaction—lots of basketball—with youth of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Busby and Lame Deer, Mont.

They also got a crash course in the rigors of cattle ranching and the “brutally hard work”—as rancher John Bailey put it—of installing fencing in eastern Montana’s “tremendously rough badlands terrain, with huge elevation changes in very short distances.”

The scale of the damage inflicted by wildfires in July and August 2012 overwhelmed eastern Montana ranchers. Literally all fences on Busby-area ranches were destroyed, Bailey said, leaving 250,000 acres of open range in which cattle, driven by flames and smoke, scattered and mixed.

MDS summer volunteers rehabbed 25 to 30 miles of barbed-wire fencing. They patched wire and strung new wire—clipping and stapling it to posts—rolled up mile upon mile of old wire and drove steel posts. They also chopped down thousands of burnt trees along the fence lines for ranchers in and around the reservation to prevent future damage to the repaired fences, said Paul Unruh of Newton, Kan., MDS project director of the Busby summer program.

Bailey lost all 72 miles of his ranch’s barbed-wire barriers, 10 miles of it shared with the Cheyenne reservation. MDS volunteers helped repair some stretches of fencing along the reservation that keep feral horses off the roadways.

Although Kathy Knobloch, a conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and a reservation member, estimates fewer than 10 percent of reservation families ranch, the activity is vital to its economy. The grazing fees of tribal members who lease pasture provide the reservation’s only income, Knobloch says. The ranchers also hire other tribal members for day jobs, such as riding and branding, which help ease the hardship caused by the reservation’s 60 to 70 percent unemployment rates.

**Bailey expressed profound appreciation** for the hardworking volunteers. Some 30 to 45 percent of the area’s terrain is too steep for mechanized post-hole augurs, so steel posts must be installed by hand in those areas. “It’s not work for lightweights,” Bailey said.—*Emily Will for Mennonite Disaster Service*
More than 1,000 Congolese Mennonites gathered on Sept. 22 in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, to witness and celebrate the ordination of two women and two men.

Sidonie Swana Falanga and Fabienne Ngombe Kidinda were the first women to be ordained to ministry in the Mennonite Church of Congo, known as CMCO (Communauté Mennonite au Congo).

A third woman of the denomination, Bercy Mundedi, was ordained in Kalonda, Western Kasai Province, on Oct. 6, along with four men.

“This is a very special day for the Mennonite church,” CMCO President Adolphe Komwesa Kalunga proclaimed in his Kinshasa address. “The door is wide open to you,” he said to the women in the assembly. “The barrier is broken.”

The five-hour services in Kinshasa and Kalonda included multiple choral performances, instructions to the candidates and their congregations and jubilant dancing and gift-giving. Sermons and comments from witnesses focused on the biblical and social bases for women’s leadership.

“We have been practicing sexual discrimination. That is not good for the church,” said Paul Kadima, a Kinshasa pastor. “Now we have put in practice Galatians 3:28. In the church we are equal.”

Robert Irundu, CMCO’s national youth president, said he believed it took time for the church to approve women’s ordination “because CMCO wanted to study the declaration of Paul requiring women to be silent in the assembly. But the Bible also says there is no distinction between men and women.”

CMCO is the last of the three Mennonite communities in Congo to ordain women. The Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo has been ordaining women since 2000. The Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo ordained a woman for the first time in July 2012, during celebrations of the church’s 50th anniversary.

The struggle in CMCO for women’s ordination has taken place over decades. Swana, 59, received a degree in theology in 1995 and has long served in a pastoral role alongside her husband, Rev. Léonard Falanga. She has been a leader in organizing women who have studied theology, teaching on the issue and attempting to persuade church leaders and pastors that women’s ordination is based on biblically sound principles.

We have been practicing sexual discrimination. That is not good for the church.—Paul Kadima

“We did not want to conduct a physical [violent] struggle,” Swana said in an interview. “Our weapon is prayer.”

Ngombe, 63, received a degree in theology in 1998 and has served as an assistant pastor in several Kinshasa churches since 2005.

All three women studied at the Protestant University of Kinshasa, now known as Christian University of Kinshasa. Mundedi, 47, graduated in 1996.

In November, two more CMCO women, identified by church leaders as Mubi Mutemba and Mundombila, will be ordained in Kananga, Western Kasai.—Nancy Myers and Charlie Malembe for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission

1,000 gather in Kinshasa for ordinations

Mennonite Church of Congo last of three groups to open ministry to women

Sidonie Swana Falanga receives a Bible from Adolphe Komwesa, president of the Mennonite Church of Congo, at her ordination in Kinshasa on Sept. 22.
Helping Cambodian sex trafficking survivors

An Eastern Mennonite Mission worker is on Daughters of Cambodia team.

Eastern Mennonite Missions worker Jenna Eshleman spent the past year working with survivors of sex trafficking in Cambodia’s capital city of Phnom Penh. She worked with a team of four Cambodian social workers, serving as social work manager with Daughters of Cambodia, a nonprofit organization that provides social services, employment, Bible studies and some medical services to former sex workers. Staff encourage their clients to remain in their own homes with their families. The organization believes the best way to promote lasting change is to help its clients learn how to make changes within their current environment. Because clients continue to live with their families, the organization has a male social worker who often works with the husbands and fathers of female clients.

“The approach of staying within their environment is really helpful for some clients,” says Eshleman. “They can start making changes at home, and if they have ongoing problems, they can always come back to the social workers and get advice. When clients have difficulty breaking out of their addictions or cycles of abuse, the social workers help them set goals to change their situations.”

Daughters of Cambodia has several businesses where its clients can work: two cafés that sell coffee, smoothies and baked goods; a spa; a boutique that sells the products the clients produce; and a guest house for tourists.—Chris Fretz of Eastern Mennonite Missions

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) urges support of founder of organization.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) urges support of Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas, founder of MCC partner Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz (Sowing Seeds of Peace Association, known as Sembrandopaz) and other community leaders, all of whom have received threats and intimidations from Colombian authorities.

Earlier this month, credible sources (who remain unnamed for fear of reprisal) confirmed the threats against Esquivia and other leaders in the nonviolent Movement of the Mountain Zone of El Carmen de Bolívar, one of whom has already been detained. Esquivia began his advocacy work in Colombia decades ago with small-scale farmers, says Bonnie Klassen, MCC’s area director for South America and Mexico. “Their successful efforts to gain legal access to land ran counter to the economic interests of some powerful political and economic leaders in the region,” she says.

Esquivia and Sembrandopaz started work with the Movement of the Mountain Zone in 2012, helping communities seek reparations for displacement, the right to return to their land and protection against future violence or forced relocation. In April, they held a peaceful march requesting dialogue with local, state and national governments.

On Sept. 9, Movement of the Mountain Zone leader Jorge Luis Montes Hernández was arrested by a government prosecutor. Montes has been accused of belonging to the FARC guerrilla group, criminal conspiracy, homicide, forced displacement and extortion.

MCC also has confirmed with a source inside a public defender’s office that there are investigations into issuing arrest warrants for Esquivia, and that a pre-arrest warrant already exists. The current threats are similar to ones Esquivia faced in 1989, 1993 and 2004.

MCC Canada and MCC U.S. sent a joint letter to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos Calderon asking him to condemn all threats against Esquivia as well as protect him and other community leaders. MCC U.S. invites all members of Congress and the U.S. embassy in Colombia at http://ow.ly/p1VGI.—Emily Loewen of MCC Canada

Ballestas threatened by Colombian authorities

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– Neil and Karen Musselman

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The Corinthian Plan has begun an open enrollment, which will continue to March 31, 2014, for employees of eligible Mennonite Church USA congregations. The open enrollment matches that of the Insurance Marketplaces, set up as part of the Affordable Care Act.

If congregations would like to enroll in the plan outside the open enrollment window, they still may apply but must go through an underwriting process.

The open enrollment change was one of several updates The Corinthian Plan Board approved at its Sept. 27 meeting.

Despite a projected national medical inflation rate of 10.5 percent, the average premium increase for The Corinthian Plan will be less than half that amount, but it will vary by congregation, based on demographic changes.

Congregations participating in the plan but waiving health coverage will see a reduction in the waiver fee in 2014. Other costs, such as dental and vision premiums and Fair Balance Fund contributions, will remain the same.

The Corinthian Plan continues to maintain stable participation and a strong financial position as the 2014 plan year begins on Jan. 1.

“We are pleased with what The Corinthian Plan is able to accomplish as it covers nearly 450 congregations and over 1,000 lives,” says Keith Harder, director of The Corinthian Plan. “And the board continues to analyze the long-term impact on the plan of the Affordable Care Act.”

Harder says the board will continue to evaluate The Corinthian Plan to ensure it continues to advance the goals of the church and the needs of the congregations it serves. The Corinthian Plan is administered by Everence Financial, a stewardship agency of Mennonite Church USA.

“The Church Alliance, of which Everence is a member, continues to encourage lawmakers to make changes to the health-care law that would solidify the ongoing value of The Corinthian Plan for the denomination, but it will take some time before we get a clear picture of what any changes will be or will look like,” Harder says.

The Corinthian Plan is owned by Mennonite Church USA and its participating congregations. Everence administers the plan, and claims are paid by Blue Cross Blue Shield.

—Jeff Shafer for Everence

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Programs of Mennonite Central Committee
Triking for Dakota land justice
Stoesz shares his conviction about land justice for the Dakota people.

As John Stoesz pedals his recumbent trike through southern Minnesota, he faces two realities—the dedication of today’s farmers to the land and the conspicuous absence of Dakota people on their ancestral land. He passes row after row of perfectly straight lines of corn. More than 150 years ago, buffalo roamed here. The former executive director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Central States is calling attention to the injustices perpetrated on the Dakota people and the subsequent advantages to white settlers and their descendants as he bicycles 2,000 miles through former Dakota land. The forced exodus of the Dakota people and subsequent bounty paid for Dakota scalps took place during and after the U.S.-Dakota war of 1862.

Stoesz strategically planned his September and October trip through 40 counties. Last year, Stoesz’ family decided to sell their grandfather’s farm, forcing him to decide what to do with profit of land taken from the Dakota. Stoesz knew about the injustices through his work with MCC Central States’ Indigenous Vision Center.

Through an Indigenous Vision Center educational exercise, Stoesz learned about the Doctrine of Discovery, a series of papal proclamations that gave European Christian explorers the freedom to “invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all … pagans whatsoever.”

Stoesz says: “Through the land, I think I have benefited from an oppressive system. It’s not that my ancestors were directly involved in the oppression in the worst violent ways, but they certainly benefitted from it, and I benefit from it.”

Through the counsel of the Indigenous Vision Center, Stoesz connected with Oyate Nipi Kte (The People Shall Live), a Minnesota-based organization focusing its work on the recovery of Dakota traditional knowledge and culture. Stoesz decided to give half his profit for indigenous land justice, including a contribution toward the purchase of land for Oyate Nipi Kte.

Founder Waziyatawin says: “It has been extraordinarily important for me to see a beneficiary of Dakota land loss take this step because it helps restore my sense of hope in the possibility of justice for our people. He has modeled a way to help make amends because he has focused on the issue of land recovery.” —Tina Schrag and Linda Espenshade
Creation care and the problem of racism

Seidel: Efforts at creation care can become expressions of white privilege.

Not too long ago, our Mennonite congregation in Lancaster, Pa., looked deliberately at issues of the environment, justice and spirituality through a “creation care” worship and adult education series. This is not uncommon in Mennonite congregations in the United States and Canada. Indeed, the issue was again taken up by Mennonite Church USA in a resolution discussed at its 2013 assembly in Phoenix.

In our congregation, one element of that series of worship, reflection and prayer was a discussion on creation care and the problem of racism. While at first glance the connections between these two may not seem clear, we discussed why the theology and ethics of creation care are not unrelated to the sin of racism that persists in the church.

Perhaps in the first place, to talk about this connection—a sort of a creation care ethic of antiracism—is to recognize a kind of irony and even doubts in our efforts. Caring for creation moves us toward a creaturely solidarity rooted in a deeper recognition of the image of God in all God’s children—actively working to dismantle the racism around and among us. But it also recognizes the possibility that our efforts at caring for creation can themselves become expressions of white privilege, underscoring the need for relationships of mutuality and accountability as we journey toward racial justice and creaturely solidarity.

“Creation care” moves us to reflect on the notion of the God of Creation and the kind of theology of creation we espouse. One outstanding element of this is seen in the second movement of creation (Genesis 1:6-8). On day two we are introduced to air and water, the two most defining characteristics of our planet; two of the most basic necessities of life. But day two also speaks to God’s role as Lord over all creation.

In such a creation theology, the implication of this lordship means nothing less than the full dependence on God as the source of our identity. Trusting in God and embracing a creaturely solidarity because of that trust emerges only when we acknowledge God as Creator and Lord of creation. Writer Julie Clawson describes this confession as one in which “we can stop asserting ourselves over others and refusing to responsibly and lovingly see them as part of the community of the imago Dei” (“Embracing Creation Theology,” God’s Politics Blog, April 15, 2011).

Imago Dei is a Latin term that translates “image of God” and asserts that all humans are created in God’s image as described later in Genesis: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Rejecting our creaturehood is one of the greatest temptations of human beings and has an impact on the rest of creation. This idolatry results in a violation of the imago Dei both in ourselves and in others. And this is one place where we might locate a root cause of the problem of racism.

Two Christian theologians who courageously opposed racism were Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr. They believed that Christ represents the oneness of the human race and that racism does violence to the one God and to the human race. Theologian Josiah Young argues that Bonhoeffer and King saw racism as a mortal sin that Christians must purge from their churches and undermine wherever it appears in society. Both believed humankind to be a single race by virtue of the fact that, regardless of their physical characteristics, all people bear and obscure the image of God who created them. Racism sinfully rips apart what God has decreed to be one (“Theology and the Problem of Racism,” Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import for Christian Social Thought, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

While both acknowledged Jesus’ Jewishness, the essential factor for King and Bonhoeffer was Christ’s God-endowed humanity, representing as the “Son of man” all humankind as the one race of God. During his time studying in New York, Bonhoeffer preached that through Christ’s cross all human beings have been drawn together, making them one, without respect to the color of their skins. Also for King, the cross is the most compelling revelation of the imago Dei, as it mirrors both God’s goodness and nonviolent presence in the ethics of the historical Jesus.

The implications for the church’s pursuit of creaturely solidarity and racial justice lies in seeing that justice, Young observes of King, as a theological attribute primarily and a virtue that human beings can only strive for as the image of God. “No particular racial type, contingent as it is, so totalizes that image as to become God. No racial type can thus
claim divine priority over any other. For King, then, both the apotheosis of skin color and the violence it appears to condone on both sides of the color line stem from racist logic” (76).

In our congregation, we discovered that, like Bonhoeffer and King, our task is one of refusal and resistance: refusal to cave in and capitulate to racist logic especially when it appears in the church. Indeed, as both King and Bonhoeffer testified to in their own lives, every Christian must take a stand against it.

And yet the unfortunate reality is that the problem of racism is no less prevalent today than it was in the times of Bonhoeffer and King. Staggering facts such as that African-Americans are incarcerated seven times the rate of white people in the United States, or that African-Americans have double the unemployment rate of whites and have for over 40 years—not to mention other disparities such as access to health care or educational resources—attest to this. But what does this have to do with creation care?

The truth of the matter is that we, in our congregation, recognized that we are not immune to the reach of this systemic racism. We are predominantly white, benefiting from white privilege. And our congregational space is, for the most part, a white space. This impacts both how we understand what creation care looks like and how we do it.

Mennonite academic and antiracism trainer Tobin Miller Shearer points out: “At its most basic level, the forces of racism in church and society give white people unearned access to a wide variety of resources, benefits and respect. The lived experience of receiving these assets and coming to expect them as normal is white privilege” (“White Privilege,” Third Way Café). Put another way, Shearer notes, “to be white in America is not to have to think about it.” And one way white people become antiracist is to become aware of the privileges U.S. society gives us—to acknowledge our white identities and the power and privilege it provides.

And this gets at our earlier assertion regarding whiteness and white space. All space is some kind of space. There is no race-neutral space, including white space (in fact, “neutral” becomes code for “white”). White space is racialized space, and not to experience it that way is another benefit of white privilege. Such denial not only deracializes a racialized context (the product and prerogative of white privilege in a white racist culture and context), but such power denial maintains a sense of our own exceptionalism, which is itself embedded within a larger white exceptionalism in our society. This creates a context where our appeals to creation care can become deflections from our ongoing participation in white racist systems and institutions, leading to what some refer to as “greenwashing” injustice.

If white privilege impacts our commitments to care for creation, how do we do creation care in just, healthy, racism-dismantling ways? First some clarification. Many describe institutional racism as racial prejudice plus systemic or institutional power. The point here is that racism is about the disproportionate distribution of power and not simply about prejudice. This distinction is important because confusing the two confuses strategies and approaches to dismantling racism. One way this happens is focusing on the interpersonal to the exclusion of the systemic. For example, reducing racism to prejudice allows us to believe that the solution to racism is eliminating our personal prejudices, building personal interracial relationships and developing multicultural competencies. All well and good. But this does not address the fundamental issue of power. And this is one reason why we talk about antiracism.

Antiracism is important because it attempts to recognize the status quo realities of systemic violence and racism. And while uncomfortable to some because of its “negative” connotation, antiracism offers a corrective to “positive” language that does not fully recognize these realities. Exclusively positive language gives too much to the status quo. It is too optimistic and does not take seriously enough the task of refusal and resistance with which Bonhoeffer and King challenge us. We must apply a critical approach. Otherwise, our attempts at alternatives will too often default to the status quo without even realizing it. This is the challenge of systemic and institutional racism. And this is the challenge for our creation care. How are we doing creation care in ways that attend to these persistent structural forces?

As a congregation, we did not discover some step-by-step plan for this. The reality is that there is no established plan to follow. But if we are to pursue a creation care ethic of antiracism for the church, one place to begin is by asking critical questions: Who benefits from our creation care? Who is comforted or discomforted by this? Who is taking risks in this and at whose cost? And at a deeper level, who gets to determine what creation care looks like? Do we need to question the category of creation care itself as an expression of our white privilege? If our commitments and practices of creation care serve to deflect rather than move us to address directly the persistence of racism in our congregations and communities—and purge it as King and Bonhoeffer chal-
lenge us to do—then unfortunately it becomes just another expression of white privilege that replicates racist patterns and relationships.

**Environmental racism refers** to the disproportionate impact of environmental contamination in communities of color, racial discrimination in developing and implementing environmental policy and the lack of people of color in the leadership of the environmental movement. An antiracist approach to creation care will not only identify but prioritize efforts to stop placing toxic dumps in African-American communities, spraying pesticides on fields in which migrant farmworkers labor, military testing and pollution near Native American reservations and exporting corporations’ toxic processes and products to the Global South (see “Environmental Racism: An Ecumenical Study Guide” by the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA).

Another example of both local and intersectional engagement is an antiracist creation care approach that values both community gardens and the pressing needs for jobs in urban neighborhoods. Or as our creation care moves us toward local food economies, our antiracism will move us to attend to what some have observed as the prevailing whiteness of community food, where white bodies stick together making food space exclusive. Geographer Rachel Slocum has observed that “community food thrives on a culture of food that has been made white” (“Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice,” *Geoforum*, 38.3). She points out that the physical clustering of white bodies, for example in farmers’ markets, “reinforces those connections among property, privilege and paler skin.” But it does not have to, she argues. The importance of identifying and understanding the racialization of space mentioned above lies in its utility to name and transform that space into something better.

**For us white folks** who are fairly comfortable with creation care, this work must be antiracist precisely because it discomforts us. If we are to be mindful of the possibility that our efforts at creation care can become expressions of white privilege, replicating racist patterns and relationships, the pursuit of creaturely solidarity becomes vital. And as we hear in Luke’s Gospel about the encounter of two travelers on their way to Emmaus with the risen Christ (Luke 24:13-35), we are reminded that this is a sacramental task. We best bear and recognize the *imago* we know intimately in Christ not when we teach or preach or even when we proclaim the prophets but when we walk together, take risks together, break bread together and extend the hospitality we have been taught by Christ.—Timothy Seidel, a member of Community Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pa., is pursuing doctoral studies in international relations with a focus on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

All space is some kind of space. There is no race-neutral space, including white space (in fact “neutral” becomes code for “white”).
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CALENDAR

Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., invites friends and former attendees to help celebrate its centennial year throughout 2013. A Body That Lives serves as a theme for the stories of people with vision and courage who influenced and guided the church’s ministry through its 100 years to the present time. Centennial themes began in February, will culminate during August and end in November with worship and a congregational meal. Beginning in February, to coincide with its founding in February 1913, the congregation has heard stories of men and women who contributed to its genesis and century of life. These “Moments in Time” serve to inform and inspire, and can be found on the 8th Street website (see below). The centennial celebrations will conclude on Nov. 24 with worship, communion and the traditional 8th Street Thanksgiving Dinner. Please check the website at www.8thstmennonite.org for additional information.

WORKERS

Martin, Anthony, was licensed as pastor at Meckville Mennonite Church, Bethel, Pa., on Sept. 8.

Martin, Kelly, was licensed as associate pastor at Goodville Mennonite Church, Goodville, Pa., on Sept. 25.

OBITUARIES


RESOURCES

From Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church by Wes Granberg-Michaelson (Eerdmans, 2013, $20) explores the consequences of the shift in the center of gravity for world Christianity from Europe and North America to a point near Timbuktu in Africa. Specifically, it considers the efforts to build Christian unity in the face of new and challenging divisions.

Healing God’s Earth: Rural Community in the Context of Urban Civilization by S. Roy Kaufman (Wipf and Stock, 2013, $31) reads the Bible through the lenses of rural communities, which are being systematically dismantled by forces of urban civilization around the world. It argues that local, face-to-face communities, both rural and urban, along with traditional cultures of all stripes, are God’s chosen instruments for the subversive, non-violent disarming of urban civilization and the healing of God’s earth.

Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent: Sacred Teachings—Annotated and Explained, annotation by Rami Shapiro (SkyLight Paths, 2013, $16.99), combines wit, irony, honesty and luminous mystical understanding, designed for those not tied to a certain tradition.

The Oral Gospel Tradition by James D.G. Dunn (Eerdmans, 2013, $45) argues that more consideration needs to be given to the oral use and transmission of the Jesus tradition as a major factor in giving the Synoptic tradition its enduring character.

Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World by Shirley Showalter (Herald Press, 2013, $15.99) is a memoir by the former Goshen (Ind.) College president. She grew up in a plain-dressing, plain-speaking Mennonite farm family in Lancaster County, Pa., and was named for Shirley Temple, a movie star she was forbidden to watch. See review on page 53.

The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration by Arlette Kouwenhoven (WINCO Publishing, 2013, $29.95) describes the migration history of 15 generations of Fehrs/DeFehrs who chose a continuous path of migration in their search for the perfect place to live their Mennonite way of life. Though a family chronicle, the story runs parallel to what tens of thousands of Mennonites have experienced.

The Suffering and Victorious Christ: Toward a More Compassionate Christology by Richard J. Mouw and Douglas A. Sweeney (BakerAcademic, 2013, $19.99) underscores that Christ offers hope not only through his resurrection but also through his incar-
Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is inviting applications for a full-time lead pastor to commence in summer 2014. We are seeking a person with a strong Anabaptist theology as well as ability to engage the congregation through worship and preaching. This person will have strong administrative skills and be able to work with and lead a multimeber pastoral team. Our desire is that the successful candidate, along with the pastoral team, can enable and nurture the gifts of the congregation in order to enhance the overall mission of the church. Pastoral experience along with a Master of Divinity or equivalent is preferred. Please send resumé to jbpeters@shaw.ca or contact Jake Peters at 204-889-5094 for information. For more about Bethel Mennonite Church see: http://bethelmennonite.ca.

Senior pastor (full-time) Forest Hills Mennonite Church in Leola, Pa., is seeking a senior pastor to provide leadership to and participate in the Pastoral Leadership Team. Role includes providing spiritual oversight and direction to the life and mission of the congregation. Interested candidates should uphold Christ-centered Anabaptist theology. Send cover letter and resumé to Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Attn: Search Committee, 100 Quarry Rd., Leola, PA. 17540 or email to fhm@foresthillschurch.org.

Eastern Mennonite University (EMS) and the Eastern Mennonite University invite qualified candidates to apply for a tenure-track, continuing faculty position in Christian formation, preaching, and worship, expected to begin fall 2014. Rank to be determined according to qualifications and experience, assistant professorship strongly preferred. Ph.D., Th.D. or equivalent terminal degree. Track record indicating potential for effective teaching and scholarship. To apply, send a letter of application and curriculum vitae by Nov. 15, 2013, through email attachment to Michael A. King, VP and Seminary Dean, Eastern Mennonite University, michael.king@emu.edu or mail to 1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Application review begins immediately; candidates prioritized for further conversation to be notified by Dec. 31, 2013, and the search will remain open until the position is filled. For more information, visit our website: www.emu.edu/humanresources. EOE

Country living at its best near Shipshewana, Ind. 17 acres available in Amish Country. 12 acres cleared ready to build and plant, five acres wooded. Spring-fed creek runs through property. Contact: myronyoder@aol.com.
Lessons from tomato plants

Some people find it strange that I enjoy eating tomatoes like they’re apples, but it happens to be one of my favorite foods. Sadly, I’m nearing the end of the harvest of my delicious Purple Haze heirloom tomatoes. This particular growing season has been spectacular, and the produce has been enormous and bursting with flavor, so I’ve had an abundance of these delicious snacks.

But it wasn’t just the size and juiciness of the tomatoes that made them especially delicious this year. There was an additional factor. For the first time, I saved seeds from a previous year’s heirloom tomato and raised them from seeds to mature plants. Last fall, I carefully extracted seeds from a tomato, meticulously rinsed and dried them, and kept them through the winter. As the first signs of spring broke through the winter, I watched a few online instructional videos, planted the seeds in starter soil and waited for the first green of seedlings to break through the surface.

The tiny plants grew quickly at first, with each day marking visible changes. Eventually, I potted them so that the roots could expand and grow. Then as the days grew warmer, I slowly introduced them into the wind and direct sunlight of the outdoors. But each evening, I took them back into the house so that the cold of the spring nights would not kill the fragile plants. Eventually, when they were sufficiently hardened to the natural elements, I put the strongest plants into the ground. Suddenly, they didn’t seem so large. Instead of being the sturdy plants that had started as tiny seedlings, they seemed vulnerable in the great space of the garden.

As I watered and watched the plants to look for continued growth, I instead saw yellowing leaves that began falling off. Since it was my first time growing the plants from seed, I assumed I had done something wrong and feared they would soon die from whatever mistake I had made. However, after a few tenuous days, new, bright green growth pushed out, and the plants reached higher. The growth was slow but visible. Clearly the plants were becoming stronger and more deeply rooted.

After weeks of the plants maturing, the first flowers appeared. For a tomato lover, the time between the appearance of the first flower and a mature red (or in this case purple) tomato is excruciating. But after more waiting, I finally experienced the fruits of my labor. How sweet they were!

As it turned out, the extended process of nurturing these plants was therapeutic for me. It served as a metaphor that I needed. Like growing tomato plants, sometimes life seems fruitless. Sometimes our faith seems more full of questions and doubts than full of new life and visible growth. Like plants introduced to the natural elements of the outdoors, painful and difficult circumstances can feel like they will break us.

At one point this summer, we went through a stretch of unseasonably cold weather, and the tomatoes stopped ripening. This reminded me of times when it feels like my own growth and fruitfulness feels plateaued or stagnant. There are many stages in the development of a tomato plant that are vital to its fruitfulness that don’t provide any immediate reward to the gardener. Likewise, there are important stages to our own growth as people that are deep but not particularly spectacular. Developing strong roots is invisible, much like the development of character.

Perhaps it is no surprise that gardening and tending to these plants spoke to me and became a metaphor for life and faith. After all, the teachings of Jesus are full of agricultural metaphors—scattering seed, fruitless fig trees, pruning grape vines and tiny mustard seeds. There is much to these organic processes that parallels our lives. As I consider this, part of what I take from my tomato plant experience is a more patient and gracious understanding about life, faith and character. It applies to the people around me, but also to my own life.

Waiting for growth and fruit can be agonizing, whether it is in the life of someone else or within me. But sometimes there is more to the story than what we see. One of the beautiful things about growing a plant is that, even with all the work and time I invest, the miracle of the life and growth of a plant is beyond my control. So maybe it is OK if I need to trust the same source of life for myself and for others as I anxiously wait to see the fruit I long for.
FILM REVIEWS

Gravity (PG-13) is an extraordinary film that you experience as much as watch. It follows two surviving astronauts from a damaged Space Shuttle as they try to make it back to Earth. The film combines wrenching suspense while exploring themes of meaning. Every aspect—writing, acting, cinematography—make this the best film thus far of 2013. —Gordon Houser

Captain Phillips (PG-13) is about the 2009 hijacking of the U.S. container ship Maersk Alabama by a crew of Somali pirates. Although the real Phillips is not the hero the film portrays, the film is both a thought-provoking docu-mentary from 2012 about the war on drugs and its consequences. The film uses historical footage and many interviews to explore the judicial system that has filled our prisons with nonviolent offenders whose crime is often selling drugs. Because of harsh sentencing requirements established by Congress during the Reagan and Clinton administra-tions (and carried on by others), judges are handicapped in handing out sentences to those found guilty of drug offenses. Interviewee David Simon, creator of The Wire, says, “They might as well say, Let’s get rid of the bottom 15 percent of the population.” That’s the effect of this so-called war on drugs. It destroys individual lives; it destroys communities. It costs all of us.—gh

Prisoners (R) is an intense film about a father who goes to extreme measures to try to find his missing 6-year-old daughter after she and a friend are kidnapped. The film shows the moral ambiguity of its characters, with one exception. It’s certainly not for everyone’s tastes.—gh

DVD REVIEW

The House I Live In (NR) is an informative and heartbreaking documentary from 2012 about the war on drugs and its consequences. The film uses historical footage and many interviews to explore the judicial system that has filled our prisons with nonviolent offenders whose crime is often selling drugs. Because of harsh sentencing requirements established by Congress during the Reagan and Clinton administrations (and carried on by others), judges are handicapped in handing out sentences to those found guilty of drug offenses. Interviewee David Simon, creator of The Wire, says, “They might as well say, Let’s get rid of the bottom 15 percent of the population.” That’s the effect of this so-called war on drugs. It destroys individual lives; it destroys communities. It costs all of us.—gh

Amish romance, memoirs, Natives

T’ll soon be time to think about Christmas gifts. And what better gift than a good book.

Thrill of the Chase: The Allure of Amish Romance Novels by Valerie Weaver-Zercher (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, $24.95) is an everything you wanted to know about Amish romances and more. Weaver-Zercher combines research, literary theory and interviews with readers, publishers and authors to explore why this genre is so popular. An excerpt appeared in our April issue.

Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World by Shirley Hershey Showalter (Herald Press, 2013, $15.99) is a memoir by the former professor of English and later president of Goshen (Ind.) College. With graceful prose and a fine use of detail, Showalter recounts her origins and her childhood in Lancaster County, Pa. She captures the tension between her insular Mennonite upbringing and the allure of the wider world.

Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African by Lamin Sanneh (Eerdmans, 2012, $24) is a fascinating memoir of Sanneh’s growing up in a polygamous household in The Gambia, attending a Muslim boarding school and the impact of Helen Keller’s autobiography on his devotion to education and faith. Sanneh converted from Islam to Christianity and later pursued academia. He is now professor of missions and world Christianity at Yale University. His story is detailed, compassionate and inspiring.

Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice and Life Together, edited by Steve Heinrichs (Herald Press, 2013, $21.99), collects essays and poetry from a variety of sources—both traditional and Christian, Native and non-Native—that address the destruction of Indigenous cultures and land by non-Native settlers and the different perspectives these groups represent.

Heinrichs calls this “a Jonah text” that speaks “a word to, against and for the dominant settler-colonial culture in North America.” Part of that call to “repent, resist, do something” relates to the ways that dominant culture has devastated the planet’s ecosystem. Those courageous enough to read it with an open posture will find new insights and challenges to their usual way of thinking.


Neville looks at these contradictory texts honestly while arguing for a “shalom hermeneutic” to “complement the church’s earlier interpretive rules of faith and love.”

While quite academic, this important book is worth the effort. Neville concludes, “Nothing short of a peacable hope, such as one finds in the vision of a new Jerusalem, does justice to what the story of Jesus reveals about God’s will and way in the world.”

More accessible if less groundbreaking is Jesus and Paul Before Christianity: Their World and Work in Retrospect by V. George Shillington (Cascade Books, 2011, $27). Shillington, who teaches at Canadian Mennonite University, seeks to let Jesus and Paul act and speak out of their own contexts.

This is a good introduction to the topic. 

Gordon Houser is associate editor of The Mennonite.
No ABORTION
No EUTHANASIA
No DEATH PENALTY
No POVERTY
No RACISM
No WAR

BE CONSISTENT.

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Evangelicals for Social Action
Richard Foster
David P. Gushee
Feminism and Nonviolence Studies Association
Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
Stanley Hauerwas
Pax Christi USA
Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
Rev. Patrick Mahoney
Ron Sider
Orthodox Peace Fellowship
People of African Interest & Descent (PAID)
Sojourners
Catholic Worker Houses in Washington DC, Detroit,
Des Moines, Houston, NYC, Waterbury
John K. Stoner
Rev. John Dear, SJ
Wendell Berry
Elizabeth McAlister
Friends Witness for a Prolife Peace Testimony
Glen Howard Stassen
Dorothy Cotton, Civil Rights Activist
Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum
Feminists for Life of America
Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ, Dead Man Walking
Martin Sheen
Jean Vanier, L'Arche International

Democrats For Life of America
Jim Wallis
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God sighting at Four Seasons

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”
—Genesis 1:29 TNIV

In early September, I visited the corporate offices of Four Seasons Produce, based in Ephrata, Pa. I stopped by to see my friend Nelson Longenecker, who serves as vice president of business innovation at Four Seasons as well as vice chair of the board of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).

From the onset of my visit, I observed that leaders of this company take seriously God’s call to be stewards of God’s creation. As stewards, they cooperate with God in the production and distribution of food for the earth’s inhabitants. They handle produce—fruits and vegetables—from many parts of the world and distribute it throughout the eastern United States.

The most visible part of God’s work at Four Seasons, of course, is the creation itself. Without the creation of the world with its vegetation, there’d be nothing for them to distribute. It’s instructive that the writers and arrangers of Scripture put God as the subject of an active verb in the very first sentence of the Bible—“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” That’s one reason I value the term “creation care” as a way of speaking about environmental concerns; it emphasizes stewardship—cooperation with God by caring for the planet God created for human enjoyment.

Four Seasons reflects God’s work by emphasizing and building on the organic nature of food. In fact, half their produce is certified as “organic,” a huge percentage increase over the past decade. Because of their support of organic farmers, Four Seasons has become their distributor of choice in the Pennsylvania area. They also support other local farmers engaged in small-scale production. The closest farmer raises produce just across the fence from the plant; he loads his wagon in the field and brings it across the parking lot to the warehouse.

Because the company imports produce from places as distant as New Zealand, they also have given thought to the carbon footprints left by various means of transportation.

I was surprised to learn that in the transportation of produce, the biggest carbon footprint of all is generally left by the customer driving to and from the store to buy groceries. That’s because the amount of fossil fuel consumed is so high in proportion to the amount of food that is moved. I also learned that sometimes local food production, especially in greenhouses, can consume a higher percentage of fossil fuel than shipping long distances by boat, which is by far the most efficient way to move large quantities of food.

Four Seasons cooperates with God in the care of the earth’s resources in a variety of ways, most visibly in energy conservation. They were recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency as the first warehouse in the country to be awarded the Energy Star. Through rainwater harvesting and enhanced cooling water treatment, they have dramatically reduced the need for public well water. Although the company is growing, they cut back 24 percent on the amount of water needed in 2012 from a similar time in 2007, saving 1.6 million gallons. Through “mixed stream” recycling, they divert 90 percent of the normal waste from landfills.

I also saw God at work in the care for employees—whom they call associates—at this company. Surveys demonstrate that associates feel like their work is significant, that they are making a difference in the world. The Spirit of God enables a cooperative approach that values people at every level in the company.

In my visit to Four Seasons, I was encouraged to see people cooperating with God in the marketplace. I can’t think of a better way for Christian faith to get down to business. MV
According to Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator of Mennonite Church USA, our denomination has moved beyond tokenism in the inclusion of underrepresented racial/ethnic members.

“We have arrived at a critical mass,” she said at a gathering of 60 Mennonite leaders of color last January. “Can we now produce systemic changes?” (see March issue).

Elizabeth’s pronouncement was right, and her question was right. In September, she dramatized the change by first asking all people of color to stand at the joint meeting of the Governance Council and Executive Board. She then asked all women to stand.

“We can see how far we have come,” she said, “and how far we have to go.”

But in an aside, Executive Board member Charlotte Hardt said something prescient to me. “Yes, we have all these women and people of color,” she said, “but we’re still doing business the same old ways. Maybe the women and people of color who make it into the system are just those who can operate in Anglo ways.”

Although many leaders worked at dismantling racism in the church over the years, an event nearly two decades ago laid the foundation for much of what has been done since. In 1994, the “Restoring Our Sight” conference in Chicago, led by Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Tobin Miller Shearer, planted the seeds for what later would bloom as the Damascus Road antiracism training provided by Mennonite Central Committee.

Damascus Road training taught us several important things:

- Most of us white people swim unaware in a sea of privilege.
- While individuals may experience the scales of privilege falling from their eyes in a personal Damascus Road conversion, real and substantial change happens only when systems are transformed.
- When organizations and institutions begin to change, racism mutates into forms that are less obvious and less easy to confront.

One of the most helpful tools developed for the antiracism training was a six-step continuum that described what each stage of positive change would look like. This continuum was helpful because no institution or organization can skip any stage. And each stage brings with it a new set of challenges requiring solutions not employed in earlier stages.

So Elizabeth and Charlotte are both right. We need systemic change in Mennonite Church USA, and the current systems have not changed much. Charlotte may also be right that the reason women and people of color must operate in our current Anglo structures is because there has not yet been a deeply shared vision or the will and resolve to change the systems.

So what systemic changes should we make?

Damascus Road training says the first people to whom we ask this question are those most hurt by white privilege. So we ask our many leaders of color (that “critical mass” as Elizabeth called it) to speak to the issue first.

Of course, not all leaders of color will have the same point of view or suggestions. But if we really have moved beyond tokenism with the leaders now in place, we white leaders will step back, sit down and listen as new voices discern what God’s Spirit would have for Mennonite Church USA in the future. —ejt