

A Anabaptist World

Mennonite news, inspiring stories

Steve Ramer, right, pastor of Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship in Colorado, with Starla Hersch, who lived in the church for several months.

A true sanctuary

Friends without homes make church building holy

PLUS

MY NEIGHBOR
AT THE BORDER

BY J RON BYLER



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ON THE COVER: Starla Hersch and Pastor Steve Ramer express the spirit of friendship with the homeless at Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship in Colorado. Photo courtesy of Steve Ramer.

BY DANIELLE KLOTZ

Telescopes and mirrors

IN THIS ISSUE OF *Anabaptist World* we've collected a set of articles exploring stewardship. As we worked with this content, I was reminded of the ways our team stewards information. There are different ideas of how a media outlet should manage what it publishes.

I'm grateful to be surrounded by our current team and to build upon the collective wisdom and experience of the editors and directors who came before us at *The Mennonite*, *Gospel Herald* and *Mennonite World Review*.

In a recent conversation, I was struck by this question: "Who does it benefit to pretend that Anabaptists are perfect?"

The question was raised because often when we publish bad news or controversial opinions, people ask why we gave space to it. Similarly, when we publish letters that express perspectives we do not personally agree with, again we are asked, "Why would you print that?"

I've come to think of the task of stewarding news and opinions as holding up a mirror and a telescope. When hard, surprising, devastating, challenging things happen in Anabaptist communities, it is our duty to hold up a mirror. We have not escaped the world's brokenness. No matter how separatist or sectarian we can be — or how exceptional we think we are — we commit sins, make mistakes and argue over issues just like our neighbors in other denominations.

Specifically, reporting on sexual misconduct, as we've had to do several times in the short history of *AW*, is a joyless task. But not to report it would only contribute to the culture of silence

that protects abusers. If it is troubling to read of those accounts — and I believe it should be — then I urge you to find ways to make sure our communities are working to create truly safe spaces, listen to victims and hold abusers accountable.

AW's mirror shows a reflection of Anabaptism, even when we aren't pleased with what we see.

THEN THERE'S OUR telescope. Telescope articles extend our sight across distances. They may surprise us with inspiration, joy and creativity. They might come from a community you wouldn't otherwise have learned about.

When pointed at the night sky, a telescope allows us to find stars, study their patterns and admire their brilliance. Just as stars can act as guides and light pathways, the stars on our pages can help us find our way and shine light on challenging situations and positive examples of living our faith.

Each issue of *AW* has a limited amount of space (of course!), and so being good stewards of its pages presents a challenge of discernment. We have to decide where to invest time, energy and resources. We won't always get it right, which is why your input is invaluable. We are grateful that you support our efforts and take the time to reach out and provide feedback. ●



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.

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Toxic or compelling?

Does the word “evangelical” attract or repel? Paul Cumin, senior pastor at Lendrum Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Alberta, wrote in *Mennonite Brethren Herald* in 2019 that he did not want his children to grow up to be evangelical Christians because that brand of faith had become toxic in North America. Brian Cooper, an associate professor of theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Canada, responded to the piece this spring, saying it is better to repair evangelicalism than abandon it. “I am an Anabaptist by choice, because I have found an Anabaptist way of being a disciple of Jesus too compelling to ignore,” he says. “I am an evangelical because the good news of Jesus Christ has taken hold of me, and I have surrendered to it. . . . That is why I will contend to overcome the lies being advanced in the name of evangelicalism, and work to restore it, so that people can see its goodness – but ultimately so they can see Jesus.”

Who's polarized? Indonesians, too

It's not just an American thing. Members of Indonesia's three Anabaptist groups write in the Mennonite World Conference *Courier* that the rise of identity politics – especially regarding religious and ethnic identity – has made it difficult to promote peaceful coexistence. “It turns into an obstacle for social cohesion when the respected group feels superior while disrespecting and even alienating and terminating the other groups,” write Paulus Widjaja, Eddy Suyanto, Lydia Adi, Teguh Sayoga, Edi Cahyono and Tri Gunanto. “Violence in the form of hate speech, discrimination and exclusion easily follows. This phenomenon takes place not only between groups but even within groups. The Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonites are not exempt. Thus, there is a great challenge without and within.”



Lakan Sumulong and Lakambini Mapayapa (Dann and Joji Pantoja).

PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

New names reclaim identity

Dann and Joji Pantoja, Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers in the Philippines, are embracing their Indigenous names and identities because their birth names represent colonial history. “We, Luis Daniel Alba Pantoja and Joji Felicitas Francisco Bautista-Pantoja, are from the Tagalog tribe of Southern Luzon, the region where Manila is located,” they wrote at waves.ca. “Our Tagalog tribe was used by the Spanish and American colonial powers in their wars to fight against the tribes of Mindanao.” As part of their decolonization journey, the couple went to Tagalog elders and requested Indigenous names. Dann was given the name Lakan Sumulong, which means “a proponent of progress.” Joji was given the name Lakambini Mapayapa, which means “a woman of peace.” Using their Indigenous names has been important in the relationship-building and peacemaking work they do with tribes of Mindanao.

LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



Letters & Comments

Write to: editor@anabaptistworld.org

Breaking the rules

Mennonite Church USA has gotten itself into an untenable situation because of guidelines interpreted as rules ("Board proposes guidelines' repeal, announces special delegate session," May 7). This is just one example of problems created by top-down authority that decides what is sin and imposes that interpretation on all members. This is not unique to Mennonites. Just ask American Catholics if they follow the Vatican's edicts on birth control.

In the early 1960s Virginia and I began attending a congregation in Franconia (now Mosaic) Mennonite Conference and considered joining. The bishop gave us a copy of the rulebook. As I recall, among other things, TV was forbidden, and women were to wear black stockings and head coverings. We chose not to pursue membership because we not only disagreed with the obsolete rules but also observed members were ignoring them. A few years later the conference attempted to update the rulebook to reflect actual practice but found this was not possible. There were too many disagreements. There has not been a rulebook since.

If, instead of imposing rules, MC USA had actual guidelines and allowed more congregational autonomy, perhaps some of the heartbreaking disagreements and defections of the past few years could have been avoided.

Abner Schlabach, *South Royalton, Vt.*

Who needs membership?

As a former pastor and former member of numerous congregations, I have for years questioned the value of membership as an institutional policy. I question whether it represents the church as a hospitable group of people seeking to live out the teachings of Jesus. It mimics secular corporate/social behavior for the purpose of control. With membership, the body in charge decides who is included. One example would be the churches that exited Mennonite Church USA due to disagreement about inclusion of anyone desiring Christian fellowship. Removing membership guidelines would incentivize participants to identify with a living, collective body, rather than just placing their names

in a book and identifying with those on the list as "the church." An authentic body of Christ is an interactive group collaborating in the work God is doing. I imagine an annual covenanting ceremony in which people commit to carry out the vision of the church. This would eliminate the option of being an anonymous observer.

Phil Esau, *Topeka, Kan.*

Peacebuilding and warmaking

Thank you for your editorial on the war in Afghanistan, "Counting the cost of revenge" (May 7), and reminding us that two Mennonite peacebuilders lost their lives during this war. Peacebuilding and warmaking both can be dangerous occupations. Although the dangers are high for both groups, peacebuilders' efforts make lives better — bringing eyesight for the blind (Glen Lapp) and electricity for previously dark homes (Al Geiser) — and cause no collateral damage.

Warriors often come to realize that the more enemies they kill, the more enemies they create. And then there is the collateral damage — the people and property they unintentionally destroy — and the destruction that continues for decades from the unexploded ordnance that litters the towns, villages and battlefields.

Doug Hostetter, *Evanston, Ill.*

An accurate description

"Maybe I could sit in the back row" by John Unger (May 7) corroborates my experience with LGBTQ inclusion in a church setting. Many people hurt silently until someone talks about the issue. Jesus loves everyone, regardless. In the Book of Acts there is a vivid example of how Peter started the first Christian church. The Hutterites follow that example [of sharing possessions] while we rationalize it away. Yet we pick up a much lesser example and make it doctrine or worse. This article is on target; please heed the call.

Elvin Siebert, *Omaha, Neb.*

Heartbreaking indifference

My husband and I live in Ontario's horse-and-buggy country. Many of my husband's relatives are Old Order Mennonites. In spite of our differences, we have cultivated loving bonds with our cousins. However, like Leon Kraybill ("Love your neighbor, get vaccinated," page 17, published at anabaptistworld.org on April 28), we are deeply troubled by the stand they are taking on the COVID vaccine.

We do not understand the staggering percentage of Old Order and other conser-

vative Mennonites who have apparently forgotten to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" We hear them saying, "Oh well, this doesn't really affect us." They are choosing conspiracy theories over fact and science. Their indifference is heartbreaking. I will be sending copies of Kraybill's article to our cousins.

Margaret Brubacher, *Elmira, Ont.*

I agree with Kraybill that "we are given minds to understand our health and free will to select the best options" [quoted from a longer version of the article online]. Everyone deserves informed consent — detailed and personalized cost/benefit advice. Tragically, we are casualties of a one-size-fits-all prescription via a \$1.5 billion governmental ad campaign using "trusted local officials" and an army of big biotech tools to shame, coerce and bribe citizens into experimental inoculation. These tactics promote mindless obedience to propaganda, not love.

Miriam Swope Roth, *Metamora, Ill.*

A successful merger

We appreciate *Anabaptist World*. You have combined two of our church periodicals and come out with something better. You seem to be attempting to represent our different Anabaptist communities well. You are challenging the church to be faithful in pursuing justice and mercy.

Herb and Sarah Myers, *Keezletown, Va.*

Erase legalistic lines

When we can surround our neighbors with the love and acceptance that each of us desires, then we will be true followers of Jesus. Lowell Nofziger (Letters, May 7) speaks my mind in asking why our Jesus communities even need to be discussing legalistic lines to be drawn about full inclusion of LGBTQ people into our Mennonite embrace.

I remember past questionings about whether a person in the military could be a legitimate Mennonite church member. Now, we have lovingly chosen a retired military person, Glen Guyton, as executive director of Mennonite Church USA. I'm blessed by 64 years of married love. Let's share our churches' embrace with all who desire that same blessing.

Charity Gourley, *Lenexa, Kan.*

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

Sharing or hoarding?

In God's economy, we are all stewards — caretakers but not owners

"GOD'S ECONOMY" is an offbeat idea. Our first reaction might be: God has an economy? We usually think of economies in the financial sense. So it feels strange to say God has one.

But God does, and it's different from the world's (as you might expect).

One of the root words of "economy" is the Greek *oikonomia*, literally "household management." An economy is a system of organizing, administering or taking care of things, like a household.

Oikonomia can be translated several ways. The most concise is "plan." Ephesians 1:10 says God has "a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him [Christ]."

In God's plan — or economy — Christ brings everything together.

But that will have to wait for the fullness of time.

Here and now, what does God's economy mean for us?

It means we are the stewards — the caretakers — of everything that belongs to God.

Which, of course, is everything.

THIS ISSUE OF *Anabaptist World* came together under the theme of stewardship. We felt drawn to the words of Jesus in Luke 12:48: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required."

Stewardship, like the word "economy," probably makes us think first of money and how we manage it. But stewardship is more than financial. Like "economy," it refers to how we take care of all kinds of resources. Specifically, it means being entrusted with assets that belong to someone else.

The steward is not the owner. Yet the steward is in charge. She or he has been given a great deal of responsibility.

A steward is assigned not merely to preserve the master's assets but to improve them. The servant in the par-

able of the talents who dug a hole and hid his master's money (Matthew 25) gets thrown into the outer darkness for failing to do anything but squirrel away the funds.

All of us are stewards of talents, money and other assets.

Will we share them or hoard them?

This is the question for every person and every congregation.

And it is about so much more than money.

For one, it is about land. Anabaptists in North America are gaining a broader view of stewardship by becoming more aware of a difficult truth: We live on and profit from land taken from Indigenous people.

This is the essence of stewardship: wise management that frees us to enjoy and share the fruits of God's creation.

Notions of religious and cultural superiority upheld European settlers' sense of entitlement — Mennonites included. This divine-right-to-own mentality is entrenched in white North American culture. Much work is needed to restore justice and atone for land theft and cultural destruction.

ENTITLED OWNERSHIP stands in contrast to the biblical mandate of land stewardship as defined in the remarkable law of jubilee.

God says, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants" (Leviticus 25:23). Every 50 years, all land that had been sold would revert to its former owners. Fields would lie fallow during a holy year celebrating divine provision for the caretakers of land that belonged to God.

A jubilee year of rest for the land

reminds us of another aspect of stewardship: management of time. The year of jubilee was a Sabbath, an exceptional pause after 49 years of ordinary time. In a similar way, God's plan for ordering time mandates a holy respite from normal activity once a week.

While humans stubbornly claim ownership of tangible things, we'll readily admit we don't truly possess time. The older we get, the faster it seems to slip away, and the more we understand its value as a nonrenewable resource.

In God's economy, the stewardship of time requires a Sabbath. In a new book, *The Unbroken Thread: Discovering the Wisdom of Tradition in an Age of Chaos*, Sohrab Ahmari writes that in our lives of constant activity we need a Sabbath more than ever.

Ahmari quotes a leading 20th-century rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel, who said the Sabbath frees us "not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord."

HESCHEL'S PERCEPTION of the Sabbath's gift of freedom applies to every form of stewardship. In fact, it is the essence of stewardship: wise management that frees us from grasping to own and liberates us to enjoy and share the fruits of God's creation.

Too often we have not been wise managers. Our freedom includes the power to destroy God's creation, a sin for which Christians in the Global North bear great responsibility.

Anabaptists historically have tilled the soil. We've sought to live at peace with God's creation. Many have dedicated their lives to caring for the land as a sacred trust. The command to "till and keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15) is obviously for them and figuratively for all. It's the human vocation to keep what God owns. In God's economy, we are all stewards. ●

Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship installed 20 lockers in back of the church and contracted with a formerly unhoused friend to paint them with images of flowers.

PHOTO: STEVE RAMER



BLESSED WITH NEW FRIENDS

BY DENISE STEFFENHAGEN

Opening its doors to the homeless, Colorado church becomes a true sanctuary

OUR LITTLE CHURCH, Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship, is passionate about advocating for justice, peace and helping those in need. Here in Colorado, COVID-19 restrictions went into effect in March 2020, so we opened our church building to the most vulnerable homeless people and became a true sanctuary. Although we could not let everyone in due to the pandemic, our church did become a place of friendship, food, showers, clothing and lodging — and a gathering place where the homeless help one another.

“I believe our church building, a place of worship, has finally become a true sanctuary, a place made holy by those who come in, off the streets, and grace us with their presence,” Pastor Steve Ramer said.

Nine years ago the congregation of about 50 active participants decided to open its doors to a local nonprofit, Faith Family Hospitality Network, which provides services for homeless families. We provided a place where families could come during the day for support and comfort and use laundry, shower and kitchen facilities.

Every three months, our church took



Wanting to be good financial stewards, we applied for grants, reduced our pastor's salary and increased our giving for 2021.



(Top) Members worship in the park across the street. Pastor Steve Ramer says: "One of the most difficult things regarding COVID was that we had to shut down our Saturday evening meals and showers and our Sunday morning breakfasts. Every Sunday at least a dozen or so unhoused neighbors would join us for church. We went to Zoom, which was fine for most of the housed folks, but we lost touch with many who did not have housing and access to internet on Sunday morning. We felt like we had abandoned the spiritual needs of our homeless friends. Meeting in the park did bring back some homeless folks on a regular basis. We plan to return to the park again this summer."

(Left) For Thanksgiving dinner in 2019, Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship planned a potluck with longtime housed members. "But the word got out that we had food," Pastor Steve Ramer says, "and folks started lining up outside. We could not turn them away, and it turned out we had just enough food to feed ourselves and about 50 unhoused folks."

(Right) Renee Schmidt and her dog Tinkerbell were unhoused until they moved into the Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship building in January 2020. Schmidt continues to live in the building and receives a stipend for assisting with various tasks and leadership — "a friend to all who knock on the door of the church," says Pastor Steve Ramer.

PHOTOS BY STEVE RAMER

its turn hosting four families to live in and enjoy our church building for a week. This rotation of hosting families had to stop during the pandemic for safety reasons, and the families are living in a large church at this time.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we provided a place for home-cooked meals, laundry and hot showers for up to 200 homeless people each week. We installed 20 large lockers outside the back of our church, with an application system to determine the need and assign lockers.

Today, homeless people keep their personal belongings safe in the lockers during the day while they work, look for work or travel to and from various locations for meals and support.

During the pandemic, the church has housed about 25 people in total, often 10 or 12 at a time. Seven have been living in the church this month.

WE WELCOME THE UNHOUSED because we want to follow Jesus' teaching that "what you do to the least, you do to me." Also, during the pandemic we desired to become true stewards of our little church building and make sure it did not sit closed and empty. In sharing our resource of a building with those who had no place of their own, we have been blessed with new friends.

Our 2020 budget was not formulated with the added expenses of utilities,

food, clothing and toiletries for people living in our church building all day, seven days a week for over a year.

Wanting to be good financial stewards, we applied for grants, reduced our pastor's salary and increased our giving for 2021.

Since that wasn't enough, we just started a GoFundMe fundraiser, gofundme.com/true-sanctuary-for-the-homeless, to extend this homeless sanctuary as long as needed, during this pandemic, to protect the lives of our unhoused friends.

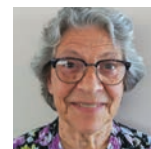
For the past year, like many churches, we moved our worship services to Zoom. Our pastor personally delivered the new hymnal, *Voices Together*, to all of us so that we might become acquainted with it during our time away.

During the summer we met, socially distanced, in the park across the street from our church. Just as before the pandemic, numerous unhoused neighbors joined us to worship outdoors in "God's cathedral." This spring we look forward to having our services outdoors again, when the weather is warm, so we can welcome our old and new friends back to in-person church.

The fellowship has become close to the people needing assistance and has seen some of them move on into housing, jobs or just going back to family. Our pastor and the elders continue to think up new ways to make life a

little more comfortable and to share our blessings with the large homeless community in Fort Collins.

Recently some of the grass in front of the church was removed by volunteers, and pavers are being placed for an outdoor meeting area with tables, umbrellas and chairs for the homeless community to enjoy. ●



Denise Steffenhagen is a member of Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship, retired high school teacher, vice president of her homeowner association and community activist. To learn more about FCMF, visit Facebook @fcmennonite or the congregation's website, fcmennonite.org.

BY LORI GUENTHER REESOR

*From everyone
to whom much
has been given,
much will be
required.*

— LUKE 12:48

‘Bring me another beer’

PHOTO BY PRADNYAL GANDHI ON UNSPLASH

Who does the party steward in Luke 12 remind us of?

THE MASTER OF a big estate, with many slaves or servants, goes away on a long trip. He leaves one servant in charge of making sure everyone gets enough to eat. What could go wrong?

(In some translations, Luke 12:35-48 uses language of master and slave, which is troubling. Violence as an appropriate punishment is also disturbing. Yet, the parable bears a message

for many — especially for white Christians, who often assume the role of the steward left in charge.)

When the master comes home, he’s so impressed with the diligent steward that he puts the steward in charge of all his possessions.

If Jesus’ story ended here, we would be left with encouragement to take good care of creation and of others, to be a faithful steward of the kingdom — at the very least, to make sure everyone has enough to eat.

The story reminds us to be ready. We don’t know when our master is returning.

But then the scene changes. This is not the end. What if the steward partied?

Hasn’t he earned it?

In verse 45, the party steward begins beating the other servants and overin-

dulging — eating, drinking and getting drunk. Has the steward been given much, or has he taken much? Will the other servants have enough to eat if the steward squanders the supplies? The steward beats those who dare to question him.

Who knows when the master is coming back? The party steward takes charge. He thinks himself better than everyone else.

You over there, bring me another beer!

The master has been gone so long that the steward figures the stuff belongs to him now. Hasn’t he earned it, keeping track of all these servants and all this food? Does no one appreciate how hard he works?

The older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son might easily have become the party steward if the father had left: Justify the drinking as a

means to relax. Abuse the workers. Who cares, as long as the share price stays high? Anyway, it's my business now. The old man is never coming back.

A violent ending

The old man does come back. The party steward has mistreated his fellow servants. Then it's lashes and flogging, judgment and condemnation. Unlike the diligent steward, the party steward has not made sure everyone had enough to eat. He has not been concerned with the others' welfare.

Unlike the Prodigal Son, the party steward doesn't confess. He doesn't think he's done anything wrong. The party steward acted like everything was his. The Prodigal Son knows he has nothing and turns to his father for food. The Prodigal Son is willing to become a servant like the others. The party steward thinks he is better than everyone else.

The diligent steward is blessed, the party steward is punished. This justice has hard edges.

Diligent stewards are punished

The news in my neighborhood brings another plot twist.

What if the diligent steward was trapped in an unjust system? I squirm when I realize I am the party steward, the one eating up all the supplies at the expense of the others.

Where I live, COVID-19 is ravaging racialized communities working in warehouses to keep the stores stocked. These good stewards make sure everyone has enough to eat. They are paying a heavy price for their diligence. They are literally the people who deliver another beer, another package, another grocery order.

In a cruel twist on the story, today the diligent stewards are being punished while the party stewards rock on in the comfort and safety of their homes.

In the Luke story, the party steward is mistreating the others directly. In current realities, the party steward can feign ignorance by outsourcing the exploitation. Or deny responsibility by claiming ownership: "It's my money, I do what I want."

In a cruel twist on the story, today the diligent stewards are being punished while the party stewards rock on in the comfort and safety of their homes.

It's all God's stuff

Mine, mine, mine. The temptation to claim ownership and control over people and things that belong to God runs through this passage.

It is all God's stuff. All on loan. We've earned none of it. We are responsible to God for how we live, and God displays a keen interest in making sure everyone has enough to eat. God is in charge; everything and everyone belongs to God.

When we acknowledge that everything belongs to God, then we can trust. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for

your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

I cling to that promise. God is generous, and we can trust God to provide. We have enough to share. Even when it seems like the world is run by party stewards. Even when we are tempted to think God's stuff is our stuff.

In Luke 12:37, there is yet another ending to the story. The master comes home from a wedding feast and waits on the servants while they recline at the table. It is an astonishing act of humility, a reversal of roles. The master makes sure everyone has enough to eat. May that day soon come. Be ready. ●



Lori Guenther Reesor of Mississauga, Ont., has been a Mennonite pastor and recently published *Growing a Generous Church: A Year in the Life of Peach Blossom Church*. She blogs at lgresor.com

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Conversation on death brings new life to church land

Pennsylvania congregation plans a memory garden and nature preserve

BY **BROOK MUSSELMAN**

AFTER A 2012 seminar on end-of-life planning, members of Akron Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania were intrigued by the idea of nontraditional burials. The congregation's cemetery offered traditional plots, but nothing like the green burials or columbarium space the seminar attendees were imagining.

(Top) Akron Mennonite Church is hoping to transform its outdoor property into a four-acre memory garden and nature preserve, incorporating a columbarium and space for green burials.

(Bottom) Akron Mennonite Church's lawn overlooks the Conestoga Valley, and plans call for that view to be preserved.

PHOTOS: AKRON MENNONITE CHURCH

The vision for transforming the church's outdoor space grew from there. This year the congregation hopes to break ground on a four-acre Akron Memory Garden and Nature Preserve, which will incorporate the existing burial ground and repurpose a large lawn to include a nature preserve and education area, walking paths and columbarium.

Members had long been interested in putting the church's lawn space to better use. John Weber, former moderator of Mennonite Church USA's Atlantic Coast Conference and chair of the project's planning committee, said the original vision was not to repurpose the lawn. But the project evolved "to embrace a nature preserve as more consistent with an Anabaptist and pro-environment theology." The nature preserve will enhance biodiversity and increase natural pollinators.

The preserve was designed to be a place for contemplation and reflection, while also preserving the view across the Conestoga Valley. Planners considered neighbors' interests and hope the new space will be inviting to community members.

Planning involved collaboration outside of the congregation. Planners leaned heavily on assistance, funding and advice from the Lancaster Conservancy and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the latter of which plans to contribute many of the trees that will be planted.

Several Lancaster City Mennonite congregations have expressed interest in contributing to the project. It has also been approved for funding from the JoinTrees program of Mennonite Men, which has a goal of working with congregations to plant one million trees by 2030.

The congregation hopes to begin groundbreaking and host volunteers and educational events as soon as the fall if the contribution goal is met. ●



Brook Musselman is conference coordinator for Atlantic Coast Conference of Mennonite Church USA. This article was first published in *ACC Currents*.

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Mennonite Men

BY J RON BYLER

MY NEIGHBOR AT THE BORDER

About one-third of the U.S.-Mexico border, just over 650 miles, has a vehicle or pedestrian barrier. This photo was taken about 30 miles east of Douglas, Ariz.

PHOTOS BY J RON BYLER

O N A WINDING dirt road east of Nogales, Ariz., just north of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, I turned a corner and came to an abrupt stop. A half dozen Border Patrol vehicles blocked the road. I watched as eight or 10 young men — handcuffed, apparently just apprehended crossing the border — were shoved into cages in the back of Border Patrol vans.

For the next two weeks I volunteered in Agua Prieta, Mexico, with church ministries responding to the needs of migrants. At the Migrant Resource Center, just steps away from the official border crossing into Mexico from Douglas, Ariz., I watched as young men like the ones I saw east of Nogales were expelled back across the border into Mexico each day. They thanked us for the food and drink but were also intent on getting in touch with their guides, most cartel-controlled, who would help them try again to cross into the United States.

What compels people to leave everything they own and the families they love to endure the indignities I observed on the border? Could it be that the violence and poverty they flee leave them with no other choices?

Just more than a year ago, before the pandemic and before I retired as executive director of Mennonite Central Committee U.S., I spent two weeks on the border, driving the 1,500

Immigrants are fleeing violence and poverty. What would it mean to take Jesus into our homes?

A mural at the Migrant Resource Center adjacent to the border crossing in Agua Prieta, Mexico, welcomes people who have recently been deported. The center is a partnership of churches and organizations working together to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need.





(Left) Artist Alvaro Enciso, left, with J Ron Byler, plants crosses where migrants have died crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. In six years, he has planted almost 1,000 crosses in the Sonoran desert. In Pima County, Ariz., alone, about 150 people die each year along the border wall.

(Right) Each week since COVID began, Linda and Jack Knox of Douglas, Ariz., meet their friend David Bonilla of Agua Prieta, Mexico, at the border wall. A former Mennonite pastoral couple in Oregon, the Knoxes have hosted hundreds of Mennonites and other visitors who want to learn more about border issues. Bonilla and his wife, Marina, former Mennonite Brethren pastors and MCC workers, now work for *Frontera de Cristo*, a Presbyterian border ministry.

miles from where the border wall juts into the Pacific Ocean south of San Diego to where the wall extends into the Gulf of Mexico in south Texas. I visited churches and other ministries responding to the needs of migrants.

In the tent city in Matamoros, Mexico, just across the border from Brownsville, Texas, I met a family who had fled violence in Honduras. The young father told me his uncle and aunt had been murdered in front of their children, and his own father, a Mennonite pastor, was harassed by the gangs. The family had already been in the tent city for more than six months.

A year later, just before I traveled to Arizona in March, this family was finally released into the United States. They are now temporarily living with a host family on the west coast and awaiting their asylum hearing. Like many asylum-seeking families and unaccompanied children crossing the border, they came legally and followed the law. They got in line — an 18-month-long line in a tent city.

TIME AFTER TIME, in this trip and the earlier one, I heard stories of families fleeing desperate situations hoping for a better life in the United States. How should we respond as a Christian community to these overwhelming needs?

On the Sunday after I returned from my recent trip to the border, my Sunday school class was studying Isaiah 58, where the prophet says clearly that our worship and our efforts to seek God mean little if we are not actively seeking justice, sharing our bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into our houses. We saw the parallels in Jesus' own words in Matthew 25 about when we welcome the stranger, it is as if we are welcoming Jesus himself.

I remembered the weekly vigil I joined near the border crossing in Douglas/Agua Prieta, where a small group of Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, prayed each week for migrants who have died in the desert crossing the border. I heard one participant say, "It's not a problem, people coming to the border seeking refuge, but it is a problem with how we are [not] receiving them."

The young father told me his uncle and aunt had been murdered in front of their children, and his own father, a Mennonite pastor, was harassed by the gangs in Honduras.

As we face the challenges on our southern border, what would it mean to take Jesus into our homes?

We can certainly support Mennonite Brethren and other Mennonite churches near the border who are responding to the needs of migrants in places like Tucson, Ariz.; in south Texas and in San Antonio; in El Paso, Nogales and elsewhere. And we can support Brethren in Christ and Mennonite congregations in Mexico in the border region.

We can raise our voices for change in our national immigration policies by staying connected with MCC's Washington Office and urging our congressional representatives to respond. Ask the Biden administration to fully restore asylum protections as international law requires. We can also learn more about border issues through learning tours and other educational resources.

In my community in Goshen, Ind., I have started to volunteer with Center for Healing and Hope, whose vision includes responding to the needs of undocumented immigrants in our community. Are there ways you can respond in your own community?

MEANWHILE, ALONG the U.S.-Mexico border, the drug trade continues unabated, guns and money come south at record levels, and the cartel in Mexico figures out new ways to get people across the border wall. The people I talked to on the border say the border wall does little to stop any of it.

In Matthew 22, Jesus tells us the greatest commandment is loving God, and the second is like it: Loving our neighbor. Maybe our job is not to worry so much about the border itself but simply to learn to love God and love our neighbors who are crossing to seek a better life. In doing so, we may be receiving Jesus himself. ●



J Ron Byler concluded 10 years of service as Mennonite Central Committee U.S. executive director in 2020. He has been on the U.S.-Mexico border a half dozen times in as many years.

BY MARTIN NAVARRO

Grants help Latino churches stretch resources to get through the pandemic

MULTIPLYING LOAVES & FISH

LATINO MENNONITE CHURCHES across the United States are practicing stewardship in ways that have brought hope to a community that continues to struggle due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Three organizations — Everence, Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service — collaborated to provide \$800,000 of financial relief to churches during the pandemic. These grants were a saving grace for several Anabaptist churches. Uses of the money ranged from paying churches' financial obligations to helping families bury their loved ones.

Like Jesus miraculously feeding a multitude, pastors were on the front lines to make their members' "five loaves and two fish" multiply. The biblical story gives insight on how community looks: Showing love through meeting needs. Providing assistance with no strings attached. Making a little go a long way to meet the needs of many.

Stories from these Latino churches reveal the challenges people face within an unjust economic system. Members who worked in factories or the hospitality industry were especially at risk of

infection. On the west coast, members of Mennonite Brethren churches were infected while picking fruit.

Congregants had to choose between working to sustain their families or staying home to protect them. Churches needed to help families stay safe and not go hungry. Similar challenges were seen in the Midwest.

Financial and health crises affect communities of color more severely than the population at large.

Latino Mennonite churches in Chicago saw a drop in attendance and financial giving. A pastor took a significant pay cut. When his church received a COVID relief grant, instead of using it for his personal expenses he helped people in his faith community buy groceries and pay overdue utility bills. This included partially funding funerals for a father and son who died of COVID-related illnesses.

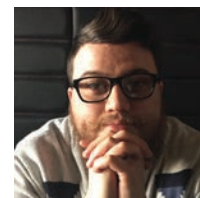
Cristobal Aleman, pastor of two Mennonite Brethren Hispanic congregations in Fresno and Raisin City, Calif., was concerned about his undocumented members who lacked access to government aid or health insurance during the pandemic. The congregations used a grant from the COVID-19 Congregational Relief Fund — provided by Everence, MCC and MDS — for food and utilities for members, food banks run by the churches and funding for an assistant pastor who hadn't received a salary during the pandemic. PHOTO: DINA GONZALEZ-PIÑA/MCC

THE PANDEMIC REVEALED a truth many churches of color already knew: Financial and health crises affect communities of color more severely than the population at large. Many do not have adequate access to health care or health insurance. Negligent employers have failed to protect their employees.

Undocumented members of our faith communities couldn't receive unemployment benefits or economic stimulus funds. They were left out of those benefits due to their immigration status. In Pasadena, Texas, *Casa del Alfarero* (The Potter's House), helped undocumented immigrants survive by purchasing groceries and connecting them with local nonprofits. The church became their financial lifeline. This was possible through mutual aid and the COVID relief fund.

The pandemic has magnified stewardship challenges and raised questions for the Anabaptist community: As disciples of Jesus, what are we called to do with the money we are blessed with? How do we understand others who might not be in the same financial situation? How does empathy for those in need play a role in our spiritual practices of stewardship?

Our companions on this stewardship journey include our fellow believers who have given their five loaves and two fish to feed the least of these. ●



Martin Navarro of Elkhart, Ind., is a stewardship consultant with Everence and associate conference minister for Illinois Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA. In both roles he serves the Latino community.

Love your neighbor, get vaccinated

AT TIMES OF CRISIS, we turn to our core beliefs for guidance. I call for a faithful COVID crisis response from the people of my Mennonite church and the broader Christian faith, grounded in the principles and ethics of our tradition. Faithfulness is not just a Sunday word but a life lived Monday through Saturday, revealed by our daily choices.

COVID infection is a real and present health crisis. I have seen the suffering of my patients, the multiple deaths and the grief of families. As part of a COVID support team, I have witnessed the devastation in nursing homes that contributed to 1,000 deaths in Lancaster County, Pa.

As we faced this grueling COVID pandemic, I have been distressed and angered to see Mennonites arguing against simple and practical protective measures. These same people give generously of time and resources elsewhere yet do not apply the same principles to COVID control.

My faith and trust in God fully support getting a COVID vaccine, wearing a mask and avoiding close gatherings with others. In fact, my faith in God and love for my neighbor are what compel me to receive a vaccine and take appropriate precautions.

Some people forgo COVID safety and say God will take care of them. While trust in God allows us to face life with confidence, I do not believe God micromanages our lives, fixing our careless or selfish choices.

Every day we make safety choices, not because we do not trust God but because that is our responsibility. We put on a coat in freezing temperatures. We wear seatbelts. We keep our small children away from busy roads. We accept antibiotics. We take blood-pressure medicine to prevent strokes.

Ignoring commonsense precautions is a willful decision not to follow principles of health and safety. The choice to get a vaccine or wear a mask is exactly like these other safety choices.

Our bodies are temples of God to be protected from harm. COVID infection destroys God-given bodies. We honor



Mariane Grace, a Goshen College senior nursing major from Bristol, Ind., administers a vaccine shot to Adriana Martinez Diaz De Leon of Goshen. PHOTO: GOSHEN COLLEGE

the miracle of our bodies by receiving a vaccine to strengthen our natural defenses. We preserve health by wearing masks and keeping physical distance. We protect our families by guiding them to best health practices.

I have been distressed and angered to see Mennonites arguing against simple protective measures.

The faith community values the sanctity of life and works to preserve life. We should be distressed by the more than 570,000 COVID deaths in the U.S. and more than 3 million deaths worldwide. Getting a COVID vaccination and wearing a mask prevent illness and death. A decision to do otherwise seems to disregard the value of life, giving higher value to money or personal rights or politics.

The biblical story of Jesus tells of his compassion and healing for the sick. Church history models ministry to the ill. Our efforts to limit or prevent COVID continue the biblical example and historical mission of the church.

Community is important in faith traditions, as we gather for religious services, singing and meals. Unfortunately, these events are high risk for

COVID transmission, proven by extensive outbreaks in those who ignore precautions. Vaccination eventually allows safe worship with our community.

MY UPBRINGING TAUGHT frugality and conservation of resources. Good health is our most precious resource. The ultimate COVID price is death, but up to 30% of people infected with COVID experience months of fatigue, loss of taste and smell, or brain fog.

COVID precautions are economically responsible. COVID infection results in time off work, loss of income and medical bills. Vaccines, masks and physical distancing are not expensive. Diligent use of these measures will help to allow reopening of society.

COVID causes emotional health issues such as isolation, loneliness and depression. We must meet the needs of the “poor in spirit.” COVID immunization will allow us to minister to mental-health needs sooner.

In our COVID discussions, we have sometimes lost compassion for our neighbors and concern for our communities. We have focused on our personal choices and being right. We have replaced the “we” with “me.”

I call us back to the ideals of loving our neighbors. To biblical principles of compassion for others. To stewardship of our health and resources. To valuing life. To using our talents to make wise choices. To being less rigid about our personal rights and more flexible for community good. To embracing safe and inexpensive precautions such as COVID vaccination and masks, which will achieve the goal of resuming our normal lives. ●



Leon Kraybill is a geriatrician and certified medical director who works in post-acute and long-term care. He attends Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Pa.



Ohio's Amish suffered a lot from COVID, but vaccines still a hard sell

There's an acceptance that people will get sick and get better — or not

THE AMISH COMMUNITIES of north-eastern Ohio engage in textbook communal living. Families eat, work and go to church together, and through the pandemic, mask-wearing and physical distancing have been spotty. That has meant that these communities bore a high rate of infection and death.

Despite this, health officials are struggling to encourage residents to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Holmes County, where half the population is Amish, has the lowest vaccina-

tion rate in Ohio, with just 10% of the population fully vaccinated.

"About less than a percent [of Amish] are coming in," said Holmes County health commissioner Michael Derr.

Marcus Yoder, who was born Amish and is now Mennonite, said the few Amish who are getting the shots are doing so privately through doctors' offices and small rural clinics — and they generally are keeping it to themselves.

"There were Amish people getting the vaccination the same day I was . . . and we all kind of looked at each other and smiled underneath our masks and assumed that we wouldn't say that we saw them," Yoder said.

Many Amish do not want to get vaccinated because they've already had COVID and believe the area has reached herd immunity, he said.

"I think one of the main driving forces is the misinformation about COVID itself — that it's not more seri-



There's oftentimes frequent breakouts of whooping cough in a settlement, and it's like . . . 'We're in whooping cough season, so it's time to deal with this sort of thing.'

Lancaster County, Pa., Amish walk to church on a Sunday morning. Health departments in Lancaster County, Pa., are connecting with Amish bishops to try to spread the word about COVID-19 vaccines.

PHOTO: DALE D. GEHMAN FOR ANABAPTIST WORLD

ous than the flu,” said Yoder, who lives in Holmes County and still has close ties to the religion and community. “They’re saying, ‘Well, it didn’t affect me that much. Look at all these old people who survived.’”

Anti-vaccination conspiracy theories also have spread throughout the community, and there is a lack of awareness about the more contagious variants spreading across the country, Yoder said.

“I think we’re going to see some more cases in our community, unfortunately, because of this,” he said. “There simply is a lot of COVID news fatigue. They simply do not want to hear about it, and that’s really unfortunate.”

While some sort of herd immunity could explain why Holmes currently has a low incidence of new cases, Derr at the health department is concerned that those who previously had the virus may not be protected.

“As a region, we definitely surged over the winter, and we know that that happened about 90 days ago,” Derr said. “We’re primed and ready for another surge because we’re not vaccinating enough.”

Health officials in Indiana and Pennsylvania are also ramping up outreach in heavily Amish areas. Local health

— Rachel Stein,
West Virginia University sociologist

departments in Lancaster County, Pa., are connecting with Amish bishops to try to spread the word about the vaccines.

THE WIDESPREAD RELUCTANCE to be vaccinated in Amish communities is not surprising to West Virginia University sociologist Rachel Stein, who studies Amish populations.

“We as non-Amish are more on board with preventative medicine,” Stein said. “They certainly don’t have that mindset that we need to do things to stop this from happening.”

Instead, she said, there’s an acceptance that people will get sick and get better — or not. While childhood vaccinations have increased in Ohio’s Amish communities in recent years, adults are still more hesitant, she added.

“There’s oftentimes frequent breakouts of whooping cough in a settlement, and it’s like . . . ‘We’re in whooping cough season, and so it’s time to deal with this sort of thing.’” she said.

In 2014, a measles outbreak spread rapidly through Ohio’s largely unvaccinated Amish communities. Even after this experience, many Amish residents

chose not to vaccinate their children against other diseases.

The low vaccination interest in Holmes County also follows national trends showing residents of rural areas are less likely to consider getting vaccinated.

A recent poll from KFF found 3 in 10 rural residents will “definitely not” get a COVID vaccine or will get vaccinated only if it is mandated.

YODER THINKS THE BEST path forward is to encourage Amish residents who did get the vaccine to talk openly about their positive experience getting the shots.

“I think that hammering people for not doing it will not get us anywhere,” Yoder said. “Some of the local business leaders have done very, very well at saying, ‘Look, let’s get the vaccination so we don’t have to wear masks in the future, so we don’t have to worry about social distancing as much in the future.’ And they’ve used that tack and that has been a healthy way to approach it.”

Derr is trying to get business owners who employ Amish workers to encourage their staffers to get a shot. Health officials hope to eventually hold vaccine clinics at these businesses and take the shots to them, but not every business owner is on board with that yet, he said.

“People are going to listen to their friends and their family, people who they interact with more, and it’s going to be that telephone effect,” he said. “The more and more people we tell about it and the better experiences they have, word will get around.”

Derr expects more Amish will get vaccinated in the fall after the shots have been around for some time but worries that the community could see a spike in cases long before then. ●

Kaiser Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at Kaiser Family Foundation. KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation. This story is part of a partnership that includes WCPN-Ideastream, National Public Radio and KHN.

South Central leadership proposes to dissolve MC USA area conference

WITH MEMBERS DIVIDED between leaving Mennonite Church USA or staying, leaders of South Central Mennonite Conference are proposing that the conference dissolve.

A Network Leadership Team resolution, announced in early May, would end the conference, allowing each congregation to choose its own affiliation.

Delegates will consider the resolution at their annual assembly July 23-25 at Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston, Kan.

A nearly yearlong “discovery process” focused on God’s call for member congregations and an assessment of their relationship with MC USA. The process revealed some churches “believe strongly that it is time for SCMC to leave MC USA” while others “are unwilling to cut those ties.”

South Central Conference counts an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 people in 35 churches and church plants in Kansas, Missouri, Colorado, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. The conference offices are located at Whitestone Mennonite Church.

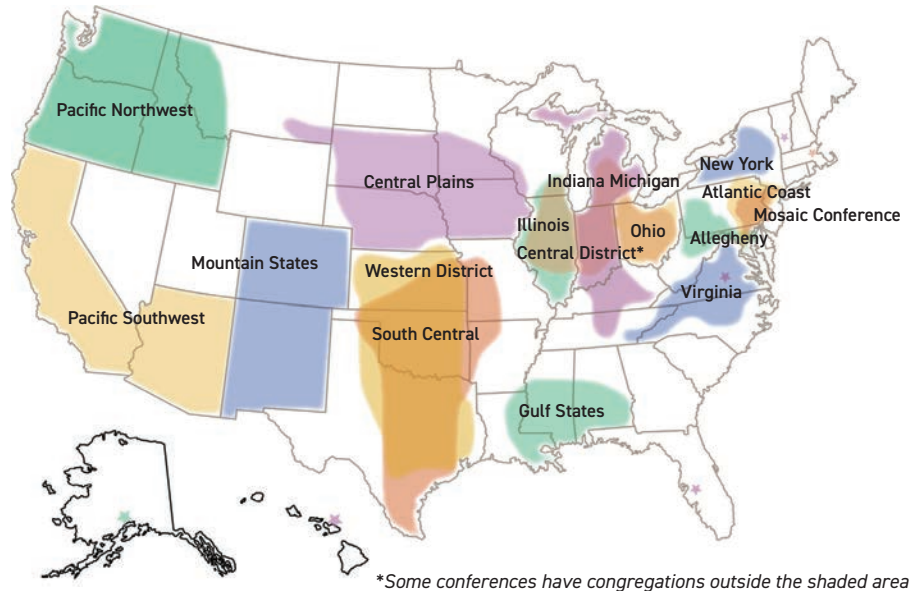
South Central network chair Gary Wolfer said a clear divide emerged in a survey in late 2020. Of 19 congregations participating, 47% said their affiliation with MC USA was meaningful, and 47% said it was not.

“It’s fairly striking, and as a leadership team we felt like if we got together to discuss this [division], it was just going to be another one of those meetings we have had over the last 20 years where we are just talking at each other,” he said.

“Given that clear divide, we decided it was best to propose something that addressed it.”

He believes the conference is likely going in two directions regardless of whether the measure passes.

The original discernment process outline shared with congregations stated, “We are in a time of moral discernment, theological realignments and changing affiliations in Menno-



*Some conferences have congregations outside the shaded area

South Central Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA shares a similar geographic footprint with Western District Conference, and several congregations have had dual affiliation in the past.

GRAPHIC: MENNONITE CHURCH USA

nite Church USA, with the result that MC USA has significantly changed in its composition of churches and its theological orientation. . . .

“The advocacy for the sanctification of same-sex relations in Mennonite Church USA, some pastors conducting same-sex covenant services with the approval of their area conferences and a few pastors living in same-sex relationships has brought us to a tipping point.”

THE RESOLUTION PROPOSES a 12-month transition period in which the conference remains with MC USA while congregations select an affiliation with another denomination or network, create their own conference with other South Central churches or become independent, concluding on or about July 24, 2022.

“Shock is the initial response from pretty much everyone,” said Wolfer of feedback he’s received since the proposal was shared. “I think the reason

why is because it’s a third way. It’s not this side or that side wins.

“I want to make clear that I’m not pressing for this to pass. I’m not sitting here saying that’s what we need to do. This is what we came to when we discerned where God is taking us. I don’t know where he’s taking us, and I’m not going to try to manipulate it or push it. I want to offer this and listen to what God says.”

SOME CONGREGATIONS have strong ties to MC USA. Hesston Mennonite Church in Kansas shares much of its building and grounds with Hesston College, a member of Mennonite Education Agency. The MC USA racial-ethnic constituency group *Iglesia Menonita Hispana*, which counts about 60 congregations, is led by executive director Abraham Ulises Arena, pastor of *Iglesia Menonita Buenas Nuevas*, a South Central congregation in San Juan, Texas.

Eleven South Central congregations

in Texas form *Unidad Cristiana de Iglesias Menonitas* (Christian Union of Mennonite Churches), and all are part of IMH.

Arena said relationships with other IMH members are important within UCIM. Also vital are IMH programs that share Spanish education, ministry and camp resources.

“We are deciding what is the next step for us as a group,” he said of UCIM. “We will try to stay together no matter what happens with South Central Conference. We will have a meeting at the end of May, and we will decide then.”

In response to questions from *Anabaptist World*, Glen Guyton, executive director of MC USA, said: “Our prayers are with the communities and people of SCMC. The inability of the conference leadership to find a path forward centered around a common vision is problematic. As Anabaptist Christians, we embrace our radical roots centered on the life of Christ and community — not the divisions orchestrated by man. . . .

“We are deeply invested in how this process will impact our members and pastors.”

SOUTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE was created by the 1920 merger of two (Old) Mennonite Church groups that formed in the 1870s. The Missouri-Iowa and Kansas-Nebraska conferences joined to become a body that later became known as South Central Mennonite Conference in 1946. It is one of 16 area conferences in MC USA.

If the conference dissolves, congregations that want to remain in MC USA could find a geographic home in Western District Conference, whose territory overlaps with South Central.

“For congregations that want to become part of Western District, I know their conference has traditionally been in [the summer], and this would allow them to have their papers in order and taken care of before the conference would dissolve,” Wolfer said.

South Central and Western District share a youth ministry network team and have a history of dual-affiliated congregations. The two conferences explored a merger in the 1990s and early 2000s. ●

Young doctor charts a path of caring

ELA CASTRO ALWAYS KNEW she wanted to spend her life serving those in need. She studied for years to earn her medical degree. She worked at a clinic. She was helping people, but something was missing. The 30-year-old felt called to serve, not just to work for a paycheck.

But it wasn't until she took a step of faith that she truly felt like she'd found her purpose.

Through a connection at her home church, *Iglesia Menonita Central* in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Castro heard about a one-year term of service with YAMEN, the Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network.

YAMEN offers young adults from outside Canada and the U.S. an opportunity to serve, grow and learn in an international placement. It is a joint program of Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference.

Castro's education and experience made her a good fit for a placement providing medical care to migrants supported by an MCC partner in Guatemala City.

“YAMEN is a great place for people to confirm their gift and their call, and for me it was proof that I can do something different than other doctors are called to do,” she said.

Casa del Migrante (The Migrant House) provides shelter, food and medical care to thousands of migrants passing through Guatemala as well as deported Guatemalans.

“There was a 9-year-old girl who was a migrant, and she was vomiting. She was not doing well. We didn't have all the medicine we needed at the shelter to treat her well,” Castro said.

She wanted to bring the girl to a hospital, but the girl's parents pleaded not to because they'd been treated poorly by doctors in the past. After a few hours of Castro's care, the girl recovered.



Ela Castro, a 2019-20 YAMEN participant, works in January 2020 at Casa del Migrante in Guatemala City.

PHOTO: SAMUEL GAITAN / CASA DEL MIGRANTE

“They really thanked me more than I expected and needed, because it wasn't me, it was God working,” Castro said. “That same day was a celebration at The Migrant House, and the girl was hanging around with me until she was ready to go to bed. I told her I was going to keep her in my prayers, and I've continued praying for her even after I left.”

CASTRO'S TIME WITH YAMEN prepared her for one of the most challenging years she'd ever faced.

When she finished her term in June, she returned home to find her parents both sick with COVID-19. Her father died from the disease just weeks after her return.

While caring for her mother, Castro and her boyfriend and sister also contracted the virus. They all recovered — but only months later, hurricanes Iota and Eta struck Central America. Castro and her mother joined a group run by a local Mennonite church to offer medical care and relief.

Castro recently got married and is providing medical care through home visits or phone calls as she determines the next step for her path to helping people who need it most. ●



Colombian Mennonites join national protests seeking economic justice

MENNONITES IN COLOMBIA asked international siblings in faith for prayers in early May after a wave of protests and violence broke out across the country.

Demonstrations began on April 28, growing into a national movement by May 5 over a proposed tax law that critics say would further repress small businesses and those living in economic insecurity already hardest hit by the pandemic. There are also new health-care and pension reforms that affect low-income families with new or expanded taxes. Many members of churches in Colombia marched with protesters to help ensure a peaceful demand for justice.

As protests grew, demands expanded beyond the right-wing government's withdrawn tax reform to other social, political and economic grievances.

Human rights groups raised concerns about excessive violence by riot police and other security forces. Protestors said police fired on crowds, and estimates of deaths were in the dozens.

“We had to take a side and join the people who are suffering the social, economic and political effects of the regime.”

— José Antonio Vaca

Many of the reported deaths were in Cali, the city that became the center of anti-government protests against poverty and inequality. By May 10 there were reports of police allowing armed

civilians to shoot protesters, especially Indigenous people blocking roads.

“There have been young people killed, policemen injured, places burned, military patrols and house searches in the poorest places, [which were] raided on the grounds that there are explosives or weapons,” wrote Yalile Caballero, president of the Colombian Mennonite Church, or IMCOL, in a Mennonite Church Canada release. “It is a time of chaos, uncertainty and much pain. Please keep us in your prayers.”

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION in demonstrations vary among the nation's Mennonite churches. The Mennonite Church of Ibagué has taken part in nonviolent marches and protests.

José Antonio Vaca, a member of the church, said some members wanted to



Representatives of *JustaPaz* — among other citizens, human rights workers and labor union members — join demonstrations in Bogotá, Colombia. PHOTO: REBEKAH YORK/MMN

do something more than wishing their best and offering prayers.

“Inside our church we have a display with the call from Jesus to be on the side of the oppressed, never on the side of the oppressor,” he said, noting he was not speaking for the entire conference or congregation. “We had to take a side and join the people who are suffering the social, economic and political effects of the regime that governs us — a regime that for some of us is a regime of death that doesn’t look out for the well-being of those in need.

“In this context, we believe that Jesus invites us to take a side and take action.”

The Ibagué congregation has relationships with the Human Rights Defense Committee of Tolima. In addition to marching with the group, the

Daniel Vargas, Pastor Amanda Valencia and Gloria Bastidas of the Mennonite Church of Ibagué march with the Human Rights Defense Committee of Tolima. The sign says, “Imagine . . . a country where your life is not at risk when fighting for your rights.”

PHOTO: JOSÉ ANTONIO VACA

church has supported it financially and given it a space to meet in the building.

“We have to make changes where justice can be achieved peacefully, especially in our violent context in Colombia where for more than 60 years we have learned to respond to violence with more violence,” Vaca said. “We believe Jesus leads us to make peaceful changes.”

JUSTAPAZ — IMCOL’S peace, justice and nonviolent action arm — has been documenting abuses and violence during protests. The organization reported that “massive displacements continue” among churches on the Pacific coast of Nariño. More than 50 families were affected by fighting between FARC dissidents and paramilitaries in La Tola and El Charco; two women from the churches were killed. *JustaPaz* has documented more than 5,000 displaced people in this region just this year.

Mennonite Mission Network worker Rebekah York marched with *JustaPaz*

on May 5 in Bogotá in solidarity with protesters demanding the right to life, dignity and human flourishing.

She described “the sights and sounds that engulfed my senses”: “Whistles blowing; horns blaring; people shouting through muffled facemasks, ‘*viva paro nacional*’ (long live the national strike) and ‘*el pueblo unido jamás será vencido*’ (the people united will never be defeated); empty aluminum pots being clanked against each other in nonviolent protest; the vibrant primary colors of the Colombian flag never out of sight; people waving white flags of solidarity out apartment windows; the cacophony of stomping, singing and dancing.”

York wrote that Peter Stucky, pastor of Teusaquillo Mennonite Church, said Mennonites march because “like the resurrected Jesus with those on the road to Emmaus, we walk alongside people and reveal insights about Jesus and Scriptures.”

Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia published a joint statement with *JustaPaz* urging “the government and civil society to pursue and deepen dialogue and negotiation on policies that will guide us toward equitable development, just peace and full respect for human rights.” ●



Ohio school leader resigns, board reorganizes after ‘personal attacks’

CENTRAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL in Kidron, Ohio, has restructured its board of trustees after its superintendent resigned and the previous board stepped aside in March.

Superintendent Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi submitted a letter of resignation March 8 to school families, citing the breaking of a covenant signed by each parent to seek change in a respectful and orderly manner.

“In the past months, I have experienced increasingly personal attacks on my faith and my integrity,” she wrote.

Jantzi wrote that social media posts and people without governance roles organized to remove her from her position. She received affirmation for her leadership and Christian priorities from colleagues and parents of students who know her.

“However, for those who do not know me, I have become a lightning rod and a symbol for everything they fear,” she wrote. “As an experienced leader, I know that I cannot please all the people all the time. It is particularly unfortunate that my four years as superintendent have coincided with an extremely divisive, contentious and fearful time in our nation, local community and even in our families.”

Former board president Michelle Steffen wrote in a March 10 email to families that Jantzi had been an exceptional Anabaptist leader.

“We have made decisions as a board and left Jeanne to defend them on her own,” Steffen wrote at the time. “Since we carry the brokenness, in our failure to stand by her this board will be stepping aside as soon as a restructured board is approved by the corporation.”

STEFFEN SAID IN A MAY 6 interview that polarization from the presidential election and the cultural climate of the nation, coupled with physical distancing, had a significant negative impact on the year.

“The general lack of trust, false



Shortly after Central Christian School's superintendent resigned in March, the school's board of trustees stepped aside pending a restructuring of the board. PHOTO: CENTRAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

assumptions and indirect communication were damaging to community life,” she said.

While hesitant to cite specific causes of division because she did not want to perpetuate false assumptions, Steffen confirmed some individuals wanted fewer mask requirements and less teaching on antiracism.

“This was not representative of a certain church or denomination, it was individuals in the community,” she said.

Jantzi wrote in an email to *Anabaptist World* that she was the first woman to lead the school and that patriarchal beliefs among influential members of the community turned into emotional abuse and made it difficult for her to lead the school.

“Some donors and parents had significant objections to Central's identity as an antiracist school, even though this was written into the school's foundational documents and included in the constitution for the school,” she wrote. “These community members repeated the concerns they learned from the evangelical press, podcasts and books reinforcing the fear that racial reconciliation is some kind of liberal, politically motivated social agenda rather than part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

THE BOARD APPOINTED high school and middle school principal Craig Martin to an interim administrator role, giving leadership in collaboration with the school's leadership team.

“The board decided it was in the best interests of the school to allow the board's nominating committee to restructure the board to be re-energized to lead a search for a new superintendent,” wrote Martin by email.

Since 2017, which coincides with Jantzi's arrival, the school's corporation members have grown from representing only congregations of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA to also include the Anabaptist groups Evana, LMC and CMC. These corporation members elected new board members on May 3. Some of the previous board members are continuing.

Citing confidentiality of personnel matters, Martin did not comment further on reasons for Jantzi's resignation.

In her letter, Jantzi wrote that she left the school for her self-protection and so that she can follow Jesus as she is called.

“I am beaten down, I feel betrayed, and I have lost trust,” she wrote. “As a disciple of Jesus, I have a calling and a purpose in life. If I cannot live that out at Central Christian, I will do that in another setting.” ●

Canadian MB leaders say no to national dialogue

SAYING THERE ARE NOT “adequate arguments for hosting a conversation on revising our Confession’s convictions about marriage and same-sex intimacy,” the National Faith and Life Team of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches has decided against hosting a national meeting on LGBTQ welcome and inclusion.

The decision was made in early May in response to an open letter signed by 517 people from over 40 Canadian MB churches asking for a national “family conversation” about the subject.

“We want to ask questions, seek clarification and speak the truth in love,” the letter said, “remembering that God welcomes all who seek truth with sincerity and integrity.”

In a statement, the NFLT acknowledged that “many in our MB family from across the country share a growing desire to find loving and just responses to LGBTQ+ people inside and outside our MB churches.”

It said it wants to “take seriously Jesus’ command to love our neighbours as ourselves” and believes its role is to foster local “conversation groups with MB pastors and leaders who want to explore what application of our convictions means for their contexts.”

It indicated it would provide resources that show “how our Confession of Faith addresses Christian discipleship in the midst of Canada’s changing culture.” This includes revising the pastoral application section of the Confession about marriage “in order to better clarify the biblical and theological foundations of our convictions and the ways that these convictions can be

lived out by all of us today.”

In an interview, CCMBC executive director Elton DaSilva said the statement represents “the beginning of a conversation” about the ways MB churches can “do better ministry to the LGBTQ community.”

For him, the question is how to practice pastoral care that doesn’t cause more pain and harm to LGBTQ people and their families. “We can definitely do better” in this area, he said.

Conversations would not include discussing the articles about marriage

in the Confession of Faith, he said, unless Canadian MB churches want to put it on the table by first bringing it to their provincial conferences, which would then bring it to the national church.

John Unger, the former MB pastor from Manitoba who helped coordinate the open letter, noted there is a hunger for talking about this subject, citing a survey that found 88 percent of Canadian MB churches want to talk about engaging the LGBTQ community. ●

MB conference removes LGBTQ-affirming church

ARTISAN CHURCH, THE Mennonite Brethren congregation in Vancouver, B.C., that has adopted a welcoming and affirming stance toward LGBTQ people, has been voted out of the British Columbia MB conference.

The vote was taken May 1 during a convention held online due to pandemic restrictions.

The vote came as a result of a request from Artisan to leave the provincial conference due to its stance of permitting gay marriage.

The final tally of the vote to allow the church to leave was not released.

Since a request by *Anabaptist World* to cover the convention was denied by BCMB, notes were provided by some of the delegates.

According to those participants, a number of delegates expressed frustration over the process and argued for more time and conversation before a vote was taken.

Some also took issue with the conference’s background explanation about Artisan, suggesting it was harsh, one-sided, accusatory and judgmental. One person said she was grieved by its tone.

When asked about the background, BCMB executive director Rob Thiessen replied he felt it was necessary to provide context, and because Artisan’s decision was disappointing.

It was intended to be redemptive and leave the door open for a change of attitude on the part of Artisan, he said, and to underscore how important the issue is.

Artisan’s moderator thanked BCMB for its support as it reached out to younger people disaffected with Christianity.

One delegate suggested Artisan will do fine without the BCMB, but the conference will be the worse off since it won’t be able to learn from Artisan.

At least two delegates spoke in favor of the resolution, with one calling for the removal of “the offending member” and another indicating the issue of gay marriage is settled according to the MB Confession of Faith.

Artisan moderator Peter Mogan expressed gratitude to BCMB for its support in planting the church and for its prayers and financial support as it reached out to younger people, especially those disaffected with Christianity. — *John Longhurst*

MC USA leader and Dove's Nest team up to keep boys safe

GLEN GUYTON, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, is working with Dove's Nest to help churches keep children safe, particularly vulnerable boys.

As part of the Dove's Nest speakers' bureau, Guyton recently gave a presentation, "Man Talk: Safeguarding Our Boys in Faith Communities," at a virtual event for the Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse, a nonprofit organization in the Philippines.



Guyton

Groff

As a father of an adult daughter and son, Guyton feels strongly about sharing this message with MC USA and other faith leaders.

"Faith communities are at risk," he said. "Sexual abuse is the most common form of abuse in church settings. No faith community or church is immune from abuse."

Abuse is a widespread problem for all children, especially girls, but Guyton shared research showing that 1 in 13 boys experiences sexual abuse in childhood and 1 in 6 men has been sexually abused or assaulted.

Guyton said boys are particularly stigmatized by sexual abuse. He debunked several myths that shame and blame boys in abusive situations.

"Faith communities have an important part to play in keeping children and youth safe from all types of child abuse and neglect," Guyton said.

Yet some of the church's biggest strengths — its high-trust environment and desire for forgiveness — can be its biggest weaknesses.

Guyton offered several ways churches can help keep children safe, including:

- Establishing prevention policies;
- Learning about abuse, such as grooming behavior and peer abuse;
- Talking about child protection in formal and informal ways as a congregation; and
- Providing opportunities for dialogue and listening to those hurt by abuse.

"**WE KNOW THAT** in every one of our congregations, there are victims and survivors, both men and women," said Anna Groff, executive director of Dove's Nest. "There is a need for prevention education and best practices."

She emphasized the important role of men in this work.

"Abuse prevention is often seen as a woman's job," said Groff. "Men have a responsibility to be a part of this conversation. Prevention programs are most effective when men and women collaborate to keep all children and youth safe."

Dove's Nest offers a collection of training and educational resources for faith communities. Their newest training resources include:

COVID-19 and Safety Training

This live Zoom training addresses the unique vulnerability of children and youth during COVID-19 and what churches can do to prevent harm and support families during this challenging time, and how they can prepare for the summer and fall as faith communities. It also includes best practices and safety tips for Zoom and virtual kids' programming for churches.

Understanding Trauma

This recorded Zoom or live Zoom training is a resource for churches wanting to dig deeper into understanding and preventing various types of trauma as well as actively supporting survivors in faith communities. It includes information on the types of

trauma, brain development, trauma triggers and "institutional courage" principles developed by Jennifer Freyd. There is an analysis of the core values of Anabaptist faith communities, with special attention on how to balance peace, reconciliation and justice when protecting the vulnerable.

"Sexual abuse is the most common form of abuse in church settings. No faith community or church is immune from abuse."

— Glen Guyton

38-Minute Training Video for Adult Volunteers

This abuse-prevention and healthy boundaries training video is designed for adults volunteering in faith communities, such as churches, camps or schools. The video covers:

- Child abuse and Jesus' message regarding safety for children;
- Why and how to implement a child protection policy;
- An overview of the Circle of Grace Christian safe environment curriculum for children and youth;
- Reporting suspected abuse;
- Tech safety and social media;
- Child-on-child perpetration; and
- Consent and safe touch.

In addition, conferences or congregations interested in inviting a Dove's Nest speaker, including Guyton, may contact Dove's Nest by email at info@dovesnest.net to discuss availability and honorariums.

Dove's Nest is a nonprofit with Mennonite roots that seeks to empower and equip faith communities to keep children and youth safe in their homes, churches and communities. ●

New York in Ukraine: name change would mark return to Mennonite roots

A UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY once known as New York, founded in 1889 by Mennonites, could once again be known by its surprisingly American original name.

The village was renamed Novhorodske in 1951 during the Cold War, but locals are campaigning to change it back, and parliament could vote on a name change this spring, Reuters reported on March 18. A request to rename the settlement gained local approval within Donetsk Oblast on Feb. 3.

“The Soviet Union’s citizens believed that the name New York was a sign of capitalism,” said Tetyana Krasko, secretary of the town council. Local officials believe restoring the original name could help bring economic revitalization to the community of about 10,000 people scarred by fighting between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists.

According to *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, New York was founded in 1889 as one of six villages of Ignatyev Colony. The mother colony, Chortitza, bought about 32,000 acres that year from Count Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatyev. The count’s wife was an American, and she requested the name New York.

In addition to several factories, New York counted a post office, two elementary schools, a secondary school and a girls school.

The New York Mennonite Church was organized in 1892, and by 1905 its baptized membership was about 600. Mennonite Brethren members also lived in New York, but they likely worshipped nearby in Nikolayevka.

New York was initially prosperous but suffered a raid by anarchist revolutionary Nestor Makhno in 1919. While most descendants of the town’s Mennonite founders were evacuated by the Soviets in 1942 before the German army arrived in the area, Reuters reported some of their families continued paying visits to Novhorodske until



Novhorodske, Ukraine, as seen in 2010, has since been scarred by battles between Ukrainians and Russian separatists. The community is trying to revert to its original name, New York, the title it carried when it was founded as a Mennonite colony.

PHOTO: VALERY DED/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

fighting broke out in 2014.

A new community center named “Ukrainian New York” opened April 6. The social hub was designed to unite the community, study the village’s history — including a small museum exhibit with photos of the community’s initial German settlers — and find ways to further develop it. Funded by donations from the governments of Denmark, Switzerland and Sweden, the United Nations Recovery and Peacebuilding Program project will also operate as a psychological health, media and educational center.

The eastern Ukraine border region occupied by Russian-backed forces remains unstable. Novhorodske and the surrounding area were hit with mortars, grenades and anti-tank and heavy machine-gun fire in a wave of dozens of early-May cease-fire violations. ●

“ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME”
HEARING AND SEEING JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW
BY TIM LEHMAN

BY TIM LEHMAN

In a world more and more divided and violent, this book is a call to refocus all of life on the words and example of Jesus—all of Jesus. This is a special challenge to Christians who may be missing the best news of Matthew’s gospel.

“Practical and profound, I highly recommend to persons of all faiths, and no faith at all.”
- Tim Schrag

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Members of Landisville Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania planted a native species demonstration orchard and extended their memorial garden in April. PHOTO: CHRIS FRETZ/MENNONITE MEN

April projects boost tree-planting campaign

Anabaptist communities are planting trees this spring, with more than 2,250 planted in April alone. Congregations, farmers, men's groups, and schools have partnered with Mennonite Men to plant trees as part of Mennonite Men's campaign, JoinTrees, with the goal of planting one million trees by 2030.

Steve Thomas, Mennonite Men U.S. coordinator and a certified arborist, has encouraged JoinTrees partners to be creative in their planting projects. The results have been intergenerational events at a variety of sites, including tree plantings at churches, farms and retreat centers and along the Indiana Toll Road.

In addition to the planting events, Mennonite Men's board of directors approved \$8,247 for five grants to congregations, farms and environmental education projects to assist them in tree-planting projects.

One of the grants helped finance tree planting at Full Circle Farm in Three Rivers, Mich., where farm owners Gabe and Bethany Bauman-Baker enlisted the help of students from Bethany Christian School in Goshen, Ind. Students helped them plant 632 trees to create a fast-growing windbreak between their field and the conventionally farmed fields beside them and to increase carbon capture.

"We have three goals with this campaign to restore God's earth," said Steve Thomas. "Doing our part to care for God's creation, we aim to mitigate global warming, serve climate justice and sustain biodiversity.

"We continue to receive inquiries about how to participate in our campaign. People are seeking to join this campaign by offering land to plant, making contributions to fund tree planting and helping to plant seedlings. We are excited by the strong, positive response across the church."

To date, 9,151 trees have been planted through the JoinTrees campaign.

— Mennonite Men

Retiring EMS teacher to help write Virginia history book

After 33 years of teaching history and Bible at Eastern Mennonite School, Elwood Yoder is ready for a new chapter of history making.

Yoder will focus full-time on research, writing and church history in a partnership with historian Steve Nolt to write a Virginia Mennonite history book — a joint project of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and the Virginia Mennonite Conference Historical Committee.

A passionate promoter of Anabaptist-inspired education, Yoder influenced many areas of life at EMS. He developed curriculum for the Kingdom Living class, in

which seniors reflect on their faith formation and goals as they complete their high school experience. The curriculum has been adapted for use by many Mennonite schools. He attended Mennonite Schools Council Bible meetings for all of his career, helping to develop core curriculum. — EMS

MCC contest winners address racial justice

Mackenzie Mast and Ryan Hostetter won top prizes in the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office's annual essay and video contest.

Mast is a junior at Bethany Christian High School in Goshen, Ind. Hostetter is in ninth grade at Eastern Mennonite High School in Harrisonburg, Va. Each will receive \$150.

In her essay, "Police Reform and Racial Justice," Mast writes, "Making changes to the way our police departments function will allow our country to break away from systemic racism and create a future based on a true vision of equality." Citing an American Civil Liberties Union resource, she notes, "Today, there are more Black people in prison and correctional departments than there were ever enslaved by our country."

She argues for diverting some funding from police to social service agencies, citing the example of Eugene, Ore., where a community program focuses on mental health, substance abuse and homelessness.

Hostetter's video, "How Police Impact Racial Injustice," examines calls in the U.S. for police reform and defunding the police from a historical perspective. After citing statistics that show Black people are disproportionately targeted by police, Hostetter says, "The killing of George Floyd was the spark that started hundreds of protests calling for change in the police force." He urges viewers to "strive for peace and equality," "stay educated" and "inform others of the truth."

Naomi Klassen of Goshen, Ind., and Titus Roesler of Freeman, S.D., earned honorable mentions for submissions on police reform and racial justice, and gun violence, respectively. — Kirstin De Mello/MCC



Mast



Hostetter

Memorial service held for longtime DR Congo worker, AIMM general secretary

A memorial service for Earl Roth, who served for nearly four decades with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and as an administrator in North America, was held April 24 at Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

Roth, 93, died Oct. 30 at Green House Village in Goshen.

For 32 years, beginning in 1954, Roth served with his wife, Ruth, as an evangelist, church planter, teacher, missionary counselor, director of a high school/industrial school and liaison with government offices. Returning to the United States in 1986, he worked as general secretary of AIMM for seven years.

Charles Buller, who serves with AIMM and travels to DR Congo frequently, sometimes to the remote locations where the Roths worked, said: "The missionary's name for which I have received the most



Earl Roth, left, greets Chief Nyanga, second from right, and other friends on an administrative trip to Congo in 1993. PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH USA ARCHIVES

inquiries and heard the most stories about is that of Earl Roth. His legacy lives on in the lives of many to this day."

Roth was born June 26, 1927, to Amelia (Steckley) and Philip Roth, in Albany, Ore. In 1948 he married Ruth Jantzen; she

died in 2004. A son, Loren Dale Roth, also preceded him in death. Survivors include a daughter, Yvonne (Virgil) Smith; a son, Marc (Judy) Roth; four grandsons and three great-grandchildren.

— Mennonite Mission Network

Minneapolis resident abandons racist covenant with neighbors

IT WAS STANDARD PRACTICE a century ago in Minneapolis to forbid people of color from living in desirable neighborhoods. Racially exclusive covenants still exist, buried in legalese and decades of history. In recent months, property owners have teamed up with city officials to eliminate the problematic wording.

The 1926 deed for Joan Kreider's property "shall not at any time be conveyed, mortgaged or leased to any person or persons of Chinese, Japanese, Moorish, Turkish, Negro, Mongolian or African descent."

"The practice was pretty successful," said Kreider, who attends Faith Mennonite Church and lives in south Minneapolis, about two miles from the police station that burned last year in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. "... Mine is a modest two-bedroom house. It's not like it was protecting mansions."

The practice faded after the 1930s, likely because the city ran out of new plats to issue. Enforcement of the covenants went away, but the wording remained.

After the state legislature passed a law in 2019 allowing homeowners to petition to have the wording removed, the Minneapolis city attorney's office moved in March to offer free legal services and paperwork.

"I immediately went online and requested it," Kreider said. "But I thought, 'This isn't just my problem, it's the neighborhood's.' I copied the paperwork and started taking it around to neighbors."

The response was positive, with many neighbors having already submitted their own paperwork or expressing appreciation for the help because they didn't know what to do. She shared the option with others at Faith Mennonite and is planning to

send many petitions in together.

Kreider struggled with talking about the effort, because eliminating largely symbolic racist covenants seems such a small thing compared to the broader work of racial justice. But as a Mennonite whose ancestors moved into locations cleared of Indigenous people, she understands her connection to land issues.

"The racial disparities in our cities are great, and so much of it is actually related to the land," Kreider said. "I've been sensitized over the last number of years about the way our relationship to the land has pushed out Native Americans as Europeans took over."

"Ownership of land has been one of the things that has been key to entering the middle class, and it was not available oftentimes to African Americans, or they had land taken. Who owns the land is a key justice issue."

— Tim Huber of *Anabaptist World*

Institutions celebrate graduates, including some from a year ago

GRADUATES FROM THE Class of 2021 were not the only ones to walk across the stage in May.

Some colleges and universities included graduates from last spring, whose commencement ceremonies went online-only due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

hosted more than 1,300 guests at three separate outdoor “walking ceremonies” May 1 for the graduates of 2020 and 2021.

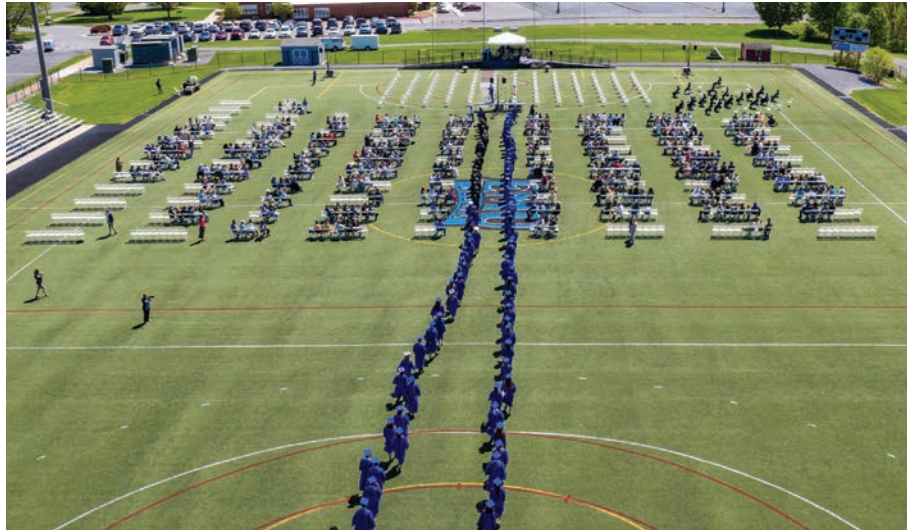
The opportunity was poignant for the 2020 grads, who lost their in-person celebration to the pandemic last year. Ninety-nine, some with family and friends in attendance, returned for the opportunity to walk across the stage. The ceremonies were repeated in an online format May 8 and 9, and EMU’s Lancaster, Pa., site hosted a graduation ceremony May 14.

EMU awarded 351 degrees, including 209 undergraduate degrees, 104 master’s degrees, 37 graduate certificates and one doctorate.

The ceremonies were organized by academic schools, with the School of Theology, Humanities and the Performing Arts getting the day started. The School of Science, Engineering, Art and Nursing followed later in the morning, with the School of Social Science and Professions in the afternoon.

Each ceremony included words from President Susan Schultz Huxman and the school dean, as well as a blessing from a faculty member. Huxman congratulated the graduates on their resilience and perseverance and urged them to stay connected to EMU as they impact the world.

HESSTON COLLEGE graduates received their diplomas and took pictures with President Joseph A. Manickam on May 1 on the steps of the Alliman Administration Center. The outdoor walking ceremony was the centerpiece of in-person and online weekend events.



EMU celebrated the classes of 2020 and 2021 during three walking ceremonies.

PHOTO: EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

The online video of Hesston’s 111th commencement did not feature a traditional commencement address. Instead, Manickam, vice president of academics Brent Yoder and academic dean Carren Moham each briefly addressed the class of 2021.

Manickam conferred 46 bachelor of science in nursing degrees, four bachelor of science degrees to students majoring in aviation professional pilot, and 81 associate degrees.

The aviation department honored the first graduating class to receive bachelor’s degrees. Roger Yoder, a Hesston aviation graduate and college board member who recently retired after 35 years as a pilot for American Airlines, delivered the reception address. He encouraged the four graduates to be “a light to the world” as modeled by Jesus and gave each a flashlight to help them complete early morning flight checks.

BETHEL COLLEGE President Jon C. Gering said history will remember the perseverance of the 75 members of this year’s graduating class.

“For nearly 15 months, their edu-

cation has been interrupted by the COVID-19 global pandemic,” he said May 16 in Memorial Hall, where ceremonies were moved due to weather. “On their path to today, nothing was ordinary.”

Brook Powers, a 2015 graduate who is now assistant athletic trainer and clinical education coordinator at Bethel, warned graduates life is complicated, and they will fail multiple times.

“You can’t let the fear of failure, of making the wrong choice, control your decisions,” she said. “Even if you make the so-called wrong choice, you’ll bounce back. I have failed more times than I can possibly count, and yet here I am, still standing.

“Embrace the change and take the risk. Challenges and failure help build resilient people, and the world needs [them].”

Nearly 200 **BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY** graduates celebrated May 8 during commencement at Salzman Stadium. Graduates wore purple stoles as a testament to pandemic resilience.

“May this stole always be a symbol to you that no matter what life path

you choose to follow, you already have persevered through difficulty to achieve your degree,” said President Jane Wood. “This stole speaks to your achievement and our continued confidence and belief in you both individually and as the Bluffton University class of 2021.”

Lawrence E. Milan, a 1973 graduate, shared the commencement address. He is senior vice president, chief human resources and diversity officer at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center. He focused on three attributes that make for a successful personal brand: self-aware, self-propelled and selfless.

“It’s not your responsibility to solve all of the world’s problems, but neither can you ignore them,” Milan said. “Know that you are not alone. The Bluffton family network has a very long reach.”

FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY held a virtual ceremony that included the announcement of graduates’ names, music and remarks from FPU President Joseph Jones, and an address by speaker James Cecy, senior pastor of Campus Bible Church in Fresno.

In all, 537 students completed the bachelor’s degree completion program; 227 received master’s degrees, including 37 from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary; and 187 earned bachelor’s degrees in the traditional undergraduate program.

Some 48 of the participants graduated in the fall of 2020 but chose to take part in the spring 2021 commencement. Graduates who registered were mailed diploma covers, commencement programs and other items they would have gotten at the ceremony and were encouraged to celebrate with family and friends.

Cyneatha Millsaps told the 21 candidates for graduation at **ANABAPTIST MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY’S** May 1 commencement service “not to take anything for granted in this challenging world — to assume nothing.”

About 60 people attended the



Bethel College graduates, with a campus threshing stone, attend commencement May 16 in Memorial Hall. PHOTO: WENDY NUGENT/NEWTON NOW

service in person in the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount, with limited in-person attendance.

Millsaps drew upon the story of Peter, a disciple of Jesus and a Jew, and Cornelius, a Gentile, in Acts 10. While the passage is often described as the conversion of Cornelius, she said, “it is much more a conversion of Peter — that is, in his attitude and his opinion toward the Gentiles.”

“Our Scripture passage today shows us that it doesn’t matter how great a

pastor or a leader you become, you can miss the mark,” said Millsaps, a 2008 AMBS graduate who is executive director of Mennonite Women USA and co-pastor of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

“The church today is stuck, deciding who is clean and unclean. For the new leaders, please do not let the systems, traditions and people cause you to miss the people of God.”

The graduating class comprised 13 men and eight women from seven countries — Argentina, Canada, Chile, Ethiopia, France, India and the U.S. Nine of the graduates are members of Mennonite Church USA, one is from Mennonite Church Canada and five are from Mennonite denominations around the world.

TABOR COLLEGE’S Shari Flaming Center for the Arts was filled to capacity for commencement May 15 due to weather. The ceremonies honored 123 undergraduate and master’s degree graduates.

The keynote speaker, 1984 graduate Gary Speese, spoke of the pillars of a godly life, abundant life and the foundation of interacting with people. He now serves in education after a career in business and real estate.

Goshen College held its ceremony April 25 (*Anabaptist World*, May 7). ●



Hesston College graduate Cristal Guzman of the Dominican Republic poses with President Joe Manickam. PHOTO: LARRY BARTEL/HESSTON COLLEGE

Former Hesston president, EMU dean impacted higher education, ministry

LABAN PEACHEY, former Hesston College president and dean of students at Eastern Mennonite College, died April 23 in Harrisonburg, Va. He was 94.

Peachey left behind a legacy in Anabaptist higher education and ministry. After teaching and filling other leadership roles at what became Eastern Mennonite University, Peachey served as president of Hesston from 1968 to 1980. He then worked as vice president of marketing for Mennonite Mutual Aid.

After retirement in 1990, he and his wife, Helen, moved back to their family farm in Virginia while he served pastoral assignments and taught at EMU and Eastern Mennonite Seminary. During these years he took great joy working with his cattle herd, fulfilling a love of caring for the earth and animals.

Peachey was born April 6, 1927, in Springs, Pa., to Shem and Salome Bender Peachey. He started saving money for a dream of buying his own farm when he was 9, raising and butchering chickens. In 1945, as a teenager, he and two of his sisters managed the enterprise when the rest of the family moved to Illinois. As was customary in his community, he did not attend high school.

After being drafted into Civilian Public Service, Peachey worked for 15 months in several locations. EMC faculty member Hubert Pellman visited



Hesston College President Emeritus Laban Peachey with then-President Howard Keim commemorate in 2011 Peachey's leadership in starting the aviation program in 1970. PHOTO: HESSTON COLLEGE

the camp and arranged for him and others to take the GED test. He often talked about this short period of his life and its profound influence on his life trajectory.

Following his older siblings who valued education, he came to EMC, where he met and married Helen Mumaw, daughter of the college's president, John R. Mumaw. After graduating in 1952, he was invited to stay on as dean of college men and join the psychology faculty. Experiences in academics, student life, the registrar's office and counseling gave him a unique breadth of higher education experience. Throughout these years, he earned a master of education degree in 1958 from the University of Virginia and a doctorate in education in 1963 from George Washington University.

DURING HIS 12 YEARS at Hesston College, he oversaw the institution of the Foundation Studies liberal arts program and expansion of career training programs, including establish-

ment of the aviation program in 1970. Peachey helped develop more student services and align them with a holistic curricular approach, emphasizing personal development, socialization and leadership.

After Hesston, the South Central Conference of the Mennonite Church engaged him for a two-year needs assessment, meeting with congregations across the Midwest and in Mexico. He helped to call and install 11 pastors and build closer ties to the conference leadership.

Peachey then spent seven years, from 1983 to 1990, at Mennonite Mutual Aid in Goshen, Ind., until retirement.

With Helen, he returned to Harrisonburg, where he farmed. Ordained in the Mennonite Church, he was conference moderator and overseer for six congregations, as well as interim pastor at nine congregations. He served as campus pastor for EMS and completed a master's degree in religion, which he had started in 1954.

He and Helen had been married 47 years when she died on Dec. 14, 2000.

A virtual memorial service was hosted May 8 by Park View Mennonite Church. ●



Laban Peachey fulfilled a number of roles at Eastern Mennonite College, including registrar.

PHOTO: EMU ARCHIVES

Tabor selects software engineering professor alumnus as next president

THE TABOR COLLEGE Board of Directors has selected David Janzen as Tabor's 14th president, effective July 1.

Janzen is professor and software engineering coordinator in the Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, Calif.



Janzen

He succeeds Jules Glanzer, who has served as president for 13 years.

"God continues to call people to his work through Tabor College," Janzen said in a May 3 announcement. "We are excited

and passionate about the mission of Tabor, and we pray that God will glorify himself through this important work."

A 1990 Tabor graduate with a degree in mathematics and computer science, Janzen has been a full-time faculty member at Cal Poly SLO since 2006. He is also a faculty fellow with Cal Poly's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

He worked in the software industry with Sprint from 1993 to 1997 and then taught at Bethel College from 1997 to 2006 and at the University of Kansas from 1991 to 1993 and 2004 to 2006.

He received his master's degree and doctorate in computer science from KU.

Janzen spoke of God's faithfulness throughout his career and his anticipation about returning to Hillsboro, Kan.

"God has led me on a more exciting, purposeful and God-honoring adventure than I could have ever imagined," he said.

JANZEN CO-FOUNDED Steadfast Innovation LLC, which created the handwriting note-taking application Squid for pen-based digital devices.

With more than 5 million downloads, Squid was featured by Google as one of the top eight applications for education. This led to strategic partnerships across the technology industry, including Microsoft and Google.

Janzen is a consultant for the San Luis Obispo Small Business Development Center. He created the "Java Essentials for Android" course, which attracted more than 10,000 subscribers.

He served as a consultant to California State University, San Marcos, as it created and launched its undergraduate software engineering major.

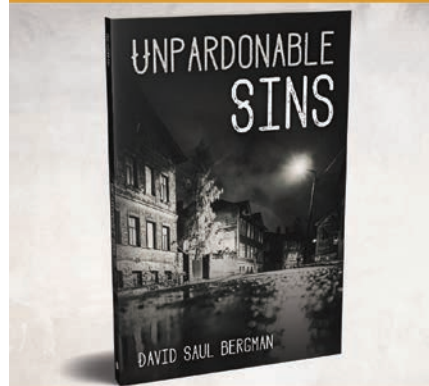
Janzen is a native of Independence, Kan., and Enid, Okla. He and his wife,

Karen (Isaac), reside in Morro Bay, Calif. Karen attended Tabor from 1986 to 1988 before graduating from Fresno Pacific University and obtaining a master of music in choral conducting degree in 1992 from Northern Arizona University.

All four of the Janzens' parents and each of their siblings attended Tabor. Their son Alexander graduated from Tabor in 2017; he is the oldest of four adult children, including June, Simon and Amber.

President Glanzer said he looked forward to turning over the stewardship of the college to Janzen, describing him as "a person of integrity and deep personal faith." ●

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Bethel peace lecturer calls for taking American Dream more seriously

ALTHOUGH LEONARD PITTS JR.

doesn't hold out much hope for the future of the United States, he hasn't given it up, either.

The author and syndicated columnist presented the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Peace Lecture at Bethel College on April 25, after giving one in 2017 at Bethel on "America in the Age of Donald Trump."

Inspired by the last four years, Pitts is now asking "Is America Possible?"

The so-called American Dream, Pitts said, stems from Thomas Jefferson writing that "all men are created equal" and have the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" — complicated words for a slave owner to write.

But it fundamentally doesn't matter if Jefferson understood fully what he wrote. The bottom line is that people

around the world took America at its word and continue waiting for those words to be taken seriously.

"Indeed, I submit to you that America is as near to perfect as anything ever created by human hands," Pitts said. "But Americans repeatedly fail to live up to it. Mainly because they simply refuse to take it seriously."

He listed examples from a mob beating of German, Irish and Catholic immigrants trying to vote in Kentucky in 1855 to the 2016 presidential election.

"In these ways and thousands more, Americans have refused to live up to America," he said.

"You will say 'not all Americans' and certainly, you'll be right. And yet, there never seems to be enough of a critical mass of Americans to make a difference, never enough who oppose the defilement of our national ideal to do

anything about it."

Pitts suggested people are reactionary creatures, more readily moved to fight what they fear than defend what they're for.

But this or that group of people is not the problem.

"Ignorance is the problem. Fear is the problem," Pitts said. "And the ideal to which Jefferson committed the United States was not made for fearful people. To the contrary, that ideal demands courage."

"Americans have never been short of physical courage or the courage to endure. But we've never quite had the courage to believe what we say we believe and to act accordingly. We've never had the backbone to be true to what we said on paper. It is time to show some guts. Americans must do this. Because America is worth it." ●

Political science professor gave career to FPU

Richard Unruh, 76, Fresno Pacific University faculty emeritus in political science, died May 7.

A Seattle native, Unruh was recruited to Fresno Pacific in 1964 by John Redekop, who was starting the school's political science program and thought Unruh should be his first student as well as his assistant. Unruh joined the faculty, first as a way to do his alternative to military service.

Along with Adonijah Pauls in the library and Luetta Reimer in English, Unruh was among the first Fresno Pacific graduates to join the faculty.

By the time he retired in 2012, Unruh had chaired the social sciences division and the faculty senate and earned a doctorate from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

A memorial service is being planned at

North Fresno Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation. — FPU

Bethel adding varsity women's flag football

Bethel College is adding women's flag football as a varsity sport, beginning in the 2022-23 academic year. It will be the athletic department's 19th varsity program.

Bethel will become the fourth member of the Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference to field a flag football team. With two other associate members, the KCAC already has six of the 14 varsity flag football programs in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. Teams play in the spring, seven to a team on a field 80 by 40 yards.

Bethel anticipates the addition to increase female student athletes from the southwest and southeast United States.

"Women's flag football is a strategic addition to our varsity sports offerings," said President Jon Gering. "It emerged as the strongest candidate after a deliberate cost/benefit analysis of a suite of athletic programs." — Bethel College

Grebel appoints peace and conflict studies professor

Conrad Grebel University College has appointed Johonna McCants-Turner as associate professor of peace and conflict studies, beginning July 1. She is assistant professor of restorative justice and peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.



McCants-Turner

"Her research and experience as co-director of the Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice at EMU put her on the leading edge of the restorative and transformative justice field," said Nathan Funk, chair of peace and conflict studies. "Her innovative scholarship draws together insights from women's studies and critical race theory as well as theology. Years of experience with grassroots advocacy and organizing enliven her teaching."

She has a doctorate in American studies from the University of Maryland. — CGUC



Unruh

Tanzanian oral history, told to Goshen professor, preserved in digital library

JAN BENDER SHETLER, Goshen College director of global engagement and professor of history, received a grant in May from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a Goshen



Shetler

College-led collaboration with Michigan State University and others to digitize and make available to the public an oral history collection from the Mara region of Tanzania.

Shetler was awarded \$183,935

under the Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant. The three-year project will prepare and move her 1995-2010 interviews and other related materials onto an open-access digital library as part of the African Online Digital Library.

Shetler's interest in oral tradition began when working with Mennonite Central Committee in Tanzania from 1985 to 1991.

"During that time, I was approached by different groups of elders working on putting together their ethnic histories," Shetler said. "They were meeting to write down their histories as passed down to them by their elders for future generations. They wanted me to help them put their histories onto a computer and make it available for editing."

Shetler's work sparked an interest. For her doctoral dissertation field research in 1995 and 1996, she collaborated with people she knew from the region, including the Magoto family in the Mara region, who adopted her into their family, provided housing and assisted in setting up interviews.

"It's a region that almost nothing has been written about historically, either by Tanzanian or expatriate scholars," she said. A systematic collection of oral memory was therefore required to begin this work.

The idea for a digital library came when she returned to the Mara region for later research and descendants of the elders she interviewed inquired about listening to recordings of those

"It's a region that almost nothing has been written about historically."

— Jan Bender Shetler

interviews. She felt a moral obligation to share this material with people in Tanzania.

Technology now allows open access to information across national boundaries. Thanks to cellphones and a large

bandwidth over Tanzania, putting the collection online was the easiest way to make the interviews, maps and other documents accessible to people in the Mara region, as well as to scholars worldwide.

Students have been working on transcribing, digitizing and creating an online platform for the initial collection over the past 20 years. Shetler began creating the first online digital library in 2012 as a Maple Scholars project at Goshen. But that website, hosted by Goshen, has since become outdated and unusable.

The grant also provides funds for Shetler to return to Tanzania to gather other material for the project and encourage local use. ●

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Racism is a shapeshifter, but I have fortitude

AS ONE WHO DOES NOT speak English as a first language, I enjoy learning new words.

I've added a word to my vocabulary recently: fortitude. Webster's dictionary defines fortitude as the strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or bear pain or adversity with courage.

Now I can say that I see fortitude every day, especially in the eyes of my Black, Latinx and Asian immigrant brothers and sisters.

Even though Black people are still being shot and murdered by the police, Asians are still being beaten, and people of color and minorities are being marginalized, they all refuse to give up. They still go out for work and go about their lives.

They refuse to be brought down by systemic oppression. They resist giving up and living in fear.

That's fortitude.

Racism is real, and I have learned that racist oppression is just the tip of the iceberg, with white power hidden below the water.

If we don't recognize it, that does not

mean it doesn't exist. We need to be brave enough to name it as it is.

IN INDONESIA, BACK in the '80s and '90s, I was raised to believe that white people are better than Black people except in two things — sports and music. Later, I learned this belief was the result of systemic oppression. It was as if white people only let Black people advance in those two areas.

I admit that I came to the United States with many preconceptions about race. I was "whitewashed" — another word I learned recently.

I have learned that, in addition to democracy, one of the leading U.S. exports is white supremacy, wrapped up in Western capitalism.

White supremacy impacts people's lives in many ways. For example, in my home country, even today, people think lighter skin is better; it gives advantages.

I used to take a beauty product to make my skin look lighter. I used to dye my hair blonde.

All over the world, people of color have adopted the white American standard of "beauty."

I have learned that racism is a shapeshifter. It can change its form. Its first shape was colonization. Then it changed into Western capitalism.

This makes me wonder: Is our freedom real, or do we just exchange one form of domination for another?

THE NAME OF MY column is "Intercultural Life" because I believe God's dream is a mutual transformation among all cultures. But if I fail to name the dominant culture — the one that perpetuates white power — then I'm afraid we are on the way toward assimilation into white culture, or to cultural segregation.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said the most segregated hour in America

is 11 a.m. on Sunday. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we have homework to do — not just to learn about other cultures but to dismantle the favoring of whiteness. We also need to empower

All over the world, people have adopted the white American standard of "beauty."

people who are marginalized by the cultural systems of oppression.

I'M GRATEFUL THAT I HAVE learned a new language and that I am still learning new words. But my homework is not done yet.

As a Southeast Asian/Indonesian/Ambonesse-Menadonesse, I still need to unlearn all the social preconditioning that white supremacy has imposed on me. I mention my race and ethnic background here because I refuse to allow the system to put me into one of its boxes.

I need to reclaim the identity that was taken from me and honor what I still have. I need to find healing for my wounds and empower others along the way.

In Matthew 9, it takes fortitude for a bleeding woman to reach out for Jesus' robes. On the other hand, in the same chapter, a synagogue leader may have known that if he called Jesus to heal his daughter, it might dismantle his privilege and status.

These two people come from different social and power dynamics. One is privileged. One has suffered and been marginalized for a long time. But the good news is Jesus heals all who come to him.

May Jesus heal us all from the wound of racism. ●



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.

From the illusion of diversity to genuine inclusion

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS like to throw around the term “diversity.” They say they are committed to creating a diverse environment and bringing together people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Typically, they do this by making diversity hires: employing Black and brown people.

The problem is the burden of assimilation that is placed upon Black and brown people. There is no real support for them. Most predominantly white organizations, religious and secular, only want Black and brown bodies to make their social media posts and websites look good. This has led to burnout and distrust.

In *The Color of Compromise* video series, Jemar Tisby offers a helpful metaphor for how we fail to create diversity.

Imagine you are trying to bake a cake. You have all the ingredients: eggs, flour, butter, icing. You mix up the ingredients and bake the cake. When you pull it out of the oven, you

realize you have made a mistake. You forgot to add the sugar. You cannot have a cake without sugar, right? So, you grab a handful of sugar and sprinkle it on top of the cake.

We sprinkle in some Black and brown people to make the cake look OK. But once you take a bite, you realize it tastes terrible.

We all know this is a terrible idea, but this is how we treat diversity. We create organizations without diversity in mind. Then we get called out for it. Then we try to fix the problem by sprinkling in some Black and brown people here and there to make the cake look OK. But once you take a bite, you realize it tastes terrible.

WHAT ARE WE to do? How do we genuinely include people who are different racially and ethnically? How do we avoid the illusion of diversity and move to a place of true inclusion?

Well, we start over. I do not mean we tweak something here and there. I mean we hit the reset button.

The only way to fix a cake with no sugar is to throw it away and bake another. If our churches, and institutions were created with only white culture in mind, then we need to start over and try again.

We have to be willing to admit that we, or those before us, made mistakes, and we need to tear things down and start again. Instead of sprinkling in some diversity, we have to be willing to include people in the process who do not necessarily look, speak or think like us.

We need more than diversity hires. We need genuine inclusion, where

all people involved have the power to make decisions. Where all opinions are heard and valued.

WE SEE THIS MODEL of inclusion during the Pentecost experience in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2, the disciples, through the Holy Spirit, are given the gift of connection and inclusion. The crowd is made up of people who speak different languages. The Holy Spirit gives the disciples the ability to speak these languages and connect with these people. They share the good news of God’s freedom for all people.

Acts 2:44-47 describes the beginning of the church community: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

In Acts 2 we see true inclusion. There is no assimilation. No sprinkling in of diversity.

The church in Acts was created with the inclusion of all people in mind. The people together created a space for all of them. A space where all could contribute. A space where everyone’s gifts mattered.

To move from the illusion of diversity to genuine inclusion, we need many different voices at the table as we create and build together.

An institution that looks diverse does not necessarily listen to all voices or value everyone’s ideas. Decision-making power needs to be shared.

When baking a cake, all the ingredients need to be in the mix, not just sprinkled on top. ●



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.

I hit the mother-in-law jackpot

When a woman marries a man, she marries his mother, too.

— conventional wisdom

MOTHERS-IN-LAW get a bad rap. They are often portrayed as overbearing and critical, especially to the women who marry their sons.

This has not been my experience, and since May is the month of Mother's Day, I'd like to honor my mother-in-law.

She is humble, patient and kind. These are traits universally easy to get along with. I hit the mother-in-law jackpot just because she is who she is.

However, there are some specific things that she has done (consciously or not) that have made it easy to be her daughter-in-law these 21 years.

For starters, she raised the man I love and share my life with. Of course, one could also blame her for the annoying or less desirable traits my husband possesses, but one can't deny that his goodness is grounded in her influence and teaching.

Of those many good teachings,

I have always appreciated that my husband and I share a respect for the church. Mine was Anabaptist-Mennonite and his was Catholic, but we are similarly comfortable honoring and submitting to a faith community. Indeed, we value it.

We were taught to go to church on Sunday, put money in the offering, help where needed and be faithful in prayer for each other and the world.

I've observed that some families are quite divided about religion. They aren't necessarily in conflict over specific beliefs. Rather, it is the practice of religion that gets contentious, especially after children join the family.

Other than raising my husband, her best act as a mother-in-law has been to be on Team Sarah. Ever since I showed up in her life, I always had the sense that she was rooting for me. She wanted me to succeed — in my life and in my marriage.

I suspect that isn't always the case. I can imagine there would be the temptation, even unconsciously, to take pleasure in the missteps of a daughter-in-law. Of course, heaven forbid a total meltdown! But if he likes mom's cooking better, or if his wife doesn't seem to understand his moods as well as his mom, well, it just goes to show what a fabulous mother she was.

Unfortunately, these viperous thoughts will slip out and bite their victim here and there, and over time the larger damage is done. There is a reason the snake plant is sometimes referred to as "mother-in-law's tongue."

SHE HAS CONTINUALLY revealed her support for me. Here are several instances that stand out.

At our wedding she hugged me and said, "I'm just so happy." Always good to be in a good mood at the outset of a journey.

When she came to visit us for the

first time, she walked into our tiny apartment and after several minutes said, "My, it is so clean in here." In fact, I had spent the better part of a day preparing for the visit, and her noticing and affirming my efforts was a validation of my role in her son's new, shared life.

When conflict arises between my husband and me, she commiserates with me. I don't remember her once taking her son's side exclusively.

Ever since I showed up in her life, I always had the sense that she was rooting for me.

To my credit, I have never discussed substantial conflicts with her. (And here's some free advice to daughters-in-law everywhere: Do not fuss about sons to their mothers. They have no interest in hearing their child run down by you or anyone else. Call someone else when you need to vent.)

She also supported my parenting. Generations parent differently, and I suspect she found the baby sign language and hyper safety measures both bewildering and excessive; she never said so.

Instead of criticism, she gave compliments. Years ago, after my toddler and I had a mutual meltdown, she said, "I'm just so impressed how you don't scream at the kids when they are difficult." It isn't a super high bar, but I'll take it.

She loves my children unconditionally. She says nice things about them, spends time with them and is interested in their lives.

So to Corinne, a saint among women: You are loved and appreciated, and I'm grateful you are in my life. ●



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

Toppled, shattered — reassembled?

“**HUMPTY DUMPTY** sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men, couldn’t put Humpty together again.”

Sound familiar, church? Is anyone feeling this alongside me? In the March 26 *Anabaptist World*, Danielle Klotz wrote, “In this issue we’ve collected articles that encourage us to hold what has been lost as communities of faith and to imagine what we might create for the future.”

Klotz didn’t speak of holding that which we’ve lost while desperately trying to regain it. No, she called for imagining what it (or we) might become. Something, perhaps, other than what we’ve been. This is the holy work of those for whom, like Humpty Dumpty, recovery of the old is no longer an option.

Richard Rohr has said the promise of faith “is that something will be born of the ruin, something so astoundingly better than the present moment we

cannot imagine it.”

While that sounds terrifically hopeful, especially in a year of so much breaking apart, it also lays bare a present problem: lack of imagination.

We are people of the resurrection. We believe in the revitalization of dead and broken parts. But too often all we want, all we can conceive of, is to be put back together the way we were before. We can’t imagine anything else.

Too often all we want is to be put back together the way we were before. With God there is always the possibility that something new can be made of us.

HUMPTY’S STORY BEGINS, as many of ours do, with a breaking apart. Life upended. We are not privy to what toppled this egg-man. All we know is he fell from perch to pavement and shattered.

What came next is what always comes next: the impulse to put it all together again and get back to where he was.

Nice, neat, normal — and now, please!

But the truth is, sometimes we fall, and it breaks us. We are upended, shattered, feeling as if we’re coming apart at the seams.

We might feel that way right now. After a year of life disrupted by the pandemic, we’re not where we used to be. It’s unnerving.

If we are ill-equipped to deal with the unexpected and unwanted truths of our painful situations, we and all the king’s men will wrongly expend our

energies in frantic efforts to fix things. To fix us, or it, or them, leaving no room for reimagining.

IN THE HOLY LONGING, Ronald Rolheiser speaks of two types of death and two ways of being restored to life.

“There is resuscitated life and there is resurrected life,” Rolheiser says. “Resuscitated life is when one is restored to one’s former life and health. . . . Resurrected life is not this. It is not a restoration of one’s old life but the reception of a radically new life.”

When we’ve been upended, we have two options: resuscitation or resurrection.

If resuscitated, we get our old lives back. That’s it. That’s my initial ask when I hit the pavement.

I’ve come to believe, however, it is too small a thing to ask. Why settle for resuscitation when we can experience resurrection?

With God there is always the possibility that something new can be made of us, both individually and corporately. But we can’t receive the new while longing for or clinging to the old.

I find I need to give up all hope of resuscitation before I can imagine resurrection. I need to lay the old down before the new can emerge. I need to stop trying to get back to who, how and where I was in order to be available to where I actually am and who or what I may become.

Surely God’s creativity is not so limited as to have to put us back together the way we were before.

If we can release what’s already gone, we can begin to wonder at what we might become.

In the words of poet John O’Donohue: “May we have the courage to take the step into the unknown that beckons us; Trust that a richer life awaits us there; That we will lose nothing but what has already died.” ●



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

What makes the soil glad?

“DO NOT FEAR, O SOIL; be glad and rejoice”: The prophet Joel passes along a message from God to the ground. Then he turns to the animals with a divine word for them, too. “Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green” (Joel 2:21-22).

God speaks to soil and animals. God has a relationship with creatures other than human beings. In the Book of Joel, we eavesdrop on their conversation. We listen along as they chat.

I’ve talked to animals, mostly my cat and the neighborhood birds, but I’ve never said a word to the soil. I’ve even spoken to the plants in my garden as I water them, but never to the ground, to the mud and clay, the soil squishing up between my toes when I walk, the dirt lodged under my fingernails when I dig.

At the beginning of Genesis, the story of human life begins with a personal moment between God and the ground, with God’s hands working the earth, shaping a lump of clay like a potter, then breathing into the clump of soil. The first human being comes forth from an intimate moment of creation — God with the ground, the earthling from the earth.

A few chapters later, in Genesis 4, when Cain kills his brother Abel, the soil becomes Abel’s keeper, a responsibility Cain refuses. Cain rejects Abel

while the earth welcomes him; the earth takes on the role of being kin to Abel. After his murder, the soil takes Abel’s life into its care. There is a mutual belonging between earth and earthling: the ground cries out to God on Abel’s behalf, and God listens to the soil. “Listen,” God says to Cain, “your brother’s blood, his life, is crying out to me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10).

From the beginning of the Bible, God and the land are in a relationship. They communicate, one crying out to the other. When God makes a covenant with the people of Israel later in the story, God includes the land as a partner — the ground as deserving of rest and joy, the soil as bound up in mutual belonging with human beings, all of them together in a relationship with God (Leviticus 26:42-43).

IN THE BOOK OF JOEL, the ground is promised gladness and joy. Redemption involves the joyful communion of earth and earthlings, plants and animals, people and birds, rivers and landscapes — a restored community among all creatures, including us.

What makes the soil glad? Environmental protections obviously do, since the ground has plenty to fear, in terms of the pollution of landscapes and waterways, the poisons injected into hills and mountains for the extraction of mineral resources. The earth pays a toxic price for the pesticides involved in food production and the precious metals in our phones. These contaminations threaten the soil’s well-being — which should also make us afraid, too, because the health of one is bound to the life of the other, the earth and the earthling as members of God’s community together.

Last week as I watched children from church play soccer at a park, I imagined the ground’s delight under our feet, the earth’s gladness as kids ran and jumped across the field. I wondered if that’s what joy looks like, for the soil — the thrill of life at play,

the ground reaching to meet the feet of children, to hold them for a fleeting moment, then bounce them across the grass, for the layers of soil to partner in the dance of creatures with creation.

IN HER BOOK *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics*, Mari Jorstad notes that Joel’s prophecy surprisingly doesn’t include a call to repentance. The people aren’t summoned to

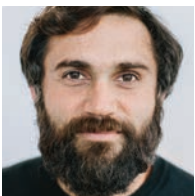
I wondered if that’s what joy feels like, for the soil — the thrill of life at play, the dance of creatures with creation.

confess their sins in response to God’s word. Unlike the other exilic prophets in the Bible, Joel’s book doesn’t include a demand for repentance as a condition for restoration.

“The soil, animals and trees need not rest their confidence on the ability of the people to repent,” Jorstad observes, “an ability the writers of the Hebrew Bible often doubt.” Instead, Joel prophesies redemption without requirements, without stipulations, without prerequisites — nothing but the promise of God’s abundant benevolence: threshing floors awash with grain, fig trees and grape vines with clusters of ripened fruit, aged wine and olive oil overflowing their containers.

It is a promise of abundance not as recompense for pious and responsible behavior but because that’s who God is and that’s what God wants: a world abounding with life, for all of us to live in joy, for grace to overwhelm our sin with goodness.

God invites us, according to the Book of Joel, into a relationship of delight with the rest of creation — to feel God’s love reaching out to us from the soil under our feet. ●



Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship in North Carolina.

A fierce and tenderhearted call

AS A PASTOR, I'VE been asking myself, “What is the calling of the church in this moment?” as we re-emerge from a year of sheltering in place and of bearing witness to the brutality of economic disparities and state-sanctioned violence. We cannot go back to normal, since normal is what got us here. Our calling is to the transformation of ourselves, our congregations and our world. In this effort, we need new articulations of our theology and of our political ethic as Mennonites.

Such resources can be found in *Liberating the Politics of Jesus: Renewing Peace Theology Through the Wisdom of Women*. An anthology authored entirely by women, it centers the voices of those on the margins. The writers de-center interpretations of Jesus that deny his lived experience as a marginalized person. They de-center a peace theology overly focused on war and militarism. They re-center the politics of Jesus in the midst of unjust power imbalances that cause systemic racism, sexism and economic exploitation.

The vision for this project originated with Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, a former moderator of Mennonite Church USA, who edited the book along with Darryl W. Stephens. Soto Albrecht wanted to bring together women to articulate how the church embodies the politics of Jesus today. The focus is not on the theology of John Howard Yoder, writer of *The Politics of Jesus*, an influential work of theology. But the writers address Yoder's sexual abuse and how to be accountable in the work of healing.

FROM BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP to theological reflection to lived experience and prophetic vision, this collection is a fierce and tenderhearted call to followers of Jesus. As suffering in our world has amplified due to the pandemic, and the rich get even richer, Soto Albrecht reminds us that suffering is a political problem. It is the result of oppressive systems, or sin, that allow for abusive realities, like

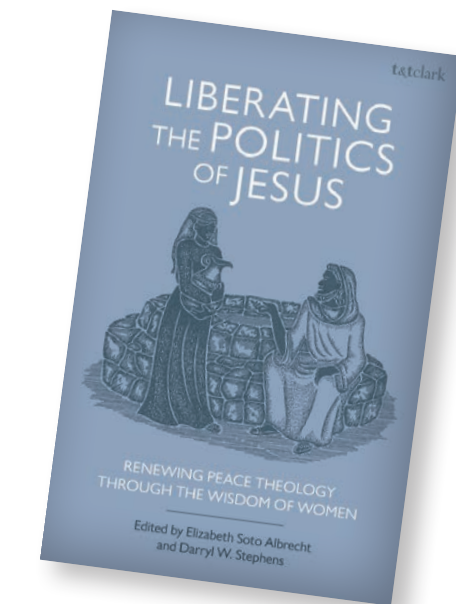
Amazon workers forced to work long hours with inadequate protective gear and then denied sick leave.

If suffering is a political problem, then our response must be political. The authors call readers to solidarity with those who suffer, making the case that that's where we encounter God.

Rather than a God who inflicts suffering as punishment or sends Jesus as a sacrifice, God is one who suffers with us. Jesus is murdered on the cross because of the life he lived — heralding release for the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, liberation for the oppressed and economic redistribution. In her chapter, “Salvation for the Sinned Against,” Linda Gehman Peachey writes: “We are not saved by suffering but rather through God's solidarity and presence with us in creative resistance to the powers of evil that exploit and enslave us.”

HILARY SCARSELLA articulates this creative resistance as political solidarity with survivors of sexual abuse. Her chapter offers the theological framework desperately needed as survivors bravely come forward and church institutions grapple, and often fail, in their response. Scarsella urges readers to respond to the testimony of survivors with all the political urgency and support we would offer to Jesus.

To these ends, in “Repairing the Moral Canopy After Institutional Betrayal,” Sara Wenger Shenk, retired president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, weaves together her personal narrative with the institutional story of taking responsibility for Yoder's abuses. She notes the transformation that took place as she and other leaders listened to the victims of sexual violence, confessed institutional complicity and publicly apologized for the harm. “What happened was not perfect,” she writes “nor did it bring full closure, but there was an acknowledged catharsis. . . . Through such acts, the moral canopy begins to



Liberating the Politics of Jesus: Renewing Peace Theology Through the Wisdom of Women, edited by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht and Darryl W. Stephens (T&T Clark, 2020)

be repaired.”

Regina Shands Stoltzfus reflects on the truth-telling that is needed for Mennonites and other Christians to transform the systemic roots of racism. After giving an overview of the origins of the Black church tradition, she offers a history of Mennonite urban missions and the complexities of creating multiracial churches in the midst of denominational and societal racism. The call is to be diverse churches that hold the powerful accountable, ask difficult questions and stand together in uncomfortable spaces. As a peace church, she says, “narratives of racialized violence must be reckoned with if we take seriously the assault on Black bodies as antithetical to God's vision and call to God's people of shalom.”

The authors of this anthology speak with the moral authority we need to meet the challenges and possibilities of this transformative moment. ●

Joanna Lawrence Shenk is associate pastor at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco.



Members of the Srour family inspect the damage of their apartment in Petah Tikva, Israel, after it was hit by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip on May 13.

PHOTO: ODED BALILTY/AP

Interfaith peace efforts strained by Israeli-Palestinian violence

THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is dismaying American Muslims and Jews who've been working to build bridges between their communities and are now struggling to quell fear and anger in their own circles.

"We're heartbroken," said Muslim attorney Atiya Aftab, the New Jersey-based co-founder of a major interfaith group, the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. She added that the situation threatens to derail the group's work.

The organization, which seeks to build trust and friendships between Muslim and Jewish women and teenage girls, issued a statement regretting the "violent response" by Hamas, the

Islamic militant group ruling Gaza, but was more expansive and forceful in condemning actions by Israeli security forces.

"The Israeli government has a responsibility to stop settlers and extremists from taking over the land and allow those who live in East Jerusalem to rightfully live there in peace," the group said. "As Muslim and Jewish women of faith . . . we have a responsibility to rise up and respond to injustice and prejudice."

The grim events in Israel and Gaza have fueled "raw discussions" among members of another Muslim-Jewish partnership, Los Angeles-based NewGround, according to its executive

director, Aziza Hasan.

She said a private Zoom gathering was planned to address tensions within the community, which includes Palestinian Americans, Muslims with origins elsewhere and Jews holding a wide range of political views. Many members have relatives or friends in areas wracked by the violence.

"NewGround has been working hard to listen deeply to the enormous anger and fear," Hasan, a Muslim, said by email. "There is fear that the violence is becoming increasingly personal in shared neighborhoods.

"We do not know the immediate path through this, but we are certain that until we humanize one another,

there won't be a path at all."

Andrea Hodos, NewGround's associate director, has close family in Israel and worries for Israelis taking refuge in bomb shelters. She has Palestinian American friends for whom she is also concerned, including one with family members in Gaza where there's little protection against Israeli air strikes.

"We need to keep all these people in mind," said Hodos, who is Jewish. "Our goal is to get as many people to stay at the table as possible, hearing one another's stories. That's what softens our hearts."

INGRID MATTSO, a Muslim scholar and former president of the Islamic Society of North America, wrote on Twitter that she fears "meaningful interfaith relationships" among U.S. Christians, Muslims and Jews are in jeopardy "if those involved continue to be silent on Israeli attacks on Palestinians in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque" during the holy month of Ramadan.

Mattson was anguished by what she saw as a muted response from some faith groups as that holy site was attacked.

She said there have been important statements by allies, citing groups such as Rabbis for Human Rights and Jewish Voice for Peace that have strongly condemned Israeli policies and actions as cruel and unjust. But Western Christian denominations, she said, have been largely silent beyond calls for both sides to be peaceful.

"I feel like people should have learned something from the last year of public education about anti-Black racism and police violence against Black people in America — that you have to say what's wrong," she said.

Jewish Voice for Peace, a California-based advocacy group critical of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians, lists interfaith outreach as one of its core missions.

"We've built deep partnerships with Muslim American groups," said the organization's executive director, Stefanie Fox. "To see this happening, in this most sacred period, is truly horrifying. . . . There's this incredibly urgent call to work together to hold the Israeli government accountable." ●

Should President Biden be denied communion?

A MOVEMENT IS GROWING among conservative Catholics to deny President Joe Biden communion during worship, but they may have to reckon with Catholic laity who disagree and a pope who has insisted the sacrament is "not a prize for the perfect."

A subset of U.S. Catholics has spent months calling on bishops to deny Biden — the second Catholic president in U.S. history — the Eucharist because of his support for abortion rights legislation, a position they argue runs afoul of Catholic teaching.

The issue has escalated to higher echelons of the hierarchy. On May 1, San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone — who oversees the home archdiocese of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, another Catholic Democrat — published a pastoral letter arguing that public officials who support abortion rights legislation should be barred from receiving the sacrament.

"Because we are dealing with public figures and public examples of cooperation in moral evil, this correction can also take the public form of exclusion from the reception of Holy Communion," Cordileone wrote.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is slated to discuss Communion at its annual meeting in June. Bishop-elect William E. Koenig — the incoming bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington, which oversees the church where Biden often worships and where members of his family are buried — was asked whether he would deny the president Eucharist in his diocese. The cleric said only that he is hoping to have a conversation with Biden but that, as a bishop, he is "called to teach the fullness and the beauty of the Catholic faith."

EFFORTS TO DENY communion to Biden and other Catholic politicians who back abortion rights are arguably out of step with the views of most U.S. Catholics and may even-



Joe and Jill Biden attended Mass at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle on Jan. 20. PHOTO: EVAN VUCCI/AP

tually clash with the pope himself, who has appeared less willing to bar believers from the Eucharist.

Polling conducted by multiple sources indicates most Catholics in the U.S. believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

While the Vatican has not wavered from its long-standing condemnation of abortion, it's been more fluid when it comes to offering communion to politicians who hold views that differ from Catholic teaching.

Pope Francis has not publicly weighed in on the question, but his writing and actions suggest an inclusive posture. In his 2013 apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel," Francis wrote "the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

The pope called for "prudence and boldness" when considering the administration of the sacraments, warning against clergy who "act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators." Churches shouldn't operate as "a tollhouse," he suggested, but as a space with open doors "where there is place for everyone." ●

Holy ghostwriters lend a hand

If a pastor under pressure outsources the sermon, is that cheating?

FACED WITH HAVING TO come up with new material every week, preachers have long used “pulpit helps” in writing their sermons. They often rely on magazines, subscription services and websites to provide anecdotes, topics and other fodder for sermons. (At least one megachurch sells “sermon kits” with outlines, graphics and promo videos.)

Some preachers hire researchers to do the Bible reading and background research and interpretation on a specific text — known as exegesis — or to provide insights about cultural trends affecting the church.

Others find a ghostwriter to help them put it all together.

Sermon content produced with the help of services like Docent Research Group has a wide audience.

“Docent’s work reaches over a million people every month who are blessed by pastors better equipped to do their work and backed up by excellent research,” the group’s website claims.

Jed Ostoich, a writer from Michigan, thinks sermon ghostwriters and researchers can serve a valid role, under the right circumstances. His first gig as a ghostwriter involved helping the interim pastor of a Texas church. The man had been on the board of elders and was put in charge after the previous pastor resigned. He had no formal training as a pastor.

Ostoich would go through the Bible text for that week’s sermon and summarize the main points, then add some background research. From there, the pastor would write his own sermon.

“I felt I was helping a guy who needs help,” said Ostoich, who has an undergraduate degree from Moody Bible Institute. “If I can provide resources to help him grow and be a good servant at his church, great.”

Ostoich would go on to do ghostwriting projects for Mars Hill Church and Mark Driscoll, including blog posts that ran under Driscoll’s byline.



Sermon writing: Half the time spent in prayer?

PHOTO BY AARON BURDEN/UNSPLASH/CREATIVE COMMONS

That made Ostoich uncomfortable — as if he was misleading folks who thought they were reading Driscoll’s words.

“The whole thing started to go sour on me at that point,” he said.

Church musicians aren’t expected to write the hymns.

GARY STRATTON, dean of the school of arts and sciences at Johnson University, a Christian school with campuses in Tennessee and Florida, says pastors, who are already busy with raising money and visiting the sick and teaching classes, are often under tremendous pressure to write compelling sermons every week.

The rise of podcasts and streaming sermons from megachurches has made things worse, with preachers of a local church often being compared to celebrity pastors. For many, preaching a sermon felt as if it became a kind of performance art rather than a spiritual activity and led some preachers to out-

source their sermon writing to others or to use other preacher’s sermons, Stratton said.

He thinks they miss out on the spiritual side of writing a sermon.

“If you’re going to prepare a sermon, half your time should be in prayer,” he said. “Praying for your people, praying for the anointing, praying for the Spirit to work in people’s lives, and the other half on preparing the actual words.”

AT LEAST ONE GHOSTWRITER whom RNS spoke with wishes pastors would be more transparent when they work with ghostwriters or a “sermon crafter.”

Church musicians aren’t expected to write the hymns. The creeds and liturgy were often written by other people. So why not allow a pastor to use a sermon someone else wrote — and be open about it?

Theologian Scot McKnight argues that pastors who use ghostwriters or researchers without telling their congregations are cheating.

The congregation, he said, believes the sermons were written by the pastor and come out of the pastor’s own interaction with the Bible and prayer. And members often attend a church because of the sermons and give money on the basis of those teachings.

Zach Lambert, pastor of Restore Austin, a congregation in Austin, Texas, said he was “starstruck” as a young minister when he was asked to ghostwrite sermons for a well-known preacher. Now pastor of a congregation of about 300, Lambert says writing sermons for his congregants is much more meaningful than hearing his words being preached to thousands.

“Every time I write a sermon, inevitably, God brings faces of people in the congregation to mind,” he said. “Even though it’s a much smaller audience than when I was ghostwriting, it’s incredibly rewarding to write a message for the folks in our church and then get to preach it to them.” ●

For some pastors, the past year was a sign from God it was time to quit

JEFF WEDDLE, a 46-year-old, wise-cracking, self-deprecating, Bible-loving, self-described “failing pastor” from Wisconsin, was already thinking of leaving the ministry before COVID and the 2020 election.

He was, as he put it, fed up with church life after two decades as a pastor.

Then, what he called “the stupid” — feuds about politics and the pandemic — put him over the edge. People at church seemed more concerned about the latest social media dustup and on-line conspiracy theories — one church member called him the antichrist for his views on COVID — than in learning about the Bible.

Sunday mornings had become filled with dread over what could go wrong next.

He eventually decided, “I don’t need this anymore.” Weddle stepped down as pastor, walked out the door and hasn’t looked back.

The last 18 months or so have been difficult for pastors like Weddle. Already stretched with the day-to-day concerns of running a congregation at a time when organized religion is on the decline, they’ve increasingly found that the divides facing the nation have made their way inside the walls of the church.

Clergy also felt a sense of isolation, cut off from contact with their congregations and unable to do the kind of in-person ministry that drew them to the pastorate. Instead of preaching and visiting the sick, they had to become video producers and online content creators.

Chuck DeGroat, professor of counseling and Christian spirituality at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich., said pastors have long had to mediate disputes over theology or church practice, like the role of women in the church or the so-called “worship wars.” They now face added stresses from the pandemic and po-



A pastor preaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. PHOTO: DIANA POLEKHINA/UNSPASH/CREATIVE COMMONS

larization, with people willing to leave their churches over mask policies or discussions of race.

“I’m hearing from pastors that they just don’t know what to do,” he said.

A recent survey of Protestant pastors by the research firm Barna Group found that 29% said they had given “real, serious consideration to quitting being in full-time ministry within the last year.”

Churches have become fragmented by political and social divides, and connectedness is waning.

David Kinnaman, president of Barna, said the past year has been a crucible for pastors. Churches have become fragmented by political and social divides. They have also become frayed, as people’s connectedness to local congregations is waning.

“The pandemic was a great revealer of the challenges churches face,” Kinnaman said.

CHARLIE COTHERMAN, pastor of Oil City Vineyard Church in rural Pennsylvania, said that in his part of the world, pastors who had strong denominational ties and relationships to draw

on may have weathered the pandemic better than pastors who were on their own.

Cotherman, who directs the Rural Ministry Project at Grove City College, said most of the pastors he works with have done pretty well during the pandemic. Some had the advantage of being in small communities with low COVID infection rates, so they were able to return to in-person services quickly.

Still, he said, COVID has taken a toll. In some churches, members, especially families, left when services went online and just haven’t come back.

“Some of these small churches in rural areas have a couple of young families,” he said. “For them to lose even one of them has been a really tough thing.”

Before he left the ministry, Weddle began a blog at FailingPastor.com, detailing some of his concerns about the ministry. Weddle said he gave the ministry his best for 21 years. But being a pastor proved an almost impossible task.

“Ultimately, you want people to grow in Christ — to be caring, making sense of the Bible and applying it to their life,” he said. “And, you know, for thousands of years it’s been very difficult to get people to do that. So, the job is inherently frustrating.” ●

Classifieds

classifieds@anabaptistworld.org

EMPLOYMENT — SCHOOL

Fresno Pacific University invites applications for Clinical Faculty in Language and Literacy. Complete job description and requirements at fresno.edu/visitors/careers. (7)

Goshen College invites applications for a full-time Assistant or Associate Professor of Communication with expertise in communication and public relations, starting July 2021. To apply, go to goshen.edu/employment. (7)

Lezha Academic Center, Albania, a vibrant, mission-minded grades 1-12 school, seeks a Principal to begin August 2021. Full position announcement, job documents and school information can be found at albanianchristianschool.org. (5-7)

Lezha Academic Center, Albania, a vibrant, mission-minded grades 1-12 school, seeks teachers for high school English, Science and Social Studies to begin August 2021. Full position announcement, job documents and school information can be found at albanianchristianschool.org. (5-7)

EMPLOYMENT — CHURCH

Grace Mennonite Church in Enid, Okla., is seeking our next pastor. Please send resumes to: GraceMennonite.EnidOK@outlook.com. (7-8)

Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va., begun in 1986, with 200 active members, is seeking a one FTE Pastor of Formation and Community Care to enlarge its pastoral team to two FTE. The pastor should have a clear sense of call to lead Shalom's ministries of spiritual formation among all ages, as well as ministries of care for one another and the broader community. The pastor covenants with the congregation to give leadership based on Shalom's Mission and Vision (shalommc.org). They will work as part of a pastoral team, sharing in responsibilities for worship, pastoral care and administrative activities that accompany their specific area of focus. Shalom is open to filling this position with one full-time pastor or two part-time pastors. If interested, please contact the Central District Conference Minister: Doug Luginbill, confmin@mcusacdc.org, 419-296-4759. (7)

First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, Ind., is seeking a full-time pastor (half-time or more will also be considered) with strong preaching skills and experience and ability to serve as

part of a pastoral team. Full job description is found at mennoniteusa.org/pastor-openings or at indymenno.org. We follow MC USA salary and benefit guidelines and are located in a large, thriving city. Contact Robin Helmuth, search committee chair, at drhpath@gmail.com. (5-7)

EMPLOYMENT — GENERAL

Mennonite Mission Network seeks Senior Executive of Ventures to create, foster, and deliver collaborative programs and services to constituents and partners; Senior Executive of Operations to oversee administrative and operational functions of the organization. Visit MennoniteMission.net/About/Employment to learn more. (7)

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Phoenix Menno Guest House, Arizona, seeks volunteer Hosts/Directors for winter 2022 Phoenix SOOP season. Responsible for overall Guest House and SOOP program management. Room and board provided. Hosts/Directors serve under Hospitality Services Center (HSC) board. Contact: Cheryl Paulovich at cjpaulovich@gmail.com or call 602-448-8754. (6-7)

TRAVEL

See the world-famous Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria, Germany, in 2022! Join tour host Pastor Weldon Martens of Grace Hill Mennonite Church of Whitewater, Kan., on a 10-day tour to Germany, France and Switzerland, Aug. 10-21, 2022. We will see the Swiss Alps, the Black Forest, Neuschwanstein Castle, and enjoy a Rhine River Cruise. Registration Status: 2/3 Full. See the tour brochure and register at pilgrimtours.com/ghmc.html or contact Pastor Weldon for a brochure or information at weldon.martens@gmail.com or 402-202-9276. (6-8)

LODGING

North Newton, Kan., guest housing. 316-283-5231; vadasnider@cox.net. (2-13)

WANTED

Housesitters(s) needed in rural Mississippi: June 20-July 4 and July 10-25. Larrym45@gmail.com. (7-8)

\$1.30 a word. Send ads to classifieds@anabaptistworld.org. For information about display ads or online advertising, see anabaptistworld.org/ads. To inquire about display ads or online advertising, email advertising@anabaptistworld.org or call 316-283-3670.

Obituaries

obituaries@anabaptistworld.org

Stanley Liechty

Stanley Liechty, 92, of Goshen, Ind., died peacefully at home April 25, 2021. He was born July 7, 1928, to Ervin C. and Alice (Brenneman) Liechty in Orrville, Ohio.



Liechty

He lived in Goshen since 1959. He was a longtime member of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen.

A graduate of Goshen College and Indiana University, he taught elementary school, retiring from Concord Community Schools in 1993. During

many of his retirement years he was known for his harmonica playing and loved nothing more than putting a smile on your face by playing a tune or cracking a joke.

He married Ruth Conrad on Aug. 17, 1959, in Wayland, Iowa. She preceded him in death in 2009.

Survivors include a daughter, Jeanne (Michael Dickens) Liechty of Goshen; two sons, Jonathan Liechty of Bloomington and Jered Liechty of Goshen; two sisters, Marilyn Moffett of North Kingdon, R.I., and Wilma Eash of Orrville, Ohio; one brother, Wayne Liechty of Apple Creek, Ohio; and two grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Ruth; and a sister, Lois Liechty.

Memorial services were held at Yoder-Culp Funeral Home, Goshen. Scattering of his cremated remains was in Greencroft Memorial Gardens, Goshen. Memorials may be made to Mennonite Central Committee or the Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship library.

Beryl Berdeen Isaak

Beryl Berdeen (Jantz) Isaak, 91, of Inman, Kan., died April 28, 2021, at Pleasant View Home. She was born Oct. 13, 1929, to Emil and Sarah (Holdeman) Jantz in Newton.



Isaak

She graduated from Walton High School in 1947. She attended one year at Bethel College, North Newton, taking a one-year business course, after which she worked for five years at Central Securities Inc., Newton. During this time she met

Paul J. Isaak, who was also attending Bethel College. They were married on May 31, 1953.

They enjoyed 53 years together before he died of cancer on July 6, 2006.

They moved to Inman in 1968, when Paul became pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church. While they were in Inman she started her career as a church secretary. She was the secretary at the remaining churches they served, which became about a 35-year career. She was editor of the *Bethel Voice* for 13 years and a longtime congregational correspondent for *Mennonite World Review*.

Survivors include two sons, Richard (Sue) Isaak of Hutchinson and Philip (Jill) Isaak of Columbus, Neb.; a daughter, Patricia (Loren) Baird of Cashmere, Wash.; seven grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren and a great-great-grandson.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Paul; three brothers, Milferd, Winston and Kerwin Jantz; a sister, Floris Miller; three sisters-in-law, Esther Mae Jantz, Irene Jantz and Elda Jantz; and a brother-in-law, Ivan Miller.

Graveside services were held at Meridian Church Cemetery northeast of Hesston. A memorial service was held at Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman. Memorials may be sent for the Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale or Bethel Mennonite Church of Inman.

Rheta Mae Wiebe

Rheta Mae (Hostetler) Wiebe, 93, of Glendale, Ariz., died April 15, 2021. She was born Dec. 14, 1927, to James and Gladys (Stoltzfus) Hostetler in Aurora, Ohio. She was the middle of three very close and loving sisters.

In 1950 she married Peter Wiebe, which was the beginning of more than 70 years as a loving and supportive preacher's wife, mother and grandmother. In 1952 they started their family, which ultimately would total more than 70 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She will be remembered for her quick smile, loving touch, continuous hospitality as the hands of Jesus and warm encouragements. She was very present with everyone she encountered, listening for how she might be able to provide care for them or their situation. Though there were some difficult and trying times, the Wiebe family remains happy and engaged together with many extended family activities. Her smile and loving hospitality will live in the hearts of all who knew her.

Survivors include her husband, Peter; seven children, David (Beth) Wiebe, Lynn (Julie) Wiebe, Carl (Mary) Wiebe, Rachel (Steve) Meyer, Marcia (Gene) Nussbaum, Rose (Barry) Rybicki, and Becky.

She was preceded in death by a son, Kenny. A celebration of life service will be held at 1 p.m. PDT June 12 at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz. Streaming will be available at [youtube.com/watch?v=sF3A5C5hRfU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3A5C5hRfU). She was buried in Hesston, Kan., with her first-born son, Kenny.

Memorial contributions may be sent to the Peter and Rheta Mae (Hostetler) Wiebe Scholarship Fund at Hesston College in Kansas.

William Henry Mason

William Henry Mason, 91, of Hesston, Kan., died April 28, 2021, at Schowalter Villa. He was born March 23, 1930, to John and Areta (Stark) Mason in Three Rivers, Mich.

He graduated from Tremont High School in Illinois in 1949. On Aug. 12, 1950, he married Ruth Nafziger at Hopedale Mennonite Church in Illinois, and they shared nearly 71 years together.

His early professional life included marketing for a farm equipment company and a position with an advertising agency. In 1970 he accepted an invitation from Hesston College President Laban Peachey to head west to Kansas to join the staff of the college as director of student life. This life-changing move to working for the Mennonite church and becoming a teacher and mentor to hundreds of young people reshaped his life.

In 2011, he retired from teaching at Hesston College. During the 40 years prior to that, he served 28 years at Hesston in staff and faculty roles, including public relations, student services, admissions and as a business instructor.

Survivors include his wife, Ruth; four children, Stephanie Mason of Maryland, Bill (Lorna) Mason Jr. of Michigan, Jim (Becky) Mason of Kansas and Phil (Cindy) Mason of Indiana; a brother, Jerry Mason of Idaho; a niece, Joy (Avin Carter) Bailey of Texas; six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by a brother, John Mason Jr.

A celebration of life service was held at Hesston Mennonite Church, where he was a member. Memorial contributions may be made to Hesston College, Mennonite Central Committee or Mennonite Economic Development Associates.

Theron F. Schlabach

Theron F. Schlabach, 87, of Goshen, Ind., died May 13, 2021, at Greencroft Health Care. He was born Dec. 6, 1933, to Ezra and Vivian (Johns) Schlabach. He married Sara Ann Kauffman on Jan. 8, 1955.

He loved to remind people that he was both a professor and a trucker. He had married and begun supporting his family as a big-rig trucker before deciding to go to Goshen College and then the University of Wisconsin, where he received his doctorate in American social history. Returning to Goshen College in 1965 to teach, he resumed trucking as a hobby for a few

weeks each summer while visiting historical sites.

Though he officially retired from teaching full-time from Goshen in 1995, he continued to teach part time into the early 2000s and to pursue his scholarly research and writing much longer. Known as a craftsman of clear and accessible prose, he is the author of five books and editor of more, including an acclaimed four-volume history of Mennonites in America.

Though rooted in Elkhart County and the Mennonite church, his faith and intellectual curiosity combined to guide him toward an increasingly international perspective. He and Sara twice led Goshen College's international studies program in Costa Rica. He led classes in Europe and traveled to China. He delighted in the international and multicultural breadth of his family, with links from Denmark to Costa Rica to Malaysia, and with great-grandchildren who share roots not only with his German-Swiss ancestors but with Africa, Central America and the Navajo.

He was baptized at Benton Mennonite Church in Benton, Ind. While studying at the University of Wisconsin he helped found Madison Mennonite Church. He was a member of College Mennonite Church for more than five decades.

Survivors include a daughter, Kristina Johnson of Goshen; three sons, Gerald (Joetta)



Schlabach

Schlabach of Michigan, J. Carlyle (Julie Birky) Schlabach of Arizona and Roderic (Mary Beth) Schlabach of Goshen; two sisters, Ruth Shaum of Goshen and Arleta (Phil) Kilmer of New Paris; a brother, Dorvin (Ruth) Schlabach of Goshen; seven grandchildren; four great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Sara, in 2009; two brothers, Dale and J. Richard Schlabach; a sister, Eudean Broni; and a grandson.

Funeral services were held at College Mennonite Church in Goshen. A private family burial was held at Clinton Union Cemetery in Goshen. Memorial donations may be given to the Jubilee Fund at College Mennonite Church or the Mennonite Historical Library Endowment at Goshen College.

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