



# Anabaptist World

Mennonite news, inspiring stories

## PORTRAIT OF THE FAITHFUL

*Churches in North  
America are struggling.  
Members of MC USA tell  
what keeps them engaged.*

### PLUS

#### SHRINKING U.S. CHRISTIANITY

Report projects a future where other  
faiths grow and secularization rises

Gifts of comfort and

# Joy

Mennonite Central Committee

Give gifts that keep on giving!  
 Help provide for the basic needs of our global neighbors this Christmas.

Choose from bees, backpacks, goats and more.  
 Visit [mcc.org/Christmas-giving](http://mcc.org/Christmas-giving) or call toll free 888.563.4676 for gift ideas.

Simplify your giving at [everence.com/giveback](http://everence.com/giveback).

### Spread joy through the MyNeighbor credit card

MyNeighbor is an easy way to support your favorite charitable organization, your Neighbor, through your normal shopping routines. For every purchase you make with the MyNeighbor card, Everence will donate 1.50% of the transaction total to your selected Neighbor.

*Everence offers credit union services that are federally insured by NCUA. We also offer securities and other products that are not federally insured and are subject to loss of principal. Some Everence products and services may not be available in your state.*

MENNONITE CREATION CARE NETWORK

**NEW PDF!**  
 Questions to ask, funding options, and how to find help when you're stuck.

## Considering Solar?

### A Guide for U.S. Churches

Now available at: [mennocreationcare.org](http://mennocreationcare.org)



FEATURES

08 Gauging the priorities

BY TIM HUBER

Mennonite Church USA gets a sample of what's important to its members.

13 Shrinking Christianity

BY BOB SMJETANA

A new report projects a future where the U.S. population is less than half Christian, while other faiths grow and secularization rises.

NEWS

16 Civilians under fire

Russian attacks complicate MCC partners' distribution of aid in Ukraine.

17 Invitation declined

U.S. Mennonite Brethren conference won't join in Anabaptist Bible project.

18 Relations reconsidered

Mosaic Mennonite Conference begins two-year discernment of relationships with Mennonite Church USA.



16



19



24

COLUMNS

32 Absence of presence
The Bride of Christ exists in flesh and blood.

33 Be prepared
Advent gives hope that God has not abandoned us.

34 Be attentive
During Advent, let's appreciate our differences — and God's universal love.

35 Can't deny it
The truth will set you free, but first it might make you miserable.

36 Foundations shaken
Advent calls us to belong to the world of Mary's song.

DEPARTMENTS

- 04 From the Executive Director
05 Currents
06 Opinion: Letters
07 Opinion: Editorial
29 Higher Education
37 Book Review
38 Wider World
41 Classifieds
42 Obituaries

ON THE COVER: Pastor Meghan Good prays for delegates at the Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, Mo., in 2015. Photo by Lowell Brown for Mennonite World Review

BY DANIELLE KLOTZ

# Trend lines and unshakable hope

**IN THIS ISSUE**, associate editor Tim Huber takes a deep dive into Mennonite Church USA's denominational survey and lays out its findings, strengths and weaknesses according to denominational leadership and professional researchers.

In the article after that, Religion News Service writer Bob Smietana outlines the trend of declining numbers of self-identifying Christians in the United States.

For many, the downward trend might not be surprising; this has been a national story for some time now. For others, the article might be alarming. If that is the case, I'd like to remind us of what Jesus told the Pharisees in Luke 19:40.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem and his followers throw their cloaks on the road before him, the Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke the crowd. People were shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Jesus turned to the Pharisees and said, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Jesus is finally accepting the title of king, even though he looks nothing like the kings of that time or any time. He is making his way toward Jerusalem and his death.

Among other things, he is telling the Pharisees that his rule does not thrive or die because of any one of his follow-

ers: "Even if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

I find these words comforting when I think about shrinking churches and declining numbers of Christians. Surveys can tell us many useful things, but they shouldn't have the power to shake our hope for God's kingdom. The disciples thought Jesus' death on the cross was the end, but we know what happened next.

If Christianity went all but dead in the United States, what stone would be rolled away next?

I trust that on our pages you will always find hope, even when the news of the day looks dark.

**ON THE BACK COVER** you will see our annual Christmas gift subscription offer. If you have friends or family who aren't subscribers yet, please consider this opportunity to introduce them to *Anabaptist World*. As you've heard from me before, subscriptions are an important part of sustaining *AW*'s unique ministry. Giving a year's subscription is not only a gift for your loved ones but also for our team at *Anabaptist World*. ●



**Anabaptist World Inc. is an independent journalistic ministry serving the global Anabaptist movement. We seek to inform, inspire and provide a forum for Mennonites and anyone interested in Anabaptism to explore faith and culture.**

Established 2020, merging *The Mennonite* and *Mennonite World Review*

## STAFF

**Executive director:** Danielle Klotz  
[daniellek@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:daniellek@anabaptistworld.org)

**Editor:** Paul Schrag  
[editor@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:editor@anabaptistworld.org)

**Associate editor:** Tim Huber  
[timh@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:timh@anabaptistworld.org)

**Business manager:** Dana Neff  
[danan@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:danan@anabaptistworld.org)

**Digital strategist:** Juan Moya  
[juanm@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:juanm@anabaptistworld.org)

**Design:** Hannah Gerig Meyer

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dawn Araujo-Hawkins	Marathana Prothro
Larry Guengerich	Marty Troyer
Hans Houshower	Karen Flores Vindel
Melody Pannell	

## EDITORIAL OFFICE

129 W. Sixth St., Newton, Kansas  
PO Box 568, Newton, KS 67114  
Phone: 316-283-3670  
Email: [editor@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:editor@anabaptistworld.org)

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

One year: \$54 US, \$70 Canadian. Order online at [anabaptistworld.org](http://anabaptistworld.org) or call 845-267-3069. For information on group rates, contact the *Anabaptist World* office.

Address changes or questions, email [anabaptistworld@cambeywest.com](mailto:anabaptistworld@cambeywest.com) or [danan@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:danan@anabaptistworld.org).

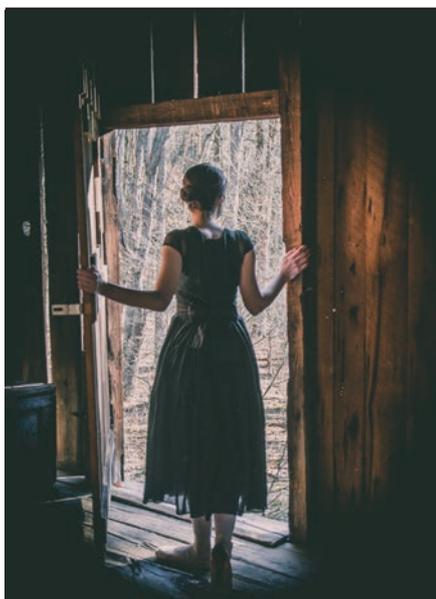
## POSTMASTER

Send address corrections to:  
PO Box 436, Congers, NY 10920-9819

*Anabaptist World* (USPS 339-180, ISSN 0889-2156) is published 16 times per year — every three weeks, with some four-week intervals — by Anabaptist World Inc., an independent nonprofit company. Periodicals postage paid at Newton, KS 67114 and additional mailing offices.

Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

This issue was mailed **Nov. 18**. The next issue will be mailed in four weeks, **Dec. 16**.



*Ordnung, An Amish Ballet.*

PHOTO: VAN DYKE AND COMPANY

## Dance like nobody's watching

A new ballet uses dance to critique Amish limits on education. *Ordnung, An Amish Ballet* was performed Nov. 10-12 by Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Dance Theater. Using pop music from 1972 to 1982, the ballet begins at the Supreme Court, whose 1972 *Wisconsin v. Yoder* ruling determined that Amish children were not required to go to school beyond the eighth grade. The story follows an Amish girl who wants to pursue a career in the arts but is driven to secrecy. The work was produced by IUP dance professor Joan Van Dyke, who believes the Supreme Court decision made sense when Amish communities were more agrarian but hinders young people's opportunities today.



Eva Luvia, a leader in the Kekchi Mennonite Church, talks with tour participants. PHOTO: ROLANDO SOSA

## Guatemalans model love amid challenge

Leaders and pastors from five Mennonite Church USA conferences took a five-day tour in Guatemala to learn about Anabaptism in Latin America.

They visited in August at the invitation of SEMILLA, the Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala City.

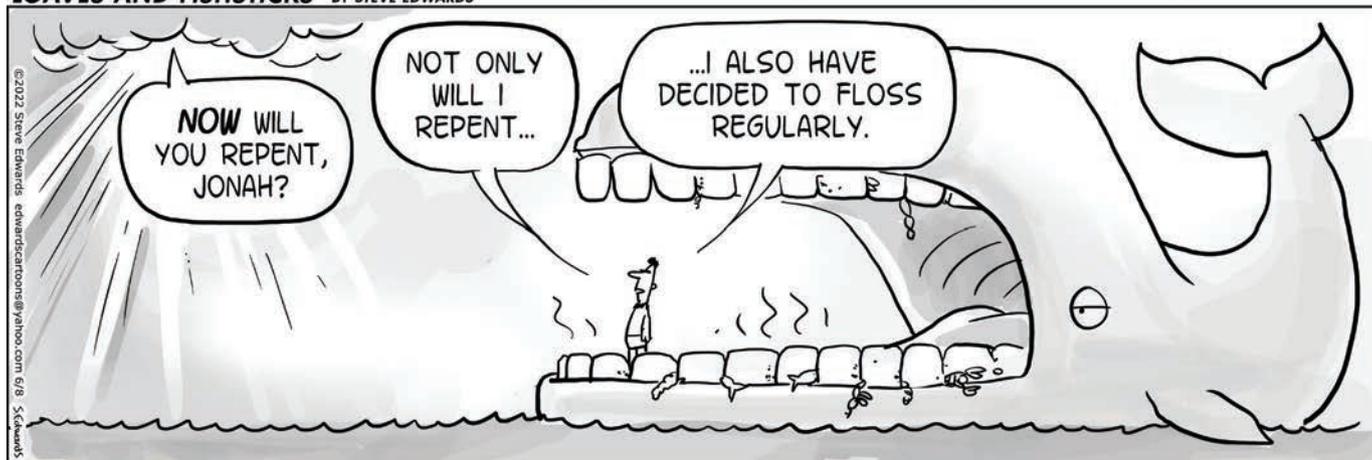
Doug Luginbill, conference minister of Central District Conference, was part of the group. "I was both inspired and humbled to hear how SEMILLA-trained pastors engage in ministry in their communities that is uniquely Anabaptist," he said. "Their commitment to nonviolent, Christ-centered love, in the midst of challenging situations, demonstrated through their stories, is an encouragement to me and my ministry."

Other participants included Marco and Sandra Güete of Mosaic Conference, Heidi Regier Kreider and Sandra Montes-Martinez of Western District Conference, Rolando Sosa of Indiana-Michigan Conference and Nathan Luitjens of Central Plains Conference. — SEMILLA

## Symbol of power, object of affection

Eastern Mennonite University professors know a thing or two about pickups. Professor Mark Metzler Sawin was cited in a Nov. 1 opinion piece by Paul Waldman in *The Washington Post* about the evolving political symbolism of the truck. (There's a growing divide between what they symbolize and who actually buys them.) "The same impulse that caused people to vote for Trump," he's quoted, "is also what is causing them to continue to buy pickup trucks: this frustration that the world changed, and it changed in a way that made my life worse — or at least made me less powerful." Sawin's EMU colleague Howard Zehr, professor in EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, also has thoughts on trucks. His book *Pickups: A Love Story*, was published in 2013, featuring his photographs of trucks and their owners.

### LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



# Letters & Comments

Write to: [editor@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:editor@anabaptistworld.org)

## Attendance analysis

My congregation, Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church, has changed from a membership of 380 in the 1950s to an attendance of 35 nowadays. Analyzing the steady drop in church attendance is difficult, and your editorial ("The Great Resignation — from church," Nov. 4) made a sincere attempt. Another side of the coin is to explain why some congregations are experiencing almost no decline. It seems that in many of these so-called "Bible" and evangelical gatherings, there is a subtle element of visceral faithfulness — not to the gospel itself but to their organizational identity. It's a *brand* that's being worshiped.

And whatever the challenges may be, a vigorous defense is mounted. Secular politics matters massively; children's and youth ministries are heavily resourced; regular attendance is a priority; closely connected charities deserve generous support. But these "mission actions" actually focus on loyalty to the system. I see guilt as the currency that oils these institutions, and what's ironic is that the talk is of liberty and religious freedom, when the very opposite is their foundation. Old Testament ethics rule, and Jesus' radical teachings are downplayed.

Our progressive churches are laboring at discerning the Spirit's guidance; this is a vastly more difficult endeavor and leaves many Christians nervous. But this will surely be the path to a true discipleship that many, and the younger ones among us especially, will find appealing.

**Karl Dick, Waterloo, Ont.**

## Don't idealize the Amish

The Oct. 14 issue ("Digital technologies: threat to Amish life?") is an example of why some of the Amish survivors I've met in my line of work have absolute red-hot rage at "mainstream" Mennonites. Because these survivors work for years to educate the world about the consequences of patriarchal authoritarianism on the vulnerable people in their communities, all while surviving unfathomable amounts of community-perpetrated trauma. Yet college-educated Mennonites are still speaking for them, over them and with great authority about the supposed gentle-

ness of their oppressors.

Your editorial asks, "Is there a lesson for us?" Yes, the lesson is that if you idealize a high-control sect of conservative and incestuous white Christians with violent disciplinary systems and promote them as moral exemplars with near-magical tools for self-governance in isolation from all the perceived ills of modernity, you can convince the Supreme Court, police departments, social workers and a sizable number of Americans that "freedom of religion" means denying children education and medical care and denying survivors of sexual and domestic violence access to life-saving services and safety nets.

There are vague nods now and then in AW's coverage of the Amish and Plain people to the extreme abuse problems in these communities ("shadow side," "foibles," etc.). But it seems to me that those vague nods are mainly there to inoculate the Amish brand against its critics. There's a fine, capitalist art to that inoculation, and sectarian Anabaptist leaders are good at getting mainstream Anabaptists to help them do it. I would love to see much more coverage centering the voices of Amish and Plain Mennonite survivors who have been shunned for reporting sexual violence and child abuse.

**Stephanie Krehbiel, Lawrence, Kan.**  
*Krehbiel is executive director and co-founder of Into Account, a nonprofit organization that advocates for survivors of abuse perpetrated in Christian settings.*

## Struggling with O.T. violence

This is my first experience with your content, and I must say I loved it ("Jesus and the New Testament on killing," by Ronald J. Sider, from *Mennonite World Review*, Nov. 25, 2019, archived on the AW website, along with content from AW's other predecessor, *The Mennonite*). Sider [who died July 27, 2022] is open-minded to questions without dismissing them dogmatically.

I have struggled, as Sider does, with the Old Testament God not measuring up to the loving God Jesus represents. Look at the flood. I know it was a bunch of evil people who died, just like when the Israelites were ordered to kill the Canaanites.

An unsatisfactory theory to me is that God allowed these things to happen to prevent what would happen if he didn't intervene. The whole world (except for Noah and family) had turned evil, so God's new plan was to destroy evil (genocide) that would have infected God's people and destroyed his plan of redemption. It is still a bit unsatisfactory, but God was contending with his creatures who had defied his plan. God had to work within the

parameters of the power Satan has in this world — and to show that God was right about us: that we could be made perfect, in a fellowship of suffering of sorts in this world, by following Christ.

**Tim Dory, Sterling Heights, Mich.**

## It's a study Bible

I agree with Don Blosser (Letters, Oct. 14) that the name "Anabaptist Bible" [a new publishing project; see update on page 17] feels awkward. Given the way "bible" is often used to mean a comprehensive manual on some topic, it sounds like a manual on Anabaptism. I remember hearing references to the "Scofield Bible," but even that is properly titled the Scofield Reference Bible. Could we call this an "Anabaptist Study Bible"?

**Elaine Kauffman, Kalispell, Mont.**

## A psalm of privilege

I put these words together as a kind of confessional:

*I am a privileged white male,  
I have no needs today.  
My coffee beans are shipped from afar,  
and likewise my chocolate bar.*

*My bank account is doing fine,  
retirement checks flow in.  
My house is paid off (now isn't that grand?)  
by taking the natives' land.*

*Yea, though I walk the city streets,  
my heart shall have no fear.  
My sex and my skin protect me from ill;  
the rapist and racist quell.*

*I fill my tank with fossil fuel,  
the only way to go.  
As polar caps melt, I turn on the heat,  
and drive to eat red meat.*

*E'en though my blinking tail light's out,  
I need not be on guard.  
The men in blue are on my side,  
their pistols and tasers hide.*

*And when I lay me down to sleep  
my dreams are mostly sweet.  
I've paid Uncle Sam to put up a fight,  
should any foe spoil the night.*

*Dear Lord and Father of my kind,  
forgive my foolish ways!  
Reclothe me in my rightful mind,  
restorative ways to find.*

**Wayne Lehman, Lititz, Pa.**

---

Join the conversation by writing to [editor@anabaptistworld.org](mailto: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.

# Surveys chart 50 years of change

## Anabaptist denominations have drifted apart. Can we reverse the trend?

SEVERAL ANABAPTIST denominations have done a big survey about every 17 years since 1972. This month, Mennonite Church USA released data from the latest one. It prompts reflection on how we've changed and what the future holds.

The 1972 and 1989 surveys included the five most progressive Anabaptist groups in North America: the Mennonite Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, Mennonite Brethren, Evangelical Mennonite Church and Brethren in Christ.

After the 2002 merger of the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church, the 2006 and 2021 surveys covered only the new denomination, MC USA.

Trends that stand out are the shrinking of MC USA, the speed of cultural change and the widening gulf between Anabaptist groups.

Today, MC USA is about the same size (56,000 members) as the smaller of the partners that created it. In 1989 the Mennonite Church had 102,200 members and the General Conference Mennonite Church 62,800 (although 47% of the GCs were Canadian and not part of the U.S. merger). In 2006, four years after the merger, MC USA had 109,000 members. Today's total is a little more than half of that.

Denominational contraction followed an era of cultural change. In 1989, the researchers observed that Mennonites had grown more urban and modern. In 1972, only 35% of Mennonites (in the groups surveyed) lived in towns of 2,500 or more. Seventeen years later, almost half (48%) did. In 1989, J. Howard Kauffman, the study's co-director, said this confirmed the researchers' "main hypothesis" that "Mennonites are assimilating into the larger society."

Assimilation included use of electronic media. Kauffman noted the speed of change. "We were surprised by the number of homes [46%] that



PHOTO: KEN KREHBIEL/MC USA

**The process of assimilation and modernization, a focus of study as recently as 1989, is complete.**

have VCRs," he said in 1989. Mennonites' reputation as media tech laggards would not last much longer: By the mid-1990s, many of those same homes would have an internet connection. Today no one would be surprised if the percentage of MC USA members with smartphones matched that of the population as a whole. The process of assimilation and modernization, a major focus of study as recently as 1989, is complete.

**THE NARROWING SCOPE** of the four surveys parallels the fragmenting of North American Anabaptists. In 1972 and 1989, five denominations saw value in a joint survey — one that would not only compile results for each but also throw all the data together to draw a unified picture of the progressive strain of Anabaptism. By 2006, the scene had shifted. The Mennonite Brethren declined to participate in a new survey. The Church of the Brethren and the Brethren in Christ did take part, but MC USA published a book that reported only the findings about its own members.

In 2021, MC USA conducted a survey alone. The denominations had drifted apart.

Assimilation may be complete, but fragmentation continues. MC USA faces the prospect of more contraction, fueled by conservative opposition to an LGBTQ-affirming resolution (page 18). Like the polarized culture around them, Anabaptist traditionalists and progressives inhabit different religious and political worlds.

So what is new? Fragmentation has marred Anabaptism for 500 years. Yet a 20th-century strain of ecumenism emerged, with the creation of Mennonite Central Committee and other joint ventures. Anabaptists grew more comfortable with crossing denominational lines.

Today, Mennonite ecumenism weakens. On Oct. 25, U.S. Mennonite Brethren leaders announced their denomination would not participate in the Anabaptist Bible project (page 17). They cited MC USA's LGBTQ-affirming resolution. When a culture-war dispute scuttles a Bible study invitation, it's a sign that the vision of unity is fading.

The early Anabaptists were always ready to open the Scriptures with any conversation partner. They believed, perhaps naively, that Christians who differed could find common ground by gathering around the biblical text. This holds the key for us, too, if we hope to reverse concerning trends. ●

BY TIM HUBER



# GAUGING THE PRIORITIES

---

## Mennonite Church USA gets a sample of what's important to its members

---

▲  
The crowd worships at the 2019 Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, Mo.

PHOTO: KEN KREHBIEL/MC USA

**A** NEW REPORT based on a survey paints a picture of the beliefs, priorities and churchgoing habits of Mennonite Church USA's most engaged and committed members.

The report acknowledges its limits. Because the survey relied on voluntary responses rather than scientific sampling methods, the data cannot be used to describe the denomination as a whole.

Glen Guyton, the denomination's executive director, said in a news release that while the data may not entirely represent all the experiences of MC USA's members, it "provides us

with important insights, especially as we consider the role of program agencies and the priorities of the denominational staff."

The full report is at [mennoniteusa.org](http://mennoniteusa.org). Springtide Research Institute collected 2,276 responses to an online survey in 2021 and did 63 follow-up interviews. Springtide's 85-page report, released Oct. 26, reveals widespread interest to embrace diversity and emphasize peacemaking and service.

The denomination counts roughly 56,000 members in 540 congregations.

A strong majority of participants indicated it is "very important" to follow Jesus in daily life (84%), express Christian love in relationships (80%), embody



### Reasons members engage

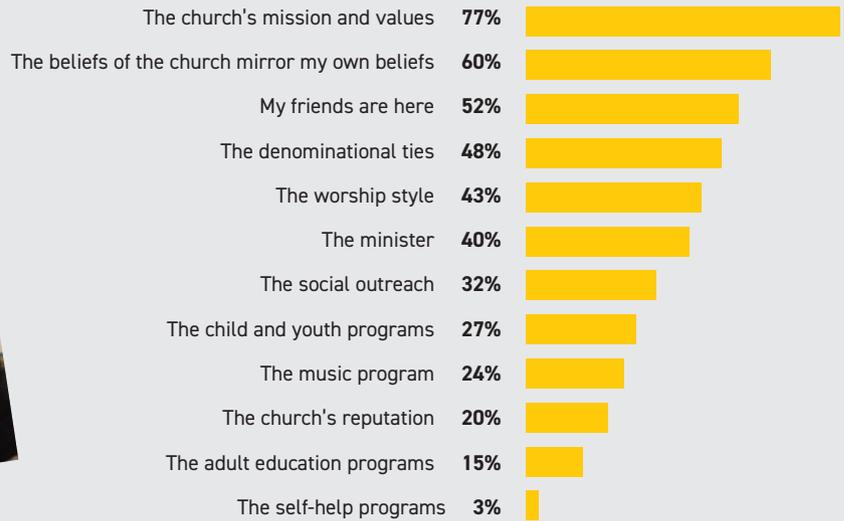


Table does not add up to 100% as survey participants were invited to select all that applied.

peacemaking (76%) and serve others outside the church (75%). The faith commitment of adult baptism is “very important” to 51% of respondents. Living a simple lifestyle is a priority for 36% and nonconformity for 30%. Evangelizing nonbelievers was ranked very important by the fewest respondents (18%).

The MC USA news release addressed evangelization’s low priority by pointing out that the preferred mode of outreach for 70% of respondents is service.

“We need to do better at reaching out and sharing our faith locally,” Guyton said in the release. “Our approach to missions is not just international.

We must become missional people that impact the community. There is a desire for that in our denomination.”

He emphasized leaning into the basic tenets of Anabaptism, rather than popular religious rhetoric, and focusing on ministry in local contexts.

In an Oct. 21 presentation about the survey to MC USA’s Constituency Leaders Council, Guyton added: “People want to serve. People want to get engaged. People want to do ministry where they get their hands dirty, where it touches other people’s lives.”

In the presentation, he summarized recommendations for denominational leaders: to govern for the future, work with underrepresented groups toward inclusion, empower diverse leaders and continue to provide resources and guidance to conferences and congregations.

**THE SURVEY FOLLOWS** three previous attempts to analyze the demographics and beliefs of Anabaptists in North America at roughly 17-year intervals. Studies in 1972 and 1989 included the Mennonite Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, Mennonite Brethren, Evangelical Mennonite Church and Brethren in Christ.

Conrad Kanagy, a sociology professor at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, conducted a third survey in 2006 of MC USA, four years after the merger of the Mennonite Church

and General Conference Mennonite Church established the new denomination. The EMC, Mennonite Brethren and Conservative Mennonite Conference declined to take part in that venture, known as “Road Signs for the Journey,” although the Brethren in Christ U.S. participated.

Kanagy has reflected on the 2006 and 2021 studies on his blog, [centerforpropheticimagination.org](http://centerforpropheticimagination.org).

“We were very cognizant [in 2006]

**64% indicated they had attended a national adult assembly, and 50% had attended a Mennonite college or seminary — proportions atypical for many congregations.**

of the two former studies [in 1972 and 1989] and their methods,” he said in an interview. “We tried to methodologically line up with how they did their sampling.”

Based on Springtide’s report, Kanagy said no comparisons should be made to earlier surveys because the methods and samples are so different. This is due to the 2021 study’s “convenience sampling”: an invitation was sent to people who had signed up to receive

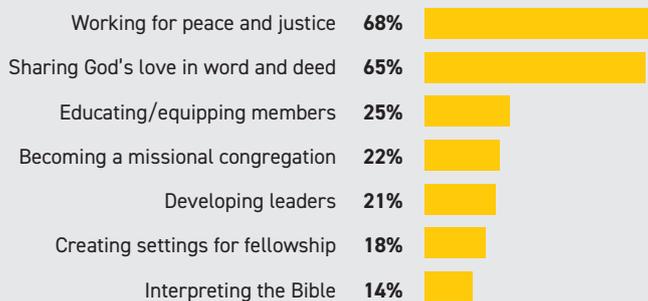
**“People want to serve. People want to get engaged. People want to do ministry where they get their hands dirty, where it touches other people’s lives.”**

— GLEN GUYTON



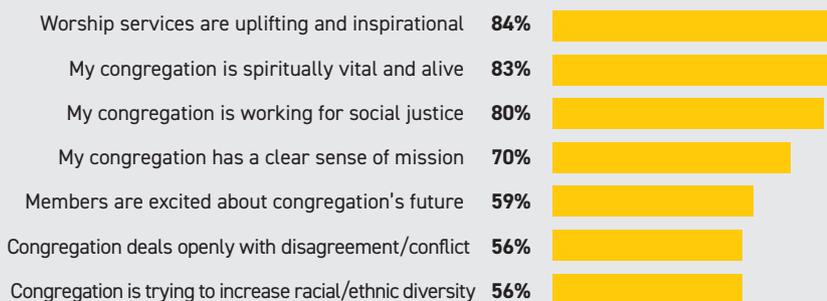
Executive director Glen Guyton speaks at the 2019 Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, Mo. PHOTO: KEN KREHBIEL/MC USA

### Essential activities of MC USA



### Perceptions of my congregation

*(Selected by Anabaptist World from a longer list)*



emails from MC USA or attended the 2021 convention. Springtide was present at the convention to reach youth and young adults. Any other participation came from people who heard about the survey, which was available in English and Spanish, and sought it out.

“It’s useful to describe the sample of the people who responded,” Kanagy said of the 2021 survey. “Beyond that, I just don’t think legitimately any comparison can be made.”

“Eighty percent of the sample has a bachelor’s degree, but I know that 80% of Mennonite Church USA does not have a bachelors’ degree. That’s just not possible. . . . [The 2021 sample] was more highly educated, older, whiter than the sample I worked with. I can’t say it tells me anything about the denomination as a whole. It’s not a probability sample.”

Sixty-four percent of the survey’s participants indicated they had attended a national adult assembly, and 50% had attended a Mennonite college or seminary — proportions atypical for many congregations. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) are licensed or ordained ministers. About 85% of respondents indicated they are heterosexual, whereas Gallup reported in February that LGBTQ identification in the U.S. was 7.1%.

Ninety-two percent of respondents are white, and 75% are at least 45 years old.

The data suggest the survey’s participants are similar demographically to national assembly delegates, who are some of MC USA’s most engaged members. Two percentages correlated closely: At a special delegate session in May, a resolution affirming the spiritual gifts of LGBTQ people and committing to inclusive actions passed with 55.7% approval. In the survey, 57% agreed that MC USA should allow ministers to officiate weddings of LGBTQ people.

**WHILE THE SURVEY SHOWED** the local church plays an important role in the lives of its active members, Kanagy believes more useful information could be learned from those who’ve left the denomination or dropped out of congregations.

“What I saw in the reporting was a failure to recognize the dramatic changes that have taken place in the

denomination in the 16 years since our survey,” he said. “The drop from 109,000 to 56,000 [members] has shifted the denomination dramatically. . . . What I saw was a glossy response to what should be more lament than celebration. Multiple conferences are still discerning what to do. Multiple congregations are discerning.”

Kanagy said he would not have stepped into the conversation if Springtide’s report had not included comparisons to earlier data. He suggested a survey of a denomination’s “most engaged” individuals upholds the status quo.

“We’re making the assumption these are the most engaged constituents. They could be most engaged on a particular social issue,” he said. “It’s like the annual business meeting at church. Who shows up is based on what’s on the agenda and who has a stake. It’s not going to be the single moms and

the homeless. . . . It seems to me we have to look beyond ourselves, or we will make recommendations and policies that reflect who we already are.”

**IN A RESPONSE** to questions from *Anabaptist World*, Guyton said the study’s primary purpose was not to make comparisons to the past but to understand what drives engagement. He said MC USA leaders felt Springtide brought expertise in sociological research that best fit the denomination’s goals, including experience working with young people in religious settings. He could not say what the organization was paid because “MC USA does not divulge what it pays specific vendors.”

Guyton said it was “exciting to see that participants consistently expressed a desire to draw the circle wider — by defining the term ‘Mennonite’ more broadly.” He was encouraged

## Voices from the survey

The report includes quotes from 63 interviews with survey participants. Here is a sample:

*We’re not going to go back to the good old days because they weren’t good old days for everybody, for one thing. [We should] take the bold stances as our religious foremothers and forefathers did with abolition or civil rights or things where the church was courageous to stand up and make having a faith mean something.*

— Melanie

*The things we think of as Mennonite culture are really sort of these white, maybe more rural, more connected to people with this Mennonite family history things. And if we position that as the Mennonite culture, then that’s really exclusionary.* — Alex

*It’s a time of shifting, a time of choosing, a time of remaking who the denomination is, and there’s part of me that really laments the losses that we’ve experienced.* — Nash

*I think we are reaching the limits of congregational autonomy because, at some point, any group does have to define itself.* — Jake

*There should be a little bit more grace extended to individuals who are at different places on the theological spectrum.* — Dean

*MC USA has a tendency to [focus] so hard on the . . . social justice kind of issues that we sometimes forget that we are a faith community or forget to talk about Jesus.* — Elee

*We’re trying to please everyone, and no one’s happy. We either need to stop trying to please folks, or we need to choose a side . . . and that takes a lot more wisdom than what I have.*

— Declan

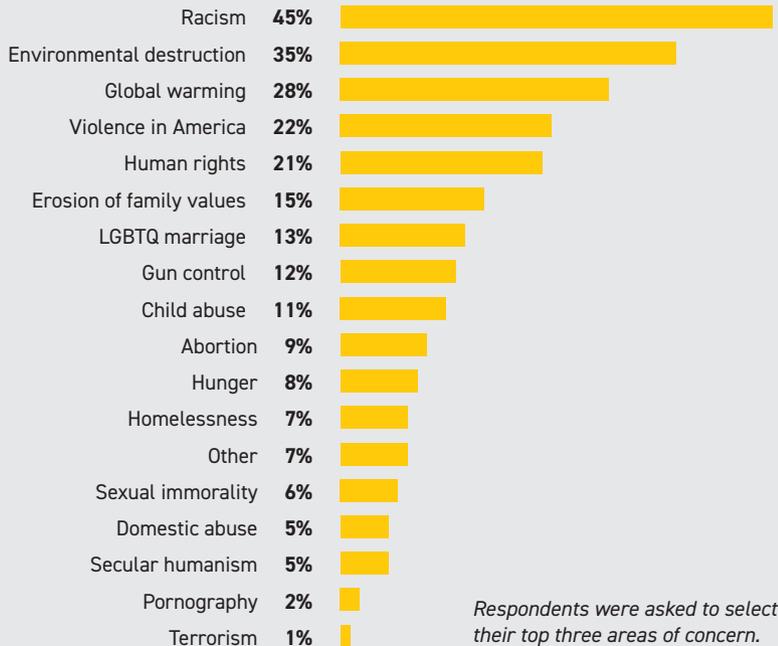
*One of the reasons I became a denominational person, which I never was before, was because I felt like MC USA was brave and faithful to Scripture by saying, “Look, we know this is not popular, but we think it’s right.”* — Abbie



Youth play Dutch Blitz at the 2013 Mennonite Church USA convention in Phoenix, Ariz.

PHOTO: JONATHAN CHARLES/MENNONITE WORLD REVIEW

### Social issues of concern for MC USA members



by interest in ecumenical “antiracist efforts, advocacy for immigrants and peacemaking that is inclusive of all.”

The survey points to next steps for systemic change, Guyton said, including the need to incorporate diversity into strategic planning, from congregations up to the Executive Board. This includes allowing immigrants and people of color to have true decision-making power, creating full-time positions for qualified people of color in organizations, being “transparent in operations and communications to disable hidden power structures” and creating mentorship opportunities to increase the number of racial/ethnic pastors and leaders. ●



**Tim Huber** is associate editor of *Anabaptist World*.

## Who are we hearing? BY JAMIE PITTS

**THIS SURVEY PROVIDES** interesting information about a sample of mostly white, highly educated Mennonite Church USA members over 40 who grew up in the Mennonite church and are currently highly active in their congregations. While it is disappointing and surprising that the survey is not more representative of MC USA membership, the data presented does shed some light on the habits and views of the survey respondents.

Personally, I resonate with many of the respondents’ convictions. Commitment to an ecumenically minded church that prioritizes peacemaking discipleship is what attracted me to MC USA. As a theologian, I am glad to read that the majority of respondents value Mennonite theology and that many believe Jesus-centered theology has an important role to play in the denomination’s future.

At the same time, I see these survey results as cause for reflection. White, highly educated Mennonites over 40 have overseen the halving

of the denomination in the 20 years since its founding. Are this group’s theological and organizational impulses the best guide to the denomination’s future? What does this group have to learn from the perspectives of MC USA members who are not well represented in the data — members who did not grow up Mennonite; immigrant members; African American, Latino and Asian American members; members who did not receive higher education; members under 40; members who are not as engaged with the church in the traditional ways the survey tracked?

These questions are highlighted in the respondents’ relative lack of interest in global partnerships (only 34%). The political issues this group professes to care about are highly global: climate change, racism, economic injustice, to name a few. Moreover, Mennonite churches are growing throughout the Global South.

How can respondents face global issues through global partnership? How can white, highly educated Mennonites come to see themselves

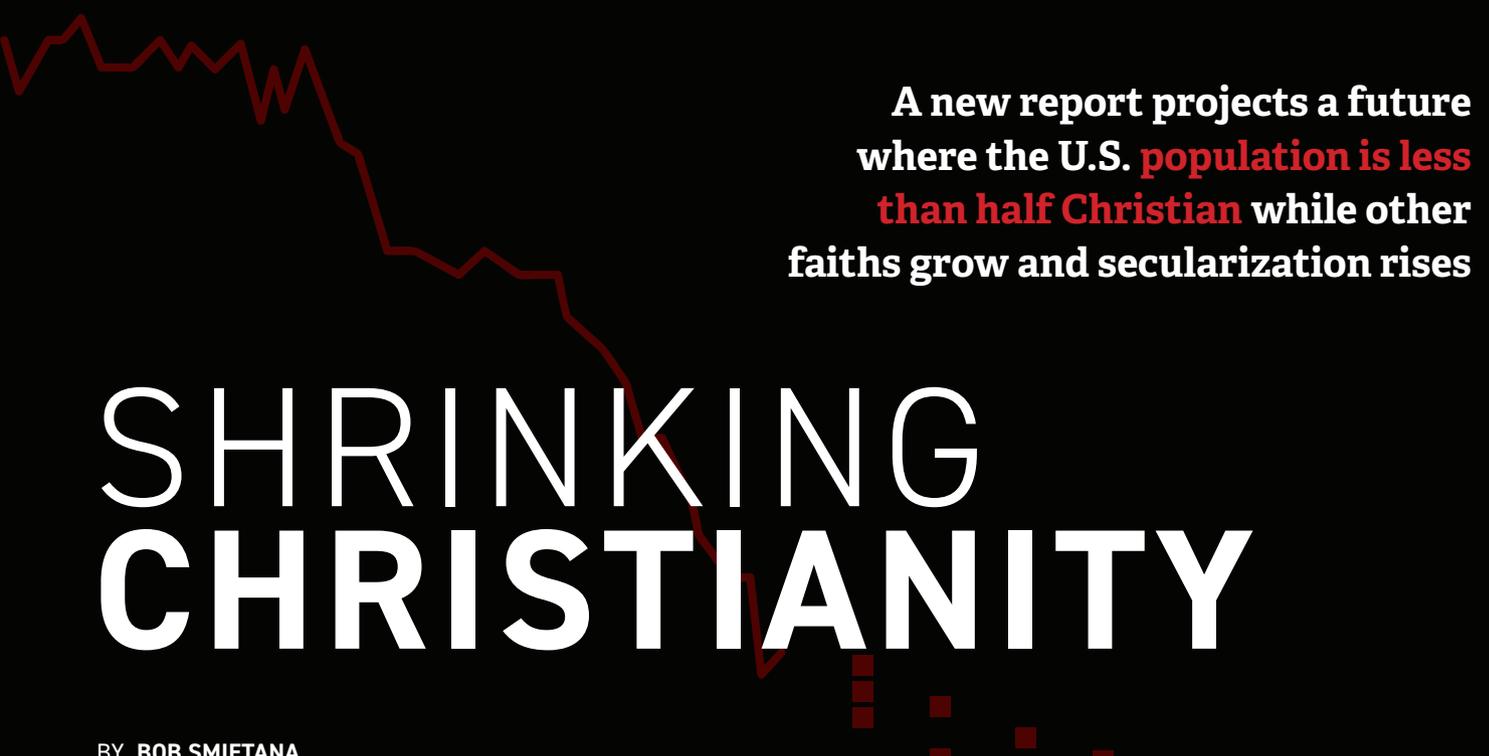
as a small part of a global family of faith? What can this group learn from other family members?

Respondents indicate they have a will to address these questions when they emphasize the need for inclusion. As the denomination’s recent history suggests, inclusion is difficult in practice. The survey points to an awareness of this difficulty without many clear answers.

The good news is that white, highly educated Mennonites over 40 are not the only ones to face these challenges. Much can be learned from other MC USA members and from other Christians seeking to witness to the Prince of Peace. ●



**Jamie Pitts** is associate professor of Anabaptist studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, director of the Institute of Mennonite Studies and editor of *Anabaptist Witness*.



A new report projects a future where the U.S. **population is less than half Christian** while other faiths grow and secularization rises

# SHRINKING CHRISTIANITY

BY **BOB SMJETANA**

**A**MERICA HAS LONG prided itself on being a country where people can choose whatever religion they like. The majority has long chosen Christianity.

By 2070, that may no longer be the case. If current trends continue, Christians could make up less than half of the population — and as little as a third — in 50 years.

Meanwhile, the so-called nones — or the religiously unaffiliated — could make up close to half of the population. And the percentage of Americans who identify as Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and other non-Christian faiths could double.

Those are among the major findings of a new report from the Pew Research

Center regarding America's religious future — a future where Christianity, though diminished, persists while non-Christian faiths grow amid rising secularization.

Researchers projected possible religious futures for the United States using a number of factors, including birth rates, migration patterns, demographics like age and sex and the current religious landscape.

They also looked at how religion is passed from one generation to another and how often people switch religions — in particular, Christians who become nones, a number that has been increasing in recent years.

They projected four scenarios, based on differing rates of religious switching — from a continued increase to no switching at all.

## For renewal, look to the margins

*Rabbis Benjamin Spratt and Joshua Stanton analyzed the decline of institutional religion for Religion News Service. An excerpt:*

The institutions of American Judaism and Christianity are suffering a decline from which they may not emerge. But an awakening is rising around the edges.

There may be a growing gap between religious identification and worship attendance, as people lose faith in institutional religion and try to make a difference — no less driven by faith — in other ways.

People of faith now at the margins and outside formal church leadership — women, people of color, immigrants and LGBTQ people — are gaining a voice and may play key roles to set a course for the future.

The present crisis of church and synagogue is not so much a crisis of faith as of purpose. When institutions become the driving purpose of religion, people move to recenter their purpose on the fulfillment of human needs and a higher calling of community.

Within the upheavals of religion today, we see the beginnings of a new awakening. Our faith communities will be forever changed, emerging more diverse, more accessible and more relevant.

“While the scenarios in this report vary in the extent of religious disaffiliation they project, they all show Christians continuing to shrink as a share of the U.S. population, even under the counterfactual assumption that all switching came to a complete stop in 2020,” according to the report. “At the same time, the unaffiliated are projected to grow under all four scenarios.”

Currently, about a third (31%) of Christians become disaffiliated before they turn 30, according to Pew Research. Twenty-one percent of nones become Christian as young adults. Should those switching rates remain stable, Christians would make up 46% of the population by 2070, while nones would make up 41% percent of the population.

If disaffiliation rates continue to grow but are capped at 50% of Christians leaving the faith, then 39% percent of Americans are projected to be Christian by 2070, with 48% percent of Americans identifying as nones. With no limit placed on the percentage of people leaving Christianity and with continued growth in disaffiliation, Christians would be 35% of the population, with nones making up a majority of Americans (52%).

If all switching came to a halt, then Christians would remain a slight majority (54%), while nones would make up 34% of Americans, according to the projection model.

Non-Christian faiths would rise to 12-13% of the population, largely

## The unaffiliated are raising unaffiliated children, while Christians are more likely to be older.

due to migration, in each scenario. Migration does affect the percentage of Christians, as most immigrants coming to the U.S. are Christians, said Conrad Hackett, associate director of research and senior demographer at Pew Research Center.

“Still, the greatest amount of change in the U.S., we think currently and in the future, will come from switching,” he said.

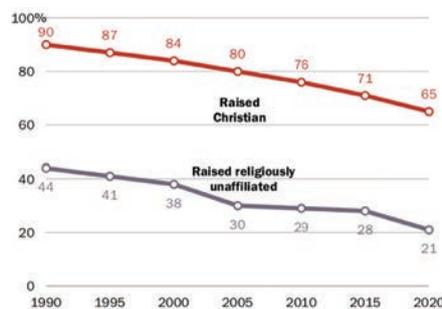
**RESEARCHERS STRESSED** the report contained projections based on data and mathematical models, not predictions.

“Though some scenarios are more plausible than others, the future is uncertain, and it is possible for the religious composition of the United States in 2070 to fall outside the ranges projected,” they wrote.

One reason for the decline among Christians and the growth among the nones in the models is age. While Christians have more children than nones, they are also older. Pew estimates the average Christian in the United States is 43, which is 10 years older than the average none.

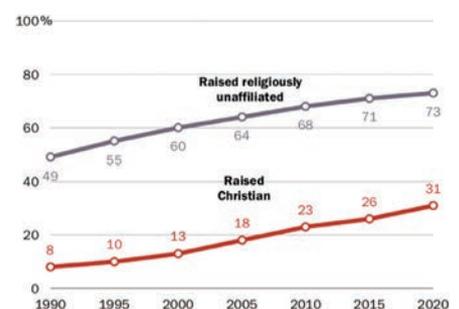
## Young Americans are now less likely to become or remain Christian...

*% of U.S. adults who are Christian at ages 30 to 34*



## ... and more likely to become or remain unaffiliated

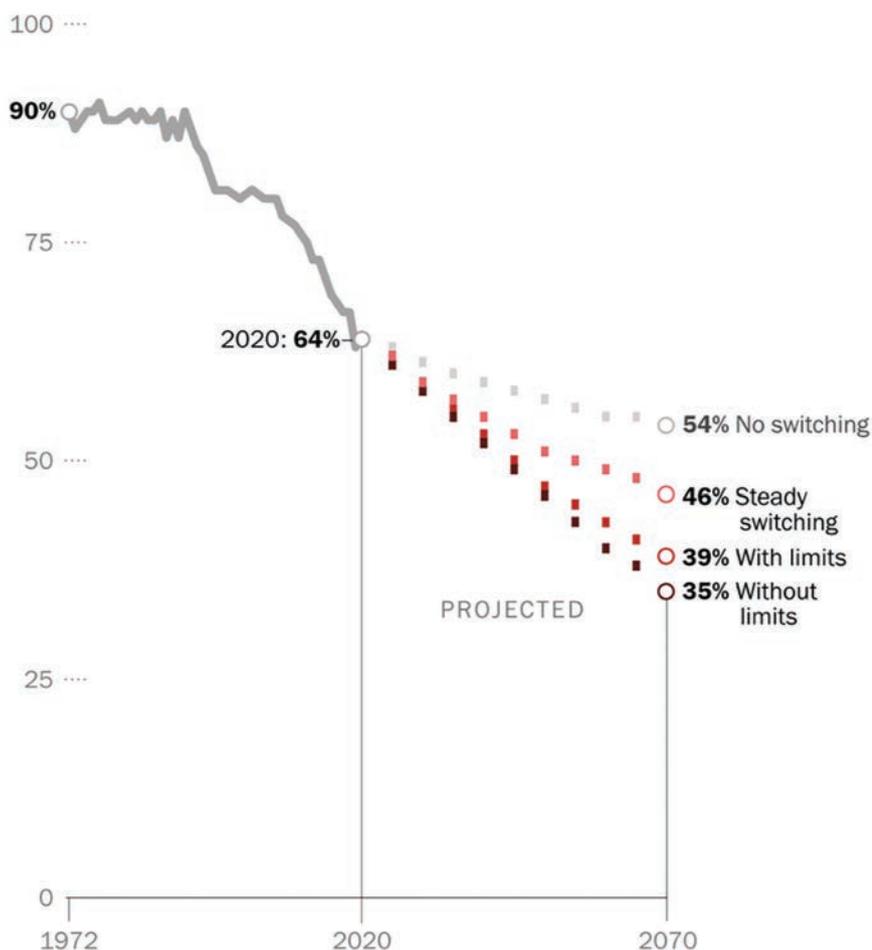
*% of U.S. adults who are religiously unaffiliated at ages 30 to 34*



Note: Estimates are based on aggregated and smoothed data from General Social Survey and Pew Research Center data. Sources: General Social Survey (1990-2018) and Pew Research Center survey (2019). “Modeling the Future of Religion in America” PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## U.S. Christians projected to fall below 50% of population if recent trends continue

% of Americans who are Christian



### Scenarios

#### No switching

This scenario imagines no person in America has changed or will change their religion after 2020.

#### Steady switching

Movement into and out of Christianity remains stable at recently observed rates. That is, in each new generation, 31% of Christians become religiously unaffiliated before they turn 30, and 21% of unaffiliated people become Christian.

#### Rising disaffiliation with limits

In each new generation, a growing share of Christians switch out before they turn 30, while a shrinking share of the 'nones' switch in. But the switching rate is capped to prevent the share of Christians who leave the faith from dropping below 50%.

#### Rising disaffiliation without limits

In each new generation, a growing share of Christians switch out before they turn 30, while a shrinking share of 'nones' switch in. No cap is imposed on switching rates.

Note: Historical data describes trends among U.S. adults based on surveys of adults. The 2020 estimate and subsequent projections show Americans of all ages. In 2020, we estimate that the religious composition of people of all ages roughly matches the adult composition. Sources: General Social Survey (1972-2006); Pew Research Center surveys (2007-2021); Pew Research Center projections (2020-2070). "Modeling the Future of Religion in America."

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The unaffiliated are raising unaffiliated children, while Christians are more likely to be older than others, said Stephanie Kramer, a senior researcher at Pew.

Researchers also looked at a relatively new trend of disaffiliation among older Americans. Sociologists have long focused on younger people, who

**The U.S. is going through a pattern of secularization that has happened in other countries, though it may be a bit behind.**

are most likely to switch religions. But in the U.S. and other countries, older people are also starting to switch at growing rates.

"It's not as large scale, but it's still

significant," Hackett said. "And it's contributing to the religious change that we have experienced and that we expect to experience."

Hackett said that the projections do not show the end of Christianity in the U.S. or of religion in general, which he expects to remain robust. And most nones, while claiming no religion, do not identify as atheists.

Kramer said the U.S. is going through a pattern of secularization that has happened in other countries, though "we may be a bit behind."

Other factors outside the model — such as changing immigration patterns and religious innovation — could lead to a revival of Christianity in the United States, according to the report. But none of the models shows a reversal of the decline of Christian affiliation, which dropped from 78% in 2007 to 63% in 2020, according to Pew research.

**Most nones, while claiming no religion, do not identify as atheists.**

In the report, researchers note that "there is no data on which to model a sudden or gradual revival of Christianity (or of religion in general) in the U.S."

"That does not mean a religious revival is impossible," they wrote. "It means there is no demographic basis on which to project one." ●



**Bob Smetana** is a national reporter for Religion News Service.



# Russian attacks complicate distribution of aid in Ukraine

## Bombing of cities prompts MCC partners to suspend parts of emergency response

**FOR MENNONITE** Central Committee partners still working in Ukraine, whether to pause their work or continue it is a day-to-day question without a clear answer.

In early October, Russian military forces renewed bombing of cities across Ukraine. One of the targets is Zaporizhzhia, where MCC's Ukraine office and many of its partners are based. By the end of October, the attacks caused some partners to temporarily suspend parts of their emergency response.

The program director of New Hope Center, based in Zaporizhzhia, said the indiscriminate nature of the attacks has required them to put a hold on their transitional shelter and trauma counseling work.

"We decided to pause almost everything we're doing in Zaporizhzhia and wait a couple of weeks to see where all this is going," said the director, whose first name is Max. "And that's very unfortunate, because the need is huge. And the ministry team here is eager to work and help with the needs. But we decided that it's better to wait . . . to keep the team safe."

Keeping the team and any relief recipients safe has been a challenge. Missiles and drones are regularly launched between 2 and 6 a.m., making even a good night's rest impossible.

"One of the missiles hit an apartment building less than 300 meters from our church at night," Max said. "And it looks very different now. There were people who got killed, got

injured. That's one of the reasons we decided not to meet as a church two Sundays ago."

**BLAINE DERSTINE**, interim representative for MCC in Ukraine, said that while many of MCC's partners are in a similar position to Max, some have found ways to adapt their programs.

"New Life Charitable Foundation is in Nikopol, where they've been under attack for weeks now," Derstine said. "Some of the staff relocated to Dnipro where there were fewer missile strikes. A new office was opened, and they're distributing food there now. And in other parts of Ukraine, our partners continue to adapt to the conditions of the conflict as the needs around them persist."

# USMB won't participate in Anabaptist Bible

**THE U.S. CONFERENCE** of Mennonite Brethren Churches will not join a project to create a study Bible celebrating the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism in 2025.

In an Oct. 25 news release, the USMB Leadership Board said participation “would not be appropriate” because Mennonite Church USA delegates recently passed an LGBTQ-affirming resolution that is “contrary to our confession of faith.”

The MB leaders cited a sentence in the “Repentance and Transformation” resolution — approved at a special delegate session in May — that says MC USA will “embody a theology that honors LGBTQIA people” when it works with other denominations.

While choosing not to participate, the Leadership Board noted that “we, as USMB, affirm the place for a project like this.”

The Anabaptist Bible is an initiative of MennoMedia, the publishing arm of MC USA and Mennonite Church Canada. It invites Anabaptist laypeople to form small groups and submit notes for a study Bible.

John D. Roth, a former Goshen College professor who directs Anabaptism at 500, the anniversary project that includes the Anabaptist Bible, said he was “surprised and deeply saddened” by the USMB response when *Anabaptist World* informed him of it.

“As a historian, I understand the cultural and political context of our current moment, but I lament that our identity as church bodies in the Anabaptist tradition is so often defined by what we oppose rather than by what we affirm,” he said in an email.

Amy Gingerich, MennoMedia’s executive director and publisher, said in an email: “Theologically we have different perspectives. Yet as Anabaptists we all love the Bible, and it’s



Lazaro Martinez of Nampa, Idaho, takes part in the Anabaptist Bible conference in August.

PHOTO: JACE LONGENECKER/FOR MENNOMEDIA

our hope in this project that theologically diverse congregations can gather around the Bible, in groups of mutual support and care, to draw deeper into God’s word and then to share with the larger church about how they understand God speaking in their context.”

Roth said the project did not include LGBTQ advocacy and did not seek collaboration or endorsement at the denominational level.

**NEARLY 100 BIBLE STUDY** groups have signed up so far, and organizers have set a goal of 500. Groups can sign up at [Anabaptismat500.com](http://Anabaptismat500.com). The editors want all content submitted by June 15.

The intent, Roth said, is to “encourage lay people in Anabaptist faith communities across North America to actively participate in Bible studies in the hopes that participants will encounter the life-giving message of Jesus in new ways.”

USMB national director Don Morris said he had no further comment beyond the news release.

Elton DaSilva, national director of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, said the CCMBC Executive Board had not decided whether to participate in the project. The CCMBC online magazine, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, published an ad for the project. ●



Left: Alina, 9, and Valeria, 11, sit among relief supplies from New Life Charitable Foundation in their rented housing in Dnipro, Ukraine.

Center: Nadiya received an MCC relief kit from Charitable Foundation Uman Help Center after her house was destroyed in the war.

Right: Staff from Believing, Hoping, Loving unload MCC relief supplies: canned chicken, handmade comforters, hygiene kits, infant care kits, relief kits, school kits and toothpaste. The supplies are going to families who have adopted orphans and internally displaced people in Lviv and Zaporizhzhia. PHOTOS: MCC PARTNERS

Nearly 8 million Ukrainians have fled the country for refuge since February, and 6.2 million are displaced within the country. Many no longer have homes to return to.

Derstine said that MCC is working on a combination of short- and longer-term plans for its Ukraine response.

“People have immense needs right now — food, water, shelter — which we’re working to address,” he said. “And even with the unclear picture of the future in Ukraine, we also have to be thinking for the long-term, what needs people will have if and when they start returning to Ukraine.” ●

# Mosaic decides to evaluate MC USA ties

**MOSAIC MENNONITE CONFERENCE** of Mennonite Church USA is beginning a two-year strategic planning process to “clarify” its relationship with MC USA and other Anabaptist communities.

Delegates at Mosaic’s annual assembly affirmed the plan with 81.5% support on Nov. 5 at Souderton Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania.

A union of the former Franconia and Eastern District conferences, Mosaic is one of MC USA’s largest bodies, with more than 8,000 members (of MC USA’s 56,000) in almost 100 congregations and ministries across the U.S.

In July, the Mosaic conference board formed a task force to lead a listening process and review of relationships. Numerous Mosaic congregations, pastors and leaders urged action due to dissatisfaction with the process and outcome of an MC USA delegate

session in May. At that meeting, delegates rescinded the denomination’s Membership Guidelines, which had prohibited pastors from officiating same-sex marriages, and approved an LGBTQ-affirming “Repentance and Transformation” resolution.

“Most people say the tensions are not new, but tensions have definitely grown since the special delegate session,” said Stephen Kriss, Mosaic’s executive minister. He said at least a quarter of Mosaic congregations asked for Mosaic to withdraw from MC USA following the delegate session.

“Much of the tension we see in Mosaic is not unique to us,” Kriss said. “It plays out across the denomination.”

A document prepared for Mosaic’s assembly noted that the “Repentance and Transformation” resolution is non-binding, that no changes are required for conferences or congregations, that credentialing decisions remain at the conference level and that there is no plan to change the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

“Nothing changed at Kansas City for Mosaic in particular, but it does change who Mennonite Church USA is,” Kriss said. “And if we as a conference say we are not just a part of Mennonite Church USA but we *are* Mennonite Church USA, the relationships and accountability come into the foreground for us. . . . For some congregations, that means they can’t be part of Mosaic because they can’t remain in relationship out of their conscience.”

The plan approved by Mosaic delegates moves the conference in the direction of adjusting its bylaws to allow member communities to suspend their membership in MC USA while remaining members of Mosaic. Kriss said it was not clear how many congregations were interested in such an arrangement.

MC USA bylaws stipulate the denomination’s members are its conferences, not its congregations. Therefore, congregations that choose to disaffiliate from MC USA still have “derived membership” in the denomination. Nevertheless, multiple conferences

over the years have allowed congregations to designate themselves as opting out of denominational membership.

MC USA executive director Glen Guyton and moderator-elect Jon Carlson participated in the Mosaic assembly. Guyton led a prayer for incoming moderator Angela Moyer Walter and assistant moderator Roy Williams.

“I value the many wonderful relationships I have built over the years with leaders and members of Mosaic Mennonite Conference,” Guyton said in an MC USA release. “As part of MC USA, they have been deeply involved in all aspects of our denominational life, and I hope that continues.”

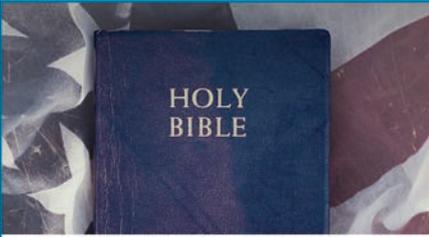
Guyton and Carlson addressed questions from delegates on membership in MC USA and Mennonite World Conference, as well as the function of the Constituency Leaders Council.

**MOSAIC ANTICIPATES** engaging a consulting group and steering team to direct the two-year process. In a list of recommendations to the Mosaic board, the listening task force said “our concerns” include “damage caused by poor decision-making models and bad processes” at MC USA’s special delegate assembly, where the only voting options were “yes” or “no.”

At its own assembly, Mosaic used a green/yellow/red system representing “affirm,” “affirm with reservations” and “withhold affirmation.” A two-thirds majority was needed to approve the strategic planning process. Affirmation without reservations would have fallen short on its own, with 60% support.

Kriss is confident the conference will need two years to clarify its relationships.

“Because of our geographical spread, our language diversity and our theological diversity, a quick process doesn’t take our diversity into account very well,” he said. “While some of us are pretty ready for a fast decision, other congregations aren’t even aware of what’s happening in Mennonite Church USA. . . . If we’re going to try to do a process that includes all of us, it’s going to take time.” ●



ONLINE SHORT COURSE  
**Resisting Christian Nationalism with the Gospel of Peace**  
 April 12 – May 9, 2023

Taught by  
**Drew Strait**, PhD



Register by  
 March 22 to  
 save \$50 USD!

 **Anabaptist Mennonite  
 Biblical Seminary**  
[amb.s.edu/short-courses](https://amb.s.edu/short-courses)

# Amish vote still desirable for Pa. GOP

**PENNSYLVANIA REPUBLICAN** governor nominee Doug Mastriano, a state politician who has been connected to a CMC (formerly Conservative Mennonite Conference) congregation, lost his bid for election to the state's highest office Nov. 8.

His embrace of Christian nationalism, lack of faith in electoral systems and support from former President Donald Trump helped him win the primary with 44% of the vote but proved to be challenging baggage when courting general-election voters. Mastriano received 41.9% of the vote in a race that had been viewed a toss-up in early April before the primary determined the two main political parties' candidates.

A *Wall Street Journal* editorial said Mastriano "was a catastrophe in Pennsylvania and hurt GOP candidates up and down the ballot."

It is unknown how many of the 2.2 million-plus votes Mastriano received came from Amish people, but a flurry of news reports indicated the traditionally apolitical group has been increasingly active in politics.

Days before the midterm election, Mastriano told the right-wing media company *Newsmax* his campaign got an early boost from Pennsylvania's Amish and Mennonite communities.

He knew he had to raise money, "and it was the Amish community that helped us get over the line to meet our initial goal," said Mastriano, whose only television advertisement focused on his time in the U.S. Army. He and his campaign "met with thousands of them, and they see that everything is on the line and that if they want to be able to live their lives as they see fit, they need a governor, Mastriano."

**CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL** groups such as Amish PAC have been targeting Plain Anabaptist groups since Trump ran for president in 2016 because there are large populations in swing states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. Such groups are attractive for campaigns seeking an edge in



An Amish group from Punxsutawney, Pa., arrives at a Nov. 5 election rally with former President Donald Trump and candidates Doug Mastriano and Mehmet Oz in Latrobe, Pa. PHOTO: JACQUELINE LARMA/AP

elections based on their conservative views.

The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies has studied the voting habits of Amish people.

Scholars determined Amish voting peaked at 13% of eligible Amish voters in Holmes County, Ohio, when George W. Bush ran for re-election in 2004, then fell back to 8% in 2016. In Lancaster County, Pa., 5% to 8% of eligible Amish voters went to the polls in the 1990s and early 2000s, jumping to 13% in 2004 before dropping back to 7% in 2016.

Ninety percent of registered Amish voters in Lancaster County were Republicans in 2016; 9% were independent and 1% Democrat.

Young Center senior scholar Steven Nolt said about 2,900 Amish in Lancaster County voted in 2020, based on data the center will publish soon. That number was up from the previous presidential election, but not enough to have made a difference in any outcome.

Based on candidate outcomes and preliminary data about lower voter turnout in Pennsylvania this year, along with "very limited anecdotes on

Amish showing up at polling places," Nolt said Amish voting likely did not increase this year.

**COREY ANDERSON**, a Beachy Amish researcher, said it was difficult to tell whether Plain Anabaptist political loyalties are higher now than at other times because so much of the information available to researchers has been anecdotal. Anderson is editor in chief of the *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* and a postdoctoral fellow with Pennsylvania State University's Population Research Institute.

"While signs of Plain people's Republican sympathies leak easily — and can even surge — so can others' determination to avoid any political allegiances," he said. "And, as with America on the whole, many people position themselves between nominal to no political interest.

"In Plain people's conversations about politics, tension exists between Anabaptist-related values of separation/nonconformity and citizenship in heaven versus alignment with the moral values and policies of economic deregulation espoused by many Republicans." ●

# Opening the way for women to lead

Byler learned to be ready for God's surprises, including a call to return to Guatemala

**DEB BYLER SAW AMAZING** growth among Kekchi women during her last five years of service with Mennonite Mission Network in Guatemala.

"Many think they aren't as intelligent as men, can't lead like men," she said. "I am impressed with the dedication of the Kekchi women leaders who are sometimes challenged by pastors who don't understand the need for the women's organization."

Byler is retiring after 16 years in Guatemala — 11 in the 1980s and '90s, and five more since 2017 — and 17 additional years of service with MMN in the Elkhart, Ind., office.

"I experienced many surprises throughout my life and career," she said. "We always need to be ready for the surprises God has for us."

Byler worked with the *Iglesia Nacional Evangélica Menonita Guatemalteca* (INEMGUA) Kekchi Mennonite Church, which consists of 128 churches. The Kekchi are an Indigenous people of Mayan descent.

She lived in San Pedro Carchá — site of the Kekchi Mennonite Church offices — supporting women to develop their gifts for ministry. In partnership with Indigenous women, Byler developed and distributed materials to pastors and hundreds of women, sponsored Bible studies, facilitated trauma healing workshops and held Sister Care Seminars (a program of Mennonite Women USA).

Byler grew up in West Liberty, Ohio, and was inspired to work in another country after a Goshen College Study Service Term in Costa Rica. In 1984, she went to Guatemala with Eastern Mennonite Missions and worked with Kekchi women, with a focus on literacy.

Twelve years later, she left Guatemala and completed a master of divinity degree at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 1999. In 2000, she began working in MMN's Human Re-



Romelia Pop, María Pa and Silvia Bo present to Deb Byler a gift from the women's committee of the Carchá region at a farewell service in Carchá, Guatemala. PHOTO: LINDA SHELLY/MMN

sources department, where she served in various roles, including director of worker care. In 2015 she earned a doctor of ministry degree at Columbia International University.

**"I ALWAYS WANTED TO RETURN** to Guatemala, but my mother was still living, so I did not feel a release from God to leave her," she said. "When my mother died in May 2016, I thought I was too old to go back. Four months later, I awoke in the night and sensed God saying to me, 'It's time to go back.'"

She checked with the Kekchi Mennonite Church staff and former mission workers, who confirmed a need. She returned Guatemala in 2017.

"For approximately eight years while I was in the United States between terms, I experienced serious depression and could not see or experience God walking with me," Byler said. "God was silent. Now, I can see God was shaping me at that time to be able to later identify with the vulnerable, human and very dedicated Kekchi

women. God was with me whether I knew it or not. I know now that God is always at work."

The fruit of her work, and that of her Guatemalan colleagues, is evident. Every region of the Kekchi Mennonite Church now has a women's committee and a supervisor who travels to the churches of her region to visit women and encourage the women leaders.

This level of organization creates opportunities for women. Currently, 29 Kekchi women are studying theology at *Instituto Bíblico Mennonita* INEMGUA in Carchá, thanks to small scholarships from MMN's International Leadership Training Endowment.

A church in each INEMGUA region held a farewell service for Byler. Women expressed appreciation for her role in raising them up with dignity.

Retiring in Goshen, Ind., Byler will miss her Guatemalan friends — and the hot tortillas they served.

"I never learned to make tortillas properly," she said. "The women laughed at my attempts!" ●

# LGBTQ group adds its voice to council

**MENNONITE CHURCH USA** implemented one of the first actions stipulated by an inclusive resolution when representatives of an LGBTQ group attended the Constituency Leaders Council meeting in October.

The emerging group, with the working title Queer Constituency Council, sent two representatives to the Oct. 21-22 virtual gathering: Randy Spaulding, pastor of Boulder Mennonite Church in Colorado, and Annabeth Roeschley, executive director of the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests.

CLC meetings gather up to three leaders from each of MC USA's 16 area conferences and two representatives of each recognized racial-ethnic and constituency group. Meetings happen one or two times a year to give counsel and advice on issues of faith and life.

The Executive Board's invitation to the new group fulfills a requirement of the Repentance and Transformation resolution, which national delegates approved at a special assembly in May.

Spaulding, who attended on behalf of Inclusive Mennonite Pastors, said the group is still in its infancy. Events leading up to the assembly prompted many advocates to take a breather over the summer.

"What does it mean to be an officially welcomed constituency group in this denomination? That question's huge," Spaulding said. "What does it mean to be welcomed into full participation in the denomination, even if in some areas that does not hold because conferences have different policies or rules?"

Roeschley added that it will take months, if not years, for conversations, processing and healing to occur. But that's not because working within the Mennonite tradition is a new venture.

"Queer people have been a constituency in an organized capacity for nearly 50 years and present in the church for much longer," Roeschley said. "We're discerning how to take official shape in the denomination in a way that is informed by this complex history and rooted in our movements. What does it mean to welcome a group

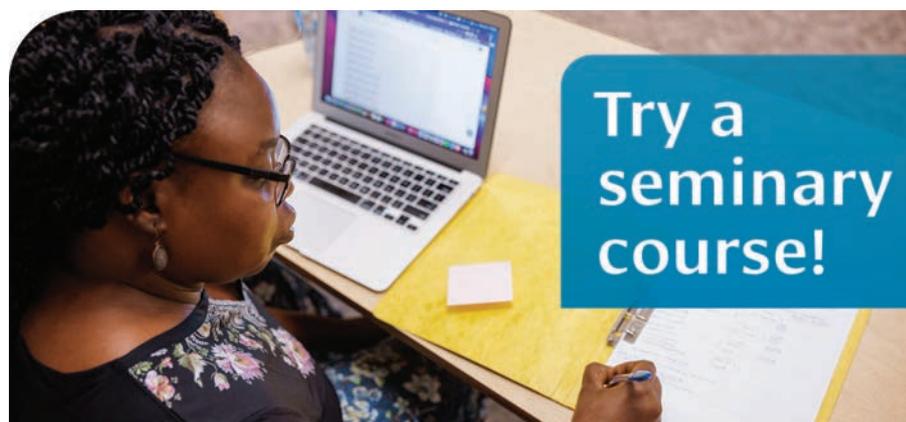
of people that up until a few months ago it had explicitly excluded? Representation doesn't necessarily just flip a switch. We must wrestle faithfully with the harm done to queer people and to the church as a whole."

MC USA moderator-elect Jon Carlson, who chaired the meeting, said the CLC does its best work when participants listen for the Holy Spirit speaking through diverse human voices.

"The New Testament consistently portrays the church as endlessly and surprisingly diverse, forming God's family by cutting across boundaries of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status," Carlson said. "At a time when society seems to be fragmenting and polarizing at an alarming pace, I'm excited to see MC USA welcome LGBTQ+ folks and traditionalists alike as we all seek to follow Jesus faithfully." ●



Pink Menno and the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests hosted a worship service during the 2015 Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, Mo. The event was held off-site at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral. "Queer people have been a constituency in an organized capacity for 50 years," says Annabeth Roeschley. PHOTO: PINK MENNO



Try a  
seminary  
course!

## Distance-friendly options include:

Spiritual Practices: Water of Life  
Human Sexuality and Christian Ethics  
The Epistle to the Romans • and more

In-person courses are also available. [Register by Jan. 2.](#)

Nonadmitted students  
get 50% off their first  
three credit hours!



**Anabaptist Mennonite  
Biblical Seminary**

[amb.s.edu/upcoming-courses](https://amb.s.edu/upcoming-courses)

# Visitors find a living faith in Paris

**EXPERIENCING THE VITALITY** of Christian faith in Paris, North American pastors and mission administrators learned new ways to address the secularization of their own communities.

Paris Mennonite Center sponsored a visit for its supporters Sept. 16-26 to share a deeper understanding of its ministries in France and throughout the French-speaking world.

James and Jeanette Krabill, former longtime workers with Mennonite Mission Network, co-hosted the visit with their son and daughter-in-law, Matthew and Toni Krabill, who serve with MMN as co-directors of the Paris Mennonite Center.

The elder Krabills served for 20 years in West Africa, and James was a Mission Network administrator for 20 more years before retiring from full-time employment in 2017.

The two-generation Krabill hosting team welcomed three participants from Ohio congregations — members of Matthew and Toni Krabill's ministry support team — and two MMN staff people who observed the vibrant spiritual life of post-Christendom Paris, often described as one of the world's most secular cities.

Paula Snyder Belousek, a former MMN Service Adventure leader and pastor of Salem Mennonite Church in Elida, was joined by Erin and Hank Unruh of Salem Mennonite Church in Kidron, where Hank Unruh pastors. Erin Unruh is a pharmacy technician.

Marisa Smucker, MMN senior executive of ventures, and Kayci Detweiler, divisional coordinator of advancement, experienced firsthand the ministries they support.

**THE GROUP MET** with French Mennonite leaders, members of the Muslim community and professors of French church history and secular culture.

For Snyder Belousek, highlights included learning about collaborative efforts of French and North American Mennonites, especially *Domaine Emmanuel* (now known as



Participants in a Mennonite Mission Network visit to Paris gather in front of the *Sacre Coeur* (Sacred Heart), one of the most frequented tourist sites in Paris and an active Catholic church. From left are Matthew Krabill, James Krabill, Toni Krabill, Kayci Detweiler, Paula Snyder Belousek, Marisa Smucker, Erin Unruh, Jeanette Krabill and Hank Unruh. PHOTO: MMN

**“Chatenay-Malabry Mennonite Church [is] a beautiful example of a multiethnic community.”**

— Paula Snyder Belousek

AEDE), an organization that provides housing and a sheltered workshop for people with developmental disabilities and mental health needs. French Mennonites started this ministry at a time when these services were rare in France.

“We also worshiped with the Chatenay-Malabry Mennonite Church, a

beautiful example of a multiethnic community, where people from a variety of backgrounds form a Christian community against the backdrop of a secular society,” Snyder Belousek said.

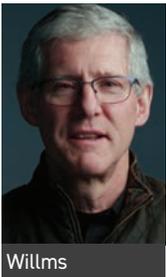
Detweiler wrote: “Matthew Krabill said that Mennonites from the United States often come to Europe for Anabaptist heritage tours, but they don’t get to hear or learn about the context of the French Mennonite church today. . . . This trip opened my eyes to the current work of the Anabaptists in France and French-speaking nations, as well as the history that brought them to this point. The global church is alive in ‘post-Christendom’ France!” ●

# Ontario MB leader ousted; two congregations suspended

**ED WILLMS** had high hopes when he organized a Sept. 13 event for about 45 pastors and other leaders from the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to talk about LGBTQ welcome and inclusion.

Willms, then executive director of the ONMB, wanted to provide a “safe place to listen, learn and hear from each other on a topic we all know needed more discussion and reflect together on what type of family of churches we envision growing into in the days ahead.”

Regrettably for Willms, his effort resulted in his being terminated without cause by the ONMB board. His last day was Oct. 31.



Willms

At the daylong event, participants had a chance to hear leaders from two ONMB churches —

FreeChurch Toronto and Southridge Community Church in St. Catharines — share about their journey of LGBTQ welcome and inclusion.

Less than two months later, both congregations had their conference membership suspended.

The gathering “was designed as a safe space for leaders from the two churches to share their stories and also for others to ask questions,” Willms said. “The conversation was not about changing our Confession of Faith or expecting churches to change their beliefs.”

Willms thought the day “was healthy and rich.” But not everyone agreed.

In the days that followed, the ONMB board received numerous calls and emails from concerned church leaders about the meeting. Some indicated they would leave the conference or withhold financial support because of it.

After processing the fallout, the

board “made the difficult decision that it would be best to move forward without my services,” Willms said. “It became evident that this would be best for all concerned.”

For Willms, the board’s decision was disheartening.

“I think they found themselves in a very difficult spot,” he said. He wishes they could have mustered “the courage” to stay the course by encouraging

**There are only two options for Canadian MB churches attempting to be more inclusive: reaffirm the official line on sexuality or be suspended and removed.**

more conversations on the topic.

“We need safe places to talk about this complex issue,” he said. “The truth is, this issue isn’t going away. We will need to be more creative in finding solutions and a path forward.”

**IF THE EVENT HAD BEEN** successful, Willms hoped it might have become a model for other provincial Mennonite Brethren conferences, and perhaps the national conference, too.

The goal of such gatherings would not be about changing the Confession, he emphasized.

“They could be opportunities to wrestle with what kind of denominational family we want to be, knowing that there is already great diversity within our family,” he said.

Right now, Willms observed, there are only two options for Canadian MB churches attempting to be more inclusive: reaffirm the official line on sexuality and same-sex marriage or be suspended and removed from membership.

“But that’s not how families operate,” he said. “We tell our kids the door is always open and you are always welcome, no matter who you are or what you do. The conference would be richer and more welcoming if it chose to live out that posture.”

Willms acknowledged it’s complicated both on the church front and even more so as a denomination, as there are divergent and strong points of view.

But it’s “still a worthy goal to strive to live out Jesus’ prayer that Christians love each other and live in unity,” he said. “That meeting was my feeble attempt to encourage us to do that.”

Willms would like to see a “landing place for borderland congregations” — churches that want to explore this topic without worrying it will put them offside with the conference or the Confession of Faith.

“We need a new approach,” he said, admitting “it requires a nuanced conversation and not everyone is comfortable with that.”

The ONMB board chair did not respond to a request for comment on Willms’ termination.

**IN A MESSAGE TO** ONMB churches on Nov. 7, board chair Michelle Knowles said Southridge Community Church had been placed under suspension due to publicly communicating its intention to invite members of the LGBTQ community into all levels of participation, leadership and decision-making.

FreeChurch Toronto also was suspended, effective Oct. 14, based on their “articulated position on full inclusion and their desire to be a fully affirming church, which is also outside of our Confession,” Knowles stated.

The suspensions are effective until the ONMB convention in February, at which time the ONMB board will recommend revocation of membership unless a resolution is achieved before that date. ●

# Scoring goals, building peace in Colombia

An MCC partner uses children's interest in soccer to teach peacebuilding skills with a 'Little World Cup'

**EACH SUMMER** for the last four years, a community on the outskirts of Soacha, Colombia, has gathered to watch its children play in their own, local version of the World Cup — a soccer tournament for peace.

In Soacha, where many families have experienced conflict, displacement and violence, *Creciendo Juntos* (Growing Together) offers children and youth after-school tutoring, activities and workshops on themes of peace and nonviolence.

The staff at the organization, many of whom are students at a nearby university, run a variety of programs year-round. From games to academic support and specialized activities like a workshop on violence against women for International Women's Day, everything that goes on at *Creciendo Juntos* imparts a message of peace.

One of the most popular activities of the year is *Mundialito por La Paz* (Little World Cup for Peace). This past summer, the event drew 81 children from ages 6 to 17.

"Soccer is so huge in Colombia," said Clara Unzicker of Benson, Ill., who is serving in Colombia through MCC's Serving and Learning Together program as a child and youth worker with *Creciendo Juntos*. "These kids are already spending so much of their free time playing anyway. And all of the activities at *Creciendo Juntos* are related to peace and nonviolence, so *Mundi-*

*alito* is a way of combining the two."

In the weeks leading up to the tournament, participants practice with their teams, divided into three age divisions. They also learn about conflict resolution, teamwork and nonviolent peacemaking.

The tournament begins with an opening ceremony, well-attended by families and community members. Children wear uniforms donated by the community — every team in a different color to represent the countries' teams that play in the World Cup. Each team is announced on a loudspeaker as music blares, and they enter to a cheering crowd. At the end of the Little World Cup for Peace, each of the three age divisions has a champion. ●



*Above right:* Children play soccer during the annual *Mundialito por la Paz* (Little World Cup for Peace) tournament.

*Right:* The tournament begins with an opening ceremony, with children carrying flags of various countries. PHOTOS: CLARA UNZICKER/MCC



## European peace groups back efforts for nonmilitary solutions in Ukraine

Members of Church and Peace, an ecumenical network of peace organizations in Europe that includes several Anabaptist organizations, reiterated their commitment to supporting a nonmilitary end to the war in Ukraine during the organization's international conference Oct. 20-23 in Crikvenica, Croatia.

Representatives from 13 European nations and four non-European countries called for churches and their members to do everything they can to support reaching a rapid cease fire, enabling diplomatic negotiations to begin. Meeting in the western Balkans and Southeast Europe, Christian and Muslim conference participants learned from local peacemakers about their experience with nonviolent action in war 25 years earlier: Military resistance seems plausible when looking at war from the beginning, but looking at war from the end shows the "military solution" is a disaster.

The conference endorsed the Sept. 8 World Council of Churches statement "War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region," which calls for greater investment in the governments of Europe and the entire international community in promoting peace and strengthening nonviolent conflict resolution and reconciliation.

— *Church and Peace*

## Mennonite Church USA honors two peacemakers

Mennonite Church USA has named John Stoner and Clara Weybright this year's #BringThePeace awardees. Stoner received the Legacy Peacemaker award,



Stoner

and Weybright received the Young Peacemaker award. The awards are sponsored by MC USA's Church Peace Tax Fund.

Stoner, of Akron, Pa., is a war tax resister. He practices peace through a mix of symbolic war tax resistance; direct action, through participation in public rallies and demonstrations; education, through both his own continual learning and by encouraging others and helping them network; and writing letters to his local newspaper. Stoner is involved in several local peace-making groups, including \$10.40 for Peace, an organization that helps individuals

express conscientious objection to war tax conscription.

Stoner was the executive secretary of Mennonite Central Committee's Peace Section for 12 years. In this position, he supported conscientious objectors and draft nonregistrants and oversaw women's concerns and the Mennonite Conciliation Service. He also helped found Community Peacemaker Teams (formerly Christian Peacemaker Teams).



Weybright

Weybright is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University, where she studied environmental science. She is a juris doctor candidate at Temple Law School in Philadelphia.

Previously, Weybright was a climate futures fellow at the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions and worked with the Mennonite Central Committee National Peace & Justice Ministries in Washington, D.C. She researched and wrote climate policy through a peace and justice lens. She was a member of the Mennonites Against Militarism council, where she worked to connect the impact of militarism on the environment. — *Jessica Griggs/MC USA*

## MCC peace contest winner builds on food generosity

The winning speech in the C. Henry Smith Peace Oratorical Contest says food can be a tool for peacebuilding if Jesus' invitation to join the feast is accepted.

Danika Warkentin, a student at Canadian Mennonite University, won the binational intercollegiate contest for students at Anabaptist colleges and universities that is administered by Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Her speech, "Join the Feast," draws inspiration from an experience she had while living in Burkina Faso. A stranger on the street offered her and her family a portion of his simple meal.

"He had faith that tomorrow, if he was hungry and had no food, someone might share with him. That's feasting," she said.

Food was central to Jesus' ministry, from banquets with tax collectors to the feeding of 5,000 hungry people. Jesus modeled abundance and inclusion. Warkentin said food used in this way is a tool for peacebuilding.

At the same time, food can be used to exclude and oppress. Warkentin gives the example of Indigenous peoples being denied the right to shape their own communities' food systems as oil and gas pipelines

run through their land.

"I just cannot reconcile the example of Jesus, the hospitable Jesus, the Jesus that fed the 5,000, with the violence that is being committed in our very nation," she said. "People are being excluded from the feast."

Greta Lapp Klassen, a senior at Goshen College, won second prize for "Humanizing Our World, One Walkway at a Time." Third place went to Elienei Mejia, a junior at Tabor College, for "America's Problem with Immigration." — *Kirstin De Mello/MCC*

## Former S.D. governor lived out lessons for high school government classes

Harvey Wollman, 87, former governor of South Dakota, died Oct. 18 at Huron Regional Medical Center.

He and his wife, Anne, were members of Ebenezer Mennonite Brethren Church near Doland, where they were involved in congregational life, singing with and directing the church choir for 30 years. Wollman was buried Oct. 24 in the cemetery of the church, which is now closed.



Wollman

After being elected lieutenant governor as a running mate in 1974, Wollman served five months as governor from 1978 to 1979 after Gov. Richard Kneip was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Singapore. He

was the last Democrat to serve in South Dakota's highest office. The governor's office said his family declined a state funeral. He served two years in the U.S. Army in Germany before teaching history and government at Doland High School, where he coached the debate team to three state championships. Wollman was elected to three consecutive terms in the State Senate beginning in 1968, serving as Senate Minority Leader, then Majority Leader. After serving as governor, Wollman was appointed by President Jimmy Carter in 1979 as a civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army. He was a member of the board of Fresno Pacific Seminary and was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 2017.

Survivors include his wife, Anne (Geigel) Wollman; children Kristine, Michael and Daniel (Julie) Wollman; and seven grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Oct. 24 at First Presbyterian Church in Huron, where the Wollmans sang in the choir.

— *Anabaptist World*

## Ohio regional pastor cites 'patriarchy and sexism' among reasons for resigning

Sherah-Leigh Gerber, a regional pastor in Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA, has resigned after less than a year in the role, partly due to "patriarchy and sexism" she experienced, the conference announced Nov. 3.



Gerber

Gerber also cited "the intense season in the life of the conference that made the emphasis of her work different than she had anticipated," according to the conference announcement.

Ohio Conference is engaged in a discernment process that includes evaluating its affiliation with MC USA.

Gerber began serving in February as regional pastor-east.

In the announcement on the conference website, the Leadership Team said it is "especially concerned about patriarchy and sexism present in our system."

"The Leadership Team strongly affirms the calling of women to all ministerial positions," it stated. "In particular, we affirm the gifts that Sherah-Leigh possesses and the significant contributions she has made to our conference life."

A 2020 survey of the conference's pastors and congregational leaders studied women in ministry. It found that women continue to experience more challenges and barriers than men, with room for growth in full acceptance in lead or solo pastoral positions.

When the findings were reported in early 2021, conference leaders reaffirmed their support for pastoral roles for women at all levels ("Ohio Conference statement reaffirms pastoral roles for women," *AW*, June 18, 2021).

"The report specifically stated, 'Comments reflected that people tend to scrutinize women leaders more than they do men,'" reported the Leadership Team. "Together as a conference we must own the patriarchy and sexism that exists in ourselves, our congregations and in the Ohio Conference system."

"These attitudes, biases, and actions, whether conscious or unconscious, are inconsistent with the Kingdom of God as revealed through our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, and we must continue the undoing of them from our system."

— *Anabaptist World*

## Germans working to support Russian COs

The German Mennonite Peace Committee has begun an initiative to support Russian conscientious objectors.

Many young men have been forcibly drafted into the Russian military against their will to support the invasion of Ukraine. Conscientious objection is illegal in both Russia and Ukraine. Drafted individuals are denied the right to flee to other countries.

The peace organization supports German politicians who are already demanding their nation grant protection to Russian COs at the federal level. It is encouraging German Mennonite individuals and congregations to contact their members of parliament to support the initiative.

"For many of our ancestors, refusing to take up arms was a basic principle of witnessing to the Christian faith," the peace committee said in a Nov. 8 release. "But conscientious objection is not just a belief, it is also an ethical and practical act that fundamentally challenges the waging of war."

— *German Mennonite Peace Committee*

## MEA offers Advent at Home worship guide

"Restoration is Near!" is the theme of Mennonite Church USA's Advent at Home 2022 worship guide.

Using the theme developed for *Leader* magazine, the guide offers weekly and daily Scriptures, worship rituals, prayers, activities and background information for individuals and households of all ages.

Talashia Keim Yoder of Goshen, Ind., wrote the curriculum. She is pastor for Christian formation at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, theater director at Bethany Christian Schools and content writer for Building Faith, a website ministry of the Mennonite Early Childhood Network.

Artist Erin Ramer of Parnell, Iowa, designed the guide. She is a freelance graphic designer and manages her local Mennonite Central Committee thrift store, Crowded Closet, in Iowa City. MEA executive director Michael Danner served as co-editor along with MEA communications coordinator Jolene VonGunten.

"In a time when the world often seems adrift and apart from the Good News of Jesus, we hope this year's theme will resonate with many who are longing for healing and restoration," Danner said.

Materials are available at [mennoniteusa.org/adventathome](http://mennoniteusa.org/adventathome). — *MEA*



**MEA**

**Benedicta Boyuo is a Ghanaian farmer, trainer, sales agent, nursery owner and entrepreneur.**

*imagine*

**what she could do with access to business capital.**

Give today at [giftsolutions.org/donate](http://giftsolutions.org/donate)

# Abbott Elementary's Anabaptists

Sitcom set in public school emphasizes teachers' ministry to students, community

**THE NEWEST TELEVISION SHOW** I was not watching soon enough is *Abbott Elementary*, a sitcom now in its second season.

Filmed in the mockumentary style made famous on television by *The Office*, the comedy is based on a group of teachers at a Philadelphia school. They look out for their students and each other as they face the challenges of budget cuts, students with sometimes stressful home lives and an administrator who is mostly (but not completely) vapid and vain.

The show was created by lead actress Quinta Brunson and won Emmy awards earlier this year for outstanding comedy series writing, casting and supporting actress. Brunson plays second-grade teacher Janine Teagues, a young teacher energized by ideological passion who seeks camaraderie with coworkers young and old.

Many interactions take place with fellow rookie teacher Jacob Hill, an earnest history teacher quick to reference his times doing service work in Africa or a book he has read on anti-racism. That, and his awkwardness, hit several Anabaptist notes.



Rashid

Jonny Rashid, a former real-life teacher who is now a real-life pastor, said *Abbott Elementary's* portrayal of school and the community is accurate. He serves at Circle of Hope, a Brethren in Christ church with four locations in the Philadelphia area.

"The way they portray education in general is new — how practical they do it," he said. "It's not a warm and fuzzy story, it's an earnest story about teachers doing their best. It doesn't really romanticize the experience of urban education like past media has."

He said the teachers who attend his



Quinta Brunson created and stars in *Abbott Elementary*. PHOTO: GILLES MINGASSON/ABC

congregation have connected with the characters' foibles and felt validated by depictions of teachers' sacrifices for success. It is an understatement to describe *Abbott Elementary* as one of the best television programs to convey the way teachers minister to their students — especially in public systems.

"As far as a nonviolent communi-

**"As far as a nonviolent communitarian ethic, I think they could all fit into Anabaptism."**

— Jonny Rashid

tarian ethic, I think they could all fit into Anabaptism," Rashid said. "Jacob does, but Gregory Eddie [a first-grade teacher] also does in terms of Anabaptist values of obedience and service. Quinta's character of Janine also does in terms of her devotion. In terms of peace-loving communitarians, all the teachers fit that."

**AS IN THE REAL WORLD**, racial and intercultural differences lead to interactions with substance and consequence. As in sitcoms, these differences lead to

humor.

"Humor can definitely break the ice. It can help people engage material that can be difficult," said Rashid, the author of *Jesus Takes a Side: Embracing the Political Demands of the Gospel*, published by Herald Press.

Jacob's quickness to quote Robin D'Angelo's *White Fragility* in one episode is an opportunity to chide with grace.

"Would Jacob be a good fit at an Anabaptist church? Sure, at a progressive Anabaptist church like Circle of Hope," Rashid said. "We're often full of well-intentioned white people who sometimes miss the mark of anti-racism."

"I think a lot of Anabaptists have some work to do with things. It's not just about reading the right books but about relating to people. I think the character of Jacob is working on that as well."

Mr. Eddie, the first-grade teacher, summed it up at the end of the second season's premiere: "We can't do it all, but we'll do what we can."

*Abbott Elementary* airs on ABC and streams on Hulu and HBO Max. ●

Tim Huber is associate editor of *Anabaptist World*.

# Bethel worship symposium celebrates ‘the most Mennonite hymnal ever’

**BETHEL COLLEGE’S** biennial Worship and the Arts Symposium was slated to be one of the first major events to introduce the new *Voices Together* hymnal.

It was — just not quite as planned.

The hymnal was published in fall 2020, and the symposium, called “Joining Voices Together,” was meant to take place in November 2021. The pandemic upended those plans.

Part of the symposium did happen. An exhibit of the 12 original artworks in the hymnal opened in Bethel’s Regier Art Gallery a year ago. It subsequently traveled to other Mennonite colleges and universities and is coming Jan. 11 to Bluffton University.

On Nov. 12, 2022, the rest of the symposium took place at Bethel with members of the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee participating.

Speakers looked at how two 20th-century hymnals, *Mennonite Hymnal* (1969) and *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (1992), influenced a 21st-century one.

Prior to the publication of *Mennonite Hymnal*, Mennonites had been very “denominational” in their hymnals, with different groups using different books.

Then, in the 1960s, “the stars aligned” for the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church to create a hymnal together, said Bradley Kauffman, *Voices Together* project director and general editor.

*Mennonite Hymnal* was an anthology of mostly well-known European and American hymns.

“There were about 14 texts and tunes that were ‘contemporary’ — written within 25 years of 1969,” Kauffman said. “At the time, there wasn’t actually an abundance of contemporary work available. The 1960s and after saw an explosion in the creation of hymns and worship music.”

**KAUFFMAN MET THE NEXT** hymnal for the first time as a Goshen College student. He was dazzled by the variety of

hymns and the musical styles and cultures represented from North America and all over the world.

*Hymnal: A Worship Book* had other major differences from the 1969 book.

“*HWB* did the heavy lifting [for us] in terms of textual changes,” said *Voices Together* text editor Adam Tice.

Most of those had to do with gendered language for people, with some changes in gendered language for God.

Cynthia Neufeld Smith, a longtime church musician, pointed out that while *Mennonite Hymnal* had no accompaniment book, later hymnals did, bringing creative energy to traditional hymns.

“There are hymns [in *HWB*] that push more into late-20th-century harmonic dissonance. There are *Taizé* songs, which were new to Mennonites. I didn’t even count the number of songs from other-than-Western cultures and languages,” she said. “There are ‘worship songs’ from the ’70s and ’80s, liturgical folk music from the Catholics, contemporary Christian music [further added to with the supplements *Sing the Journey* and *Sing the Story*].”

“From this perspective, *VT* is continuing in the trajectory rather than making a radical shift.”

**VOICES TOGETHER**, she said, “may be the most Mennonite hymnal ever, since there are so many hymns written by Mennonites and Anabaptists.”

Although the committee had been tasked with creating a hymnal for “the broad middle of the church,” there was no intention to make something everyone loved.

“There should be things that make you uncomfortable, or stretch you in some way, or don’t work for your congregation” Tice said. “The hope is that you’ll realize, though, that for every hymn you don’t like, there’s someone or some group who has been waiting just for that.” ●



Bethel College students participate in the Worship and The Arts Symposium.

PHOTO: MELANIE ZUERCHER/BETHEL COLLEGE



## Thinking about seminary?

Join us for a **free webinar** and learn about AMBS and our degree programs!

**January 18 • 8:15 pm ET**

Learn more: [ambs.edu/preview](https://ambs.edu/preview)

 **Anabaptist Mennonite  
Biblical Seminary**

Hesston College

# Hesston celebrates emerita faculty in business, library

**HESSTON COLLEGE** celebrated two new emerita faculty members Oct. 24. With more than 74 years of service between them, business professor Vickie Andres and library director Margaret Wiebe were honored for their dedication to the college and students.

Andres served in the business department for 33 years as professor, mentor and business advocate. She ushered in relationships with local businesses that brought internships, jobs and financial support. Her vision for a business program was the beginning of the college's School of Management.

"Vickie helped to put together the entire program," said Carren Moham, vice president of academics. "A lot of it would not have happened if it hadn't

been for Vickie's input."

The current home of Mary Miller Library is the result of Wiebe's work and vision. Beginning her career at Hesston in 1981, Wiebe brought forth the library's remodel and renovation.

In the span of 40 years, the way information is delivered has seen extensive change.

"The library at the beginning of her career and today is a really different place," said chemistry professor Will Wiebe-Friesen, "and we can thank her flexibility, creativity and adapting to those changes for the many resources we all have available to us now."

Emerita status is granted to selected faculty who have served the college for 15 or more years and have retired. ●



Margaret Wiebe and Vickie Andres gained emerita status at Hesston College.

PHOTO: LARRY BARTEL/HESSTON COLLEGE

# EMU students bridge summer break

**SEVEN EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY** engineering students put their brains and muscles to work this summer with Engineers in Action, contributing to bridge-building projects that increased access and safety for rural communities in West Virginia and Bolivia.

Ethan Spicher participated in a project in West Virginia as part of a summer internship with JZ Engineering, a structural engineering company based in Harrisonburg. He spent two weeks with students from Duke University and Georgia Tech working on a 16-foot vehicular bridge.

Students Mana Acosta and Luke Wheeler spent six weeks in Jatun Pampa, Bolivia, working with Georgia Institute of Technology and University of Delaware students on a 113-meter span serving 300 rural residents. Several other students, including Laura Benner, See Hla, Caleb Oesch



Eastern Mennonite University engineering major Mana Acosta spent six weeks in Bolivia as part of an Engineers in Action team helping to build a bridge in an isolated community.

PHOTO: EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

and Ben Bontrager-Singer, comprised EMU's Bridge Team and contributed to the yearlong planning process and fundraising.

The Bridge Team is studying bridge design and preparing to help build a bridge in West Virginia next summer.

— EMU



**ANABAPTIST**  
Climate  
Collaborative

## Climate center at EMU becomes independent entity

The Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions is evolving with incorporation under a new name. After six years, the Anabaptist Climate Collaborative is now an independent nonprofit, moving away from affiliation with Eastern Mennonite University and its other partners, Mennonite Central Committee and Goshen College.

Doug Graber Neufeld, a biology and environmental science professor at EMU, has led the center since its beginning. He plans to step down in early 2023. A new board will facilitate the search for new leadership.

Neufeld said the center needs to evolve with the climate crisis to be effective.

"This independent organization is prepared to embrace new roles in programs that impact an expanded audience, while continuing programs that have successfully motivated people and organizations to take meaningful actions," he said.

Much of the previous organization's programming was focused on empowering advocacy among young people, equipping pastors to engage congregations, raising voices of those most impacted by climate change and supporting researchers from Anabaptist institutions. — *EMU*

## Donors establish three new Bluffton endowments

The Bluffton University Board of Trustees approved three new endowments in October.

The Shirley N. Tung and Michael W.N. Chiu Scholarship will support students studying education with preference given to female students, students from an American minority group or nontraditional students. Tung is a 1968 graduate with a degree in home economics.

The couple also endowed a fund to aid international students in need of emergency relief.

The Dr. Perry Bush Scholarship was established with funding from an anonymous donor. The scholarship recognizes the contributions made by Bush, professor of history, through his teaching, service, outreach, numerous publications and speaking engagements. — *Bluffton University*

## FPU professor publishes book on Christ-followers in non-Christian religions

Darren Duerksen, associate professor and program director in intercultural and religious studies at Fresno Pacific University, recently published *Christ-Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements* (Regnum Press, 2022).



Duerksen

The book focuses on a trend of people following Christ while remaining a part of their non-Christian religious community. These "insider" Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Native American and other followers of Christ have generated much interest and controversy, particularly in Western mission agencies and churches.

Duerksen analyzes ways that God's Spirit may be working through these people and how their understandings of Christ can challenge and expand Western understandings of Christian mission and discipleship. — *FPU*

## Brethren college receives \$500 million challenge gift

McPherson College, a Church of the Brethren institution in Kansas, announced on Nov. 4 the largest gift to a small liberal arts college in the United States: a pledge from an anonymous donor to contribute two dollars for every dollar given by others, up to \$500 million.

The college has until June 30 to meet the target. If it can raise \$250 million, the double-match gift would bring the total to \$750 million. The college has raised \$130 million to date.

Funds will go to the college's endowment and support its strategic plan. The plan calls for continuing a student-debt project that matches funds for students who hold jobs while attending school, building a student life center and creating two centers — a Kansas Center for Rural and Community Health Science and a National Center for the Future of Engineering, Design and Mobility.

With an enrollment of roughly 800 students, McPherson College is a south central Kansas neighbor of three Mennonite colleges: Tabor, Bethel and Hesston.

— *Anabaptist World*

### NIH RESEARCH STUDY



*Help researchers identify genes that may affect the chance of getting bipolar disorder. Together we may help future generations.*

- Study participation includes an interview (2-4 hours) and a blood sample.
- Participants must be 18 or older and may be eligible if they have either a bipolar diagnosis or a family member with bipolar disorder.
- No travel necessary. No cost to participate. Financial compensation provided.

*Join A Study!*

Call 1-866-644-4363 or TTY: 1-866-411-1010

Email [bipolargenes@mail.nih.gov](mailto:bipolargenes@mail.nih.gov), [www.nimh.nih.gov/JoinAStudy](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/JoinAStudy)

Write to National Institute of Mental Health

10 Center Drive, MSC 1264, Bethesda, Maryland 20892-1264

Department of Health & Human Services  
National Institutes of Health



National Institute  
of Mental Health

[www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) Protocol No. 80-M-0083

# The Bride of Christ exists in flesh and blood

*The time has come. The time is now. Just go. Go. GO! I don't care how. You can go by foot. You can go by cow. Marvin K. Mooney, will you please go now? — Dr. Seuss*

**WHEN THE COVID LOCKDOWN** happened, we were shocked to find ourselves stuck in our houses. But honestly, we've been moving toward a more homebound existence for years now, decades really. The Sears Roebuck catalog was the precursor for online shopping. Radio and television, bringing entertainment into living rooms, set a precedent for our plethora of streaming services.

Humans are drawn to access and ease, and few things provide those more readily than the internet.

Though we were headed that way, COVID certainly fast-forwarded the reality of an online world. Starting in March of 2020, we were forced to do everything from home: school, work, book club, shopping, family holidays, and, of course, church.

We hated lockdown and prayed for the day we could “go back to normal.” But at the same time, we got used to the ease and access of an online option — for some things.

Unsurprisingly, kid sports teams are running at full capacity. It is difficult to pass a basketball to a teammate via a computer screen.

School seats quickly filled up, as



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

online education proved ineffective for most children.

Online shopping revenue continues to grow overall, though items like groceries and clothes seem to be falling back to projected pre-pandemic levels. But other things are slow to bounce back. Many office buildings remain empty or partially filled as employees choose to keep working remotely. Movie theaters are still far behind their pre-pandemic revenue amounts. Restaurants struggle to balance online ordering versus in-person dining.

**SADLY, THE NUMBERS** are not so good for churches either. A Pew Research study from March 2022 found church attendance recovery has plateaued since the fall of 2021. Church attendance is still lower than pre-COVID and doesn't seem to be rising.

There aren't easy, tidy answers for why some people haven't come back after a two-year break. No doubt some folks simply found they didn't miss church, either socially or spiritually. Whatever inertia had them going pre-2020 was lost, and they have floated in a different direction.

However, I believe that most of those still sleeping in on Sundays have forgotten that the church, unlike much of modern life, cannot function online.

Church isn't unlike a sports team in that regard. The coach may post online tutorials, or the players may gather in chat rooms to strategize and socialize. But the team is not a team unless it meets on a court or a field and passes balls around. The idea of an online team is absurd.

Online church is absurd, as well. Yes, the church service can be live-streamed. Yes, people can Zoom into a Bible study. But the bride of Christ is not embodied in cyberspace. She exists in flesh and blood. There is no online version of being the church that feeds

the hungry, clothes the sick and passes out cups of cold water in Jesus' name.

Without people in the pews, churches will have to close their doors and turn off the lights. That is not good news for those who come to the clothes pantries, AA meetings, music lessons, free meals, homeless shelters, safe havens for abused women and their

**Imagine a sports team asking its members to bond over the internet. How much more unrealistic for the church.**

children, child-care centers, medical clinics or sacred spaces for solace and worship.

**ABSENT MEMBERS** mistakenly assume, perhaps unconsciously, that like a grocery store, it doesn't matter whether people actually go inside the building or not. It does.

*Koinonia*, a Greek word meaning Christian fellowship and communion, has no true online equivalent. Again, imagine a sports team asking its members to bond over the internet. How much more unrealistic for the church, which believes in remembering its Savior through the communal breaking of the bread? (Remember drive-through communion?)

For an entire year, most of the Christian church went online. I'm not here to judge the hard decisions leaders had to make, but I think now is the time to remind those who haven't returned that online isn't the best option. Church is happening at church. The doors are open. We miss you. It is time to come back. ●

# Advent gives me hope that God has not abandoned us

**ADVENT CAN** sneak up on you. It is also a lot of work. But, as the season approaches, I get excited. This excitement is born out of the reminders Advent brings. The attention we give to connecting people with the narrative of Christ's birth is important for the church and for each one of us.

Advent is a monthlong reminder of the hope we have in Jesus. It's a reminder of the moment God broke into the world.

I've been thinking about three reminders the Advent season brings.

## Advent reminds us to stay connected.

Recently, COVID hit my household, and everything stalled. We had to stay in the house for two weeks. We didn't see friends, and I couldn't attend church in person. It was a lonely time. It felt like everything moved to the back burner.

When I finally got well and returned to seeing people in person, I realized how much I had missed. I had lost connection to what was happening in the world around me.

The Advent story speaks to the need to be aware of what's happening around us. Mary's song in Luke

I comes from the voice of one who is connected. Mary is aware of what is happening. She is living the oppression. She knows of the injustices. This connection leads her to testify to what God is doing through her baby boy, Jesus.

## John the Baptist's message is for us, too. Be prepared. Get ready for God to do big things.

When we stay connected to what is happening in our world, we can see what God is doing. For us in North America, isolation is easier than ever, but Advent reminds us to connect with the stories of others. We might not always fully understand everything that is going on, but our connection to the stories and the people gives us clues about what God is doing.

## Advent reminds us to be prepared.

There is a saying that "if you stay ready, you don't have to get ready." Preparation is central to the Advent story.

John the Baptist's purpose was to prepare the way of the Lord. John prepared the people for what God would do. He called them to repent. He baptized them and gave instructions for how to live in the new age the Messiah would establish.

Those with two coats should give to those with none. Tax collectors must no longer cheat taxpayers. Soldiers should quit extorting and threatening people.

John's message is for us, too. Be prepared. Get ready for God to do big things.

We prepare through our action. We call the powerful to repent. (Maybe we are the powerful!) We take care of the oppressed and the vulnerable.

Our actions make room for God to transform our world. God allows us to participate in the divine work of restoration and transformation.

## Advent reminds us joy is still possible.

Let's be honest: This has been a depressing few years for many of us. Through all of the sickness, financial struggles, climate disasters and political tension, I have gotten more pessimistic. I do not know how we can make things better anymore.

It seems that for every happy moment there has been a terrible moment. The circumstances I have gone through over the past three years have changed me.

And yet: Joy is still possible. I think of God's people 2,000 years ago carrying God's promise with them as they walked through the hardships of their lives. They were waiting for God to do something. God finally responded by entering their world — our world — to walk with us.

Advent gives me hope that God has not abandoned us. It gives me hope that God is moving, sometimes in mysterious ways.

As a spiritual practice, I have been taking a moment each day to say one thing that I am grateful for: my family, my friends, my church. This has helped me to keep positive thoughts at the front of my mind, even when my life is in chaos.

Advent is a gift. It is a time for reflection, prayer, connection and remembering. God decided to be with us, even when the world looks bleak. This Advent, remember who God is, what God has done and what God will do. ●



**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.

# This Advent, I'll take a look across the street

**GROWING UP** in a Christian family in Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country, I didn't often see Christmas decorations except in church. But we always knew where we could find a Christmas display. It was at a car dealership in a corner of the city. The owner must have been Christian.

Every year at the end of November, my family and I were excited to find out what kind of Christmas exhibit the owner would put up: Santa and his sleigh, a snowman, a nativity scene. Each year was different.

He also put up colorful lights, so at night it was wonderful to see — sacred and secular Christmas decorations, including symbols of cold weather and snow, in a tropical climate. It never snows in Indonesia!

As the years passed, the car dealership moved and there were no more Christmas exhibits on that corner. But the colorful lights and snowmen will stand forever in my Christmas childhood memories.



**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.

Not quite satisfied with a mental picture from memory, I opened up Google Maps to see what that corner of Bandung looks like right now. As I scrolled the surroundings, something came up. I realized that right across

**As a child, I never noticed the mosque. It did not matter to me. But now it does.**

the street stands one of the city's Great Mosques.

As a child, I never noticed the mosque. It did not matter to me. But now it does.

**AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS**, we need to change our attitude toward people with different beliefs.

In his ministry, Jesus interacted with people of diverse backgrounds: Romans who believed in multiple gods, Canaanites who worshiped Baal, Samaritans who worshiped Yahweh at Mount Gerizim rather than at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus didn't try to convince people to join his religion. He healed the sick, delivered the demonically oppressed, told people to tell others what God had done for them, praised people for their faith and announced they would feast in heaven with the prophets.

Jesus simply loved them, praised the good in them and answered the questions they were asking — sometimes by pointing them toward finding the answers for themselves.

Mesach Krisetya, an Indonesian Mennonite leader who died earlier this year, said Christian missionaries in Indonesia often posed a conquering strategy. It is common for Christians

to feel threatened by Islam and for Muslims to feel offended by former colonial powers, politics and cultural arrogance. Krisetya urged pluralist sensitivity, aware that neither Muslims nor Christians lose identity through a careful exchange.

**RECENTLY WE INVITED** a Jewish rabbi to speak at our Mosaic Mennonite Conference staff meeting. Her congregation is just two blocks around the corner from my congregation in South Philadelphia.

We invited her to share her knowledge of *chesed*, a Hebrew word meaning God's steadfast love. It was the theme for our conference assembly this year. *Chesed* is equivalent to the Greek *agape*.

As she explained the love of God and the practice of *chesed*, I was amazed by her insights on the Old Testament. She invited us to their Shabbat dinner, which I'm very interested to experience.

During Advent this year, I will try to be aware of my surroundings. I will try to find God in other people and in every corner of my life. I will try to love even when it hurts. I will try to extend grace to everyone, regardless of their actions, beliefs, status, politics or nationality.

"Praise the Lord, all you nations! Ex-tol him, all you peoples! For great is his steadfast love (*chesed*) toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 117).

I believe one thing unites us as humans: God's constant, steadfast, faithful love.

Let us show the world that we are Jesus' followers not by how many Christmas decorations we put up but by how much we love strangers as well as friends. ●

# No longer living in denial

**CONTEMPLATION** has been described to me as a long, loving look at the real. In my spiritual-direction training, I get to do a good bit of this. And, truth be told, it doesn't always mix well with my sometimes desirable defense mechanism of denial. There are some things to which I'd rather keep my eyes closed. But here we are just the same.

This morning, God's nudge to me was to notice and name (not deny the existence of) four key areas of my life: needs, weeds, deeds and seeds.

To notice is to observe, to perceive, to pay attention to or become conscious of. To name is simply but profoundly to call it what it is.

Noticing and naming are the epitome of truth telling, the opposite of denial — and something in which I don't always willingly participate.

Thus God's invitation, which I recognized as a setup for a long, loving look at the real.

I think most of us tend to deny the existence of things we don't want to see (hello, global warming), because

once we see them, we are somehow responsible for them. Denying the existence of a thing, however, will make no difference to its reality. Closing my eyes to it does not mean it is not there.

**TO NOTICE AND NAME** is to tell the truth — in this case, about my needs, deeds, weeds and seeds. About the very condition of me, the state of my soul. For me to engage with this invitation means I must be ready to agree with God about what is actually there.

**Needs:** As a good little servant of God, I tend to deny the existence of my needs. Needs? What needs? Me? While focusing on others is a neighborly and biblical thing to do, not noticing or tending to my own needs sets me up for burnout and boundary issues. Not naming them to God or others can lead to resentment. The invitation: Can I name my needs?

**Weeds:** I imagine the weeds to be those things that take up unnecessary space in, or choke the vitality out of, my life, work or relationships. That prevent their fullness from coming forth. These may be identifiable as attitudes, anxieties and addictions. However, they may also look like a garden of good growing in the wrong place, competing with needed space. The invitation: Can I confess (agree with God about) my weeds?

**Deeds:** Here is where I pay attention to my words and works throughout the day. Are they aligned with and arising from the center of me, or are they coming from my weedy parts? Are there things for which I make excuses or justifications? The invitation: Can I notice (be conscious of) my deeds?

**Seeds:** We've all been given something to cultivate and care for, to scatter and to sow. These are the seeds. But

sometimes I deny their existence. It's the whole light-under-the-bushel thing. It's vulnerable to show up and share who I am and what I have to contribute. The invitation: Can I sow my seeds?

Instead of denying them, can we:  
Name our needs?  
Confess our weeds?  
Notice our deeds?  
Sow our seeds?

**THIS PRACTICE IS** rearranging my life. How could it not? It's not all easy

**I've heard it said the truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable.**

to see, but the fruit coming forth is plump and juicy.

Our year is quickly coming to a close. If you make resolutions, why not resolve to notice and name? To pay attention to the life that is yours and the state of your soul?

To do so, you may want to ponder three questions:

What are the needs, weeds, deeds and seeds you are being invited to notice and name?

What are the reasons you choose denial?

What might help you take a long, loving look at what is real?

I've heard it said the truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable. Avoidance of this misery is one thing that has kept me from noticing and naming, leaving me on the surface of my soul, living in ignorant oblivion.

There are many inconvenient truths. To notice and name is to tell the truth anyway, and by telling the truth to be set free. ●



**Jenny Gehman** is a freelance writer and retreat speaker who publishes a weekly devotional, *Little Life Words*, at [jennygehman.com](http://jennygehman.com). She and her husband, Dan, attend Millersville Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania and enjoy hosting friends and strangers from around the world.

# Advent of Jesus will shake the foundations of the world

**THE INCARNATION.** Advent is a celebration of the incarnation, of God who became human flesh in Jesus Christ. The advent of Jesus, the accounts of his birth and life and death — all are glimpses of God, announcements of what God's presence looks like in our world and in our lives.

Advent announces that this world is the place where God will dwell. The home of God is here, on Earth. Our lives are not foreign to God; earthly life is not alien to God's life.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth summarized the meaning of the incarnation as God's yes to creation, a pledge of solidarity to human life. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is God's affirmation of humanity: God has taken our side, God is for us, God will live God's life for the sake of ours.

Irenaeus of Smyrna, a bishop in the second century, said all of this better than anyone else: "The glory of God is the human being, fully alive." That's the significance of the incarnation, of God becoming human: for us to find ourselves in the glory of God as we become fully alive.



**Isaac S. Villegas** of Durham, N.C., is president of the North Carolina Council of Churches and an ordained Mennonite minister.

We are living testimonies. With our love we testify to what God is about, to what God does, to who God is. Our life is a kind of worship, the exaltation of God manifest in our daily acts of love, our ordinary and extraordinary care for others. All of this is God's love incarnate in us.

This doesn't mean everything we do is good for our world or good for us. That should be obvious, especially as we come to terms with the environmental destruction our species has caused. The world, as it is, is not the way things should be. Our lives, as they are, are not necessarily the way they should be.

God's affirmation — God's yes, as Barth would say — is not a commitment to the status quo, to life as it is. To commit ourselves to the incarnation is not submission to life as we know it, to life as we want it, but a commitment to the reign of God's love, God's peace, God's fierce mercy.

**THAT'S WHY** Mary's Magnificat, in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, is so important. Her words are here at the beginning of the story of Jesus as a framework to understand everything else that happens. Mary tells us what Jesus will mean for our world and for each of our lives.

She rejoices in God's promises: to save her, to look with favor upon her lowly status, to be on her side.

This hope in God's affirmation of her life is also a word of judgment. God's mercy involves judgment. The incarnation won't reinforce the way things are.

The presence of God in Jesus will shake the foundations of the world. The powerful will be brought down from their thrones, Mary prophesies in her song, and the lowly will be lifted up. The hungry will have enough to eat, and God will banish the wealthy

(Luke 1:52-53).

Mary gets specific about what this child will mean for the world: God's mercy, Christ's salvation, will involve judgment. It will be a decisive no to all the ways we harm each other, a pronouncement against the evils of this world that sneak into our lives.

**THE ADVENT OF CHRIST** is a commissioning to belong to the world of Mary's song — to belong to her prayer, her dream, her vision for a world turned upside down, turned right-side

**The advent of Christ is a commissioning to belong to the world of Mary's song — to belong to her prayer, her dream.**

up: all things restored to God's justice, the goodness of creation renewed for all of us, where there will be no more rich or poor because no one will have too much, which means everyone will have enough.

The incarnation is God's promise to be with us, to transform us, to lead us into God's life — a life which, as we look toward the manger in Bethlehem, is vulnerable, dependent and fragile.

If that manger is what God's presence looks like, then what does it mean for us to be present to each other? To be present as a sign of God's presence?

The gospel, as we approach Bethlehem during Advent, is this: to know again — this year, with all that has changed in us, with all that has changed in our world — that the one who created us also loves us. This love has been made flesh. We will know God's incarnate love when we love each other. ●

# Are you bounded, fuzzy or centered?

**IS YOUR CHURCH** inclusive? Does it hold high expectations for its people? Is it possible to do both? Mark D. Baker argues that it is.

Twenty years ago, Baker, professor of mission and theology at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, was introduced to Paul Hiebert's work on bounded and centered sets. It changed his outlook on Christian practice.

He describes three kinds of groups: bounded, fuzzy and centered. Bounded sets have clear borders that define who is in and who is out. A fuzzy set is similar but has no boundary line; the grounds for distinction are vague.

A centered set is entirely different. Rather than occupying a place on the bounded-fuzzy continuum, a centered group "uses a directional and relational basis of evaluation," Baker writes. "The group is created by defining a center and observing people's relationship with the center." Even those far from the center are part of the group if they are heading toward the center.

Applying these concepts to churches, Baker notes that bounded churches may feel legalistic, with a list of correct beliefs and visible behaviors. He draws on his experience with a church in Honduras, where he served 10 years as a missionary.

Many who leave bounded churches gravitate to fuzzy churches, where there is no boundary line and tolerance is a supreme virtue. Yet people who make this move may feel unmoored. "Vague Christianity is not interesting or compelling, life-giving or transformative," Baker writes. People tend to drift away from such churches.

**THE KEY TO A CENTERED CHURCH** is defining the center: To whom do we offer worship and allegiance?

"It is not enough to simply say that God is the center of a church," he writes. "We must describe who God is, because our conceptions about God will influence whether we do church in a bounded, fuzzy or centered way,

and the paradigm of our church will influence how we see God."

He uses biblical exposition, focusing on Jesus' parables in Luke 15, particularly of the prodigal son, to illustrate the loving nature of God. The text shows Jesus as radically inclusive but not fuzzy. He confronts the Pharisees' privilege and status. A centered church, Baker concludes, "will continually remind us of the gospel of Jesus Christ and will reorient us to the God of the center again and again."

Baker notes two types of change that happen in a centered church. One is directional. "Is someone facing the center or oriented in the other direction?" Conversion happens when someone turns toward the center. The second is pace: Members do not move toward the center at the same speed. But as long as they're facing the center, they are part of the church.

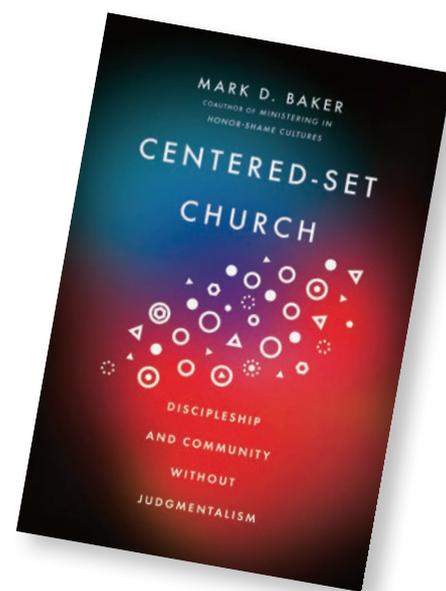
**AS BAKER CONSIDERS** discipleship, he looks at how to practice exhortation from a centered perspective, how to do centered intervention and how to exhibit a centered character, following the example of Jesus.

Centered exhortation may include linking imperatives to indicatives ("Forgive as you have been forgiven"), avoiding "ought" or "should" and using directional language (moving toward the center).

The idea is to encourage change while maintaining a strong sense of acceptance, affirming that the person will never be outside God's or the community's love.

Centered intervention involves prioritizing people over rules, making things right, discerning different approaches and exploring rather than pronouncing. The main idea is: "A centered approach is not focused on a line but on movement toward the center."

Baker includes stories of people and churches practicing a centered approach. Several are Anabaptist churches. Some of the individual sto-



*Centered-Set Church: Discipleship and Community Without Judgmentalism* by Mark D. Baker (IVP Academic, 2022)

ries include his students.

Anticipating objections, Baker looks at ministries that appear to demand a bounded approach and shows how a centered approach can work better. He considers addiction recovery, reentry after prison, homeless ministry and children's ministry. He further looks at centered alternatives to membership, leadership and evangelism, telling stories of churches using these alternatives.

He concludes with three examples of "the richness of the centered way": the unconditional love of a compassionate God, authentic relationships, and journeying together with repentance, forgiveness, reorientation and love.

*Centered-Set Church* is a rich resource that invites an approach that can call for high expectations in moving toward the God of love while being fully inclusive of all who are walking that path, no matter where they are on the journey. ●

Gordon Houser is the author of *Present Tense: A Mennonite Spirituality*.



Pope Francis, seated center, attends a prayer at Rome's Colosseum on Oct. 25 during the "Cry for Peace" conference. PHOTO: ANDREW MEDICHINI/AP

# Pope condemns nuclear weapons as Putin threatens escalation in Ukraine

**AT ROME'S FAMED** Colosseum on Oct. 25, Pope Francis made an impassioned appeal for peace and the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons as the Russian war in Ukraine risks escalating.

"We can be the generation that lets the planet and humanity die, that hoards and sells weapons in the illusion of saving only ourselves against others, or we can be the generation that creates new ways of living together, doesn't invest in arms, abolishes war as an instrument for solving conflicts and halts the exploitation of the planet's resources," the pope said.

Seated in a wheelchair due to his chronic knee pain, Francis spoke to a crowd gathered before the arches of the Colosseum, where religious and political representatives met to appeal for peace and interreligious dialogue.

"With firm conviction we say: No more war! Let's halt every conflict," the pope said. "War only leads to death and destruction. It's a trip with no return where we are all losers."

Francis' speech focused on the priority of dialogue over violence and underlined the importance of reenergizing discussions for the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons.

The pope's appeal took place as Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine. The Vatican and Pope Francis have attempted to mediate a peace between Ukraine and Russia, but their efforts have yielded few practical results.

"Today, in fact, something we dreaded and hoped never to hear of again is threatened outright: the use of nuclear

weapons, which even after Hiroshima and Nagasaki continued wrongly to be produced and tested," Francis said.

An ecumenical event, "The Cry for Peace" was organized by the Catholic lay movement of Sant'Egidio, which works closely with the pope on matters of war, conflict, migrants and refugees.

Prayers were read by an evangelical Christian refugee from Cameroon whom the pope met while on the island of Cyprus. A group of migrants and Edith Bruck, a Holocaust survivor, offered their witness for peace.

"This year our prayer has become a heartfelt plea, because today peace has been gravely violated, assaulted and trampled upon, and this in Europe, on the very continent that in the last century endured the horrors of two world wars," the pope said. ●

# Pastors discuss reboot of evangelicalism

Is it possible to reclaim a movement that has become a political and consumer culture?

**A CONFERENCE ABOUT** the future of the largest U.S. religious tradition began with a bit of honesty. “Nobody knows exactly what an evangelical is,” said Joel Lawrence, executive director of the Center for Pastor Theologians, at the opening of the Reconstructing Evangelicalism conference Oct. 24 in Oak Park, Ill.

The conference, which drew about 400 pastors and other church leaders to Calvary Memorial Church in the Chicago suburbs, was inspired by a trend among evangelicals and other Protestants to “deconstruct” the faith they grew up with — examining core beliefs and often rejecting the conservative politics, sexism and racial divides evangelicalism has come to be known for.

The question “What is an evangelical?” led to a spirited conversation about the movement’s flaws and how to mend them.

Doug Sweeney, dean of Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., admitted that for much of the American public, the word evangelical is synonymous with MAGA-style politics. He argued that “evangelical” should be tied more to theology than politics.

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, academic dean of Esperanza College in Philadelphia, said the theological gatekeeping among evangelicals is often “quite ruthless.” Evangelical Christians from Latin America or other parts of the church outside the United States, she said, are largely ignored by American evangelical pastors.

She argued that any reconstruction of evangelicalism must include a more robust understanding of human sinfulness. While evangelicals often focus on personal sin, they tend to miss the way that power can be misused by sinful church leaders or movements.

**HISTORIAN** Kristin Kobes Du Mez, author of *Jesus and John Wayne: How*



Panelists Joel Lawrence, Malcolm Foley, Gavin Ortlund, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Doug Sweeney and Kristin Kobes Du Mez participate in the Reconstructing Evangelicalism conference. PHOTO: BOB SMJETANA/RNS

*White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, defined evangelicalism as a political and consumer culture. This is based on observation of churches that try to grow by giving people what they want, which of late has included hot-button conservative politics and culture-war rhetoric. Leaders who address racism, sexism or other social justice issues get pushback from inside the church and from social media.

**Churches try to grow by giving people what they want, which of late has included hot-button conservative politics and culture-war rhetoric.**

She pointed to evangelicals like Beth Moore, a popular Bible teacher who became unwelcome in the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest evangelical group, for calling out sexism and abuse in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination.

“If you step out of line, you will be punished,” said Du Mez.

She said many pastors have a clear grasp of theology but lack an understanding of the cultural factors affecting the country and their churches.

Still, if evangelicalism is to be reconstructed, panelists said, it has to be done with humility. Some evangelicals, they said, see their movement as the last hope for Christianity in the world — an idea the panelists rejected.

**MALCOLM FOLEY**, who directs the Black church studies program at Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, advocated for an activist form of evangelicalism, one that combines evangelism with social action. “That is the only evangelicalism that I think is worthy of talking about,” he said.

At the same time, Foley was skeptical that the word “evangelical” could be saved or reconstructed.

“The work and energy that we would be investing in reclaiming that term could also be used in loving our neighbors,” he said. “Instead of needing to reclaim the term, just be gospel people. Be people who are going to invest in deep spiritual, economic and physical solidarity as the church. They can call you whatever they want.”

Sweeney countered that he was not willing to give up on evangelicalism. A self-described “evangelical Lutheran” and a member of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, Sweeney summoned a picture of the gospel-focused cross-denominational movement that evangelicalism aspires to be and that he hopes to remain part of. ●

# Differing visions, election setback test Christian nationalism's appeal

**IMAGINE A COMMON** scene: It's Sunday morning in a white Pennsylvania suburb. A churchgoer joins his evangelical congregation for hymn singing, Bible reading, a sermon and prayer.

Now imagine the churchgoer's prayer: "Father God, we're asking you to open the eyes of President Trump's understanding that . . . he will know how to implement divine intervention, that you will surround him with none of this deep-state trash, none of this RINO trash . . . in the name of Jesus."

That was an actual prayer given from the stage at a recent stop on the ReAwaken America tour, a Christian-inflected traveling roadshow featuring MAGA celebrities — RINOS are "Republicans in name only" — that drew crowds in the thousands to venues across the country.

Inspired by conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 virus and a "stolen" 2020 election, the two-day event visited almost two dozen cities before the midterm elections.

Though Trump rallies themselves have taken on a pseudo-evangelical character, the ReAwaken events cost upwards of \$250 per ticket and were akin to religious revivals. They featured clergy, religious rhetoric and even baptisms — and occasionally revealed rifts in the Christian nationalist movement.

**WHEN TENNESSEE PASTOR** Greg Locke took the stage at the ReAwaken America Tour in Manheim, Pa., Oct. 21, the throngs who had come out to hear conspiracy theories and inflammatory rhetoric about Democratic candidates instead heard Locke aim some of his sharpest criticism at a surprising target: Pope Francis.

"If you trust anybody but Jesus to get you to heaven, you ain't going," Locke said, his voice rising. "You say, 'Well what about the pope?' . . . He has prostituted the church."

It was an odd note to strike at a rally

where perhaps the biggest name on the speaker's roster was retired Gen. Michael Flynn, a Catholic who later made it a point to mention his faith while voicing support for Christian nationalism. "I'm a Christian — I'm a Catholic, by the way," said Flynn.

Locke had aired his anti-Catholic position a few days before in a Facebook post advocating for burning rosaries and "Catholic statues." When another user urged him to abandon the anti-Catholic rhetoric, Locke doubled down. "Catholicism is idolatry 100%" he wrote.

Anti-Catholic rhetoric has long been a theme in nativist American thought. In the Christian nationalist surge that fueled the ReAwaken gatherings, the ideology appealed to a wide range of right-wing coalitions.

**THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES** among the hardline Christian nationalist groups — some now emboldened to embrace the Christian nationalist label — have been present from the start. Texas Pastor Robert Jeffress, who rose to national prominence as an early supporter of Donald Trump,

**In the aftermath of Jan. 6, several types of extremists gravitated toward Christian nationalism.**

is an ardent purveyor of Christian nationalism. In 2018, he preached a sermon titled "America Is a Christian Nation" and now sells a book of the same name.

Before then, the pastor was known for railing against the Catholic Church. In 2010 he argued it was little more than a "cult-like, pagan religion," adding, "isn't that the genius of Satan?"

But Jeffress and other faith leaders'



A woman is baptized during the ReAwaken America tour in Batavia, N.Y., on Aug. 12. In the version of America laid out at the ReAwaken tour, Christianity is at the center of American life and institutions, it's under attack, and attendees need to fight to restore the nation's Christian roots. PHOTO: CAROLYN KASTER/AP

sectarian rhetoric faded as they made common cause in support for the president. After Trump was voted out of office, Catholics and conservative Protestants were unified in the Stop the Steal movement. By the time the movement culminated in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, a form of Trumpian ecumenism had taken hold, as rioters of several faiths prayed together as they led the assault.

In the aftermath of Jan. 6, several types of extremists gravitated toward Christian nationalism, some linking it to opposition to pandemic restrictions, masks and vaccines and others incorporating the ideology into attacks on LGBTQ people.

But within this cohort, the different variants of Christian nationalism began to show themselves and develop. Even as Locke was becoming a major Christian nationalist voice, Nick Fuentes, the white nationalist head of the group America First, and a Catholic, was on the rise as well. While Locke has advocated for burning rosaries, Fuentes has celebrated the idea of "Catholic Taliban rule."

**DOUG MASTRIANO'S LOSS** to Josh Shapiro in the Pennsylvania governor's race was closely watched as a test of Christian nationalism's appeal. Mastriano broke out of the Republican primary pack by cloaking himself in one of the most vocal strains of Christian nationalism: anti-pandemic restrictions, pro-conspiracy theories about the 2020 election and dubious separation of church and state.

Samuel Perry, co-author of *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to Amer-*

*ican Democracy*, argued that Mastriano's campaign represented more of Christian nationalism's fringe than its broader appeal.

Even so, Perry said, "the fact that he hasn't been blown out of the water since day one tells the radical Christian nationalist fringe — the kind that would support arresting women who have abortions or overturn *Obergefell* [the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that guaranteed same-sex couples the right to marry] or institutionalize Christian supremacy — that their views are find-

ing resonance among enough people to where they can just keep trying," Perry said.

Andrew Whitehead, who wrote *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* with Perry, said: "Because voters in primaries are usually the most motivated, and strong supporters of Christian nationalism are very motivated, candidates who embrace Christian nationalism may continue to win nominations even if they sometimes lose general elections." ●

## Classifieds

[classifieds@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:classifieds@anabaptistworld.org)

### EMPLOYMENT — CHURCH

**Central Mennonite Church**, Archbold, Ohio, seeks two FTE additional pastors. One position is an associate pastor to expand our work in the areas of community life and outreach. We are adding a third pastor to strengthen our youth and young adult programs. Central is committed to God's Word and Anabaptist beliefs. To apply, contact Ohio Regional Pastor Tony Doehrmann, 419-551-1107; ocrpwest@gmail.com. (15)

**The Mennonite Congregation of Boston**, a small faith community meeting since 1962, seeks a part-time pastor beginning in 2023. Start date flexible. Position requires pastoral care, communication management, worship planning, and 1-2 meditations per month or as needed. Compensation aligns with Mennonite Church USA Pastor Salary Guidelines. Full job description posted online: <https://bit.ly/MCOBopening>. To apply or request information, email the search committee (menncob.pastor@gmail.com). (15)

**Shalom Mennonite Church**, Newton, Kan., seeks a full-time pastor to lead our multi-generational, welcoming and inclusive, social-justice-minded congregation. We are looking for an individual who will be active in preaching, community ministry, worship planning and pastoral care, with gifts in administration and working collaboratively. A full job description can be found at [mennowdc.org](http://mennowdc.org). If interested, please contact Western District Conference Minister, Heidi Regier Kreider at [heidirk@mennowdc.org](mailto:heidirk@mennowdc.org). (14-15)

**First Mennonite Church**, Indianapolis, Ind., is searching for a half-time Pastoral Team Member. We are a welcoming faith community committed to making peace, seeking justice and serving as

the hands, heart and voice of Christ. Priorities will be to support and equip Church Life Commission (congregational care team and small groups), collaborate with Faith Formation Commission (Christian education for children, youth and adults) and to integrate persons of all ages, backgrounds and identities into the life of the congregation. For full job description, visit [indymenno.org](http://indymenno.org) or email [drhpath@gmail.com](mailto:drhpath@gmail.com). (13-15)

### EMPLOYMENT — GENERAL

**Atlantic Coast Conference** of Mennonite Church USA seeks an experienced Anabaptist leader to serve as Executive Conference Minister. This individual will support and work together with conference staff, pastors, lay leaders and other volunteers as we live out our vision to be centered in Christ, to build connections and to share God's love in our diverse contexts. The position is 1 FTE (negotiable) with salary and benefits commensurate with MC USA pastor salary guidelines. Individuals from underrepresented groups are encouraged to apply. See [atlanticcoastconference.net/ECM](http://atlanticcoastconference.net/ECM) for more information. Send inquiries and resumes to [searchcommittee@atlanticcoastconference.net](mailto:searchcommittee@atlanticcoastconference.net). (14-15)

### EMPLOYMENT — SCHOOL

**Bluffton University** invites applications for the following faculty positions to begin fall 2023. Nutrition & Dietetics; Psychology; Social Work (includes field director); Education; Music & Marching Band Director; Business; and Faculty position & Field Director for MSW program. See [bluffton.edu/employment](http://bluffton.edu/employment) for details. (15)

**Bluffton University** also invites applications for the M'della Moon Endowed Chair in Botany and Environmental Science, full-time, tenure-track position. See [bluffton.edu/employment](http://bluffton.edu/employment) for details. (15)

**Goshen College** invites applications for a full-time assistant or associate professor of ASL and Sign Language Interpreting to teach American

Sign Language (ASL) and Interpreting courses beginning in August 2023. Candidates with one or more of the following specialties preferred: Teaching ASL, Sign Language Interpreting, Deaf Culture. Primary teaching responsibilities will be in the area of ASL courses and Sign Language Interpreting courses as well as managing the Deaf Studies program. For more information and to apply, go to [goshen.edu/employment](http://goshen.edu/employment). (15)

**Truett Seminary** has an opening for a teaching position in World Christianity and Witness. We are inviting you to learn more about the job using the following link: [apply.interfolio.com/115012c](http://apply.interfolio.com/115012c). (14-16)

### FOR SALE — REAL ESTATE

**Investment property** in North Newton, Kan., for sale. Two new houses; rented for \$2,700 per month. Contact owner-agent at 316-283-8441 or [sbrodhagen@cox.net](mailto:sbrodhagen@cox.net). (12-16)

### LODGING

**North Newton** guest housing — 316-283-5231; [vadasnider@cox.net](mailto:vadasnider@cox.net). (10-9)

### TRAVEL

**Next Christmas in Europe!** Trip of a lifetime to Germany and Austria! Early December 2023: Scenic Alps, Lodge in 12th-century castle; "Silent Night" Chapel; Christmas Markets and Concert in Vienna. Details and registration coming soon! Pastor Weldon Martens, [weldon.martens@gmail.com](mailto:weldon.martens@gmail.com); 402-202-9276. (15)

**Visiting New York?** Interested in biblical archaeology? Visit [BiblicalArcheologyAtTheMet.org](http://BiblicalArcheologyAtTheMet.org). (9, 11, 13, 15, 16)

*\$1.50 a word. Send ads to [classifieds@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:classifieds@anabaptistworld.org). For information about display ads or online advertising, see [anabaptistworld.org/ads](http://anabaptistworld.org/ads). To inquire about display ads or online advertising, email [advertising@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:advertising@anabaptistworld.org) or call 316-283-3670.*

# Obituaries

[obituaries@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:obituaries@anabaptistworld.org)

## Dale D. Stoll

Dale David Stoll, 85, of Sarasota, Fla., died Sept. 13, 2022. He was born Oct. 5, 1936, to Henry and Goldie (Miller) Stoll in Mount Ayr, Ind.

He was baptized at Burr Oak Mennonite Church. In 1954 he graduated from Eastern Mennonite High School in Harrisonburg, Va. He earned a bachelor's in commerce degree from Goshen College in Indiana and a master's degree in hospital administration from the University of Minnesota.

His long career in nonprofit healthcare management began in 1965 at Evanston Hospital in Illinois and later at St. Luke's hospital in Cleveland. In 1971 he moved to Flower Hospital in Toledo, Ohio, where he served as president. He oversaw the hospital's relocation to Sylvania, Ohio, with the construction of a new hospital and campus. After retiring from Flower, he consulted for Mennonite Board of Missions at a variety of facilities, including Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center in La Junta, Colo. He was an honest and fair employer who cared about each person.

He served on the board of directors of Charter One Bank, the Ohio Hospital Association, Sunnyside Village, Charis Counseling Center and Sarasota Christian School. He taught business courses at Goshen College's Sarasota campus. He was a visionary leader who left a legacy of new facilities and programs that continue to provide a wide spectrum of care.

Every summer, he and Carolyn took their family to Little Eden Camp and later built a cottage on Fife Lake for gatherings. He enjoyed boating and riding motorcycles, snowmobiles and ATVs through the woods of northern Michigan. He loved music and contributed his bass voice to choirs and a *cappella* groups.

Christian faith was central to his life. He was active in congregations everywhere he lived. His and Carolyn's current church home is Covenant Mennonite in Sarasota.

Survivors include his wife of 62 years, Carolyn Ruth (Morrison); four children, Steve, David, Suzanne (Dave) Douma and Ned (Cindy) Stoll; five grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

He was preceded in death by his brother and sister-in-law, Paul and Lois (Herr) Stoll; their son Ned was welcomed into his and Carolyn's family at that time.

Send obituaries to [obituaries@anabaptistworld.org](mailto: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](http://anabaptistworld.org/obituaries).

## Homer D. Nissley

Homer D. Nissley, 88, of South Bend, Ind., died Jan. 12, 2021, after a brief illness. He was born Dec. 31, 1932, to Sue (Schmucker) and Daniel H. Nissley in Nappanee and lived in South Bend since 1963.

On June 3, 1956, he married Betty Graber in Etna Green.

He grew up in an Amish family and learned how to work hard. As a conscientious objector during the Korean War, he served in 1-W



Nissley

alternative service at an Indianapolis hospital. He attended Goshen College, where he earned his bachelor's degree in education and went on to earn a master's degree in education from Indiana University.

He spent many years as a teacher in elementary schools. As president of

the South Bend teachers union, he worked to bring equity among teachers through affirmative action policies and within schools through desegregation.

He and Betty were early members of Kern Road Mennonite Church, where he served in many leadership and mentoring roles, especially as a witness to peace and justice issues.

He was a founding member of the Near Northwest Neighborhood organization, committed to promoting neighborhood revitalization and community development. He served with Mennonite Disaster Service in Louisiana to help with rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. He loved woodworking and donated handcrafted items for Mennonite Central Committee relief sales. He volunteered with Meals on Wheels.

Survivors include his wife, Betty; three daughters, Rachel S. (Greg) Hansen of Lawrenceville, N.J., Lena M. (Rob Scott) Nissley of Baraboo, Wis., and Kathy (Matt Eberly) Nissley of Madison, Wis.; three sons, James D. Nissley of South Bend, Dwight V. (Mary Ellen Palko) Nissley of Frederick, Md., and Gareth L. (Carolyn M. Martin) Nissley of Indianapolis; three sisters, Ruby Nissley and Miriam (Cleo) Orendorf, both of Nappanee, and Sue Ellen Nissley of Wakarusa; three brothers, Lloyd (Gladys) Nissley and Ira (Reinhilde) Nissley, both of Nappanee, and Dan (Paige) Nissley of Lebanon, Pa.; and 16 grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by a son, Jay H. Nissley; a sister, Treva Yoder; and two brothers, Melvin and Vernon Nissley.

## John Willems

John Willems, 89, of Albany, Ore., died Sept. 13, 2022, at Samaritan Evergreen Hospice. He was born May 8, 1933, to Abraham F. and Anna (Isaac) Willems on a farm near Greensburg, Kan.

His first eight years of school were in a one-room country school. After high school he attended Hesston College in Kansas.

He married Dora Schrock on July 21, 1955, at Albany Mennonite Church. They were the first couple to be married at the church.

He came to Oregon in 1952 for alternative service at Lebanon Community Hospital for two years, later returning to the hospital for training as a radiological technologist and working there for 12 years. He felt the call to become a pastor, and in 1964 returned to school in the Hesston College Pastoral Ministry Program.

He began to serve as pastor of Beth-El Mennonite Church, Milford, Neb., in 1966. In



Willems

1973 he became pastor of Salem Mennonite Church and then pastor of Bethany Mennonite in Albany, beginning in 1985 and retiring in 1998.

From the late 1950s through 2006, he served in church conferences wherever his church was located at the time, serving as conference

moderator four times. He was a rare pastor who enjoyed administrative responsibility. He also served in community organizations, churchwide and inter-Mennonite committees, as well as the Mennonite Village Council. In retirement he served with Oregon Mennonite Residential Services, which relates to people with developmental disabilities. His greatest joy was seeing people committing or recommitting their lives to Jesus Christ and becoming part of a congregation.

He was a member of Albany Mennonite Church and became involved in church work as a young adult. His first elected position in church was co-superintendent of Sunday school when he was 19.

Survivors include a daughter, Mardell (Douglas) Hochstetler of Albany; a son, Kevin Willems of Lake Stevens, Wash.; two granddaughters and one grandson.

A graveside service was held at Fairview Mennonite Cemetery and a memorial service at Albany Mennonite Church. Memorials may be given to Mennonite Village's Endowment Fund or Albany Mennonite Church.

## Arlene Ruth Mark

Arlene Ruth Martin Mark, 91, of Goshen, Ind., died Oct. 29, 2022, at Greencroft. She was born July 30, 1931, to Joseph Preston Martin and Mamie Susan Reiff Martin in Hagerstown, Md., and raised in Maugansville.

Her church was conservative, with higher education not only uncommon but frowned on, especially for women. With the support of her father, she attended Eastern Mennonite College for two years. She taught for two years to earn money to attend Goshen College. She graduated in 1955 with a degree in teaching and was immediately hired.

She and George Mark were married in the Goshen College church chapel on Dec. 17, 1955. They moved frequently during George's

medical training and 1-W service before settling in Elkhart, where they lived for over 50 years before moving to Goshen.

They were members of Prairie Street Mennonite Church. She was involved in local, conference and national church leadership. She preached the first sermon by a female in many congregations, advocating for women's full participation while not being allowed to stand behind the pulpit. A lover of words and worship, she studied at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and Notre Dame. She compiled the

first Mennonite book of worship liturgy, *Words for Worship*. She wrote Sunday school and Bible school materials for children.

She appreciated good food, music, poetry and literature and travel. She passed a love of reading to her descendants and students. She believed

strongly in giving to others. Her neighbors and church friends knew her as the first to bring a meal in times of turmoil. She served on many nonprofit boards, including the Mennonite Church General Board. She was the first female chair of the Goshen College Board of Overseers.

Survivors include three children, Susan (Dennis Landis), David (Dawn Catalino) and Paul (Kimberley MacDonald); 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband, George; a son and daughter-in-law, Scott (Summer Quimby); three brothers, Mervin, Glenn and Dale; and two infant siblings, Warren and Rheta.

A memorial service is planned for 11 a.m. Dec. 3 at College Mennonite Church. Donations may be given to Church Community Services in Elkhart or the Goshen College scholarship fund for first-generation students.

## Harley Wagler

Harley Wagler, 81, died Sept. 30, 2022, at Hutchinson Hospital in Kansas after a short bout with cancer. He was born Sept. 9, 1941, in Hutchinson to Raymond and Fannie (Mast) Wagler.

He grew up on a dairy farm in Partridge and showed an early love of animals. But perhaps his strongest affections were kindled when he, acting on a tip from a local librarian, discovered the world of Slavic literature in the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky. He sometimes remained in the haymow after chores to read yet another chapter of Dostoevsky.

His life combined scholarship with service to others. At age 20 he went to Costa Rica for a term of alternative service under Conservative Mennonite Conference. He later studied at the University of Kansas and the University of Pennsylvania, and he worked in Yugoslavia with Eastern Mennonite Missions. A golden chapter in his life was a stint in Bulgaria on a Fulbright

Scholarship.

He directed the Russian Studies Program in Nizhnii Novgorod, Russia, from 1993 until it closed in 2010. Harley then continued teaching at a Russian university until 2021, when he returned to his beloved roots in Partridge. He was a lifelong member of Plainview Mennonite Church, Hutchinson.

He was a caring and gentle man who loved interacting with all those he met. He had a wide range of friends and connected easily with children. His fondness for animals led to many adventures, and he became a walking encyclopedia on animal, bird and insect behavior. He was grounded in a strong faith and lived a simple, honest life. He was a generous man and considered his work rebuilding churches in Russia as one of his greatest accomplishments.

Survivors include his siblings, Paul Wagler (Ellen) of Wichita, Ruth Miller (Roman) of Partridge, Philip Wagler of Hutchinson, Eldon Wagler (Jane) of Lusaka, Zambia, and Duane Wagler of Colorado Springs, Colo.; beloved goddaughter Nastia Oleneva; godson Aleksei James Black; and 13 nephews and nieces.

## Donald L. Schmidt

Donald Lee Schmidt, 86, of Newton, Kan., died Nov. 2, 2022, from complications of pancreatic cancer at Kidron Bethel Village. He was born June 18, 1936, at home to David and Kathryn Schmidt, who farmed near Medford, Okla.

In 1948, the family moved to Newton, where Don attended First Mennonite Church and graduated from Newton High School. He graduated from Bethel College and performed 1-W service at Indiana University in lieu of being drafted into the military. He married the love of his life, Marlene (Kopper), in 1960.

In the 1960s, after jobs managing Antrim Lumber and selling fertilizer in York, Neb., he was hired as an accountant at Hesston Corporation (now AGCO), where he would spend his entire career, weathering mergers and acquisitions and advancing to the position of corporate controller before retiring in 2001.

His life was defined by his faith in God, his commitment to serving his church community and his love for his wife and three children: Mike, Greg and Lori. He served in a number of positions at First Mennonite, including as a deacon and congregational leader, and held positions on several boards, including Kidron Bethel, Ten Thousand Villages and the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board.

The quintessential jack of all trades, he built the family's second home with his father. A passion for golf and antique cars occupied his spare time. Whether attending Mike's football games or Lori's music recitals or helping Greg with various projects, Don was devoted to their

well-being and encouraged them to pursue their passions. With Marlene, he enjoyed a marriage marked by family vacations, concerts, dining out and time spent with friends and family.

He is survived by his children, Mike, Greg and Lori; and a brother, Lewis Schmidt (Dorothy). His wife, Marlene, preceded him in death.

## John Hamilton Parker

John Hamilton Parker, 82, of Lansdale, Pa., died Aug. 29, 2022. He was born Oct. 7, 1939, to Laura H. and Leland C. Parker of Bath, N.Y.

He earned a bachelor's degree and a doctorate from the University of Rochester and completed postdoctoral studies at Johns Hopkins Medical School in the 1960s. He married Marcia Witters in 1962.

As a scientist in pharmaceutical companies and a college professor, he and his family lived in multiple cities during the next 50 years: Rochester, Albany and Buffalo, N.Y., Baltimore, Md., Elkhart, Ind., Lansdale, Pa., Raleigh, N.C., and San Ramon, Calif. He was called to develop new vaccines and other pharmaceutical products and to serve as a link with the Food and Drug Administration to assure their safety and effectiveness and to guarantee the cleanliness of their production facilities.

Although he had studied about Mennonites during his high school years at Mount Hermon School, founded by Dwight L. Moody in Massachusetts, he and Marcia first met live Mennonites in their six years of living in Elkhart in the 1970s. This occurred through friendships with their children's educators and several teaching colleagues of Marcia in Elkhart. They converted from Episcopalians to Mennonites through nurturing experiences, book studies and baptism at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart. Thereafter, they joined five other congregations as they pursued his career calls in other cities. Mennonite congregations where they became members included Raleigh Mennonite Church, Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship, Perkasio Mennonite Church, Plains Mennonite Church and First Mennonite Church of San Francisco. Along the way, he served as adult Sunday school teacher and chair of the finance committee and church council. He found God's calming presence in natural settings where meditation, photography and exploring nature trails brought peace from his international business travel and other stresses.

Survivors include his wife of 50 years, Marcia Witters Parker; a daughter Lisa (Vincent) LaSorsa; a son, David (Maureen) Parker; and seven grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by a brother, Robert Warren Parker; and a daughter, Lindsay (Michael) Neiswender.

Memorial services were held at Plains Mennonite Church, Hatfield, Pa.



Mark



Wagler



Parker

# Christmas gift subscriptions for just \$27



## Give a gift that lasts the entire year!

With this special offer, we're making it easy to give the gift of independent journalism covering the global Anabaptist movement. For just \$27 (**save half off the regular rate!**), your gift recipients will receive a one-year subscription, including 16 print issues and email delivery of the PDF digital edition. We'll also send a letter announcing your thoughtful gift.

*Note: This offer is good for U.S. addresses only.*

### Two easy ways to order:

- ONLINE:** [anabaptistworld.org/xmasgift22](http://anabaptistworld.org/xmasgift22)
- CHECK:** Make your check payable to *Anabaptist World* and mail to:  
Anabaptist World  
P.O. Box 436  
Congers, NY 10920-0436

[anabaptistworld.org/xmasgift22](http://anabaptistworld.org/xmasgift22)

