

AW Anabaptist World

Mennonite news, inspiring stories

UKRAINE

*Rich history,
vibrant witness
in time of tension*

Dasha Bardus, 11, who loves poetry and music, keeps up with her peers in a Mennonite Central Committee project for children with special needs in Ukraine.

PLUS

CONFESSIONS ARE
LIVING DOCUMENTS

BY MELISSA FLORER-BIXLER

To **serve** with **love**

Women's History in Mission

Irene Weaver 1910–2010

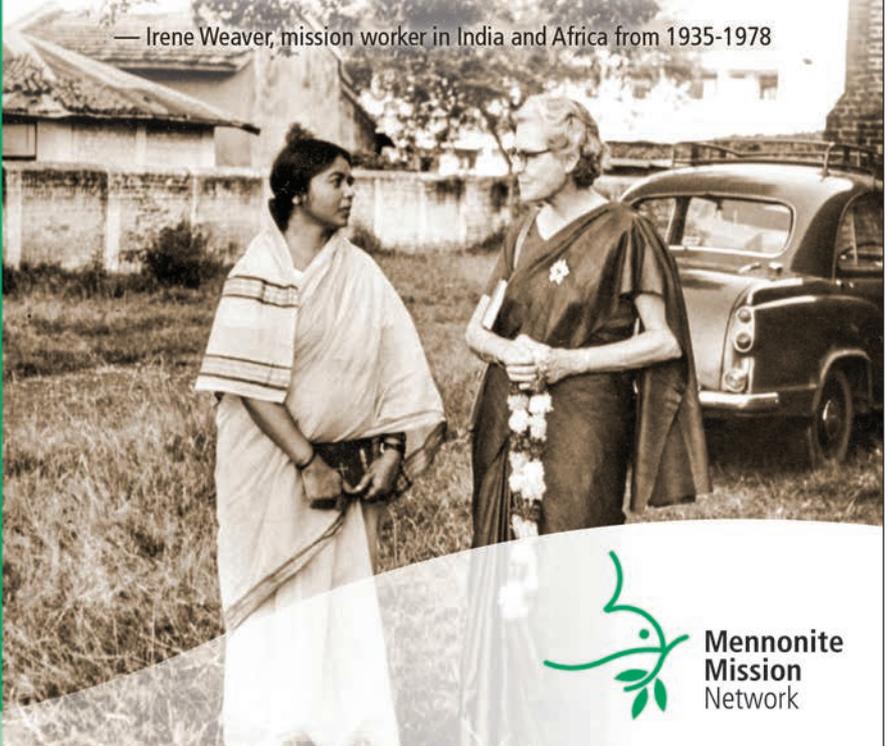
As a missionary in India in the 1940s, Irene Weaver began to speak out against doing mission exclusively from the mission worker's/foreigner's cultural perspective. She and her husband, Edwin Weaver, positioned themselves as teacher-learners; they walked alongside those they served, respecting cultures and prioritizing the integrity of the people. This mission strategy is foundational to how Mennonite Mission Network partners with indigenous churches today.

[MennoniteMission.net/Serve](https://www.MennoniteMission.net/Serve)

Mrs. P. J. Malagar and Irene Weaver in Satya, India.
Photo provided by Mennonite Church USA Archives.

"The whole purpose of my life is to
LOVE PEOPLE INTO GOD'S KINGDOM"

— Irene Weaver, mission worker in India and Africa from 1935-1978



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BY PAUL SCHRAG

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ON THE COVER: Dasha Bardus, 11, of Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, participates in a Mennonite Central Committee-supported project that improves educational outcomes for children with special needs. A teacher says her positive attitude helps overcome difficulties of cerebral palsy. **Photo by Micah Epp/MCC**

BY DANIELLE KLOTZ

What binds us?

IN HIS SERMON ON THE PLAIN (Luke 20), Jesus answers an implied question: “How shall we live?” As in the similar Sermon on the Mount, he responds, “Love your enemies.” He lists various ways to do this — turn the other cheek, give your coat and shirt, lend without expecting anything in return. His message is prophetic, hard and contradictory to many human instincts.

Jesus points the way to love for the sake of loving, not for gain. He offers no promise that this kind of love will always feel good or be easy. But still, he asks it of us. In fact, his death is an example of what might come from such reckless love.

I suppose my thoughts have turned this way because several articles in this issue challenge us to think about what binds us together as followers of Christ.

Throughout our history as Anabaptists, we’ve been good at defining what separates us. We are known for our ability to thrive separate from “the world.” So much so that it’s common in some places for a person like me — who doesn’t wear a head covering or traditional Mennonite dress — to not be recognized as a Mennonite. Or to be told I’m not a real Mennonite.

And we’ve been good at separating from each other. I wouldn’t say there haven’t ever been good reasons for it, but I will say I find some of them less than compelling — cape dress or no cape, colors or patterns, zippers or buttons, tops on buggies or no tops. (I am pro-tops; it gets cold, people!)

I realize that when these practices became lines in the sand, they were serious matters, considered theologically significant. Some of them continue to define certain Anabaptist groups.

In the more progressive Anabaptist denominations, the conversations look different. Tops on buggies aren’t up for discussion, but questions about the purpose of a Confession of Faith, Membership Guidelines, inclusion, exclusion and corporate repentance are taking center stage.

I hope this issue provides avenues to consider our own understandings about what unifies us.

I WONDER ABOUT our historic superpower of separateness, in light of Jesus’ example. He came down to Earth. He wasn’t afraid of those deemed unclean. He understood, intimately, the world’s struggles and pain.

In our conversations about what binds us together, what are the limits of our superpower of separateness and its conscious or unconscious influence over us?

Is our separateness for self-preservation? Is it on principle? Is it out of faithfulness? Depending on who is answering, yes might be true of each one. I wonder what Jesus would say to us today about it. ●



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Do you swear to tell the truth?

A CBC radio program interviewed ministers about “colorful” language. Allan Rudy-Froese, professor of preaching at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, told *Tapestry* that while he doesn’t use curse words in a sermon, he’s intrigued by their ability to speak authentically. “Sometimes, the swear word is actually the most honest word,” he said. “There’s a kind of honesty there about what’s happening, and we’re finding ways to put it into words.”

In one exercise, he has seminary students recite The Lord’s Prayer in an angry tone to reflect frustration about the state of the world. “Give us this day our daily bread.’ Well, [there are] lots of people who don’t have bread at all,” he said. “This is an issue of justice. And in the context of injustice, we should be angry, right? Our anger should be turned into love and into service. But in the moment, there’s just anger, and it’s probably good that we express anger.”

No-holds holiness

Hands-off courtship is essential, writes Andrew Shank in *The Eastern Mennonite Testimony* of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. To ensure physical contact does not take place, “it may be wiser to avoid the handshake,” he writes. “Admittedly, not shaking hands at the first formal meeting may seem almost clumsy, and a handshake could be done without any suggestion of impropriety. But as the relationship progresses, the temptation for a lingering handshake or an extra squeeze might be hard to resist. Such contact would be inappropriate.”

The Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church was organized in 1969 as conservatives withdrew from Lancaster Mennonite Conference.



For Amadeo Castillo, Suyapa Arely Rivera Villanueva and children, their repaired house is “a gift sent by God.” PHOTO: ABSALÓN CALIX/CASM

Out of the mud, from sadness to calm

When Hurricanes Eta and Iota stormed through Choloma, Honduras, in November 2020, Amadeo Castillo and his family lost everything.

“The roof, the walls, the floor, furniture were all ruined,” Castillo said. “It saddened my soul to see how everything was. A half meter of mud covered everything. We had to throw everything away.”

But a year later, he and his wife, Suyapa Arely Rivera Villanueva, and their three children — Maria, 8, Fernanda, 4, and Ana, 1 — stood outside their repaired house, complete with a new zinc roof that keeps them dry.

The *Comisión de Acción Social Mennonita* (Mennonite Social Action Commission), a development organization born out of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Honduras, provided the zinc and wood for roofing and rebar and cement Castillo used to help rebuild their house.

“That is a gift sent by God,” Castillo said. “We are living more calmly, with more confidence and asking God that there not be another disaster.”

Mennonite Central Committee funded supplies for 225 families in the area. It was one of many ways MCC donors helped churches and community organizations in Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala respond to the twin hurricanes. — MCC

LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



Letters & Comments

Write to: editor@anabaptistworld.org

In Jesus' name

Thank you to James E. Brenneman for describing why it is better to think of ourselves as Jesus-centered than Christ-centered ("There's just something about that name," Feb. 11). These days, for many people, the "God question" has died, is dormant or has been killed by forms of Christianity that claim to have all the answers to our needs. An intimate focus on Jesus of Nazareth, located among us in the 21st century, in all of his human compassion, can resurrect the God question for many people. For me, this is what resurrection is all about: representing God's essence of love as we reach out to all marginalized people with healing, saving love.

Brad Yoder, Noblesville, Ind.

Brenneman's article reminded me of Peter's attempt to lecture Jesus on his messianic identity (Mark 8:31-33). Peter wanted a messianic identity of political, religious, national control, with the disciples in charge. Jesus had to tell Peter that this messianic understanding was of Satan and had no place in the ministry of Jesus.

As Brenneman identifies so clearly, Peter's messianic understanding dominates our religious culture. Popular Protestant Christianity preaches a messiah who uses power, control, exclusion and even war to achieve un-Jesus-like ends. He correctly identifies the importance of the teachings of Jesus for Anabaptists and numerous other religious groups.

We have replaced Jesus' message of feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, including the outcast and loving our neighbor (Matthew 25) with a false message that divides people and even advocates killing those who are not like us. Is it any wonder this message is being rejected in many religious circles, even within our own faith communities? Brenneman presents a Jesus-message of salvation that needs to be told again and again.

Don Blosser, Goshen, Ind.

I appreciated Brenneman's article, although I believe he did not go far enough. While the Trinity is a deeply resonant theological image, it is finally not biblical. To base one's faith on a theological dogma

can cause trouble, as Brenneman shows. We are far better off sticking to biblical titles, such as Son or Messiah, rather than the theological idea that Jesus "is" God.

Mitchell Brown, Evanston Ill.

I do not see the problems Brenneman sees with the concept of the cosmic Christ, which has been around since the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century. In the Eastern Church there was no need to emphasize Jesus' cultural distinctives, as these were well known to followers of Jesus in the East. Sadly, Western Christianity has forgotten about the Eastern Church and pays no mind to its history. For the Eastern Church, historically and presently, there is little difference between Jesus and the Christ. The emphasis is both on following the example of Jesus and on worshipping Jesus as the Christ. The Anabaptist tradition has the same errors of omission as all Western churches. Its understanding is Eurocentric and discounts Christianity in its varied forms around the world.

Micheal McEvoy, Nashwauk, Minn.

Thank you for Brenneman's radical call to follow Jesus, the dark-hued Palestinian refugee. Noting *AW*'s "Christ-centered" values statement [cited in Danielle Klotz's executive director's column], I suggest the editors and board reread the Brenneman article and revise the values statement.

Lynn Jost, Fresno, Calif.

To Brenneman's article I would add that in the Gospels there is no reference to what Jesus looked like.

Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pa.

Honoring different choices

Thank you for Lucinda J. Kinsinger's insightful column, "Those who stay, and a man who went" (Feb. 11). We especially appreciate that she honored and legitimized both the decision to stay by some and to go by others. We were blessed, also, by her tribute to Paul Nisly.

Lois and Ernie Hess, Lancaster, Pa.

The next generation?

John D. Roth features prominently in most news referencing the study or sharing of Mennonite history. He's nearing retirement ("MennoMedia hires staff for Anabaptism quincentenary," Feb. 11). I appreciate all Professor Roth has contributed and hope we've been forming the next generation of researchers, recorders and writers of our history.

Rex Rempel, Kirkland, Wash.

100 new war-tax resisters?

It was gratifying to read a summary of the "statement on the value and morality of the 2022 U.S. defense budget" by Mennonite Church USA staff in collaboration with the Mennonites Against Militarism reference council ("Military's priority questioned," Jan. 21). The statement asks, "Are there 100 new war tax resisters among us?"

Is paying for war a form of participation in war? When the U.S. government is annually levying the constituency of MC USA more in taxes to support war and militarism than what we are contributing to our church budgets, we need creativity and courage to step outside our usual paths. Might one of our new paths be to redirect our tax dollars that underwrite war-making to the MC USA Peace Tax Fund?

If our conscience doesn't compel us to redirect up to the portion of our federal income-tax levy that pays for war and militarism — currently widely regarded as 48% — let's consider a tax-deductible contribution to the MC USA Peace Tax Fund. The fund supports educational programs that promote peace, such as a Bible study curriculum on nonviolence. It allocates grants to Mennonite youth so they can participate in activities like the March 6-11 Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Young Adult Peacebuilders Training.

Consider engaging your congregation in this witness. Akron Mennonite Church has a budget line for this fund.

Channeling conscripted income toward meeting human needs gives a testimony to the world regarding Jesus' way of peace.

Harold A. Penner, Akron, Pa.

Introducing Anabaptism

Thank you for the report about the exhibition at Trachselwald Castle ("Stairway stories," Feb. 11). We have recently installed a wireless network that enables visitors to read the exhibit texts via QR code, also in English. And we are working on an English version of the exhibition guide, available in April. We have had very positive responses. Because several well-known electric bike circuits propose a stop at the castle, there are many visitors who have never heard about Anabaptists and are impressed by what they see.

Hanspeter Jecker, Muttenz, Switzerland
The writer is president of the Swiss Society for Anabaptist History.

Join the conversation by writing to editor@anabaptistworld.org or *Anabaptist World*, Box 568, Newton, KS 67114. Letters are edited; 250 words or fewer are preferred. Include your name and hometown.

Rich history, vibrant witness

Where Mennonite ancestors prospered and suffered, Ukrainians and MCC still serve

UKRAINE HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE

in Mennonite history, but today's Mennonite presence there is less well-known.

It is a small presence. There are 520 members in 11 congregations, by Mennonite World Conference's count.

But the impact of Mennonites in Ukraine exceeds what the numbers suggest.

Ukraine is the place where Mennonites enjoyed some of their greatest prosperity and endured some of their worst suffering.

With Ukraine bracing for a Russian invasion as *Anabaptist World* went to press on Feb. 22, we highlight Mennonite ministry and history there.

One Ukrainian Mennonite worth knowing is Sergey Panasovich.

He is the pastor of New Hope Mennonite Church in Zaporizhzhia. In June 2019, he told a visiting group of Mennonite Central Committee board members about his congregation's

ministry in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, where an eight-year war has claimed 14,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands.

The North Americans had traveled to Ukraine, the country where MCC's work began in 1920, to get an early start on celebrating the agency's centennial.

More than two and a half years later, Panasovich is still doing what he described then, say Rob and Rebecca Hessenauer, MCC's country representatives in Ukraine.

Twice a week, Panasovich said, he drives four hours to Avdievka to coordinate peacebuilding and material aid programs supported by MCC. In 2019, Avdievka was less than two miles from the front that divides Ukrainian-controlled territory from the region held by Russian-backed rebels.



Panasovich



Mennonite Central Committee staff and partners raise 100th anniversary balloons after a worship service on June 23, 2019, in Khortitsa, Ukraine, at a "house of culture" where a Mennonite congregation met until 1935.

PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG/MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW

Panasovich's congregation belongs to the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Ukraine. The association is one of MCC's partners.

In 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and instigated fighting in Donbas, New

Even after living for generations in Russian-ruled Ukraine, the Mennonites never assimilated.

Hope launched war-relief ministries. Members opened their doors to people who fled the shelling and fighting. Elderly women donated chickens.

Delivering food to the war zone, Panasovich saw "strong men cry because there were people who didn't forget about them," he said.

After eight years of conflict in the

CRISIS IN UKRAINE

Mennonite Central Committee workers evacuate, Ukrainian churches respond to threat of war / PAGE 17

east, living under the shadow of war is not new, the Hessenauers said. In a Feb. 4 email, they expressed concern, but not alarm, about Russia's buildup of troops at the border. As the crisis escalated, they and two other North American MCC staff evacuated the country on Feb. 13.

MCC's programs of relief, peace, health and education in Ukraine include working with partners to assist people displaced by war in the east.

Among other North American Anabaptist organizations serving in Ukraine, Christian Aid Ministries gives food, firewood, literature and other aid to people affected by the fighting.

As Russia's mobilization threatened a wider war, the MB association sent a letter to European Mennonites requesting prayer. "We see with our own eyes a large number of weapons," said the writer, Roman Rakhuba. Pastors were making evacuation plans for believers and nonbelievers because "this is our calling as Christians."

PANASOVICH AND OTHERS are writing a new chapter in the Ukrainian Mennonite story.

"We tell people the Mennonites are not indifferent to the place where their ancestors came from," he said in 2019.

Mennonites have lived in Ukraine since the 1780s, when they answered Catherine the Great's call for German farmers to settle the Russian Empire's southland. Migrations continued for decades as Mennonites built prosperous colonies. Incentives to settle in Ukraine included self-government and exemption from military service.

Even after living for generations

in Russian-ruled Ukraine, the Mennonites never assimilated. When the government threatened to end their military exemption, a Mennonite delegation traveled to St. Petersburg in 1871 to plead their case.

The minister of war was aghast when he discovered the Mennonites only spoke German.

“You have been in Russia for 70 years and still cannot speak Russian? That is a sin!” he exclaimed, according to *Testing Faith and Tradition*, the Europe volume in MWC’s Global Mennonite History.

Eventually, the Russian government agreed to provide alternative service for Mennonite conscripts under military authority. But that was not enough to stop a third of the Mennonite population — some 18,000 people — from pulling up their roots in Eurasia’s southern steppes and starting new lives by breaking sod on the remarkably similar landscape of North America’s central plains.

Settling along a corridor from Kansas to Manitoba, many of the immigrants joined the General Conference Mennonite Church, transforming it from a small movement into the second-largest Mennonite denomination in North America — and a 21st-century merger partner with the Mennonite Church.

WHILE THE IMMIGRANTS prospered, those who remained in Ukraine fared even better. Some called the four decades between the mid-1870s and



Natalia Mezentseva, second from left, director of New Life, an MCC partner, accepts an MCC centennial gift from North American visitors in Nikopol, Ukraine, in June 2019. Looking on are Robert Enns of Calgary, Alberta, and women’s shelter residents Viktoria Rabchenyuk, second from right, and Tatiana Yorzh. PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG/MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW

World War I a golden age. According to *Testing Faith and Tradition*, even today people ask “whether there ever really was a such a ‘Mennonite paradise.’ . . . What is clear is that the Russian Mennonites reached astonishing economic and cultural heights.”

After such an ascent, the depths that followed were shocking. When the czarist government collapsed in the wake of crippling losses in World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution unleashed chaos. The Red Army, White Army and forces of the anarchist Nestor Makhno ravaged the land and the Mennonite colonies.

In *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine*, Anne Applebaum cites the

memoir of Heinrich Epp, evocatively titled “The Day the World Ended: December 7, 1919, Steinbach, Russia”: “Epp remembered going from house to house . . . and finding that all had been murdered. At each one, he opened the door and found corpses.”

(The 2019 tour group laid flowers at a memorial in Eichenfeld, where 82 Mennonites perished at the hands of Makhno’s forces on Oct. 26-27, 1919.)

THE WORST WAS YET to come. In the 1920s, as the Soviets rose to power, about 20,000 Mennonites managed to flee to Canada before authorities in Moscow halted the exodus. In the 1930s, those left behind endured the closure of churches, arrests and executions, forced exile to Siberia and elsewhere in the east — and the *Holodomor*, a term derived from the Ukrainian words for hunger and extermination.

Fueled by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s paranoia, the *Holodomor* was an act of genocide — the intentional starvation of the Ukrainian people. It claimed the lives of 3.9 million Ukrainians between 1931 and 1934. Applebaum describes the atrocity as motivated by Stalin’s desire to destroy



Lydia Grigoryevna, second from left, gets a birthday hug at Nikolaipolye Mennonite Church in Ukraine in June 2019.

PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG/MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW

Ukrainian national identity and crush any challenge to Soviet authority.

But Ukrainians' national spirit did not die. In fact, it outlived the Soviet Union. In 1991, Ukraine became a sovereign nation for the first time.

Today, Russian President Vladimir Putin, regretting the loss of an empire, covets Ukraine. Repossessing — or controlling as a vassal — the land that some called “little Russia” would empower Putin’s repressive state and deter the emergence of a neighboring democracy allied with the West.

ON JUNE 23, 2019, in Khortitsa, site of the first Mennonite settlement in Ukraine, MCC staff and North American board members gathered to open MCC’s centennial celebration.

They met in a “house of culture” that was once a Mennonite church. As they sang “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” the hymn seemed to carry the weight of history’s joys and sorrows.

For several days they had recalled the events that brought MCC into being — the war, terror and famine that led the Mennonites of Ukraine to plead for help from North America.

They had remembered those who lost their lives in Ukraine’s crucible of



Visitors lay flowers at a memorial in Eichenfeld, Ukraine, where 82 Mennonites were killed by forces of the anarchist leader Nestor Makhno in 1919. PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG/MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW



Sheep graze beside the oldest Mennonite Brethren church building, dedicated in 1883, in the former Mennonite village of Rückenau, Ukraine. It is no longer a church. A plaque commemorates the 150th anniversary of the MB denomination, founded in 1860 during a spiritual revival among Mennonites in Ukraine. PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG/MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW

suffering — including Clayton Kratz, the 24-year-old MCC worker who disappeared after being arrested in 1921 in Halbstadt, staying at his post as the Red Army advanced toward the city.

They had recalled other milestones of Mennonite history, including the founding of the Mennonite Brethren denomination in 1860 in Ukraine, as they visited Molotschna, where the oldest MB church building still stands. It’s now an “oil press,” the tour guide said — a relic of the golden age.

THE VISIT TO UKRAINE reminded us that while worldly powers rise and fall and the works of man flourish for a season, God’s faithfulness endures (Psalm 119:90).

God’s people remain faithful, too. Sergey Panasovich still offers comfort and makes peace in a nation girding for war. He and MCC workers and their partners testify that peace and human dignity are not achieved through military might.

Millions perished as Stalin tried to destroy Ukrainian national identity. But, in the end, it was the Soviet Union — mighty in weapons but empty in soul — that lay in ruins as Ukrainians declared their independence.

The surge of freedom that ended the Cold War brought hope for greater security as the U.S.-Soviet rivalry

ended without nuclear war. Since then, many have grown complacent about the dangers of nuclear weapons. With U.S.-Russian relations now at their lowest point since the Cold War, calls are rising to reverse the progress

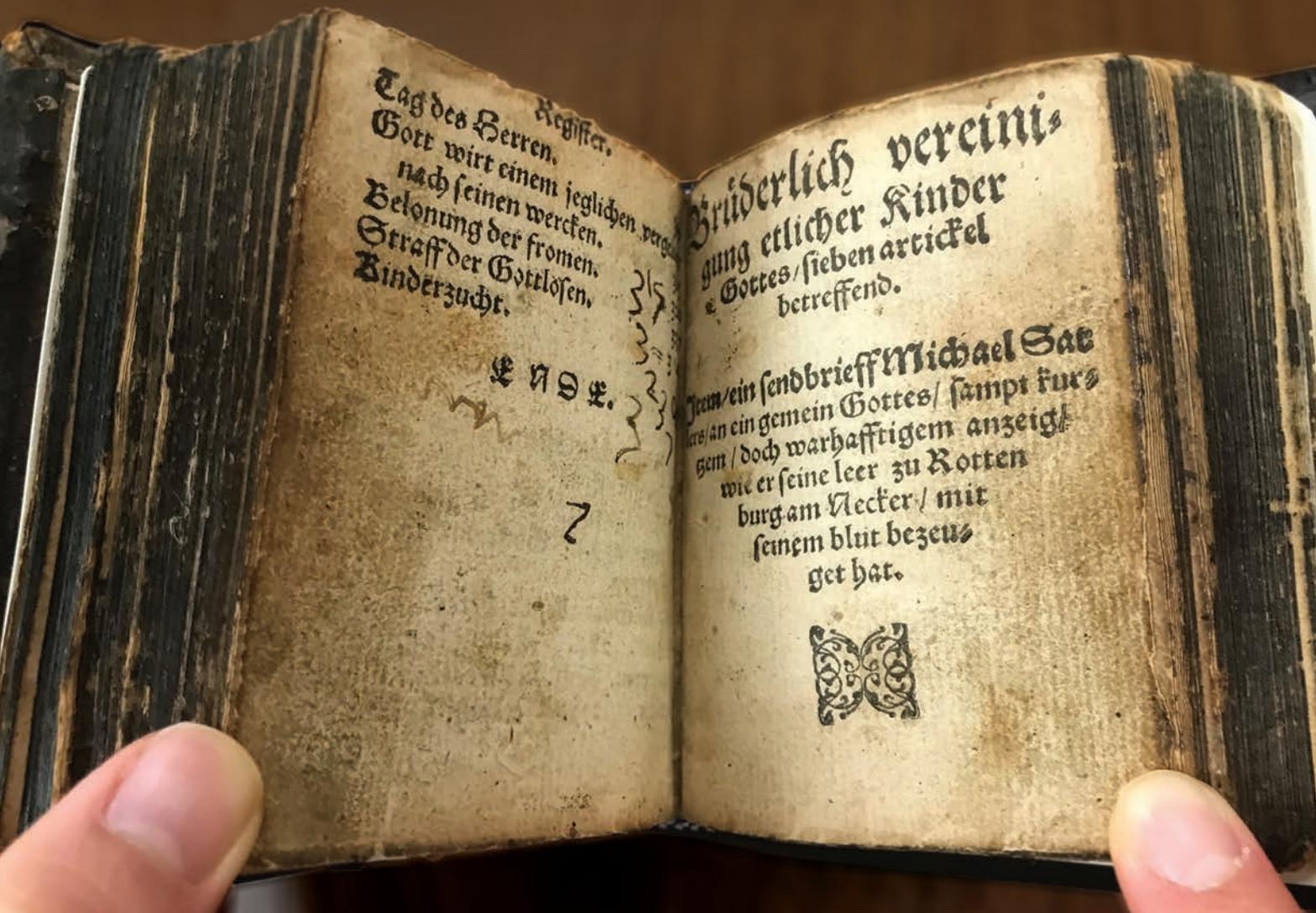
Stalin tried to destroy Ukrainian national identity. But, in the end, it was the Soviet Union that lay in ruins.

of disarmament and bolster the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Peacemakers need to make their voices heard, opposing the risks and waste of militarism.

MCC and its partners, including the remnant of Mennonites in Ukraine, are working to resolve violence and ease poverty by peaceful means. History teaches that nations should follow their example. ●



Paul Schrag of Newton, Kan., is editor of *Anabaptist World*.



Confessional or creedal?

Creeds are binding and forever. Confessions are living documents because the church is alive.

EACH SUNDAY AFTER the sermon, the priest called us to stand. By the time I was a teenager, I no longer needed to open the prayer book. I could recite the Nicene Creed by heart.

In unison, the congregation spoke the words the church adopted 1,700 years ago:

We believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth . . .

A priest told me the creed was

placed after the sermon purposefully.

“No matter how heretical the sermon,” he said, tongue-in-cheek, “the creed makes clear what we believe.”

My journey to the Mennonite church began a few months after this exchange. But it took years for me to understand that I couldn’t slot the traditions of the Episcopal Church into Anabaptist boxes.

Infant dedication wasn’t the equivalent of infant baptism. The denomination’s role didn’t match the authority of bishops.

◀ FIRST CONFESSION

An undated edition of the Schleithem Confession from around 1560. This is the oldest copy known in the United States.

The first Anabaptist Confession of Faith, the Schleithem Confession bears the imprint of Michael Sattler, its primary writer. An assembly of Anabaptists ratified its seven articles at the Swiss village of Schleithem on Feb. 24, 1527. The document circulated quickly in the Swiss and South German Anabaptist communities. It addresses baptism, excommunication, the Lord's Supper, separation from the world, the duties of pastors, nonviolence and avoidance of oaths.

PHOTO: MENNONITE HISTORICAL LIBRARY, GOSHEN COLLEGE

The most difficult and interesting shift was from creeds to Confessions.

Now, as a pastor in Mennonite Church USA, it is my job to help those new to Anabaptism understand how the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* differs from the creeds of the traditions that many in my congregation are leaving behind.

In membership classes, I say our spiritual forebears affirmed that authority rested in the Bible and that creeds, while useful, were superseded by Scripture as interpreted and lived by a body of believers.

Confessions are different from creeds' binding doctrines. Rather than marking for all time the community's boundaries, Confessions describe a church at a moment in time. They address the questions before us and express the discernment of our generation.

Confessions make us clearer to ourselves and others. The first Anabaptist Confession — Schleithem, compiled in 1527 — leaves out the doctrines Anabaptism shared with the universal church. There is no mention of the Trinity or the divinity of Christ. It simply cites Anabaptists' distinctive beliefs.

Confessions change over time. The Dutch Mennonite leader Hans de Ries, who formulated a "Brief Confession of Faith" in Hoorn in 1618, described a Confession as "simply a short statement of what we believe we find in God's Word in contradistinction from others who also claim to hold to the Scriptures."

"And shall we be bound by it?" he

wrote. "We say no, it is subject to improvement."

Confessions are living documents because the church is alive, growing in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE exercises in membership class is to look at three Confessions from different periods of history. We pay special attention to the language used for the church's relationship to the state.

I ask new members to think about the historical moment in which the Confession was written. What was happening in the world? What questions were people asking? What shifts do we see from a generation prior?

The Confession that elicits the most interesting insight is the 1963 *Mennonite Confession of Faith*, approved by Mennonite Church delegates in Kalona, Iowa. What historical moment was

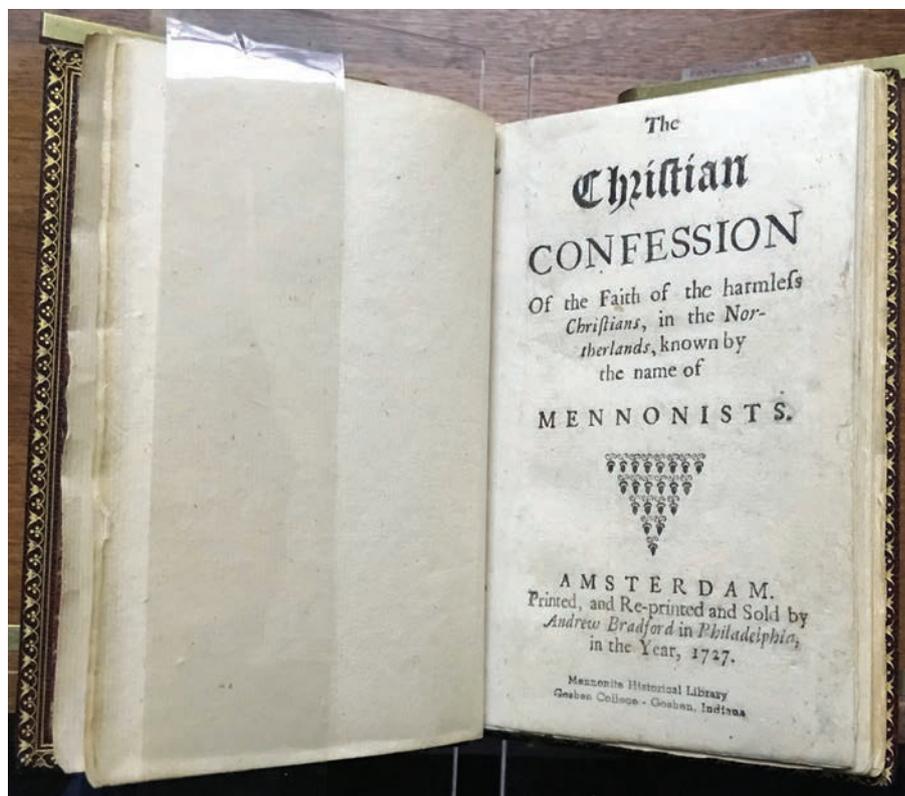
the church facing at that time?

The civil rights movement was a leading concern. Thus the 1963 Confession called the MC denomination to "witness against racial discrimination, economic injustice and all forms of hu-

In 1963, the majority white church responded to Black Mennonites' wisdom by writing the concerns of their time into the Confession.

man slavery and moral degradation."

This was a departure from previous generations of Mennonites who believed tactics of resistance — boycotts, sit-ins, demonstrations — were tools of

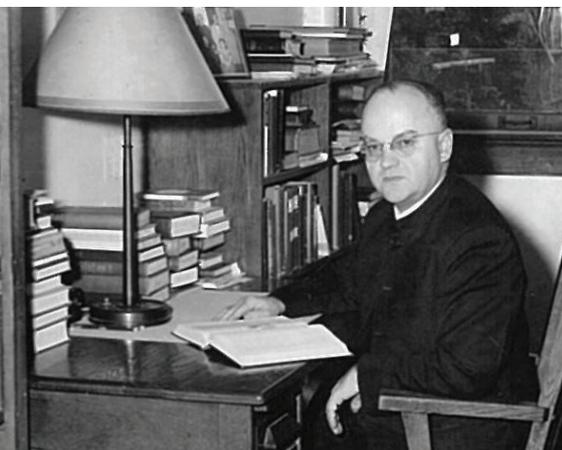


LONGTIME INFLUENCE

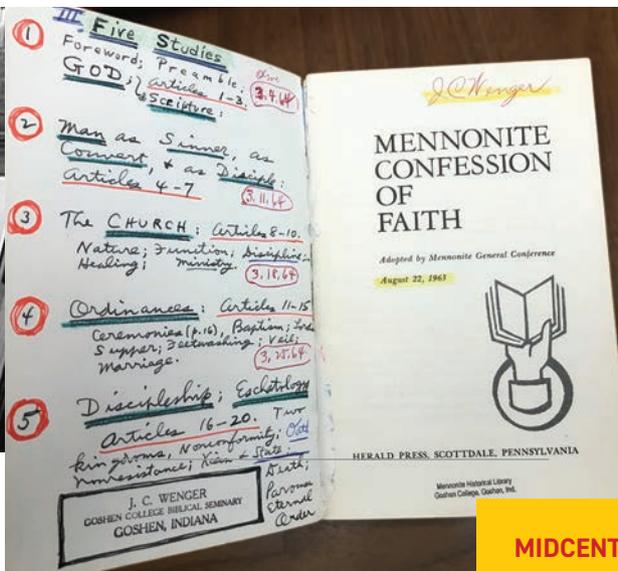
The first North American edition of the Dordrecht Confession, 1727.

The Dordrecht Confession gained wide acceptance after its adoption by Dutch Mennonites in 1632. Approved by Lancaster and Franconia conferences in Pennsylvania in 1725, it continues to be widely used among conservative Anabaptists. Its 18 articles include "washing of the saints' feet . . . as a sign of true humility" and "shunning the separated . . . [for] the reformation of the sinner." In 1963, the committee that wrote the *Mennonite Confession of Faith* said their document "should be regarded as supplementary" to Dordrecht (*Gospel Herald*, Sept. 3, 1963).

PHOTO: MENNONITE HISTORICAL LIBRARY, GOSHEN COLLEGE



Confession writer J.C. Wenger in 1956.
PHOTO: MENNONITE HISTORICAL LIBRARY, GOSHEN COLLEGE



MIDCENTURY CONCERNS (left)

J.C. Wenger's well-marked copy of the 1963 *Mennonite Confession of Faith*.

Seminary professor J.C. Wenger (1910-1995) was likely the primary drafter of the *Mennonite Confession of Faith*, which served the Mennonite Church denomination. He marked this copy with his outline for a study series at Olive Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., where he served as bishop. MC delegates adopted the Confession at Kalona, Iowa, in August 1963.

PHOTO: MENNONITE HISTORICAL LIBRARY, GOSHEN COLLEGE

MERGER FORERUNNER (right)

Pre-merger, the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* served two denominations. Post-merger, it serves two others.

Delegates at the third joint convention of the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church on July 25-30, 1995, in Wichita, Kan., approved a Confession of Faith for both denominations. Since the 2002 merger, it has served Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. The introduction cites predecessors including Schleithem, Dordrecht, Ris (Dutch, 1776, "widely used in General Conference circles"), *Christian Fundamentals* (1921) and the 1963 MC Confession.



Melissa Florer-Bixler is pastor of Raleigh Mennonite Church in North Carolina and author of *How to Have an Enemy: Righteous Anger and the Work of Peace* (Herald Press, 2021).

coercion that followers of Jesus should not use.

But Vincent Harding and other Black Mennonites were challenging the majority white church to take up the call of peacemaking by actively opposing systemic racism.



Harding in 1961

The majority white church responded to Black Mennonites' wisdom by writing the concerns of their time into the Confession. Today, almost 60 years later, members of MC USA actively participate in resistance to racism.

(The General Conference Mennonite Church, which merged with the Mennonite Church in 2002 to form MC USA, did not have a Confession until 1995. This reflected GC congregational polity, uniting for ministry while respecting differences.)

IT IS TROUBLING to see Mennonites treat Confessions as litmus tests rather than as descriptions of a living church. A Confession is not meant as a cudgel to hold people in line.

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective — adopted by MC and GC delegates in 1995 — cites six purposes:

- Providing "guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture."
- Providing "guidance for belief and practice."
- Building a "foundation for unity."
- Offering an "outline for instructing new members."

- Giving an "updated interpretation of belief and practice in the midst of changing times."
- Providing "help in discussing Mennonite belief and practice with other[s]."

I believe the 1995 Confession will not always serve MC USA well. Parts of it no longer resemble the church I know. While we confess that marriage is "between one man and one woman for life," in my congregation there are divorced and remarried people and LGBTQ people who are married.

I experience these marriages as holy and beloved. As our congregation attended to Scripture, we discerned that the faithfulness the Bible anticipates as the gift of marriage is present in relationships beyond those our Confession deems normative and blessed.

Twenty-seven years have passed since the adoption of MC USA's Confession. In those 27 years we've seen the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to systemic police violence. Gun violence has exploded. LGBTQ people and divorced and remarried couples are part of our churches. We face the challenges of climate disaster and a widening gap between the rich and poor.

We can use our Confession as a creed, a mechanism to hold people in check. Or we can listen to each other and to God at work among us. We can gather for the holy work of asking what the Holy Spirit says to us as we read the Bible together. We can trust the God who calls us to proclaim that "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). ●

CONFESSIONAL QUESTIONS



An elder member of a church facing expulsion reflects on grace, judgment and the nature of belief

MY CONGREGATION, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church in Clovis, Calif., has been discerning what it means to be inclusive. After voting to become LGBTQ-affirming, we expect our membership in the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches will be terminated (*AW*, Feb. 11). At issue is our adherence, or lack of it, to the USMB Confession of Faith.

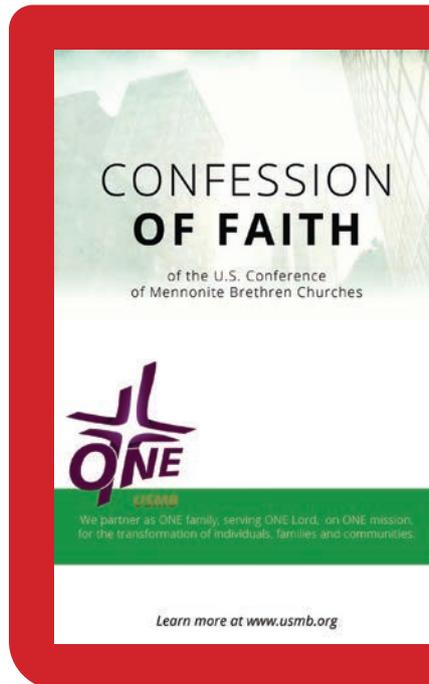
At the age of 84, I defer to younger people to shape the church of the future. Yet, as I ponder the meaning and purpose of Confessions, I offer my thoughts, believing they are relevant to the Anabaptist-Mennonite community.

Old Testament scholar Phyllis Trible has compared Scripture to a pilgrim wandering through the ages. The people of each age ask the pilgrim different questions.

When I was academic dean at MB-sponsored Fresno Pacific College during the 1970s, we faced the question of whether to hire a candidate for a faculty position in biblical studies. The candidate came highly recommended but was divorced and remarried.

In the end, the reasons the candidate cited for the divorce were not sufficient to overcome the simple fact that the divorce had happened. Divorce was a critical question at that time.

One could name issue after con-



MENNONITE BRETHERN DISTINCTIVES

The introduction to the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith describes the document as “an authoritative guide for biblical interpretation, theological identity and ethical practice.”

The Mennonite Brethren Church adopted a Confession of Faith in Russia and North America in 1902 and revised it in 1975. A new Confession, adopted in Wichita, Kan., in 1999, acknowledged a debt to the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. When the binational North American MB conference dissolved in 2000, the U.S. and Canadian conferences both endorsed the 1999 document. In 2014 the U.S. conference revised one article to say nonparticipation in the military is a choice “many of us” make. In 2021 the Canadian conference revised its article on baptism to clarify theology and make it more invitational.

tested issue as our Scripture pilgrim wandered through the ages. Slavery is one obvious example of a grave sin Christians once claimed to justify by Scripture. We are still working out the consequences.

Today, LGBTQ inclusion is a contested issue. Amid the conversation in my congregation, I am asking questions about Confessions of Faith.

Are Confessions descriptive or prescriptive?

“Prescriptive” demands conformity. “Descriptive” leans toward dialogue about what a faith community says it believes. Attempts to prescribe what we must believe run up against the reality that a person convinced against their will is of the same mind still. Real belief cannot be mandated or forced.

In a 1966 analysis of church-spon-

sored higher education, the Danforth Foundation defined categories of colleges. Some are “defender-of-the-faith colleges.” Others are “free Christian colleges” — faith-affirming, surely, but open to conversation about matters

A person convinced against their will is of the same mind still. Real belief cannot be mandated or forced.

of faith and ethics on which people disagree.

Churches may also be so categorized. Defender-of-the-faith churches view Confessions as prescriptive and demand conformity. Dialogue-affirming churches view Confessions as

descriptive, as teaching instruments. These churches leave the door open to conversation about matters on which members disagree, without threat of expulsion.

Who is entitled to discern matters of faith and ethics?

In Anabaptist practice, individual beliefs need to be tested in a community. “Where two or three are gathered in my name,” Jesus said, “I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). But who are the two or three?

Deviations from a Confession, or a faith-community norm, tend initially to be individual and local, arising from specific circumstances. Inviting people to declare their reasons, however, becomes irrelevant if the matter has already been decided at the conference level. Local faith communities, who know their people best, should be allowed to discern whether a deviation is valid and ought to be permitted.

Which is better, centered thinking or boundary thinking?

“Jesus is Lord” was the early Christians’ centered statement of faith. Dialogue-affirming communities will focus here. For them, practices at the boundary will be more fluid and may change from time to time.

Defenders of the faith will more likely hold strictly to the boundaries, not considering that people may confess Jesus as Lord while still having many reasons for deviating from an aspect of a Confession or an ethical norm of a community.

A Mennonite Brethren pastor once shared with me that sitting in his office with parents and their unmarried, pregnant daughter made the option of abortion look different from what he could say publicly. Life can be complex, not easily resolved by Confessional generalizations.

How do we hold what we believe?

At Fresno Pacific College in the 1970s, a guest speaker counseled students about “provisional certitudes.” We all need certitudes, but it makes a difference how we hold them. Certitudes held without question lead to a closed mind. Certitudes held provisionally, until challenged by greater wisdom, lead to a learner’s mind.

What might happen if, instead of judgment, we extended grace to those who — for discerned good reasons, even new biblical insights — see things differently?

Does grace trump judgment?

In parliamentary debate, those who seek change must make their case. Those who deviate are judged. This is a cultural rule.

But the rules do not always rule. Societal change does not wait for parliamentary debate. It happens through lived practice. Adventurous souls step out, deviating from the norm. Others follow.

Those who favor the status quo judge those who are different. But, as Paul and Barnabas demonstrated, those initially judged may turn out to be right (Acts 15).

Confessions of Faith, too, change, but the process is slow. In the meantime, what might happen if, instead of judgment, we extended grace to those who — for discerned good reasons, even new biblical insights — see things differently?

Anabaptist history is replete with occasions when grace, rather than judgment, would have better served those who were excommunicated and the churches they belonged to.

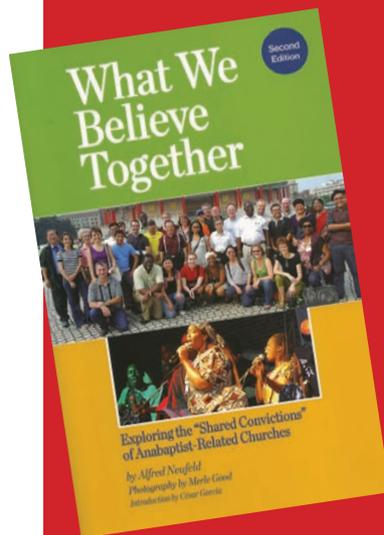
Rather than rushing to judgment, we should follow the recommendation of Gamaliel to wait and see what comes of it (Acts 5:33-39).

Church life is filled with disagreements. But we have options other than going our separate ways.

I am grateful for our Scripture pilgrim, wandering through the ages, patiently enduring our questions and proclaiming the centered confession that Jesus is Lord. ●



Dalton Reimer is a member of Willow Avenue Mennonite Church in Clovis, Calif., faculty emeritus at Fresno Pacific University and author of *Story-Formed Pathways to Peace*.



What We Believe Together (Good Books, 2015) by Alfred Neufeld explores Mennonite World Conference’s “Shared Convictions.”

7 POINTS FOR THE WORLD: MWC'S SHARED CONVICTIONS

While not a Confession of Faith, the Mennonite World Conference “Statement of Shared Convictions” seeks to unite Anabaptists around the world by defining basic beliefs held in common. The MWC General Council adopted the document at a meeting in Pasadena, Calif., on March 15, 2006. It is online at mwc-cmm.org/shared-convictions.

Its seven points address the identity of God; Jesus Christ as redeemer and example; believers baptism and discipleship; the authority of the Bible; peacemaking and nonviolence; worship and the Lord’s Supper; and the church as an inclusive, invitational, nonconformed community serving others and caring for creation.

At the 2006 MWC General Council meeting in Pasadena, Calif., Thijn Thijink-van der Vlugt of the Netherlands, left, Barbara Hege-Galle of Germany and Rebecca Osiro of Kenya visit during a break. Council members approved the “Shared Convictions” document.

PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAG/MENNONITE WEEKLY REVIEW





We can check the right boxes. But do we have life with God?

Between the guardrails

PHOTO: ASHLEY-KNEDLER/UNSPLASH

A S A PASTOR for 10 years, I was a one-sermon preacher. “Life with God, life with God, life with God,” I repeated.

“If you do not have a life with God where you spend daily time in God’s presence, in God’s Word and listening to the Spirit, there is only so much I can do for you in a crisis,” I preached.

“If we each have a life with God, where each of us is spending time getting to know God, sitting before God with our questions, meditating on Scripture and being transparent before God, then we can work through any issue together,” I preached.

Often, I got blank stares. It’s easier to talk about one’s beliefs about sexuality, whether women should lead or what you believe about the Bible. As a survey scientist, I am aware of this. It’s easy to create a questionnaire for folks to check the right boxes. It’s also easy to lie when answering the questions.

There are so many things wrong

with focusing on belief statements and membership guidelines as measures of faithfulness.

First, they become substitutes for true discipleship. If you check the right boxes, then you are a disciple of Jesus. But Scripture says even demons can check the right boxes.

It’s tough to focus on the world God loves while trying to confine the saints between the guardrails we build.

Second, belief statements and membership guidelines are human constructions. Why would a people who have Scripture as our guide, the Spirit as our counselor and a life with God need to create belief statements or membership guidelines unless we fail to trust God’s Word and God’s Spirit?

The secular world uses laws and coercion to control its citizens. But

a church that has Scripture and the Spirit to guide us should not need to rely on legal forms of authority.

It’s tough to focus on the world God loves while trying to confine the saints between the guardrails we build. It’s tough to make new disciples when we’re busy keeping the old ones within the lines we draw.

It’s easier just to ask the saints to check the right boxes and then look the other way when we know they are lying. Which is why many of those who are leaving the church today just might be more honest than some who stay. Jesus preferred honest hearts that don’t fit between perfect lines. ●



Conrad Kanagy is professor of sociology at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania and a former pastor of Elizabethtown Mennonite Church. He blogs at achurchdismantled.com.

MC USA Executive Board looks ahead to special delegate session

Denomination withdraws from CPT steering committee, revamps peace staff roles

THE MENNONITE CHURCH USA Executive Board provided direction and feedback during its Feb. 3-4 meeting for a special delegate assembly in May focused on the denomination's Membership Guidelines.

An MC USA release stated attention was given to the need for clear rules of order during the assembly, when two resolutions to eliminate rules that prohibit pastors from performing same-sex marriage ceremonies will go to delegates for consideration.

Other discussion topics included the use of facilitators for discussions and onsite pastoral care for delegates.

Jon Carlson, moderator-elect and chair of the resolutions committee, said the committee is evaluating the resolutions process and considering ways to strengthen it.

"The delegate assembly in May will give us some insight into how these processes are functioning," Carlson said. "We're starting to think and dream about this. We have been looking at what other Christian traditions do. We're trying to cast a wide net."

It is possible there may be a new resolution process to propose to delegates in 2023.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Glen Guyton reported staff are analyzing a 2021 denominational survey, which will be shared this spring. He said climate justice continues to be a key concern for many, especially younger members.

Other goals for 2022 include developing sustainable funding models, reviewing the resolution process, working with Mennonite Education Agency and MC USA colleges and universities to identify and promote church leadership educational opportunities, and peace and justice initiatives.

Associate executive director Iris de

"The delegate assembly in May will give us some insight into how these processes are functioning. . . . We have been looking at what other Christian traditions do."

— **Jon Carlson**, moderator-elect, on plans to evaluate the MC USA resolutions process



León-Hartshorn previewed upcoming staff changes.

"Director of racial/ethnic engagement" is a new position that will work with racial/ethnic entities within MC USA, support program agencies and help denominational leaders define diversity, equity and inclusion goals. Sue Park-Hur, the current denominational minister of transformative peacemaking, has accepted this role.

Park-Hur's former role will become "denominational minister for peace and justice," a liaison for initiatives throughout MC USA, including antiracism, immigration and militarism. The position has some overlap with activities of the Peace and Justice Support Network, which Mennonite Mission Network ended last year.

"We're trying to complement the work that we do and to resource agencies in a more holistic way," Guyton said. "For our system to work, the Executive Board staff needs to have more of a coordinating function and to ensure that we are not operating in silos."

THE BOARD AFFIRMED a staff recommendation to withdraw from its representation on the steering com-

mittee of Community Peacemaker Teams, formerly Christian Peacemaker Teams, in response to its "shift from a Christ-centered organization to a more community-based entity," the news release stated.

The Executive Board offered a blessing to the organization for its continued work. In a Feb. 9 letter to Guyton, CPT staff expressed appreciation for MC USA's willingness to continue supporting the organization in other ways.

"CPT will always honor its Anabaptist roots while making sure everyone feels welcome in our spaces," they wrote. "We are grateful for the continuing partnership that has nurtured so many people in the organization. CPT is committed to cultivating our relationship with all congregations, and, of course, with MC USA individual members."

In other business, Jim Caskey of the Executive Board audit committee said MC USA finished the fiscal year with increased net assets, a strong cash position and a high operating efficiency ratio of 87%.

The next meeting will be held in person May 27 ahead of the special delegate session in Kansas City, Mo. ●

MCC workers evacuate Ukraine; churches respond to threat of war

AS RUSSIAN MILITARY FORCES gathered near Ukraine's border, churches and organizations operating in Ukraine took precautions in response to escalating tensions.

Mennonite Central Committee evacuated North American staff and family members out of the country Feb. 13, three days after the buildup of Russian soldiers at the border prompted U.S. President Joe Biden to declare "American citizens should leave now."

MCC staff is based in Zaporizhzhia, less than 200 miles from the eastern border. Evacuated personnel include four adults and two children: Rob and Rebecca Hessenauer and their children of Philadelphia, Micah Epp of North Newton, Kan., and Andrea Shalay of Winnipeg, Man.

Laura Kalmar, MCC Canada director of marketing and communications, said Ukrainian staff who remained were following security protocols and staying in touch with MCC leadership.

"The safety and security of all our staff and partners — and, indeed, all the people of Ukraine — are of utmost concern," she said Feb. 16.

Ukrainians have been on sustained, routine alert since 2014 when Russia seized the Crimea region. The military buildup that began in January heightened tensions.

Roman Rakhuba of the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine said those tensions were compounded by hospitals being overwhelmed with COVID patients, stoking fear and uncertainty.

Mennonite World Conference European coordinator José Arrais shared a letter from Rakhuba on Jan. 26.

"Most of our churches are located five to 100 kilometers (three to 60 miles) from the front line, and we see with our own eyes a large number of weapons," he wrote.

Mennonite Brethren churches were preparing basement shelters with water, food and medical supplies.



The Mennonite Centre at Molochansk, Ukraine, in a 2019 file photo. The building is a former Mennonite school. PHOTO: MATT SAWATZKY/MCC

"All the pastors of the Mennonite churches are developing a plan for responding to hostilities and evacuating people," he wrote. The pastors "understand that in case of war we will not run away, but we will take our families out and will be evacuating both believers and nonbelievers."

FRIENDS OF THE Mennonite Centre in Ukraine operates an assistance center in Molochansk, south of Zaporizhzhia, serving people experiencing poverty in former Mennonite villages. The Canadian-sponsored organization has not had a North American director on site for two years due to the pandemic, but board chair Alvin Suderman has been in weekly contact with manager Oksana Druchinin.

The center has typically fed meals to about 60 seniors three times a week, but lately the number has doubled due to the pandemic and inflation.

"There is a sense of fatalistic calmness in Ukraine," Suderman said Feb. 14. ". . . At our insistence, they have stockpiled some nonperishable food in case of disruption by an invasion so that our meal program could continue. We have also repaired and tested our backup generator and increased our

supply of propane."

The Mennonite Benevolent Society, based in Winnipeg, sponsors the Mennonite Family Centre, which provides programs for seniors and children with special needs in Zaporizhzhia. Project director Louie Sawatzky said all 32 of the center's staff are local citizens.

"We will continue the programs where we can, with home-care workers working out of their homes as they do now and, as much as possible, run the other programs as we are able," he said Feb. 14.

Mennonite Economic Development Associates has supported horticultural projects in Ukraine since 2014. Field operations ended in December, and MEDA was in the final stages of concluding operations before the latest round of tensions with Russia. The last office will close in March.

"This project was originally designed to be in some parts of eastern Ukraine and Crimea," said Scott Ruddick, MEDA director of security. "When Crimea was invaded, we shut that down and redid the programming. The programming is ending because the project life cycle is done. The shut-down really has nothing to do with the current state of things." ●



Participants at the Anabaptist Collaboration on Climate Change discuss how Anabaptist organizations can work together in response to climate change on Jan. 26-27 in Akron, Pa. PHOTO: JOSEPH HARDER/CSCS

Agencies commit to climate action

Leaders of 18 entities discuss how Anabaptists can contribute to climate-change solutions

THE LARGEST GATHERING of Anabaptist leaders on climate change in North America was notable for who was absent.

“We represent the people who are causing the problem more than people who are affected by it,” said Doug Graber Neufeld, director of the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions and biology professor at Eastern Mennonite University, during the Anabaptist Collaboration on Climate Change conference Jan. 26-27 at Mennonite Central Committee’s Welcoming Place in Akron, Pa.

Leaders from 18 Anabaptist organizations in the United States and Canada convened to address what many consider a moral emergency.

Sarah Augustine, who represented the Coalition for Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery, sought to represent those on the front lines of climate change and to remind others that climate change isn’t an abstract concept. There are people suffering now.

“Indigenous people and vulnerable people . . . are usually the first people who are impacted; they’re the first who are going to be refugees, the first who are displaced, the first people injured by climate change,” she said. “It’s good to see Mennonite institutions willing to take a stand.”

Ray Martin, who helped found CSCS, believes Anabaptists are uniquely positioned for climate action.

Those gathered drafted a statement later signed by the majority of the participating entities: “As organizations founded on Christian faith in the Anabaptist tradition, we recognize the significant threat to global communities, economic justice and the next generations from climate change. We are committed to explore our work and

mission in support of sustainable and just climate solutions.”

THE MEETING WAS organized by the CSCS, which for five years has functioned as a joint initiative among three partners: EMU, MCC and Goshen College. To broaden its reach, CSCS is deepening its relationships with a wider range of partners.

“There is a real risk that climate change will have a huge impact on things Mennonites care about,” said Ray Martin, who helped found CSCS. “The well-being of families, conflict, sustainability of agriculture, hunger, our sense of community, our health, the livability of low-lying areas, even our faith” will be affected.

Martin believes Anabaptists are uniquely positioned for climate action.

Anabaptists have a history of radical innovation, a theology centered on community and care for creation, a background in agriculture and land stewardship and a value placed on

simple, selfless living. These attributes “may make us more open to acknowledging the concerns of global warming and more willing to change our ways to address the risks,” he said.

Jennifer Halteman Schrock, director of Mennonite Creation Care Network, which works closely with CSCS on congregational outreach, appreciated the questions posed at the gathering.

“How might we leverage our unique identity in practical ways?” she asked. “What assets do our organizations have that we could mobilize? What could we do together? It will take time for answers to emerge.”

Participants were asked how CSCS can support Anabaptist organizations in climate efforts.

“With climate change accelerating, it is clear that individual organizations will find it more and more difficult to make a difference,” said Mark Lancaster, CSCS advancement director. “There is a growing need for building collaborations among Anabaptist organizations to create broader impact, and CSCS would like to embrace this role to coordinate work and catalyze actions.”

The center plans to organize more gatherings on climate change, including a broader range of participants.

CSCS FACILITATORS encouraged participants to consider how organizations can incorporate climate justice into their operations and missions.

- **For Mennonite Men**, climate action looks like developing the JoinTrees campaign to plant 1 million trees by 2030.
- **For Goshen College**, it looks like developing young leaders and conducting research to inform the sustainability work of others.
- **For Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship**, it means exploring the ethics and impact of climate change on human health.
- **For MennoMedia**, it looks like incorporating Anabaptist perspectives of climate issues into publications that reach beyond Anabaptist audiences.

“Having the Mennonite church step forward as a tradition and say, ‘On behalf of peace we have to defend the climate . . . defend the Earth’ — that brings me hope,” Augustine said. ●

Canadian call to action

MC Canada issues statement on ‘climate emergency’

LEADERS OF MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA are calling on members, congregations and regional churches to respond to the climate emergency.

“We must act, we must act together, and we must act urgently,” wrote the denomination’s executive ministers in a four-page document published Feb. 7.

The document was prepared after the Joint Council, which includes executive ministers and moderators from each regional church, affirmed climate action as a nationwide ministry emphasis in a Jan. 30 meeting.

“This is the most significant existential crisis facing us as humanity right now. The church needs to respond in real, practical ways.”

The document acknowledges the climate emergency requires immediate action but emphasizes there is still good news: “For us as Christians, the good news always starts with this: ‘God so loved the world’ (John 3:16). God our Creator, the Creator of the earth and all that is in it, has crafted all things in love and deemed them ‘very good’ (Genesis 1:31).”

The ministers stress action must be rooted in God’s call for the church to “enter into the groaning of God’s suffering creation, to walk in solidarity with all that suffers because of human greed and violence, walking toward newness and fullness of life” (Romans 8:18-27).

SIX INITIATIVES “reflect our working commitments as a nationwide

church.” These came out of consultation with working groups and regional church boards across MC Canada:

- Broaden the mandate of MC Canada’s Sustainability Leadership Group.
- Create space for youth to engage on the climate crisis.
- Open discernment about “simple living” and encourage congregations and members toward this path.
- Explore divestment/investment options related to mitigating climate change.
- Set up a central webpage to provide creation care and climate action resources for congregations and working groups.
- Commit funds to support MC Canada’s climate actions.

“In 2021, in B.C., we learned two new terms: ‘heat dome’ and ‘atmospheric river;’” said Mennonite Church British Columbia executive minister Garry Janzen. “Almost 600 lives were lost as a result of the heat dome in July. We have experienced three atmospheric rivers from November 2021 to January 2022, causing extensive flooding, massive destruction of property and shorelines and catastrophic loss of animal life and crops on farms in the Fraser Valley.”

Michael Pahl, executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba, said: “This is the most significant existential crisis facing us as humanity right now. The church needs to respond in real, practical ways, and we as a Mennonite Church have important gifts we can share toward this global, ecumenical effort.”

The full document, “Taking Action on Climate Change: The Eco-Mission of the Church in a Critical Time,” is online at mennonitechurch.ca/climate-action. ●

Separation from the world binds Low German Mennonites

Numbering 100,000 in Canada, they're internationally mobile and not monolithic



AFTER BEING MOSTLY IGNORED for decades, conservative Low German-speaking Mennonites in Canada are on the public radar during the pandemic.

This is due to how many members of the group have resisted efforts to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or wear masks, said Hans Werner, a retired professor from the University of Winnipeg.

“They have a long history of resisting state-imposed requirements” like vaccinations, said Werner, a member of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man., who has spent time studying and writing about the group.

Their anti-vaccination status has created tension between them and more progressive Mennonites in Canada, who have been more accepting of following public health orders, he added.

Also known as *Kanadier* (Canadian) Mennonites, they are descendants of those who came to Canada in the 1870s but then left for Mexico and Paraguay starting in the 1920s when the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan went back on promises to let them run their own schools.

Many retain Canadian citizenship today, allowing them to move between Canada and other countries like Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia and Belize. Most come back for economic reasons.

In Canada, they can be found mostly in southern Manitoba, southwestern Ontario, Nova Scotia and Alberta. It is estimated there may be as many as 100,000 in the country.

Some have also settled in Kansas and Texas, Werner said. Some are undocumented.

Wilhelm Loewen and his family of *El Temporal* Colony, Campeche, Mexico.

PHOTO: KENNERT GIESBRECHT/DIE MENNONITISCHE POST



A boy and girl at *Nuevo Progreso* Colony, Campeche, Mexico. PHOTO: KENNERT GIESBRECHT/DIE MENNONITISCHE POST

“They left because they felt their privileges, promised when they chose to come to Canada, were being taken away,” he said. “They felt the state was imposing its control over them.”

But they are not monolithic, and not all oppose vaccination against COVID-19. Those who resist vaccination often attend churches “infused with American right-wing thinking,” he said.

ONE THING THAT BINDS THEM together is a firm belief in the Anabaptist idea of separation from the world, expressed in rural community life and distinctive dress.

“This is a different take from more progressive Mennonites,” Werner said.

One area of tension between them and other Mennonites is how some Mennonite denominations “see them as a mission field,” he said. “This is very disconcerting for them, a very divisive thing. Their idea of religion is more community-based.”

Werner doesn’t want to gloss over challenges the group faces.

“They have serious problems,” he said, including lack of education and poverty.

Werner, who is fluent in Low German, wants to help mainstream Canadian Mennonites understand more about this group.

“Low German Mennonites have often been the objects of curiosity,” he said. “Depending on who is looking, and on which group the gaze falls, they are backward, an embarrassment, quaint, hard workers, enterprising farmers, a problem or a blissful escape from the tensions of modern life.”

He is doing that through an online course at Canadian Mennonite University, “The Low German Mennonite Diaspora: A History of Separation, Adaptation and Resistance.”

The course, which runs for an hour on Thursdays from March 3 to April 7, is taught through CMU’s Xplore

“Depending on who is looking, and on which group the gaze falls, they are backward, an embarrassment, quaint, hard workers, enterprising farmers, a problem or a blissful escape from the tensions of modern life.”

— Hans Werner

program. It examines the origins, culture and faith practices of the Low German Mennonites of the Americas. Questions it addresses include what it means to live separately from the world, how faith and culture are intertwined and what their story might teach other Mennonites. ●

Fire destroys Pennsylvania camp's maintenance building, equipment

LAURELVILLE RETREAT CENTER in Mount Pleasant, Pa., lost its maintenance building and all the contents in an early morning fire Feb. 12.

The Mennonite camp, which occupies more than 600 acres, reported the fire was caused by either a furnace or air compressor.

Executive director Jeanette Lahm said the building and contents were valued at around \$315,000. The fire did not spread to the woods or other buildings.

Located about a quarter mile from the main grounds, the structure housed equipment, vehicles, tractors, tools, mowers, plows, golf carts and supplies. Donations are being accepted at laurelville.org.

"The insurance will have coverage for the building," Lahm said Feb. 21 as about 70 volunteers, including people from the Laurelville board, Cove Valley Camp and four other local camps, did cleanup. "Contents will be shy of that, but we have a donation response for that. . . . We're still down a few vehicles. They weren't worth a lot on the books, but they were worth a lot to us." ●



Top: Firefighters contain the blaze Feb. 12 at Laurelville Retreat Center's maintenance shed.

PHOTO: JAMES BROOKS/USAF FIRE PHOTOGRAPHY

Middle: The maintenance building housed vehicles, equipment and supplies.

PHOTO: LAURELVILLE RETREAT CENTER

Bottom: The maintenance building was constructed in 2001.

PHOTO: LAURELVILLE RETREAT CENTER



Was that a Mennonite pastor?

Mennonite Church Canada denounces white nationalism at 'Freedom Convoy'

WHEN A CHURCH SERVICE was held on Jan. 30 in Ottawa at the so-called "Freedom Convoy" — a protest by truckers from across Canada against vaccine mandates and public health restrictions that was tainted by anti-semitism and white nationalist and Nazi symbols — some media identified the preacher as a Mennonite.

The speaker, Henry Hildebrandt, actually is the pastor of the Church of God Restoration in Aylmer, Ont., a group of about 30 churches headquartered in Ohio. His church, which has attracted Low German-speaking Mennonites, is at the forefront of flouting pandemic restrictions and has been fined over \$100,000.

The involvement of people like Hildebrandt — who grew up a Mennonite in Mexico — is one of the reasons Mennonite Church Canada issued a statement to separate the denomination from clergy and others in the rallies who were identified as Mennonite.

But the bigger concern was symbols of bigotry and hate at the protest, which found hundreds of trucks converging on the Canadian capital.

"We unequivocally denounce the symbols, words and actions of white nationalism being expressed in Ottawa and across the country," said the statement, released Jan. 30. "While we support the right of people to gather peacefully in protest of government laws perceived to be unjust, we cannot support any action that promotes anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or racism."

Church leaders decided to issue the statement after seeing Nazi flags and symbols and the use of yellow stars at the convoy in Ottawa and in other cities, said Michael Pahl, executive minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba, who signed the statement along with colleagues across the country.

"We were also moved to action when we saw members of the Jewish and Muslim communities calling on Christians to respond," he said. ●



Protestors show support for Freedom Convoy truck drivers Jan. 27 in Vaughan, Ont. PHOTO: ARTHUR MOLA/AP

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Ask God for a little, get much more

Once-nomadic congregation settles into a home with spiritual and economic potential

PLANTING A CHURCH in Bogotá, Colombia, Jaime and María Victoria Ramírez have seen God provide far more than they dreamed of.

They've also learned not to be discouraged by having to move around a lot before finding a long-term home.

The Ramírezes' church-planting journey began when they wanted to make discipleship training more convenient for people in the Bogotá neighborhood of Suba. Jaime Ramírez and fellow pastor Peter Stucky decided to plant a church there.

The Ramírezes drew inspiration from the Sent Network, which *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (Christian Mennonite Church of Colombia, or IMCOL) encouraged them to participate in.

A program of Mennonite Mission Network, the Sent Network is designed to recruit, equip and prepare church planters to create and foster Anabaptist communities.

It uses a framework known as APEST, which stands for Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher. This helped the Ramírezes and the rest of the leadership team focus on their specific callings.

Finding a permanent location for the church was a challenge. When the congregation started meeting in 2014, they met on the terrace of a member's rented home. Soon after, they started moving from home to home.

Eventually, they rented a small space in a communal building. But they would often show up only to find someone else had rented the space.

Still, the congregation persevered. Another member offered their home, and the congregation helped make repairs to it. Eventually, they rented space in an apartment building in the *Caminos de Esperanza* (Pathways of Hope) neighborhood. They adopted the name of the neighborhood as the congregation's name.

Soon they outgrew the *Caminos de*



After years of moving from place to place, the Pathways of Hope congregation bought a building with three storefronts. PHOTO: MENNONITE MISSION NETWORK

Esperanza building. After renting a two-story house for about three years, the congregation began to expand its ministries.

“It is as if I asked God for a small car and God gave us an airplane.”

— Jaime Ramírez

JAIME RAMÍREZ HAD ALWAYS been an entrepreneur who hoped to start businesses for the kingdom of God. He and María Victoria wanted to provide jobs for the women in their community. Their daughter, Dayana Ramírez Sosa, was trained as a baker, so they started a bakery in the building the church was renting.

Five women from the congregation, along with Jaime Ramírez, began producing baked goods, which flew off the shelves.

IMCOL was excited by the poten-

tial and began fundraising with the congregation. Grants and loans, some through MMN, along with local efforts made it possible to purchase a building with more than 3,000 square feet. It includes three storefronts — where they plan to locate the bakery, a coffee shop and bookstore — and ample space for church services.

Jaime Ramírez sees the hand of God in the real-estate deal. They were able to buy the property for a little more than half the appraised value.

“It is as if I asked God for a small car and God gave us an airplane,” he said.

Pathways of Hope plans to keep on expanding its ministries. Jaime Ramírez has ideas for several projects, including providing diapers for mothers with handicapped children and food for people without homes.

“I’m 66 now. I’m not that young,” he said. “But I see myself [continuing to] combine social work, entrepreneurial work and church-planting work. That’s where I see my future.” ●

EMM's building is soaking up the sun

EASTERN MENNONITE MISSIONS flipped the switch Jan. 3 to begin generating enough solar energy to meet half of the electrical demands of its new Hub 450 property in Lancaster, Pa.

"We are delighted to be able to initiate this renewable energy resource as part of our renovations on this historic building," said EMM chief operating officer Joe Hollinger.

Hub 450 is the name of the building EMM owns at 450 N. Prince St. It is occupied by EMM's administrative staff and the local, cross-cultural ministries of the Hub 450 hospitality center.

EMM anticipates the rooftop solar array to generate 73,800 kilowatt hours of electricity a year. This will eliminate 25.6 tons of greenhouse gases from being emitted into the atmosphere annually.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated in 2020 that an average Pennsylvania house uses 846 kilowatt hours of electricity a month. EMM's solar array is expected to generate the monthly equivalent of seven households' electricity consumption — or 6,150 kilowatt hours. Designed by Dennis Kready of MVE Group, the solar array is made up of 150 modules.

This system is financed by an investment relationship in which a private entity will own the solar array for six years. During this time, the energy will be sold to EMM at a predetermined price. At the end of the term, the owner of the system will sell it to EMM at fair market value.

Other sustainable efforts at Hub 450 include LED lighting and a new roof with 8 inches of fiberglass insulation and a reflective, white rubber top layer.

During the 2020 renovation, EMM was able to recycle several hundred ceiling tiles, 18 tons of light iron, 500 pounds of copper pipe and 2,000 pounds of copper wire. Many of the cabinets and doors were donated to Habitat ReStore. ●



The 150 solar modules at Eastern Mennonite Mission's Hub 450 property will generate 73,800 kilowatt hours of energy a year, about half of the facility's energy needs. PHOTO: BOB BUZZARD/MVE GROUP

Friends of Shirati celebrates Women's History Month

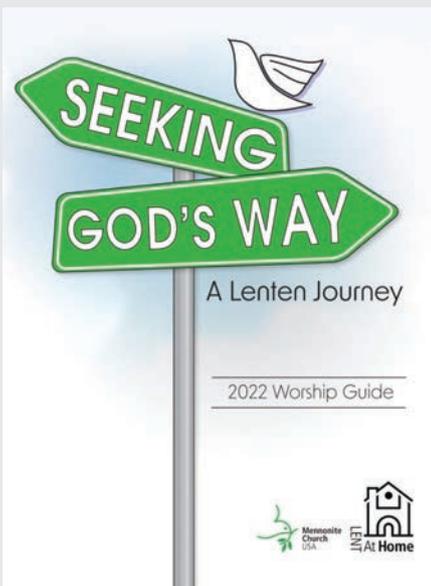
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Friends of Shirati provides medical, education and development assistance to Shirati Hospital, Tanzania. www.friendsofshirati.org

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Mennonite Church USA daily resources to observe Lent at home are available free online.

PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH USA

MC USA home Lent guide available online

Mennonite Education Agency of Mennonite Church USA has released its Lent at Home 2022 worship guide at mennoniteusa.org/lentathome. The annual guide provides options for households to follow daily or weekly rituals, including Scripture readings, prayers and other activities.

"Lent is a long season, and finding a ritual that's sustainable is hard! This year's resource includes a daily calendar with simple daily practices. Even if you miss a day or two, you can experience the big picture of Lent," said Talashia Keim Yoder, author of the Lent at Home guide and pastor of Christian formation at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

In addition to the guide and calendar, Keim Yoder has created two videos that introduce the guide.

— Mennonite Church USA

ACC offices moving due to school consolidation

The office of Atlantic Coast Conference of Mennonite Church USA will move in June.

The office currently is located in Locust Grove Elementary School in Smoketown, Pa. Due to consolidation in the Lancaster Mennonite School system, the building is being sold, and the office is moving to Forest Hills Mennonite Church in Leola.

ACC's *Currents* newsletter reported a former Sunday school wing at the church is being updated, with a final move planned in early June. — *Anabaptist World*

Conference to focus on Amish and their neighbors

The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania will host a conference June 2-4 on interactions between Amish communities and the wider society.

"The Amish and Their Neighbors" will focus on areas such as public health, government regulation, business and economic development, charitable work, land use and environmental issues, tourism and civic involvement.

Carl Desportes Bowman, director of survey research at the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, will give a keynote address about how 21st-century American culture pertains to the Amish.

Other presenters include Jeanette Harder, professor of social work at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, on Plain communities and foster care and adoption; Rachel E. Stein, associate professor of sociology at West Virginia University, on relationships between public health officials and the Amish amid COVID; and Kyle Kopko, director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, on Old Order Amish voter participation in the 2004, 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

"The population growth and geographic spread of Amish and other Plain Anabaptist groups make the topics presented and discussed at this conference critically important," said Steve Nolt, interim director of the Young Center. "Today, there are more Amish living in new places with neighbors who have not previously interacted with Plain people. This development means new relationships are forming, and, in some cases, potential misunderstandings are surfacing."

More information is at etown.edu/amish2022.

— Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies

MennoMedia reappoints director, reports strong sales

Amy Gingerich has been reappointed as executive director of MennoMedia. The agency also reported strong sales of the *Voices Together* hymnal and other books.

The MennoMedia board unanimously affirmed Gingerich for a second four-year term leading the publishing agency of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

Board chair Lee Schmucker said Gingerich "demonstrates creative, visionary and collaborative leadership guiding MennoMedia in delivering thoughtful Anabaptist resources."

Accomplishments under Gingerich's leadership include a "financial turnaround during the past four years, even with the challenges of the global pandemic," a MennoMedia release stated.

Sales of *Voices Together* surpassed expectations. Published at the end of 2020, the new hymnal sold nearly 42,000 copies in its first year, three times the goal.

Sales of Herald Press books surpassed \$1 million in fiscal year 2021, a feat not accomplished since 2012. MennoMedia publishes 18 to 21 new books a year under the Herald Press imprint.



Gingerich

The *Shine* curriculum launched a new *Shine at Home* curriculum for families amid changing patterns of attendance due to the pandemic. A new annual story Bible corresponding with the weekly Bible stories debuted in fall 2020 to draw children and families deeper into the biblical story.

— *Anabaptist World*

U.S. MBs redirect COVID funds to church planting

Mennonite Brethren Foundation has redirected more than \$200,000 remaining in its COVID Church Relief Fund to be used for church planting.

The organization started the fund in April 2020 to assist MB congregations during the pandemic. More than \$527,000 was raised, including \$375,000 from MB Foundation, and \$310,728 was allocated to 54 churches.

MB Foundation stated that funds not used would be earmarked for church planting. Requests for funds decreased in recent months. The MB Foundation Board of Directors redirected the remaining \$216,315 to the recently formed national Church Planting Council of the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

"The funds were initially a tremendous resource to our churches during the pandemic," said USMB executive director Don Morris. "With the redirection to church planting, they will now be a blessing to future churches." — *Anabaptist World*

Hispanic Mennonite Church has new moderator-elect

Josué González of Miami was elected as moderator-elect of *Iglesia Menonita Hispana* (Hispanic Mennonite Church) Jan. 29 during IMH's national assembly.

IMH is a racial-ethnic constituency group of Mennonite Church USA.



González

González's four-year term began immediately. He will serve two years as moderator-elect and two years as moderator. He will also serve on the Constituency Leaders Council of MC USA.

González is a founding member and elder of *Iglesia Menonita*

Encuentro de Renovación (Encounter for Renewal Mennonite Church) in Miami, which is part of Mosaic Mennonite Conference. He is a cargo flight dispatcher and married to Noemi.

He is also a student of the *Instituto Bíblico Anabautista* (Anabaptist Bible Institute) of Mennonite Education Agency and is set to graduate this spring.

González shared his thoughts about being called to leadership in the Hispanic Mennonite Church.

"When I started my studies at the Anabaptist Bible Institute, my life changed, and I started to think that God is training me not only to know more about him but to serve him as a true disciple," he said. "I understood that I should work with the Mennonite church and be able to help in the ministry where the Lord will use me. I just said, 'Here I am, Lord. I am willing to work for you.'" — MEA

Webinar to address disabilities, estate planning

Anabaptist Disabilities Network and Everence will host a webinar on disabilities and estate planning.

The webinar will address how to provide for a person's physical, emotional and financial well-being after the death of a caregiver — a process that can be complex and confusing.

"After We're Gone: Disabilities and Estate Planning," will take place at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. EDT March 31. Registrants will be able to watch a recording at a later time.

The webinar will be led by Dennis LeFevre, Everence financial planner and consultant. Registration is online at bit.ly/ADN-webinar-registration.

— *Anabaptist Disabilities Network*

MWC announces staffing changes

Mennonite World Conference announced Feb. 15 that J Ron Byler of Goshen, Ind., started in the role of interim chief development officer in January. He has served staff and volunteer roles with Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Church USA.

Greg Chandler Burns began as information technology and development coordinator in January, working from MWC's Kitchener, Ont., office.

Jardely Martínez and Michael Darby will be co-coordinators of assembly communications this summer. They previously served with MCC Guatemala and are now based in Colombia. Martínez is also youth program coordinator for assembly. She is a member of *Dios es Amor* (Mennonite

Brethren) in Bogota, Colombia, and Darby is a member of First Mennonite Church in Iowa City.

Jennifer Olivia is an intern on the assembly communications team, working from her home in Semarang, Indonesia.

Shirley Redekop completed her term as chief development officer in January.

Elina Ciptadi stepped back from assembly communications due to other commitments.

The term of Bill Braun, Executive Committee member for North America, ended early. His congregation, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church in Clovis, Calif., has been suspended from membership in an MWC member church, the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Braun served MWC for many years as a General Council delegate and as an Executive Committee member from 2015 to 2021. — MWC

MCC appoints Canadian, U.S. board chairs

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE CANADA welcomed Ron Ratzlaff as chair of its board of directors on Dec. 1. Ratzlaff replaces Paul Gilbert, who held the role since 2018.



Ratzlaff

Ratzlaff has been involved with MCC in a variety of roles over many decades, as advancement director for MCC British Columbia; country representative in Kenya with his wife, Martha; university instructor

in Nigeria under MCC's Teachers Abroad Program; and project consultant.

Prior to his most recent service with MCC, Ratzlaff served as executive pastor at Bethany Chapel of Calgary. Now retired, Ratzlaff spent 33 years as a business and technology leader for a wide range of companies. The Ratzlaffs live in Cochrane, Alberta, and attend Dalhousie Church in Calgary.

THE MCC U.S. BOARD has appointed Gilberto Pérez Jr. as board chair, effective in March.

Pérez has worked at Goshen College since 2012, currently as vice

president for student life and dean of students. Formerly, he was associate professor of social work and co-director of the Center for Intercultural and International Education.



Perez

Prior to arriving at the college, Pérez worked at North-eastern Center, a community mental health center in Ligonier, Ind. He also served as a pastor and peace evangelist.

Pérez's journey with MCC began as a young adult, helping pack meat at an MCC meat canning site in Goshen. Pérez served in MCC's Summer Service program in North Newton, Kan., and in Akron, Pa., where he worked with MCC's Community Ministries program as an administrative intern.

Pérez grew up in South Texas and now lives in Goshen, where he attends Waterford Mennonite Church. Pérez and his spouse, Denise Diener, have three young adult children.

Pérez replaces outgoing MCC U.S. board chair Gwen White, who was appointed to that role in 2019 and has served on the board since 2008.

— *Mennonite Central Committee*

Hesston College

Where have all the pastors gone?

Hesston College event to suggest new models for biblical leadership structures

HESSTON COLLEGE'S Center for Anabaptist Leadership and Learning will host a Weekend College event — “Where Have All the Pastors Gone?” — in person and online March 25-26.

CALL faculty members Michele Hershberger, Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg and Nick Ladd created the event in response to an exodus of traditionally educated pastors from church leadership positions.

There are more open positions than there are candidates, and pastoral roles sit empty.

“Where Have All the Pastors Gone?” aims to identify reasons for gaps in church leadership and suggest new models for congregations to create biblical leadership structures.

Activities begin March 25 with programming on understanding barriers to “cultivating call” in congregations. On March 26, participants will identify unhealthy patterns in church structures, leading to an examination of what it might take to become a more biblical church in behavior and leadership.



Hesston College faculty members Michele Hershberger, Nick Ladd and Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg will suggest new models for biblical leadership structures at “Where Have All the Pastors Gone?”

PHOTOS: HESSTON COLLEGE

“We don’t like to look at the real reason for the lack of leadership in our church, because the real reasons reflect how we live out our faith,” said Ladd, Bible and religion professor. “It is simpler to just come on Sunday morning for an hour and 20 minutes than it is to come together, to discuss something

and to encourage each other.”

The cost to attend in person or online is \$75 per individual, \$50 per person for groups of three or more from the same congregation and \$25 per person for members of CALL partner congregations.

Registration is at hesston.edu. ●

Institutions collaborate on technology

A COLLABORATION among Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University and Goshen College is strengthening the three institutions’ ties and improving their information technology departments.

“We have various working relationships with our fellow Mennonite institutions at all levels, but as presidents, we came together last year to think about additional ways to meet some of the gaps our institutions face and how we could all work together for the benefit of all our students,” said Bluffton President Jane Wood.

The colleges were awarded a

\$100,000 grant from the Transformational Partnerships Fund after starting new collaborative efforts in January 2021. The grant supported a joint IT assessment.

A second \$25,000 grant from the Knowlton Foundation will help fund the implementation of IT enhancements on the three campuses.

“We are lean organizations, and these grants and collaborations enable us to be on the leading edge of meeting our students’ technological needs,” said Goshen President Rebecca Stoltzfus.

The assessment addressed issues related to network, wireless and secu-

rity infrastructure. Implementation of the IT project is expected to take six months.

“This exciting partnership among several Mennonite Higher Education Association schools aids us in better serving our students, faculty and staff,” said EMU President Susan Schultz Huxman. “This is an opportunity to highlight our collaborative spirit as well. Our similar mission and values mean that the usual logistical challenges of such collaborations will be overcome by our high degree of trust and commitment to forging future shared pathways.” ●

Human rights lawyer to deliver EMU commencement address

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVIST Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, will deliver the keynote address during Eastern Mennonite University's commencement ceremony May 8.



Stevenson

Stevenson will receive an honorary doctor of justice degree from EMU. He is EMU's second recipient of the honor, joining Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee, a Liberian peace activist who graduated in 2007 from EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.

Under Stevenson's leadership, the Equal Justice Initiative has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill and aiding children prosecuted as adults. Stevenson has argued and won cases at the U.S. Supreme Court, including a 2019 ruling protecting condemned prisoners who suffer from dementia and a landmark 2012 ruling that banned mandatory life-imprisonment-without-parole sentences for children 17 or younger. Stevenson and his staff have won reversals, relief or release from prison for over 135 wrongly condemned prisoners on death row and won relief for

hundreds of others wrongly convicted or unfairly sentenced.

A professor at New York University School of Law, Stevenson has led the creation of two acclaimed cultural sites that opened in 2018: the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. These institutions chronicle the legacy of slavery, lynching and racial segregation and the connection to mass incarceration and contemporary issues of racial bias.

Stevenson's book *Just Mercy* (One World, 2015) is EMU's Common Read selection for 2022. The book won the 2015 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction from the American Library Association and was made into a motion picture in 2019. ●

New housing coming to Tabor campus

TABOR COLLEGE is set to break ground on new student housing this spring. Since approval in April 2021, plans have taken shape for the new project on the northeast corner of campus.

The initial build will be for a two-story duplex with a basement just south of Dakota Hall and northeast of the business studies building.

With a record number of freshmen in the current academic year, the need for new housing became more evident.

"The decisions we are making are going to impact generations of students, and that's very exciting," said President David Janzen. "It's going to be an inviting place for a long, long time."

A housing task force was created two years ago to assess student living. The committee assembled a report of what would be wanted in a new residence hall and developed a floor plan.

Similar to the townhouses completed in 2006, the two-story duplex will include two residence halls and



Tabor College will begin construction this spring on new student housing that includes 80 beds spread across 46 rooms. GRAPHIC: TABOR COLLEGE

allow men and/or women to move into separate facilities upon completion. Tabor will add 80 beds, including 34 double rooms and 12 single rooms, to accommodate growth and replace aging residence halls.

Each residence hall will have its own kitchen, living room and storm shelter. There will also be eight study rooms and six study/social areas between the

two spaces.

"It strikes the right balance of home, community and security," Janzen said. "Those are three big words in this process. You walk in and it feels like a home. It doesn't feel like a dormitory. You come in and there is a foyer, lounge and kitchen. It will feel like you're walking into someone's house."

— Tabor College

Goshen religion and science conference to address trauma and the environment

Goshen College's Conference on Religion and Science will take place online March 11-13. The event will explore "Trauma and the Environment: How Then Shall We Live?" It features Ann Pederson, professor of religion at Augustana University in Rock Island, Ill., and Jennifer Gubbels, Augustana associate professor and chair of biology.



Pederson

Epigenetics is the study of how behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way an individual's genes work. The speakers will present two lectures at goshen.edu/livestream. "Seeing the Place of Science and Religion: Epigenetics and the Extended Mind" will be at 7:30 p.m. March 11, followed by "Inherited Trauma: Epigenetics and Preterm Birth" at 10:30 a.m. March 12. Registration is at goshen.edu/religion-science. — *Goshen College*



Gubbels

Augsburger Lecture at EMU to focus on theology

Nancy E. Bedford will address "Why Theology Matters" March 29-30 in the Augsburg Lecture Series at Eastern Mennonite University's Martin Chapel.



Bedford

Bedford is Georgia Harkness Professor of Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., and the author of *Who Was Jesus and What Does It Mean to Follow Him?* (Herald Press, 2021).

Her presentation will consider the identity and mission of Jesus, how Christians have understood Jesus to be both human and divine and what his radical teachings and ministry mean today.

She is a member of Reba Place Church, a Mennonite congregation in Evanston, where she is on the preaching team and the racial justice group. Her research interests focus on global feminist and decolonial theories and theologies; Latin

American theologies; Latinx theologies in North America; theological hermeneutics; whiteness, violence and racism; theology and food; liberating readings of Scripture and of the theological tradition; and the rearticulation of classical doctrine from the perspective of critical, artistic and poetic reason.

Bedford's presentations will also be livestreamed via Facebook.

— *Virginia Mennonite Conference*

Bethel welcomes new vice president of finance

Jayna Bertholf will begin serving as Bethel College vice president for business and finance on March 14.



Bertholf

Bertholf has been assistant professor of accounting and finance since 2016 at Southwestern College in Winfield. She is a graduate of Kansas State University with a master's degree in business education from Emporia State

University. From 2005 to 2016, she taught business at Winfield High School.

She is a licensed certified public accountant and serves on the board of directors for the Kansas Society of CPAs.

Her son, Sam Bertholf, graduated from Bethel in 2018.

"In the time my son was at Bethel, I came to love and admire the college for its family atmosphere, dedication to citizenship and commitment to the development of its students," she said.

Following Allen Wedel's retirement as vice president for business affairs in May 2020, Amy Ruetten served in an interim role for one year. Gregg Dick, controller, has filled the interim position since then.

— *Bethel College*

Bluffton to install lights at stadium this summer

A gift from a Bluffton University alumnus and his wife will allow Beavers football games to be played under stadium lights. Randy Gade, a 1973 graduate, and his wife, Debbie, made a \$300,000 gift for the addition of lights at Salzman Stadium.

The lights will be installed over the summer, with work expected to be complete by Aug. 1.

A business major originally from Eaton, Ohio, Gade was a member of the football and wrestling teams.

The Gades started their company, Accutech Instrumentation Inc., in 1988 in Florida. It is now a multimillion-dollar business unit of parent company Fluid Flow Products Inc., with clients including SpaceX, Blue Origin, Virgin Galactic and Siemens Power Generation. They worked together to build the business and sold it three years ago.

The stadium's Alumni Field is also the home for men's and women's soccer and the practice space for other teams. The addition of lights brings the opportunity to host high school playoff games.

— *Bluffton University*

Grebel hosting lectures on social concerns

Conrad Grebel University College is hosting two lectures addressing social concerns and oppression in March.

Sofia Samatar, associate professor at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va., and an award-winning fantasy



Samatar

author, will deliver the Bechtel Lecture in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies on March 10. Her forthcoming memoir, *The White Mosque*, shares what she learned about identity and border-crossing from the history of a Mennonite village in Central Asia.



Shands Stoltzfus

Her lecture, "On Dwelling: Shelters in Place and Time," will explore what it means to shelter in place from an ethical point of view. She considers the questions, "What does shelter look like for those who are forced to leave their homes?"

and "When prevented from staying in place, how can a person dwell?"

Regina Shands Stoltzfus, this year's Rodney and Lorna Sawatsky Visiting Scholar at Grebel, will present "Resistance Strategies: Equipping Ourselves and Our Communities for Long-Term Justice Work" on March 24. Her lecture will address maintaining a just world. She is a published author and the director of Goshen College's Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies program.

Both lectures will be hosted virtually. Registration is at uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/lecture-series.

— *Conrad Grebel University College*

Bethel museum special exhibit looks back on 125 years of collecting

TO CELEBRATE the depth and breadth of what is now Kauffman Museum at Bethel College, “The Magic of Things: 5 Continents, 25 Centuries, 125 Years of Collecting” opened Feb. 19.

In 1896, students and friends of Bethel announced the formation of a Museum of Natural History and American Relics. In 1941, Charles Kauffman began integrating his personal collections with the museum, eventually opening Kauffman Museum. The current building was completed in 1983.

Current and former staff have selected more than 100 artifacts to illustrate how objects astonish collectors, donors and museum staff. Items in “The Magic of Things” are not on permanent display, and many are exhibited for the first time.

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, the museum’s curator of cultural history from 1983 to 1993, is lead curator for the exhibit.

“I have always been fascinated by the global and deep historical reach of Kauffman Museum’s collections, so I selected a statuette from ancient Egypt, 20th-century Chinese Buddhist paintings and 21st-century African ritual pottery,” Janzen said.



Kauffman Museum technician Dave Kreider, right, and museum intern Capri Stevenson-Bisom, a Bethel College senior, work on a display of animal specimens from the Charles Kauffman taxidermy collection. PHOTO: BETHEL COLLEGE

Demonstrating the exhibit’s subtitle are a *ngoma* drum from a Zimbabwean healer, a 1914 Indian motorcycle, a Mesopotamian cuneiform tablet from 524 BCE, a Macintosh computer from 1986, a red-sided eclectus parrot from New Guinea and a horse-drawn hearse from a Goessel, Kan., funeral home.

Steve Friesen of Littleton, Colo., director of the museum from 1975 to 1977, joined the exhibit team.

“I have always returned to my roots at Bethel College and Kauffman Museum,” Friesen said. “It is a special joy for me to select Charles Kauffman’s rather unusual folk creations using animal horns, hide and hair to construct chairs and decorative items for the home.”

OTHER GUEST CURATORS are current museum director Andi Schmidt Andres, exhibit technician Dave Kreider, exhibit assistant Austin Prouty, curator of exhibits Chuck Regier, museum assistant Kristin Schmidt, former directors John M. Janzen and Michael Reinschmidt, director emerita Rachel Pannabecker, emeritus Bethel faculty and longtime museum contributors Dwight Platt and Bob Regier and former museum staffer Renae Stucky.

Reinhild Janzen will speak March 6 on “Ritual Markers of Life and Death in Uganda and Taiwan,” and on April 3, John Janzen will present “Drums or Organ: Contesting Musical Styles in African Christianity.” Pannabecker and Kreider will give a program on “Collecting for College and Community: Past, Present and Future,” May 22, the exhibit’s closing day. ●



Kauffman Museum volunteer Steve Kreider Yoder, museum technician Dave Kreider and volunteer Jim Mueller ready a hearse for the museum’s 125th-anniversary special exhibit. The horse-drawn hearse dates from the 1890s and was used in the Goessel, Kan., community. PHOTO: BETHEL COLLEGE

A space to soften my hard heart

MY HUSBAND AND I (and a host of others) have lived in our home for 27 years. Let's just say it was (over) due for a freshening up. We put our Christmas money toward the project and invited our friend Brenda to help. Brenda is an artist with an eye for interior design and a heart to create hospitable places and spaces.

Even though we know and love Brenda, it felt vulnerable to invite her into the areas of our home in need of change. I had to face things I didn't really want to face.

Throughout the month we worked together, I fought the urge to hide and cover, coaxing myself to stay open and fully present to the process. I'm glad I did.

"This creates softness," Brenda would repeatedly say as she recommended paint colors, advocated for plants and hung curtains. "Soft," she'd say, "is more hospitable, not only to others but to the happenings of the Holy. You want to create softness wherever you can." And so we did.

It's interesting because not two days after phase one of Project Softness, I was drawn to a familiar verse of Scripture.

"Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).



Jenny Gehman is a freelance writer and retreat speaker who publishes a weekly devotional, Little Life Words, at jennygehman.com. She and her husband, Dan, are elders at Millersville Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania and enjoy hosting friends and strangers from around the world.

I was surprised to learn that "delight" does not mean to enjoy God (although I highly recommend doing so). It means — get this — "to be soft."

Who knew? Here was an invitation to do internally in my heart what I

Here was an invitation to do internally in my heart what I was doing externally in my home. To create softness in order to be more hospitable to the Holy.

was doing externally in my home. To create softness in order to be more hospitable to the Holy.

This word, "delight," means to be soft, pliable, yielding, supple enough to bend freely or repeatedly.

Suddenly, I'm imagining the Potter and the clay and God making something new out of the old (again, like my home, see Jeremiah 18:1-6).

AND ALSO, SUDDENLY, I'm seeing all my own hard edges, my rigidity, resistance and rebellion, those things I'd rather not face. God's been trying to make something new out of the clay of me recently, and I've not been having it. I've been attached to the old. Rigid, resistant and rebelliously set in my ways.

To be rebellious is to not cooperate, to have strong feelings of disagreement with the One in authority. Check!

To be resistant is to not accept, to not want to welcome changes or new ideas. Check, check!

To be rigid is to be not able, to be stiff or unyielding, unable to be changed or persuaded. Check, check, check!

I sensed the Spirit saying, "Jenny, I'd like to make something new here.

Work with me, daughter! Be soft in my hands and I will make you . . . and I will give you . . . but I can't do either as long as you are rigid, resistant and rebellious."

Sigh.

Back on the home front, hubby took a week off work to paint, and I spent time clearing the clutter and gathering the recommended resources. We set aside a workday to put the "new" in place.

When Brenda arrived at our door, she mentioned she had just come from another house where she was invited to give input on design. The owner of that house, however, was rigid, resistant and rebellious (to use my words). Every suggestion Brenda gave was met with rejection or objection. The owner's ways were set in stone (like my heart), so there was nothing Brenda could do to effect a more favorable outcome.

"I like working with you," Brenda said as she turned to me, "because you are so open to change."

If only the same could be said of my heart!

AS I WRITE THIS, I am sitting in my "new" living room. It is fresh, airy and peaceful. I feel welcomed and safe, as if I'm gently falling open. My hard edges soften.

I am putty in the Potter's hands. Delighting, I yield to divine ways and wisdom.

"A new heart I will give you," God says, holding the clay of me, "and a new spirit I will put within you; I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

In other words, God will create softness.

My response is a simple song.

Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still. ●

Who is the greatest?

SPORTS FANS ARE FAMILIAR with “goats” — and I’m not talking about bearded farm animals. I mean the Greatest Of All Time.

In American football, Tom Brady’s G.O.A.T. status is practically undisputed. In other sports, there are debates. In soccer, is it Ronaldo or Messi? In basketball, is it King James or Michael Jordan? Every fan has an opinion.

There is something compelling about greatness in any endeavor. We are fascinated by those who are not satisfied with being merely good. We admire the combination of talent and hard work that greatness requires.

Yes, “Great” can also be associated with negative things — the Great Depression, the Great War. But the meaning is similar: something that stands out among all others.

FOR CHRISTIANS, what does it mean to be great? Society sees greatness differently than Jesus did.

Jesus’ disciples needed to learn this lesson. They had an argument about

which of them was the G.O.A.T. They were competitive.

Did each one think he was the greatest? Or did they narrow down the candidates?

No matter how the argument went, Jesus rebuked their pride.

He said, “But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:26-27).

Jesus redefined greatness. He inverted the equation. Instead of seeking power and praise, Jesus taught his disciples — and therefore also us, his disciples today — to be humble servants.

Instead of asking how we can win and rise to the top, we should ask how we can serve others.

THERE IS AN INDONESIAN proverb, *Diatas langit masih ada langit*, which means, “There is still sky above the sky.” This tells us that no matter how high somebody’s achievement reaches, there is always something greater.

It’s like the saying in sports that “records are made to be broken.” The one who is currently the greatest probably won’t be the greatest forever.

Jesus taught that instead of being full of pride and arrogance, we need to be humble. He said, “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11)

In a society that seeks upward mobility, Jesus’ message is the same. We are all equally great in God’s eyes, regardless of our status in the world’s eyes. We don’t need to climb the social ladder. We just need to follow Jesus and serve others.

For some people, this message is disturbing — and not just because they don’t want to serve. Since they have power and privilege, they don’t want to

be equal with others. For them, equality would feel like losing greatness.

But for people without power and privilege, equality is good news.

The challenge for Anabaptist Christians who have power and privilege is to see equality as good news.

Everything depends upon what kind of greatness we aspire to. People

For those with power and privilege, equality would feel like losing greatness. For others, it is good news.

will get to heaven not because of their wealth or righteousness but because Jesus saves them.

JUST LIKE TODAY, athletic events were popular in first-century Greco-Roman culture. Paul used a sports analogy to describe the determination, focus and discipline Jesus modeled in serving others.

He compares life to a race. However, the goal is not a medal but an eternal crown. The competition is not to defeat others but to serve them.

“Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Jesus is the G.O.A.T. He used his power not for gain nor glory but to serve the powerless.

Do you want to be great? Do you want to win a prize that lasts forever? Then follow Jesus’ example of greatness. ●



Hendy Stevan Matahelemual of South Philadelphia grew up in Bandung, Indonesia. After serving as a pastor in Indonesia, he moved to the United States. He received a master’s degree in Christian leadership from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in 2019. He is an ordained minister in Mosaic Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

The reverse Golden Rule

When an action does not come naturally to you, it is a greater expression of love.

— Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages*

AS A TODDLER, my daughter did not want to be comforted right away when she got hurt. After an injury, no matter how minor, she needed 30 seconds to process the trauma.

Unfortunately, those 30 seconds were filled with loud cries and panicked breathing. Her shrieks got louder if I approached before she was ready.

This made for some awkward play dates. Numerous times we were with friends and my daughter would have a minor accident, like falling on the sidewalk. She'd begin wailing, her knee bleeding for all to see.

Observing that I, her mother, was standing several feet away, quietly watching, one parent would advance. "Oh! Is she all right? Does she need a Band-Aid?"

I was then forced to step protectively in between my daughter and the Good Samaritan. "Just wait," I'd say. "Believe me, she doesn't like to be helped right away."

My daughter was unusual. Most people in crisis, regardless of age, want help as quickly as possible. So, when

given the chance, we rush in to help. We respond as we would like others to respond to us.

It was difficult for me to understand that my daughter also wanted attention, just at a distance. She wanted aid, but in her own way and time. Caring for her meant doing what was contrary to my initial impulses and how I would

With the best of intentions, we offer others what we would want — and, to our bewilderment, we make the situation worse.

want to be cared for.

Over the years I've seen this same formula played out time and again. With the best of intentions, we offer others what we would want — and, to our bewilderment, we make the situation worse.

I've come to believe that following the Golden Rule quite often means doing unto others as you would not have done to you.

I'LL GIVE AN EXAMPLE from my marriage. (Rest assured, I have permission from my husband to share this.)

When my husband sees that I'm upset about something, he tries to deescalate the situation with pacifying words: "It isn't a big deal." "She didn't mean anything by it."

This is not a successful strategy. Instead of feeling supported, I feel my husband is on their side, and I become equally mad at him.

For my part, when I see my husband stressed or unhappy, I immediately want to care for him by going to war. I rant about the people who are treating him wrongly. I offer to march down

to their office and talk to them myself. Right this very minute.

This results in my husband becoming doubly stressed. He has his previous problem, plus a wife who needs mollifying.

Luckily, 21 years of marriage has taught us that we sometimes need to show love in ways that come unnaturally to us. We have to learn a script that the other person needs to hear, even though we would never find those words or actions within ourselves.

Recently a friend asked me for a favor and then changed her mind at the last minute, after I had changed my plans to accommodate her need. I was irritated and felt disrespected. When I told my husband, he said simply, "That sounds really annoying, and I'm sorry she did that."

It was miraculous. Once my feelings were validated and I had an ally, I realized the situation wasn't worth the energy I was pouring into it.

ANOTHER TIME, my husband was upset that an important work order he had been requesting for months was being ghosted. But instead of storming the dean's office, he would prefer that I argue for the other side: "I'm sure they are swamped with beginning-of-the-year issues."

Never in a million years would I think to take that tactic. It makes zero sense to me to give the offending party the benefit of the doubt.

But my husband is a better person. It gives him pain to think ill of others, and he longs to dispel the drama. He'd much rather the conflict be caused by unlucky timing than by malicious intent.

My little girl is in her teens now and rarely needs a Band-Aid. But the lesson is still true. It is true of all my children, my husband, friends and family. They all need to be loved in their way, not mine. ●



Sarah Kehrberg lives in the Craggy Mountains of western North Carolina with her husband and three children.

Survival is the reality

POOR PEOPLE CANNOT EAT THEOLOGY. This is something I've told myself since becoming a pastor. It's a reminder that what I say from the pulpit has to meet people where they are.

This is not to claim that my words are somehow food for people or will change their lives. It is simply telling me to be real. As a pastor, I have to speak to the realities people face.

I am constantly reminded that not all realities are the same.

Growing up in the church, I have always been fascinated by the concept of salvation. God saving us from death and sin is the highlight of the gospel. One day, all pain and suffering will cease, and God will make things right. The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

I have clung to this promise and used it to encourage my congregation and myself. But how long will it take for it to happen? Is this promise actually our reality?

One of my biggest critiques of evangelical Christianity is that it is so focused on the endgame. It makes the spiritual much more important than

the physical. Our bodies will perish, but our souls will live forever.

But what does that do for us now? Is the gospel of Jesus — the Good News — only good when we die?

It is tempting to treat the gospel like a spiritual version of a 401(k) retirement fund. It's all about the future. At least that has been my experience.

IN HER BOOK, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, womanist theologian Delores Williams examines the theological concepts of liberation and salvation. Using the perspective of Black women in the United States, she argues that God is not always the liberating God we want God to be. At times, God is a God of survival.

She looks to Genesis and uses the story of Hagar, who was not freed from slavery. She did not experience liberation, or what some would call salvation.

She was thrust into the wilderness with her newborn child. God's promise for tomorrow would not have been useful to Hagar.

The promise that was useful was that God would be with her in the wilderness. God promised to be in the struggle with her. God would help her survive.

We cannot just go up to people who are suffering and tell them God has something for them in the future. We cannot just say that one day they will be free.

We — the church — need to share the good news for today: God is with the suffering and the oppressed. God sees and cares about the pain they face now.

This message is not only for those who are suffering. It is for all of us. Those of us in the pews. Those of us who are not on the streets. Those of us who come from privilege.

We are called to care about the ones

God cares about. We need to be where God is.

WHEN WE READ THE STORIES of Jesus, it's easy to focus on Jesus' words. But let's also look at his actions. When people needed food, he fed them. When people were possessed by demons, he cast them out. When people were excluded, he welcomed them.

We cannot just go up to people who are suffering and tell them God has something for them in the future.

Jesus not only cared about people's spiritual futures. He met their immediate, physical needs. That is what "God with us" means. Our God is with the oppressed and helps them to survive. To keep on keeping on. Living day by day.

The first thing we have to do in this life is survive. This is God's promise for today. Yes, we get glimpses of liberation and salvation. But we are never fully free from the damage human sin has caused.

What, then, is the work of the church? Our job is to help people survive. To give folks a glimpse of the promise that God has for them right now.

So, churches, keep those ministries for the houseless going. Continue to be sanctuaries for our undocumented siblings. Continue to meet the needs of your community.

We know liberation is coming one day. But right now we need to help people survive.

God is with us in this work. God is with the suffering. God keeps God's promises for tomorrow and for today. ●



Jerrell Williams is pastor of Salem Mennonite Church in Oregon. A 2015 graduate of Bethel College, he has a master of divinity degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

See how he loved!

LAZARUS DIES, AND JESUS WEEPS.

He doesn't get to his friend Lazarus in time, in time to touch his sick body, to heal him. All that's left to do is mourn. So we have the shortest verse in the Bible: "And Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Some biblical interpreters emphasize the strangeness of Jesus in the Gospel of John — his otherness, his mysterious speeches, his odd behavior that confuses the people who meet him. He comes across as otherworldly: As the first chapter describes him, Jesus is the eternal word from heaven, a bewildering light cast into the night of incomprehension.

But then we read about him mourning the loss of a friend. What can be more human, more earthly, more ordinary, than crying? — the way that emotions sneak up on us, catching us off guard, reminding us that our bodies defy us. Tears betray our grip on ourselves.

Jesus weeps. He is "greatly disturbed." The storyteller repeats this phrase (John 11:33 and 38), making the inner life of Jesus an emphasis of the passage.

The Greek word here has everything to do with bodily emotion, his visceral response. Jesus can't bear the loss of Lazarus, and the weight of it all press-



PAVEL CZERWINSKI/UNSPLASH

es into his body. He cries. He shudders. Because he lost a beloved friend: "Our friend Lazarus," he says (John 11:11).

Observing Jesus' deep emotion, some of the onlookers say: "See how he loved him!"

JESUS' TEARS HAVE everything to do with waiting, with undergoing time. We, as human beings, persevere even when our desire for redemption feels unbearable. Jesus weeps not because he's convinced that he'll never see Lazarus again. Instead, Jesus knows he will see him again, but not until the end of time.

That's what Martha believes, and so does Jesus — a common Jewish belief about restoration. "Martha said to Jesus, 'I know that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection on the last day'" (John 11:24).

Yes, they will see him again, but not soon enough. They will have to suffer a lifetime of waiting and longing. The separation overwhelms him.

I don't know what shifts for Jesus in that moment, as he weeps, as the unbearable sense of loss trembles through him. For reasons unrevealed to us, mysterious beyond our comprehension, Jesus risks a miracle. He calls upon the power of heaven to free Lazarus from the tomb, to liberate him from the power of death.

In Jesus we see the nature of God's

love revealed: that the one who made all things, the creator of the world, is affected by a friendship.

Jesus is undone at the loss of a friend.

There is nothing else in this world that Jesus wants more than to be with the people God loves, to be with us, with all of us. And nothing will get in the way of Jesus' desire for fellowship with his friends, not even the grave.

That's what we find out at the end, when he tells the crowd to roll away the stone at the entrance of the tomb. "Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, Come out!'" (John 11:43). Death cannot destroy Jesus' friendships.

That's where we find ourselves in the story. That's where we find ourselves in our world. We're in the middle, with Jesus, aching for redemption.

THE SCENE ENDS with the assurance of reunion. But in the middle, Jesus weeps as he longs for the restoration of his companionship.

And that's where we find ourselves in the story. That's where we find ourselves in our world. We're in the middle, with Jesus, aching for redemption.

And in the midst of it all, the invitation is to fall in love with the world we have, a world full of heartbreak and devastation, of death and loss.

The tears of Jesus are an invitation to love, to be overwhelmed by what we have — to love this world, this earth, this life. To love the people around us. To love them with God's love.

The Christian life is this: to be known by our love. ●



Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship in North Carolina and president of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

People of the land, around the world

MENNONITE FARMERS is the result of a multiyear collaboration of the author, Winnipeg-based historian Royden Loewen, with scholars John Eicher, Hans Peter Fast, Susie Fisher, Aileen Friesen, Danang Kristiawan, Belinda Ncube and Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, who investigated historical and contemporary agricultural practices in seven communities across the world.

The title uses “Mennonite” as a catch-all term, but the far-flung communities included in this study incorporate Anabaptist groups ranging from Brethren in Christ to Russian Baptists to Old Colony settlers to progressive Mennonites, and more.

Beginning in 2013, participating team members spent time in seven locales, conducting oral history interviews and amassing written records from farmers and their local church institutions — in Friesland, the Netherlands; Washington County, Iowa; rural Manitoba; Java, Indonesia; Matabeleland, Zimbabwe; Waldheim, Siberia; and Riva Palacio Colony, Bolivia.

They interviewed 159 women and men who spoke — in Dutch, Ndebele, Low German, Spanish, Russian, Javanese and English — of farming in their communities, religious identity and family relationships, weather and other environmental factors and interactions with local and global markets.

Loewen concludes that the stories “possess no single Anabaptist vision regarding farmland, no common extension of nonviolence to the land.” Rather, while aiming to be stewards of the land — whether the local soil is peat, clay, sandy or some other type — farmers have employed enormously varied strategies for growing crops and raising farm animals.

Loewen concludes that religiously driven goals, if articulated at all, are mostly unspoken but “embodied in everyday activity geared to sustenance and generational succession.”

He makes the case that it is in the nuances of local contexts — for exam-

ple, whether interviewees are growing rice or corn, sunflowers or vegetables and raising hogs or other animals — that agricultural challenges and perspectives on sustainability come most into focus. That is, the seven case studies chosen for this research provide no basis for the notion that Anabaptist-inflected religious commitment has led to any particularly “Mennonite approach” to the land, to nature, or to environmental activism.

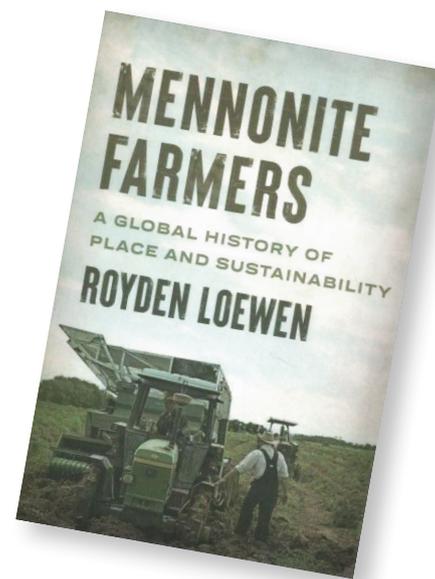
Loewen acknowledges that despite the book’s organizational themes (which suggest that farmers the world over have common concerns such as climate change and transnational market challenges), this effort at global comparative scholarship reveals that “just below the surface . . . are stories of immense complexity, containing the minutiae of history of specific places.”

Loewen is interested in both the proverbial forest and the trees. But it is the trees — each community’s farmers and their localized ways of attending to business — that get top billing here.

IN WRITING ABOUT farmers rooted in locales ranging from the tropics to cold climates, Loewen suggests this book may lead readers to understand “farmers’ challenges at the local level in the history of food growing everywhere.”

While offering a few data points about how Mennonite aid agencies — including Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Economic Development Associates and Mennonite Disaster Service — have impacted the lives of agriculturalists in giving and receiving, the book suggests farmers around the globe have much in common with their neighbors, irrespective of religious affinities.

One example comes from Manitoba, where farmers specializing in wheat and canola are not particularly worried about global warming, given that rising temperatures portend longer growing seasons, with the possibility of establishing corn and soybeans as part



Mennonite Farmers: A Global History of Place and Sustainability by Royden Loewen
(Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021)

of farm economies.

In a counter-example, vegetable-growing farmers in Matabeleland, a “community of the ox-drawn plow and the donkey-pulled wagon,” articulated far more concern about climate change and its impact on livelihoods. Moreover, in this southwestern corner of Zimbabwe, human causation of pollution and changing weather patterns are noticed and decried. Here, Loewen writes, “farmers are known for their spiritual view of the land, blurring the line between the creator and creation, at odds with a dichotomous Northern viewpoint.”

Given the book’s attention to the colonial — and in some cases, post-colonial — legacies that inform these communities’ cultures, *Mennonite Farmers* serves as an accessible entry point for readers interested in learning about places other than their own, as well as the interplays between natural resources and human cultivation. ●

Rachel Waltner Goossen is professor of history at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan.

‘The culture war is killing people’

White evangelicals ‘victimized by misinformation,’ former NIH director says

FORMER NATIONAL Institutes of Health director Francis Collins is heartbroken that more of his fellow white evangelicals have not received the COVID-19 vaccines.

“I am just basically heartbroken in a circumstance where, as an answer to prayer, vaccines have been developed that turned out to be much better than we dared to hope for,” he said in an interview with Religion News Service.

“And yet they are still not seen as something that a lot of white evangelicals are interested in taking part in and, as a result, people are dying. I just didn’t see that happening, and certainly not at this scale.”

Collins is the founder and senior fellow of BioLogos, an organization

that seeks to foster the integration of “rigorous science” with Christian faith.



Collins

He and BioLogos President Deborah Haarsma, an astronomer, spoke to journalists at a Faith Angle Forum/BioLogos webinar, “Faith and Science in an Age of Tribalism,” on Feb. 2.

Haarsma said the country’s divisions have reshaped views of science.

“The world has become so aggressively polarized that it seems like every issue has to land in a red camp or a blue camp, and when you view the world that way, somehow Christian

faith gets assigned to red and science gets assigned to blue,” she said. “And for scientists who are Christians, like myself and Francis Collins, this just doesn’t make any sense to us.”

Collins stepped down in December after 12 years as the NIH director and still runs a government research lab.

He tied “this red-blue situation” — including social media, political messages and words heard in churches — directly to the COVID-19 pandemic. He said it includes white evangelicals who are resistant to or disinterested in pursuing vaccines — some 30% to 40%, according to PRRI and Pew Research Center.

“The culture war is literally killing people,” added Collins, citing estimates that more than 100,000 people have died unnecessarily due to vaccine resistance and hesitancy even as “hundreds of thousands of lives” were saved.

COLLINS SAID IN AN interview that many white evangelicals have been “victimized by the misinformation and lies and conspiracies that are floating around, particularly on social media and some of it in cable news.”

A recent study published by the National Academy of Sciences indicates that after some unvaccinated Christians heard from medical experts who shared their religious identity — including Collins and BioLogos — they said they intended to receive the vaccine. This indicated to him that “unless that truth comes at you from somebody you trust, you’re not going to call it truth at all.”

Haarsma wondered if different messaging earlier in the pandemic might have averted some of the mistrust. When influencers said “trust the science,” what a lot of Christians might have heard was “trust the science instead of trusting God.” Messages about caring for your community or being patriotic might have been more effective. ●

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Merely spectators? Churches ponder how to engage with online worshipers

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, The Potter's House of Denver had plenty of use for its 3,500-seat sanctuary in the south-east corner of the Colorado capital. But in early January, the megachurch announced it was selling its building and continuing to hold services online, as it had been doing for nearly two years.

Pastor Touré Roberts said the building needed “significant repairs” and COVID-19 shutdowns had made maintaining it impractical, although some in-person activities such as the food bank would continue.

As the pandemic enters its third year, more houses of worship are weighing the costs and benefits of online versus in-person worship. While most will not go the way of Potter's House and become fully virtual, the dramatic shifts brought on by COVID-19 restrictions are raising questions about the nature of worship and the purpose of community.

“COVID-19 forced every church in America to rethink how to best serve their parishioners and the broader community,” Roberts told *The Denver Post*. “We decided that the best way forward would be to sell the property, continue our online offering that had proven a successful alternative, and maintain our hands-on community outreach operations.”

For some, shrinking congregations and dwindling donations have forced closures. More than 4,000 U.S. churches shut their doors in 2020, according to research from Barna Group, a religion polling firm. Others have experienced a broader reach as new viewers have tuned in from afar — and as sometimes-alienated groups such as the elderly, disabled and LGBTQ have found virtual church homes.

WHAT WILL THESE churches do with this new online audience? What was once a temporary measure has begun to feel like a necessity.

Many of them “spent a lot of time



Josh Kellso, a pastor at Grace Bible Church in Tempe, Ariz., delivers a sermon by livestream from an empty sanctuary on March 22, 2020. PHOTO: MATT YORK/AP

and resources to get online” in the pandemic and don't want that to go to waste, said Heidi Campbell, a researcher studying digital religion at Texas A&M University. But they're having to figure out what it means to worship online in meaningful ways.

“Over the holidays, a lot of them saw that not as many people had come back face to face,” Campbell said. “And so churches are trying to make this decision about how might this be not

Is this a long-term change in how people see church integrating into their lives?

just a season of change but a long-term change in how people see church integrating into their lives?”

The idea of virtual worship has been around since long before the pandemic, said Scott Thumma, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford International University. As long as the internet has been around, groups from neopagans to gay evangelicals that felt shut out of physical spaces have taken their religious practice online. Some churches have hired dedicated “online pastors.”

The pandemic spurred some people to start online-only ministries, seeing an opportunity to attract diverse congregations while freeing themselves

from the financial burden of physical buildings. Many religious traditions see the online space as a new mission field to reach people who otherwise wouldn't be drawn to worship.

BUT PROVIDING a fully online platform poses challenges. Virtual worshipers can become merely spectators. A *New York Times* column sparked debate by calling for a return to in-person worship, arguing that people “need physical touch and interaction.” Thumma believes community can be formed online, but it takes extra effort.

“How do you move from just watching to actually being involved, actually engaging with people, actually getting committed enough to give money and to do service and volunteer?” Thumma said. “That's going to be a challenge.”

There are also theological considerations. While many Catholic churches streamed Sunday Mass during the pandemic shutdowns, the sacraments cannot be taken virtually. Pope Francis has said “spiritual communion” without bread and wine should not be considered a replacement.

Campbell expects many churches with hybrid services to lean into it as a permanent fixture.

“For some people, it's like ‘This meets my needs, and I like this style of worship,’” she said. “But how much of that is just because people are looking at different options, and how much is that a long-term strategy?” ●

The sacred work of white discomfort

Learning unpleasant truths isn't debilitating. It is necessary for moral growth.

IN FLORIDA, A STATE SENATE committee wants to make it illegal to cause discomfort to white people. The bill notes the State Board of Education requires that instruction “may not suppress or distort significant historical events, such as the Holocaust, slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the civil rights movement and the contributions of women, African American and Hispanic people to our country.”

So far, so good. But here is the next sentence:

“Examples of theories that distort historical events and are inconsistent with SBE-approved standards include the denial or minimization of the Holocaust and the teaching of Critical Race Theory, meaning the theory that racism is not merely the product of prejudice but that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems in order to uphold the supremacy of white persons.”

Minimization or denial of the Holocaust is prohibited, but minimization and denial of America's treatment of Native Americans and African Americans is mandated. The systematic murder of Jews overseas holds lessons for today, but the bigotry and violence toward Native Americans and African Americans at home does not.

The most pernicious part of the bill is its definition of “individual freedom,” consisting of eight principles plainly written to protect white people. The final one is the most sweeping: “An individual should not be made to feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race.”

This bill shares a common purpose with a raft of CRT bills emerging in state legislatures across the country.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to say that individual freedom requires avoiding discomfort? What does this reveal about the mindset of white Christians today?

Let me start with an analogy. What

if this bill mandated not just Florida's teachers but also its athletic coaches not to cause discomfort? What kind of teams would Florida schools produce if players could argue they were being discriminated against if they were made to feel uncomfortable?

When I played soccer in college, my coaches relentlessly pointed out my shortcomings. These criticisms made me feel uncomfortable, even embarrassed. But they were necessary for motivating me to be a better athlete.

The coaches also made us painfully push through a wall of fatigue, with no end in sight. In sports, discomfort builds resilience and strength.

Here's another analogy. What if this metric were applied to parents? What kind of children would we have if they never felt discomfort? Some

What about the role of discomfort in Christian theology? It is central to salvation and discipleship.

forms of discomfort — such as feeling bad about ourselves when we've done something wrong — help us assume responsibility for our mistakes and spur us to make things right.

Discomfort is an essential part of becoming a mature adult with a moral conscience.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE of discomfort in Christian theology? Particularly in white evangelical circles, discomfort is central to salvation and discipleship. In traditional revival meetings, discomfort was institutionalized in the “anxious bench” where those wrestling with conviction of their sins would struggle in prayer.

The beloved hymn “Amazing Grace” captures this dynamic. It identifies



A classroom in Rye, N.Y. PHOTO: MARY ALTAFFER/AP

the singer as “a wretch” in need of salvation. We don't come to salvation, nor grow in discipleship, without an experience of exquisite discomfort.

The sacred role of discomfort is not limited to individual sin. The Bible is replete with language about the sins of one generation being visited down three or four generations (Exodus 20, Numbers 14, Deuteronomy 5, Jeremiah 32). This transmission is not mystical but genetic and cultural. Just as abuse begets abuse, and addiction begets addiction, prejudice begets prejudice.

The Apostle Paul talks about reckoning not just with sinful individual nature but with “principalities and powers” — a theological way of describing the impersonal, menacing aspects of cultural and institutional power.

IN MY OWN FAMILY'S history, I've seen these dynamics play out, particularly in two moments of revelation. The first was realizing my family's denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, was explicitly founded in 1845 as a place where the gospel of Jesus Christ could coexist with slavery.

The second came when I discovered the estate records of a great-uncle, the namesake of my fifth great-grand-

father, Pleasant Moon, whose 1815 Bible rests on my bookshelf. A ledger lists four human beings intermixed with material objects such as a feather bed, a spinning wheel and a cow, with monetary values assigned:

I negro woman named Naomi @ \$800
I named Susan @ \$450
I named Eliza @ \$275
I named Bird, a boy @ \$150

I knew there were enslavers in the family tree. I knew my people, even my parents' generation, benefited from Jim Crow segregation in Macon, Ga., with schools, libraries, parks, pools, theaters, jobs and entire neighborhoods marked "for whites only."

Still, holding this page in my hands was disorienting. The pride I had felt in the lineage of the people inscribed in the births/marriages/deaths pages of our heirloom Bible became mixed with feelings of shock and shame.

"DISCOMFORT" IS AN impotent word to describe the emotions these dueling histories have generated in me. But wrestling with the truth has not been debilitating. It has been a source of spiritual growth. It has freed me from the delusion of goodness that white Christians feel compelled to defend in every narrative about ourselves.

Holding a more truthful understanding of history has given me more agency, not less. The assertion in anti-CRT bills that white people should not feel uncomfortable because of their race presupposes that unpleasant truths are debilitating. It assumes white people will simply feel bad for being white.

But this assumption fails to imagine the transforming alternative I discovered. Discomfort didn't make me feel bad for being white. It gave me the critical distance necessary to free myself from the power that whiteness has held over my family for generations.

If white Christians can muster the courage to walk in its company, discomfort with our racial history can be a sacred and saving gift. ●

Robert P. Jones is CEO and founder of the Public Religion Research Institute and the author of *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*.

Denomination buys medical debt, forgives it

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST has paid off more than \$100 million in medical debt for people across the United States.

The UCC announced Feb. 14 that it used \$200,000 from one of its annual Giving Tuesday campaigns to purchase and pay off \$33 million in medical debt for residents of Ohio, where the mainline Protestant denomination is based.

That brought the total medical debt the UCC has purchased and paid off since late 2019 to more than \$104 million.

Providers sell the debt at pennies on the dollar to recoup some of the unpaid bills. Usually, those who buy the debt continue to bill people for it. RIP Medical Debt abolishes the debt.

The donation comes as part of RIP Medical Debt's "A Nation That Cares" campaign, rallying churches and other Christian nonprofits to raise \$5 million to relieve roughly \$500 million of medical debt across the country. The UCC was one of the first groups to donate to the nonprofit's campaign, and its donation so far is the largest, according to RIP Medical Debt.

The donation also culminates efforts to purchase and pay off medical debt by the UCC that started more than two years ago.

THE EFFORT WAS LAUNCHED in Chicago when Trinity United Church of Christ joined with churches from a number of denominations to raise \$38,000 to pay

off \$5.3 million in medical debt. Trinity's pastor, Otis Moss III, said the aim was to help the "poorest of the poor" on the city's South Side.

Moss said the idea came from a conversation he had with Traci Blackmon, who heads the UCC's Justice and Local Church Ministries. The two were discussing how they could engage their communities when the conversation turned to an article about RIP Medical Debt.

The nonprofit, founded in 2014, purchases bundles of medical debt from healthcare providers and from the secondary debt market at an average of \$1 for \$100 of debt.

Those providers sell the debt at pennies on the dollar to recoup some of the unpaid bills. Usually, those who buy that debt continue to bill people for it.

RIP Medical Debt abolishes the debt, with no tax consequences or strings attached.

The beneficiaries, while remaining anonymous to the denomination, receive a letter saying, "The funds that abolished this debt were generously provided by the United Church of Christ."

THE CHICAGO CHURCHES hoped their initial donation would inspire others to give.

UCC churches across the country made medical debt relief the focus of Giving Tuesday campaigns.

They also hoped it would inspire change, including healthcare reform.

The UCC's most recent medical debt purchase abolished the medical debt of 10,757 households. The criteria used for qualifying debtors were those earning less than two times the federal poverty level; in financial hardship, with out-of-pocket expenses that are 5% or more of income; or facing insolvency, with debts greater than assets. ●

Classifieds

classifieds@anabaptistworld.org

EMPLOYMENT — GENERAL

Mennonite Church USA is seeking a full-time Denominational Minister of Peace and Justice as part of the Church Vitality Team. This position will resource conference ministers, conferences and pastors with opportunities to strengthen capacity and engagement in peace and justice. Serve as a liaison and coordinator for peace and justice initiatives throughout MC USA. Required: experience as pastor/conference leader; advanced degree (M.Div., M.A. or D.Min. in theology, ministry, leadership or education). Experience in peace and justice. We are committed to diversity among staff and welcome people of diverse backgrounds and abilities to apply. For a copy of the job description, email HR@MennoniteUSA.org or call 316-281-4257. (3)

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center in Lombard, Ill., is seeking a full-time administrative assistant to support the executive director and other program staff in the main office. Responsibilities include communication with clients, coordination of materials and events and ensuring the flow of office tasks. The position will remain open until filled. Competitive wages and benefits are commensurate with experience. For a full description or to apply, visit lpeacecenter.org or send a cover letter and resume to admin@lpeacecenter.org. (3-4)

Camp Deerpark is seeking a facilities director. Salaried position with benefits. Camp Deerpark is a ministry of the NYC Mennonite Churches. For more information, please contact Ken Bontrager at 845-283-8669 or deerparkdirector@gmail.com. (3-5)

Manager for USDA-licensed kennel in Arkansas. A lady who loves animals, a dedicated worker, physically able, organized. Flexible hours, place to live provided. 479-438-0196. (3)

The Central District Conference (CDC) of Mennonite Church USA seeks a .33 to .5 FTE associate conference minister with primary responsibility for resourcing emerging communities of faith. CDC currently serves 48 congregations across 11 states. Several new or potential communities of faith are exploring how they are called to be church. The successful candidate will demonstrate a deep love for the Anabaptist/Mennonite church in its many forms, be able to engage in creative discernment strategies and be informed by MC USA agency resources. Travel is expected. Candidates who bring additional diversity to our current CDC staff are preferred. Salary commensurate with MC USA guidelines. For job descriptions and

questions, contact the search committee chair, Jan Lugibihl, at jan.lugibihl@gmail.com. (2-3)

Hiring for gorgeous assisted-living nursing home work. 2.6 miles from Pinecraft in Sarasota, Fla. No experience needed. Resident Att. \$15/hour. Some experience? \$16/hour. CNA trained? \$17/hour. Bring friends or family to be hired with you! Please call 319-461-6900. Full or part-time hours available. (16-3)

EMPLOYMENT — CHURCH

Chicago Community Mennonite Church is seeking an interim pastor. The position is full time, but part time will be considered. Interim pastor will have the option to apply for a permanent position in the future. We are a welcoming and affirming congregation that shares an Anabaptist faith and seeks to witness through word and deed to the truth revealed in Jesus' life and teaching. For more information: ccmcil.org/employment.html. Email: assistant@ccmcil.org. (3)

Maple Grove Mennonite Church of Belleville, Pa., is seeking a full-time pastor. Interested candidates may contact the chairperson of the search committee, Herb Zook, at 7hwzook@gmail.com for a detailed outline of the requirements and responsibilities of the position. (3)

Salford Mennonite Church, Harleysville, Pa., a Christ-centered, inclusive congregation in Mosaic Conference, seeks a full-time associate pastor to join our ministry team and congregation of learners and servants. The successful candidate will demonstrate passion and creativity for youth ministry, congregational care and outreach. There will be regular opportunities to preach. Contact lead pastor David Greiser at greiserd@salfordmc.org for more information. (3)

East Petersburg Mennonite Church, East Petersburg, Pa., seeks a 75% FTE Equipping Pastor. The position will focus on providing vision/leadership along with an elder team, discipleship, worship ministry collaboration, faith community care facilitation, preaching/teaching and equipping people for ministry in the church and beyond. For more information: eastpetemc.org/equipping-pastor-search. (1-3)

Oak Grove Mennonite Church of West Liberty, Ohio, is seeking a half- to full-time Youth Pastor. Job responsibilities include coordinating volunteers and planning programming for junior high through post-high ages, connecting and communicating with families and working as a part of a pastoral team. Oak Grove is a 150-member rural church whose focus is to share the love of Christ in our community and around the world. For more information or to submit a resume, please email us at alex@oakgrovemennonite.org. (1-4)

The Mennonite Church of Normal, Ill., seeks a Pastoral Team (2.5 FTE) due to retirements. We are an inclusive and welcoming church with functioning leadership teams and commissions. To apply, contact Doug Luginbill at Central District Conference: confmin@mcusacdc.org. (1-3)

EMPLOYMENT — SCHOOL

Middle School Principal, grades 5-8. Lancaster Mennonite School is seeking a Middle School Principal for grades 5-8 to join for the coming 2022-23 school year. They are seeking a strong, dynamic candidate who will empower students to change their world through Christlike love, peacemaking and service. The Principal will work in collaboration with the administrative team and the middle school teachers to shape a new program that includes interdisciplinary projects and classroom project-based learning through thematic teaching. To learn more or apply, please visit: lancastermennonite.org/employment or contact HR via email: humanresources@lancastermennonite.org. (3)

Bluffton University invites applications for a faculty position in Sport Management beginning fall 2022. Visit bluffton.edu/employment/index.aspx for more details. (3)

Fresno Pacific University invites applications for a Faculty in Biology. Complete job description and requirements at fresno.edu/visitors/careers. (3)

Fresno Pacific University invites applications for a Faculty in Nursing – Graduate – MSN-FNP. Complete job description and requirements at fresno.edu/careers. (3)

Goshen College invites applications for a full-time appointment as Director for the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, which includes Directing the Mennonite Historical Library and Assistant or Associate Professor of History with expertise in Anabaptist-Mennonite studies, starting July 2022. For more details and to apply, go to goshen.edu/employment. (3)

Head of School — Freeman Academy (Freeman, S.D.) seeks qualified candidates who are passionate about Christian education to serve in administrative role. Apply today: freemanacademy.org. (2-4)

COMING EVENTS

The 2022 Illinois Mennonite Relief Sale Board is organizing an online auction for the 64th Annual Illinois Mennonite Relief Sale during the week of March 12-19. To participate, go to the Illinois Mennonite Relief Sale web page, ilreliefsale.org, and click on Sullivanauctioneers.proxibid.com. Then please scroll down to find the Illinois Mennonite Relief Sale Grand Auction. Actual bidding will be March 12-19.

Successful bidders will receive an emailed invoice from Sullivan Auction Service. Payment will be due at time of pick up at the Mennonite Church of Normal, located at 805 South Cottage Ave., Normal, Ill., on March 20 from 1 to 5 p.m. Anyone desiring items be mailed will be required to pay the expenses involved. Some of the items to be sold include a number of beautiful quilts. There will be a variety of general items including a Victorian doll house, pictures, tools, toys and much more. At a later date, a catalog listing items and some photographs will be available on ilreliefsale.org. The theme for the 2022 Illinois Relief Sale is "People Helping People Worldwide in the Name of Christ!" For additional details please phone Mrs. Donald (Ruthie) Roth at 309-266-7704 or Mr. Don Litwiller at 309-360-5991. (3)

Illinois Mennonite Relief Sale's online auction is live March 12 to March 19, 2022. Find us on Facebook @ILMennoniteReliefSale or visit ilreliefsale.org. (3)

Fundraiser. Friends of Shirati has been supporting the medical work at Shirati Hospital since 2005. Please join us on March 12, 2022, at 6:30 p.m. for a Zoom fundraiser in support of Shirati Hospital medical work and programs. You can join at jmu-edu.zoom.us/j/85478424411 or by calling +1 646 876-9923. Donated funds will be used for various programs, including cervical cancer screenings; orthopedic surgeries to correct birth defects; programs for children living with HIV or developmental disabilities; and medicine and medical supplies. We also provide support to upgrade hospital facilities and scholarships for hospital staff. Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 10903, Lancaster, PA 17605 or at the website: friendsofshirati.org. For any questions, please call 717-884-9074 or email admin@friendsofshirati.org. (3)

AVAILABLE

Church pews available. First Mennonite Church in Urbana, Ill., would like to repurpose pews from sanctuary. Pews (23) are in good condition and would be given to groups or individuals. (Donations accepted.) Shipping/delivery is responsibility of recipient. More information with photos and contact available at fmc-cu.org/ pews. (2-3)

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Obituaries

obituaries@anabaptistworld.org

Pedro C. Mejia

Pedro C. Mejia, 92, of Rock Island, Ill., died Jan. 16, 2022, at his home. He was born Dec. 8, 1929, to Jose Antero Mejia and Josefa Castro Mejia in Oklahoma City, Okla.

He married Maria Lira on Aug. 24, 1953, in Santa Elena, Texas.

He retired from John Deere Foundry after 30 years of service. He enjoyed gardening, fishing and reading. He especially enjoyed spending time with his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. He was a lifetime member of Spanish Mennonite Church in Moline, Ill., and Davenport, Iowa.

Survivors include eight sons, Eliseo (Mikaela) Mejia of Oklahoma City, Isaias "Ike" (Josefina) Mejia, Ismael (Anna) Mejia, Guadalupe (Ramona) Mejia, Pedro Mejia Jr. and Adalberto (Blanca) Mejia, all of Rock Island, Antero Mejia of Crystal City, Texas, and Santos Mejia of East Moline; three daughters, Margie (Josue) Mejia-Caraballo of Rock Island, Josefa Mejia of East Moline and Maria Brannan of Dothan, Ala.; a sister, Bersabe Alvarado of Weslaco, Texas; 33 grandchildren; 71 great-grandchildren and six great-great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Maria Mejia; and grandsons Cody Brannan and Joseph Mejia.

Funeral services were held at Wheelan-Pressly Funeral Home and Crematory, Rock Island. Burial was in Calvary Cemetery, Rock Island.

Willis C. Hallman

Willis Christian Hallman, 95, of Kansas City, Mo., died Jan. 18, 2022, after a bout with congestive heart failure. He was born Jan. 2, 1927, in Vineland Station, Ont., to Anna and Aaron Hallman.

He spent his first years on his parents' fruit farm, pruning trees and preparing fruit for sale. At age 21 he entered Eastern Mennonite University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in biology. In 1950 he married Katherine Anne Hertzler from Elverson, Pa.



Hallman

His home congregation asked him to serve as pastor in the future, so he was ordained and the family moved to Goshen, Ind., for seminary. After seminary, he accepted a call to serve as pastor in Scottdale, Pa.

Because of his interest in counseling, he felt the need to study psychology. He and Kit drove

out to the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Within two days, plans were completed for him to study psychology and serve as pastor for two Evangelical United Brethren churches in the area. A parsonage was supplied, and the family spent six good years among the generous farmers of Stull and Richland, Kan.

A KU professor suggested he apply to work with challenged children at Marillac School, in Kansas City, which he did, and served there 14 years. During this time, Vicki Lynn Melching joined the family in her teen years, continuing to adulthood and beyond. Next came his move to private practice, which he carried on informally into his final years. He and Kit lived at Kingswood Senior Center for two and one-half years. It was a sudden passing, but 37 years after his first cardiac arrest.

Services were held at The Summit Church, Lee's Summit, Mo. A family burial was in Green Lawn Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to Mennonite Central Committee.

Send obituaries to obituaries@anabaptistworld.org or Anabaptist World, PO Box 568, Newton, KS 67114. From your text, we will prepare an obituary, up to 350 words, compliant with our style. The fee is \$50. Send check or pay online at anabaptistworld.org/obituaries.

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TO BECOME OUR
AMBASSADORS

MW USA is looking for ambassadors to help us connect to women and women's groups. If you are leading or connected to activities for women please join our growing list of ambassadors.

Contact the regional representatives or office@mwusa.org with any questions and to sign up now.

Meet our Regional Representatives:



Clockwise from top right:

Cyneatha Millsaps,
Executive Director &
Midwest Representative:

Erica Lea-Simka,
Southwest Representative:

Suzanne Lay,
East Coast Representative:

Nelly Ascencio,
Northwest Representative

Mennonite Women USA celebrates local artist, **Heather Blaha.**

Come explore the gallery of art created for the book, *The Fig Tree*.

These amazing pieces of artwork will delight your curiosity and welcome you into the story.

All are welcomed to

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- A day of art, music and storytelling -

Sunday | March 6, 2022

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Heather A. Smith Blaha is an 8th grade teacher and artist. Member of Prairie Street Mennonite Church, Elkhart. She has illustrated the book *The Fig Tree* by Ron Ringenburg. Most of her art is inspired by things most others consider trash to be tossed away. She sees beauty and potential beyond the items' original purposes. For more of her work in full color, find her on Instagram @LastNightIMade



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