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ON THE COVER: Mary K. Nafziger teaches Sunday school at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., in 1947.
Photo: Mennonite Church USA Archives

BY DANIELLE KLOTZ

From flannelgraph to grown-up community

WHEN I THINK BACK to my childhood Sunday school experiences, I remember Bible stories played out on a flannelgraph and beautifully painted wooden figures that represented biblical characters. (Was this common in most congregations?)

Those wooden figures seemed extra special. There was something beautiful and fragile about them, and perhaps since children often aren't trusted with such things, they stood out to me.

The truth of my own Sunday school experience is that the other young people around me became my community. We grew up together and were shaped by the same dedicated congregational leaders. They stood up at my wedding with me and remain people I could call on in a moment of need.

As adults, what started as a congregational small group has become like family. A common denominator of the group was that in one way or another we spoke Spanish in our homes. Often, to some degree, as individuals or families we carried multiple cultural identities.

There is nothing quite like the refuge you can find in another person who understands you. In some ways, the differences within the group seem great, and yet Nata and I have experienced repeatedly their love, kindness and support whenever we needed it — and even sometimes when we didn't know what we needed.

In the years of COVID, this group has felt like true church to us. In the friendship and the community we have created, I see the fruit of the Spirit blooming constantly.

MY SMALL GROUP and Sunday school experiences remind me that our journeys of spiritual growth in community can look different at different times in our lives. I'm grateful for the support and guidance I've experienced from these and other formational groups.

Today, the variety of formats and ways to participate is vast. I hope in this issue you can find inspiration for your current or future small group or Sunday school.

One resource I'll name here is from Saltproject.org. I've mentioned them before, and I'm always excited for the print resources they create. One is called *Great and Small: Guide to the Most Okayest Summer Ever!*

This summer my family and I will have a lot of transitions. We are anticipating a new baby. With all the big events and emotions that come with this, I felt like this summer family activity and devotional packet might be a perfect fit. ●



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He's been foolish. And homeless. And now a pastor.

Scott Dixon's journey from homelessness to Christian ministry proves God uses the foolish to shame the wise, he says in the Mennonite Brethren magazine *Christian Leader*. After a divorce in 2011, Dixon fell back into old habits of drug abuse and ended up on the streets of Fresno, Calif. There he



Dixon

faced gangs and guns, endured beatings and ate from dumpsters. While staying in a trailer in Madera, Calif., the trailer's owner invited him to Madera Avenue Bible Church, an MB congregation. Dixon felt unworthy, but he started reading the Bible, and "the more I read, the more I believed. I hit my knees in tears, wondering how God could forgive someone like me." Last year, Pastor Mike Unger invited him to help lead the youth group, with the title of co-youth pastor. "I've been foolish, trust me," he says of his past. Now his passion is "talking to people on the streets and riverbanks and letting them know that if I could come through this, they can, too." He would like to go to seminary.



Dresses donated by sexual assault survivors from Amish and other plain-dressing religious groups hang on a clothesline beneath a description of each survivor's age and church affiliation on April 29 in Leola, Pa. The exhibit's purpose was to show that sexual assault is a reality among children and adults in such groups and to confront the myth that abuse is caused by a victim's clothing choice. PHOTO: JESSIE WARDARSKI/AP

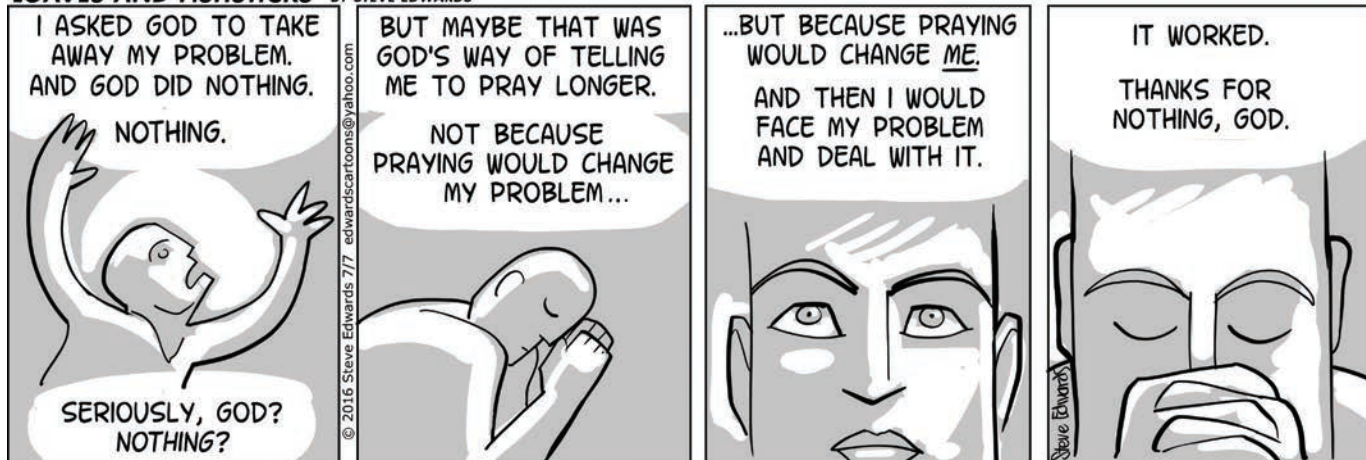
Innocent clothing spotlights harmful actions

Forest Hills Mennonite Church and two advocacy groups hosted an exhibit of clothing worn by victims of sexual abuse at the time of the incident. The Associated Press reported Hope Anne Dueck, executive director of A Better Way and one of the event's organizers, said survivors report being told things such as, "If you had been wearing your head covering, then you probably wouldn't have been assaulted" or "You couldn't have been dressed modestly enough." "As a survivor myself," Dueck said, "I knew that was not the truth." Most survivors donated children's clothing, including an infant onesie. Dueck said the lone adult outfit belonged to a woman raped by her husband shortly after giving birth.

Rebel swords into plowshares

A coalition called Swords Into Plowshares, led by the Jefferson School African American Heritage Society, is developing a plan to melt down the bronze from the Robert E. Lee statue taken down last year in Charlottesville, Va., for an art project. Jalane Schmidt, associate professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia and a Swords Into Plowshares steering committee member, told *Baptist News*: "We are attempting to promote more inclusive narratives about our past, and we do that by sponsoring different art and performance initiatives. . . . How do we take something that was harmful and turn it into something that gives healing and restoration? That's a way of living our faith in the present day."

LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



Letters & Comments

Write to: editor@anabaptistworld.org

'Mennonite' opened doors

The Mennonite name for churches may or may not be efficacious ("By any other name," May 6). I can give a personal witness from a different context: When I arrived at the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2009 as a presidential appointee, I was an unknown novice. Word got around to career officials that I was a Mennonite. A doorway to acceptance and inclusion, sometimes only begrudgingly and partially opened to political appointees, swung wide for me because of Mennonite Disaster Service. MDS's reputation for letting its "yea be yea" and its "nay be nay," quality workmanship and humility far exceeded its relatively modest size. A reciprocal effect was also true: By being known to be a Mennonite, I was conscious of representing a tradition that helped govern my way of being.

David L. Myers, *Ocean Pines, Md.*

Myers directed the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships from 2009 to 2017 and also served as senior adviser to the FEMA administrator from 2013 to 2017.

I appreciated the articles by Brad Roth and Ron Adams (May 6) about changing church names from "Mennonite" to some other generic-sounding name. As a pastor at Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis/St. Paul in the '80s, I saw the congregation benefit from the name. We had a reputation as a peace church, and others told us we had an influence far beyond our numbers. I received invitations from high schools, colleges and seminaries to speak about Mennonites and our beliefs. This would not have occurred if we had a name like Community Bible Church. Our membership increased when some of our families moved to be near the church, which influenced other neighbors to attend. "Mennonite" was not a hindrance. It clearly defined who we were.

Myron Schrag, *Goshen, Ind.*

Neither right nor left

In regard to homosexuality, Christians tend to polarize. Some go to the pole on the right. They say homosexuality is bad.

It is something people choose. It is an abomination. Others go to the pole on the left. They say homosexuality is good. It is a gift from God. It should be celebrated.

There are problems with the right pole. Sexual orientation is determined primarily *in utero*, by certain hormones. People do not choose it. Homosexual behavior today often takes place within a committed partnership. These partnerships stand in contrast to the harmful homosexual relationships in the ancient Roman world.

There are also problems with the left pole. The body of a man and the body of a woman are complementary. Homosexual relationships lack this physical complementarity. Romans 1:26 says homosexual behavior is "unnatural." The Greek phrase is best translated "beside nature."

Homosexuality is neither bad nor good. It is a human weakness, a variation from God's intention and design.

Brent A. Koehn, *Elkhart, Ind.*

There's no pure church

I'm writing in response to the opinion pieces by Darrel Miller and Scott Sprunger (May 6, offering contrasting views on the resolutions about Mennonite Church USA's Membership Guidelines that delegates will consider at the special assembly May 27-30 in Kansas City, Mo.) While I hear what Sprunger is saying, my preference lies with Miller's position. We embrace divorced people without calling their relationships normative. Neither the biblical record nor church history supports identifying gay marriage as normative.

Regardless of the delegates' decision, I'm not leaving MC USA. Staying in relationship is better than looking for a non-existent pure church.

David Ewert, *Metamora, Ill.*

A plea, with love and grief

I write with a plea to support the Resolution for Repentance and Transformation that will be presented to the Mennonite Church USA special delegate assembly. Mennonite institutions desperately need a sincere repentance for the harm they have committed against LGBTQ+ people and an urgent commitment to reconciliation.

I write as a member of the queer community and as one with Mennonite roots. It is frightening to share this part of myself. I grew up in a Mennonite church in small-town Kansas. I went to Sunday school, was baptized in high school and made *zwieback* for the Mennonite Central Committee sale. It took me until I was out of college to come out to myself as a bisexual and queer woman. It is taking me even longer to feel

settled in my own skin and to unlearn the harmful teachings that made me contort myself to fit an unnatural mold and miss out on the full possibilities of joy.

The places where LGBTQ+ people should be most safe — places of faith — are often the very places that provide the language and the fuel and the excuse for the machines of hate. Many Mennonite churches and other houses of faith have become LGBTQ+ affirming. This gives me hope. But official Mennonite conference policies rooted in discrimination continue to perpetuate physical, emotional and spiritual violence.

There is so much I still love about this church family. So I write this with both love and grief. We urgently need safety, healing and a transformed church.

Erin Wiebe, *Cambridge, Mass.*

We're all objectors

With a war raging in Europe and threatening nuclear holocaust, we are besieged with questions of conscience, like: What percentage of Americans are conscientious objectors to disobeying the Ten Commandments? Nearly all our neighbors are COs to some forms of immoral behavior. Conscientious objection is almost universally observed in some fashion. Yet conscientious objection to war is treated like a strange idea from another planet, notwithstanding the insanity and depravity of war, which multiplies the sins of human nature on a frightening scale.

John K. Stoner, *Akron, Pa.*

Contrasting Jesuses

Thank you for James E. Brenneman's "There's just something about that name" (Feb. 11) on the contrast between the Jewish Jesus and the Christ-created Jesus of American exceptionalism.

J. Alfred Smith Sr., *Oakland, Calif.*

Touching divine scars

Thank you to Jerrell Williams ("Don't be afraid of deconstruction," April 15) for calling us out from an anxious and unexamined faith and into the living and evident faith of the disciple Thomas and the early Anabaptists. My prayer is that we will deconstruct our debates about closely held ideas and reconstruct our lives given in love to each other and the world.

Dan Nester-Detweiler, *Evanston, Ill.*

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.

Think for yourself — with others

In Sunday school, ordinary people have their say and meet the needs of mind and heart

I HEARD A PASTOR begin a sermon by saying we could be sure everything he was about to say was true because it came straight from the Bible and the Bible was inerrant.

The pastor wasn't Mennonite, but he was preaching in a Mennonite church.

His confidence in grasping absolute truth made me squirm.

The message was clear: No need to think for yourself. Just accept what I tell you.

This is not the Anabaptist way.

Ironclad certainty might satisfy this pastor's flock. But many others — especially young people wary of churchly platitudes and dogmas — aren't looking for a religious authority or institution that claims to answer every question. They're more likely to be drawn to a community of faith where it's safe to ask questions.

Where would they do that at your church?

Where and how are we doing the inquiring that builds a mature faith? Are we making the effort to seek divine wisdom together?

At the risk of sounding slightly old-fashioned: Whatever happened to Sunday school?

We don't have to think of it as

“school.” And it doesn't have to happen on Sunday.

But it has to happen. To know and follow Jesus — and to love God with heart, soul and mind — there is no substitute for Christians studying the Bible together. Hearing a sermon is not enough.

Imagine the heresies the pew sitters might dream up without the firm hand of authority to guide them.

Anabaptists especially ought to embrace the value of ordinary people gathering outside the worship service to learn and interpret Scripture.

The 16th-century Anabaptists were among the first Reformers to cast off the yoke of clerical authority. They held the radical idea that ordinary people could discern the meaning of Scripture by reading and praying together.

Imagine the heresies the pew sitters might dream up without the firm hand of authority to guide them.

Even so — and contrary to the pre-

vailing populist mindset — we average folks need the scholars.

“Many Christians hold an anti-intellectual bias,” observes Dennis R. Edwards in *What Is the Bible and How Do We Understand It?*, part of a 10-book Bible study series published by Herald Press in 2020-21. This bias runs deep in evangelicalism, and Anabaptists might be susceptible to it.

There's an antidote to the idea that scholarship is boring or irrelevant: group studies that connect Scripture and theology to everyday concerns and current issues. Herald Press (a part of MennoMedia) specializes in books like this.

It's turning them out at a fast clip: Three titles scheduled for release in the next few weeks are *Jesus Takes a Side: Embracing the Political Demands of the Gospel*, *When We Belong: Reclaiming Christianity on the Margins* and *Upside-Down Apocalypse: Grounding Revelation in the Gospel of Peace*.

Downloadable study guides for most new Herald Press books are available at heraldpress.com/study-guides.

REBOUNDED FROM COVID-19

slowdowns, the time is ripe to revive learning in church. After a pandemic



The late Mennonite cartoonist Joel Kauffmann satirized the know-it-all Sunday school student in his Pontius' Puddle comic strip.

slump, MennoMedia staff are encouraged by growing use of their products, including the *Salt & Light* curriculum (see page 10). Over the past two years, they've been impressed by the creativity of teachers who have kept faith-formation activities alive for children, youth and families.

MennoMedia staff admit they have more questions than answers as they develop resources to meet today's needs. But they're working at it, collecting input from surveys, focus groups, webinars and events as they seek to understand what works for congregations now.

There's not much data about Sunday school or congregational Bible study in Mennonite Church USA. In a 2021 survey completed by 2,276 members, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that their church "studies the Bible together." (Does listening to a sermon count?)

For decades, Sunday school attendance has trended down: 53% of respondents in a 2006 MC USA survey said they attended Sunday school, compared to 71% in a 1972 survey of several Anabaptist denominations.

WHEN I TEACH, I've been known to say, "Today we're going to put the 'school' back in Sunday school" — meaning I hope to devote more time to Bible study than to sharing personal updates and prayer requests. Yet I know book learning is only one valuable part of our time together. My congregation, First Mennonite in Newton, Kan., has a long tradition of vibrant Sunday school classes. They're our focal point of support and community. They meet the needs of mind and heart.

Sunday school, or whatever you call your small-group meeting, is where the human touch and the power of the Word come together. It's the place to bring our questions, doubts, curiosity, wisdom gained from experience. What we learn will be more meaningful because we discovered it together. ●

BY RETA HALTEMAN FINGER

What I learned

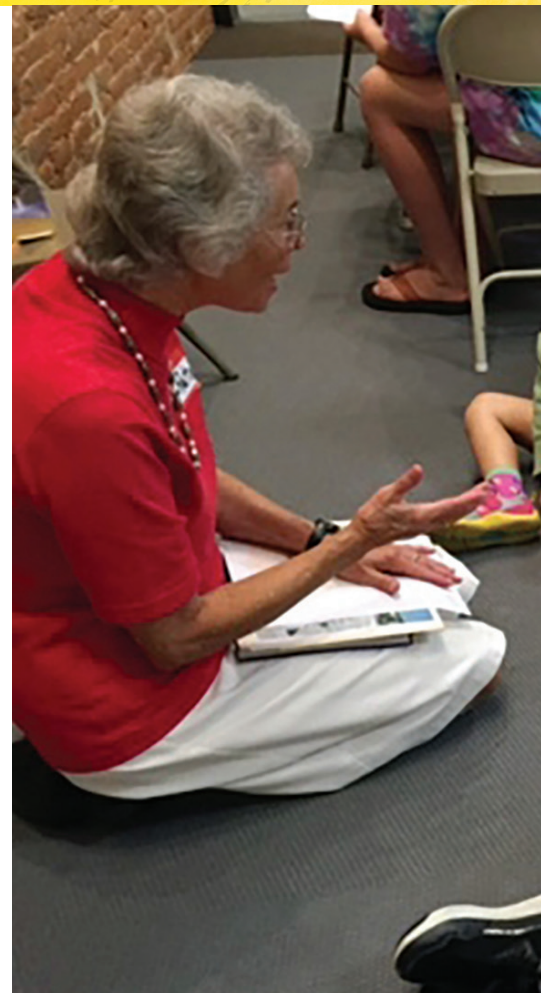
Sunday school lost momentum during the pandemic. What would spark a revival? A teacher shares the joy of discovery in studying Scripture.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE Easter, the worship service at my church featured a dramatic reading instead of a sermon.

Several people reenacted the text in John 19 about Jesus' trial before Pilate and the Jewish high priests. This text is awash in irony as these two political powers battle over how to get rid of Jesus and blame the other party for it. The climax comes when Pilate seats Jesus on the judge's bench and taunts the priests with, "Shall I crucify your King?"

As leaders of a people pledged to worship only Yahweh God (Deuteronomy 20:10-20), the high priests shockingly betray their highest loyalty by insisting, "We have no king but the emperor!" With that admission, Pilate knows he has won the battle. He can now hand Jesus over to be executed without inciting a riot. The One whose kingdom is not of this world is condemned by both religion and the state.

After that service, I yearned to meet with a group to discuss this powerful text and how it might speak to our political loyalties today. The drama reminded me of divisions in America



that draw Christians toward different sides. In the struggle between church and state, where is truth? Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the truth." But how do we find it?

The COVID-19 pandemic forced congregations to cancel or make major adjustments to their Sunday education hour. What did we lose over these two years? Can we, like the woman with the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10, find it again?

Although I am just as concerned about children's Sunday school, this



writing Bible lessons



Reta Halteman Finger teaches children at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va. PHOTO: JIM BISHOP

Discovering how these texts interact with the Jesus story illustrates how studying the Bible together strengthens our Anabaptist faith and theology.

draw his wisdom and ethics as he grew to adulthood? Surely from the Scriptures of his own people.

Discovering how these texts interact with the Jesus story in the New Testament illustrates how studying the Bible together strengthens our Anabaptist faith and theology. Let's have a look.

Hospitality in a hostile place: Jeremiah 29:4-14

The context sharpens the drama of the first lesson, "Hospitality to Strangers and Enemies." In the sixth century BCE, the Babylonian empire conquers Judea and hauls its king off to their capital city, along with the temple treasures and the leading Jews. Two prophets, Hananiah and Jeremiah, try to offer hope to both the captives and the broken lives of those who remained. But they do not agree. One prophesies information and the other disinformation. Which is which?

Representing the Davidic kingship, Hananiah encourages war preparation and promises that within two years the king and all the exiles will return.

article is about adult Christian education. As you can see on the next page, MennoMedia's *Salt & Light* curriculum represents a shift toward choosing more Anabaptist-oriented texts for our weekly Bible studies.

I BECAME KEENLY AWARE of this during the locked-down winter of 2020-21. I was writing the lessons on "God's Approachable Community" for the fall quarter of 2021. As I wrote about "Church Means Assembly" and "Open Table Fellowship," I hoped that

by fall we could assemble and share fellowship at tables. Sadly, the virus had other ideas. At my congregation, we canceled many social occasions and Zoomed only one adult Sunday class most quarters. Children lost many hours of Sunday school education.

Even so, digging into the 13 texts chosen for the fall quarter proved to be a rich experience. Four passages from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) brought me deeper into the life and teachings of Jesus — a major goal of *Salt & Light*. From where did Jesus



FREEDOM TO BE DISTINCTIVELY ANABAPTIST

In 2020, MennoMedia introduced the *Salt & Light* Bible study series for adult Sunday school classes and other groups. The Bible outlines are developed by a team of Mennonite and United Methodist Bible scholars and educators who have a passion for creating exciting and transformative Bible studies for adults.

MennoMedia editors and writers have freedom to align the outlines and resultant Bible studies with our Anabaptist theology and practice. By developing our own outlines, we are creating a curriculum that grows from our Anabaptist biblical interpretation and practices.

The curriculum outlines for our previous Adult Bible Study belonged to the Committee on the Uniform Series. When CUS developed its six-year cycle of Bible studies for 2022-28, MennoMedia editors became concerned that the themes were two or three quarters in length with a heavy representation of Old Testament texts and less emphasis on the Gospels.

We saw this as an opportunity to develop Anabaptist Bible outlines. MennoMedia is involved in the development of this curriculum from the inception of each Bible study session to publication.

"We Follow Jesus" is a special *Salt & Light* study of texts and themes that undergird our Anabaptist theology and practice planned for the "Anabaptism at 500" celebration marking the anniversary of Anabaptism's founding in 1525. We hope all Anabaptist congregations will join in this special study in winter 2024-25.

— Sharon K. Williams

Sharon K. Williams is the managing editor of *Salt & Light*.

Jeremiah draws from a more non-violent, Mosaic perspective. He writes a letter to the exiles to tell them it will be another 70 years before Jews can return home. Instead, they should settle down in Babylon, build houses, have families and "seek the welfare of the city where I [Yahweh] have sent you into exile" (Jeremiah 29:7).

We can imagine the exiles' reply: "Yahweh did this so we could learn to cooperate with our enemies? Jeremiah, are you crazy? These pagan people have torn us from our homes, devastated our land and marched us to an idol-worshipping city to suffer and die!"

Yet Jeremiah persists: Pray for this city, "for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

When I compared Jeremiah's letter with Jesus' teachings in the Gospels, I realized where Jesus' love-your-enemies ideas came from. He didn't make them up. He didn't receive a lightning bolt from heaven. Jesus learned proactive pacifism from studying Scripture.

Creating peace with food: 1 Samuel 25, Isaiah 25 and 55

Within the unit on "Open Table Fellowship," we find another example of averting war and hate.

Matthew's Gospel begins by naming Jesus as the son of David. Jesus would have learned stories about David from the writings of 1 and 2 Samuel.

This story is a cliffhanger. In 1 Samuel 25, a young David is roaming the "wild west" countryside with his band of outlaws who guard farmers' sheep from other outlaws. The plot is complicated and political, and values of honor and shame pervade the story. Nabel is a nasty, selfish farmer who dishonors David and his men by refusing to invite them to the end-of-summer feast as a thank-you for their protection.

War is imminent, but thanks to a whistleblower, Nabel's wife Abigail learns about this and, with her servants, provides food for David and his 600 men. War is averted, and David's future as king is secure.

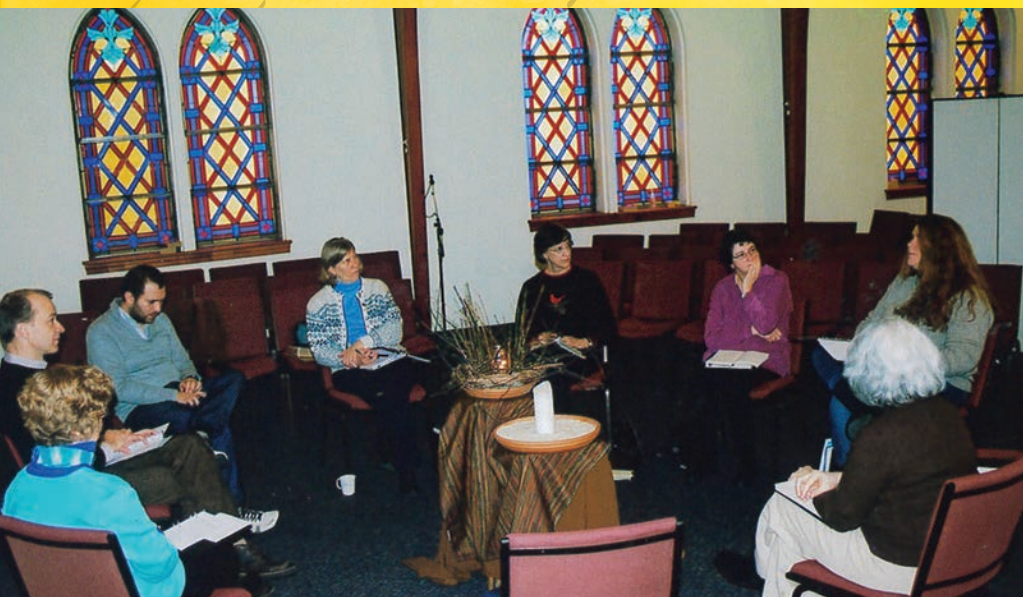
As the young Jesus learned he was a descendant of King David, this story would have given him insights into how to share food in community. Throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal. Often at these meals Jesus challenges honor/shame issues of who gets invited and who sits in the place of honor (see Luke 14:7-24).

Speaking of food, who can forget the stories in the Gospels where Jesus



When I compared Jeremiah's letter with Jesus' teachings in the Gospels, I realized where Jesus' love-your-enemies ideas came from.

PHOTO: DALE D. GEHMAN



A Sunday school class meets at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va. PHOTO: JIM BISHOP

becomes Abigail as he provides a meal for thousands. Luke also cites Jesus' women disciples who, like Abigail, "provided for them out of their resources" (Luke 8:1-3).

Surely these meals, along with the Last Supper Jesus planned, prefigured in his mind the great meal to come that the prophet Isaiah described in 25:6-10 and 55:1-3. Read this magnificent poetry about "God's Super Supper," featured in the final lesson of the fall quarter.

Covenant renewal: Deuteronomy 29

Deuteronomy 29:1, 10-20 lays out the details of what it means to worship only one God and not idols. In this way, Israel was set apart from every other people group in the ancient world. That text was vividly in my mind as I listened to the Jewish high priests in the readers theater from John 19:1-15. They were forsaking that basic commitment as they recognized no other king and lord but Caesar.

These texts are just surface examples of the learning that happens when we dig into our sacred texts and their literary and historical contexts. Just as Jesus put into practice the lessons he learned from Scripture, we too can learn from the powerful and often counterintuitive interactions between the Testaments. Perhaps here we will find Jesus' truth from John 14:6.

Yes, the ancient world of Jesus was vastly different from ours. But human nature hasn't changed. Our idols may

Just as Jesus put into practice the lessons he learned from Scripture, we too can learn from the powerful and often counterintuitive interactions between the Testaments.

not be made of wood or stone, but they still distract us from loving God with all our hearts and souls, and our neighbors as ourselves.

We are still recovering from the pandemic's disruption of our worship, fellowship and Bible study. Did it do lasting damage? Are we sliding into secular life? How can we revive Christian education? Can we return to what we had? Or do we need new ways to learn the Bible together? Can MennoMedia's *Salt & Light* materials inspire us? Is it time for covenant renewal? ●



Reta Halteman Finger attends Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va. Since retiring from teaching New Testament at Messiah University, she writes for Christian publications and lessons for *Salt & Light*. See her Bible study blog at "Reta's Reflections" at eewc.com.



Mel Lehman leads Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship's weekly Zoom Bible study.

PHOTO: SUSAN MILLER

VIRTUAL BIBLE STUDY IS TOO GOOD TO STOP

In the fall of 2020, members of Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship in New York City missed the fellowship of congregational life. COVID-forced isolation compounded our need for spiritual growth.

Our Sunday evening worship services on Zoom sometimes included breakout groups, but we missed the intimacy that takes more than six minutes a week to maintain.

On the plus side, Zoom let us welcome speakers and guests from around the world.

Why not invite them to a weekly Bible study? We did, and 17 months later the group is still studying, praying and growing together.

"The heart of our Bible study is a simple sharing of how the good news of the gospel in our weekly Scripture reading is experienced in our daily lives," said Mel Lehman, who leads the group. "We also spend a few minutes each week seeing what fresh insights the work of biblical scholars might bring to familiar passages of Scripture."

Participants have joined from places as diverse as Thailand, Washington state, Virginia, Idaho, Indiana and New Jersey, in addition to New York City.

Ron Baer, who Zooms in from Washington state, said, "It has been an absolute pleasure to join this extraordinary group. I would like to emphasize the power of Zoom-type platforms. It is one of the amazing gifts from our apocalyptic time."

— Susan Miller

BRINGING THE BIBLE TO LIFE



When all ages gather around Scripture, old stories feel new again

IMAGINE A LINE of people in a church fellowship hall, each representing a person from the Bible and history. Imagine them putting themselves in order of most evil to most good. Where would you put Gandhi?

At First Mennonite Church in McPherson Kan., Gandhi ended up in the “not good” half because he was not a Christian. When some of the participants didn’t agree with this, the group had a fruitful discussion as part of their Whole Church Sunday School study of the Ten Commandments.

“One of the best outcomes of our Whole Church Sunday School was the integration within the congregation of all ages mixed together in ways we normally didn’t gather. This sparked great communication and creativity,” said Cora Duerksen, who was part of the planning committee.

For years, First Mennonite has used the summers to explore the Bible together. They’ve studied the Ten Commandments and Jesus’ parables. They have used two all-ages curricula, *Detectives of Divinity* and *God Rocks*, from Springs Forth Faith Formation, an Anabaptist organization.

“The Bible stories come to life when we think about the characters and situations they found themselves in,” said Donna Zerger, another member of the planning committee. “We understand their reactions and relate it to our own lives. We see they had many of

the same problems we have — jealousy, injustice, foolishness, fear.

“When a story becomes as well known as these Bible stories are, one can repeat the narrative and gloss over the human element. We try to bring that element back by identifying with the people who lived so long ago.”

BRINGING SCRIPTURE to life means connecting the biblical story to a contemporary story or situation.

When the group studied the account in Joshua 3-4 of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River, Zerger told of her husband’s grandmother crossing the Volga River in Russia as part of their journey to America.

We try to bring the human element back by identifying with the people who lived so long ago.

When the group studied the Parable of the Persistent Woman (Luke 18), it was time to read Dr. Seuss’ *Green Eggs and Ham*.

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders (Matthew 7) led naturally to the story of the Three Little Pigs.

A study of Peter involved learning stories from Peter’s life and telling them in first-person format.

The commandment on not committing adultery led to creating a game show, “The Oldlywed Game.”

“Our congregation featured puppets, writing together as a group, storytelling and acting for much of our learning together,” Zerger said. “One of

Mark Stucky uses puppets to connect children’s life experiences to the biblical story.

PHOTO: DONNA ZERGER

our members, Mark Stucky, is a genius with puppets. He would take a story and retell it with the puppets and find ways to have the children’s life experiences connect to the Bible story.”

The Whole Church Sunday School meets in the church basement, where all generations sit around tables together, and begins with drinks and doughnuts. Each lesson starts with a question such as, “When did you not follow instructions and ran into trouble because of it?” or “How do you make important decisions? With whom do you consult?”

“I learned some amazing things about people I had been going to church with for years,” Zerger said. “The ‘superficial’ talk can be just as valuable as the deeper discussions.”

These discussions happen in the last 15 minutes, when children participate in a game or craft time while the adults dig into the topic a little more.

When First Mennonite wanted to encourage the congregation to learn about the Bible together, it wasn’t just the children who called on their imaginations. When everyone engaged with the stories, the Bible did come to life. ●



Carol Duerksen is a writer and editor from Goessel, Kan., and staff member of Springs Forth Faith Formation Inc.

'This class is special'

For persistent disciples, 'learning community' isn't just a trendy name

THE DISCIPLESHIP CLASS at Grantham Brethren in Christ Church in Mechanicsburg, Pa., has an unbroken tradition of 50 years. When COVID-19 closed everything down in March 2020, we were in the middle of a study of the Psalms.

We transitioned to Zoom and remained there until August 2021. Zoom turned out to be a haven for introverts like me. For reasons that are hard to explain, it was easier for me to participate in discussion over Zoom.

People joined us who could never have joined in person — from places

But over the past two years, thanks to Zoom, we really became a learning community. We're a group of folks who found a way, amid the disruption and isolation of a pandemic, to come together and learn, even about difficult topics like complicity in racism.

Habits we began on Zoom have continued: collecting prayer requests each week, using poetry and technology. On Zoom, teachers could use video or PowerPoint, which in person had always been an annoyance to arrange. But we asked for and received a smart TV, which we now use regularly.

We've been taking advantage of that technology in our current study of Jesus' parables. Using Greg Carey's book *Stories Jesus Told: How to Read a Parable*, we've watched videos of Carey explaining parables, listened to other scholars (including a Jewish scholar of the New Testament) and watched

excerpts of sermons from different Christian traditions. We've tried to apply the parables not only to our personal lives but also to the way we do church at Grantham.

Our class is a testimony to persistence. Amid the changing ideas of what Sunday school should be, our little community persists in learning together to be disciples of Jesus.

As one of our newer class members has said, "This class is special." ●



Harriet Sider Bicksler is retired from a career as a writer and editor and still serves as editor for the Brethren in Christ Historical Society.

Habits we began on Zoom have continued. We asked for and received a smart TV, which we now use regularly.

like North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia. A former beloved pastor now living in Florida became our class chaplain, reading Scripture and praying for a list of requests that kept getting longer.

When we're at church, the class lasts for an hour. But on Zoom some of us sometimes spent almost two hours together.

Our convener started a Facebook page for check-ins, discussions and additional readings during the week.

At Grantham, we haven't used the language of "Sunday school" for more than a decade. When the change was announced — from Sunday school to Learning Communities — some of us scoffed. I still revert to the traditional term sometimes.



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BY STEVEN P. PARDINI

To teach well,
learn from
the best

‘Teacher, what must I do?’

JESUS WAS A transformative teacher. Observing his methods, we can learn to be good teachers, too.

In Mathew 19, a rich young man asks Jesus, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” He testifies that he obeys the commandments, implying he acquired his wealth meritoriously. He hopes to add spiritual assurance to material comfort.

Jesus responds to the question with a question: “Why do you ask me about what is good?” He goes on to say: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

This was not the response the man expected. “He went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

Jesus, the teacher, created a disorienting dilemma. He sought to transform the man from one who saw

eternal life as an asset to be acquired to one who would follow Jesus in the way of salvation.

I have taught adult Bible study for 40 years. Many learners come to the classroom reluctant to change what they think or how they live. This is not surprising. We naturally want to deflect the discomforts we encounter.

Learners will not be healed by grace and transformed by the teachings of Jesus unless they are willing to recognize their unmet needs.

Good Bible study creates disorienting dilemmas, as Jesus did. These dilemmas stimulate new understanding and awareness. They lead to critiquing unexamined biases, false assumptions and invalid beliefs.

The goal is to develop a new frame of reference, to form new habits of the mind and heart, which lead to new behaviors.

Learning requires trust between teacher and learner. To create a safe

“The Sermon on the Mount” by Jan Luyken (1649-1712), the Dutch Mennonite engraver who illustrated *Martyrs Mirror*. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

space for learning, the teacher needs to model vulnerability and authenticity.

Good teachers treat learners’ responses with respect and validate their feelings. The classroom should become a sacred space where all walk together in the presence of God unashamed.

Bible teachers point their students to Jesus, the teacher who changes the minds, hearts, spirits and behaviors of those who follow him. ●



Steven P. Pardini is a member of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church in Virginia.

Two countries' 'dark, terrible time'

Ethiopian church leader shares concern for Ukraine, requests help from North America

ETHIOPIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

are no strangers to turmoil, prompting the president of the Meserete Kristos Church to send a message of support to Mennonites in Ukraine in MKC's April newsletter.

"My words are completely inadequate to explain the pain and suffering you are passing through," wrote MKC President Desalegn Abebe. "This is a dark and terrible time. We, too, have been in similar challenges, but we still believe that God is in control and able to transform the darkness into a shining light in the days ahead."

Abebe also has a message for North American Mennonites. A year and a half of violence has led to 12 MKC churches being burned, 44 displaced and 163 full-time ministers and their families displaced and without income.

"Your forefathers planted MKC in Ethiopia," he said by online video. "Now we are the largest church [in Mennonite World Conference], and we are in need. Come over and help us so that we can help the needy ones among us. And pray for us that God would bring some bright days ahead."

The World Food Programme said 7 million Ethiopians were in dire need of food assistance last October. The United Nations reported more than 2 million people have fled their homes.

MKC is involved in humanitarian aid and peacebuilding, such as trauma-healing programs in remote villages and participation in Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission.

The conflict began in 2020 between the national government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, based in the northern state of Tigray.

Violence shifted to neighboring states with regional and ethnic militias. A U.N. report on human-rights violations implicated all sides.

The situation is complex for MKC because the church includes members from all regions and ethnic groups in the conflict. Abebe said it is a challenge



A refugee camp in Debark, Ethiopia, housing people displaced by civil conflict. PHOTO: PAUL MOSLEY/MCC

to encourage churches not to take a position but focus on unity in Christ.

"I can't deny that division is in our midst based on ethnic background," he said, adding there are also strong signs of churches supporting each other.

MKC is also working for peace on the political level. Abebe and colleagues are in conversation with government officials about both aid and peace. An MKC member was recently selected to sit on the 11-member National Dialogue Commission.

A CONTINENT AWAY, another conflict compounds the suffering in Ethiopia.

Mennonite Central Committee Ethiopia country representatives Rebecca and Paul Mosley said inflation related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine makes food relief more expensive.

"Inflation is catastrophic here," they said from Addis Ababa. "Inflation means people just don't eat."

MCC has added emergency response to its work with partners, including MKC, in conservation agriculture, health, water, education and peacebuilding. Much of MCC's emergency relief is through Afar Pastoralist Development Association, the largest nongovernmental organization in Afar, which borders Tigray.

Life was difficult in the sparsely populated state even before the violence. Many inhabitants are nomadic goat herders. The Mosleys said herds have been decimated and thousands of people displaced. In cases where people can return, they go back to destroyed homes, clinics, schools and water systems. MCC is partnering with APDA to provide palm-mat shelters.

MCC partners with MKC to train people in trauma healing and peacebuilding. MCC also assisted organizing a national gathering at which representatives from Christian denominations discussed conflict and peace.

Abebe holds gratitude for support from Mennonites around the world.

"Many countries have given us weapons to fight each other," he said. "But Mennonites in the rest of the world have given us money and courage."

"We are one body in Christ. If one part of our body is sick, all of our body [is] sick. If you feel that [sickness], then now is a time to join hands and help our people in Ethiopia and in Ukraine."

MKC ministries can be supported by contacting Norm Dyck of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada at ndyck@mcec.ca or 855-476-2500 ext. 707, or by contributing to MCC's work. ●

She's always running forward

Kenyan immigrant's leadership gifts flower with support of North Carolina church



Eddith Ogola, left, and son, Eric, with friend and fellow student Christiana Mansaray. Mansaray survived Ebola and civil war in Sierra Leone, and Ogola recalls harrowing post-election violence in East Africa. Both are now training as healthcare workers. PHOTO: COURTESY OF JONATHAN LARSON

HER MIDDLE NAME, Akinyi, means “dawn,” a customary tag for one born in the wee hours in western Kenya. But little else about Eddith Ogola’s beginnings whispered promise.

One of nine children born to a mother of scarce means, she grew up on an island in Lake Victoria. As with peers in that fishing village, she was given away in marriage at a young age, putting an end to her education.

In time, she followed her husband, Aggrey, to his work in the port city of Mombasa, where the *dhow*s (sailboats), tankers and warships hinted at a world far beyond her island home. There they received news that her husband’s brother in America would sponsor them to join him in North Carolina. With little grasp of what this would entail, she consented to make the great leap, with her husband and teenage son.

Durham, where the family arrived in 2015, had its challenges. Around some corners she met with bitter racism.

Like the time she took her youngest child, Eric, to enroll at a church preschool but was brusquely shown the door. She couldn’t help but notice the playground was full of only white children. And poverty most everywhere brings its daily indignities.

But she crossed paths with a Christian woman, Sylvia Daniels, who possessed this virtue: “She took me as I was,” Ogola says. Whether that meant help with childcare or taking an interest in the state of her pantry, Daniels’ friendship met the moment.

Learning that Ogola was a Pentecostal believer, Daniels offered to take her to a Sunday gathering — not of her own Mennonite congregation but a charismatic church of Ogola’s choosing.

When the day came, Ogola told her, “No, take me to *your* church. I want to come with you.”

That Sunday she was a guest at Durham Mennonite Church. There a bond was knit that led to Ogola and

her family living in a quaint log cabin next to the church building where the congregation had met in its infancy.

Ogola had long hoped that her older son, Edward, might be baptized. They had expressed this to a pastor in Kenya but had been turned away, ostensibly because he had been “born in sin.” Bruised by such harsh judgment, she wondered how Edward’s interest would be received by a Mennonite congregation. They found the courage to ask Spencer Bradford, then pastor of the Durham church, who began meeting with Edward. This culminated in a day of belonging, not just with new friends but a family of faith.

ABOUT THAT TIME, Ogola’s middle name came to bud like the crimson flame trees in the land of her birth. She learned at age 37 that Durham Technical College offered classes for adults wanting to pursue their foreshortened education. These courses awakened for her a dream that outran anything in

her beginnings: a calling to serve one day as a nurse.

Something inside whispered, “Eddith, don’t be like Lot’s wife, always looking back,” she says. “I’m running forward, even if my shoes fall off.”

Once embarked on these studies, though, she struggled with daily demands — of her courses, of parenting a special-needs child, of being a homemaker and wife and of her part-time work.

She wondered how her peers were coping. She discovered she was not alone in living on the ragged edge.

Strengthened by shared distress and Ogola’s winsome air, a self-help circle attracted growing numbers of student-parents. The school administration listened empathetically and set

“If she says the church built her, maybe it’s just that we loved her when she needed it most with the same love we’ve all received.” — Marcia Nice

out in search of resources that would make it possible for them to focus on their coursework.

OGOLA’S LEADERSHIP skills did not escape the attention of campus authorities. Glad for any measures that might ease the rate of attrition among adult students, they hired her to work with peers who grapple with obstacles beyond the classroom. Retention of these students, often also front-line workers, is a priority. Ogola found herself assigned to the staff of the Department of Student Engagement.

Before long, an array of back-up services — on-campus childcare, food assistance, diapers, tutoring, training in self-advocacy, help with housing and utilities, mental health support — came into play.

Now every Tuesday evening, a student circle meets for encouragement, counsel and practical solutions. The network consists of more than 300 current and former students. Ogola presides gently as her peers seek a path

through headwinds toward success and independence.

“What I do there at Durham Tech, listening and then looking for solutions, I learned at Durham Mennonite Church,” Ogola says. “It’s this church that built who I am.”

Marcia Nice, Durham Mennonite’s worship leader, recalls: “When Eddith first started coming to DMC she especially loved the ‘pass the peace’ part of the service, a tradition for years before COVID when we would all get up and move around the room to greet one another, to exchange hugs and say, ‘Peace be with you!’”

Ogola felt this acceptance keenly, especially in the face of racism.

Nice observes: “If she says the church built her, maybe it’s just that we loved her when she needed it most with the same love we’ve all received.”

Two women from the church especially were there for Ogola in times of need.

“When Eddith had Eric, the littlest one, Sylvia [Daniels] was there,” Nice says. “One of the nurses at DMC, Sharyn Tieszen, would drop by on her way to work to take Eddith’s blood pressure after the birth. She’d almost died giving birth to him, and Sharyn wanted to make sure she was OK.”

THESE SERVANT-LIKE traits at work in the community, and now in Ogola’s life, are bearing results, says Christiana Mansaray, Ogola’s campus friend.

“At graduation, we go wild — cannot hold back tears — at watching peers who once faced certain failure but who now step forward to receive recognition on completion of their studies,” she says. “These successes come as gifts from above. And Eddith has played her part.”

Maggie West, Ogola’s supervisor at Durham Tech, says of her ambitions to be a nurse: “She’s remarkable for her powers of empathy, her drive and patient problem-solving with others. Without a doubt, those qualities will lead to her own career success, too.”

That prophetic middle name is coming into its own. ●

Jonathan Larson, a former Africa service worker, storyteller, teacher and writer, attends Durham Mennonite Church.

Immigrant experience shapes view of war

GERMANY IS HOME to thousands of *Russlanddeutsche* (Germans from Russia), many of them of Mennonite background, who immigrated since the 1970s from the former Soviet Union.

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Museum of Russian-German Cultural History in Detmold created a coordinator position to arrange accommodation for refugees, with the long-term goal of focusing on peace and international understanding through on-site encounters.

Museum director Kornelius Ens told the evangelical German magazine *Chrismon* that anyone with Russian-German heritage should take a stand against the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a matter of dealing with their own history.

“I would like to hear from every Russian-German: *Krieg ist scheisse*. Period,” he said. “The fate of the Russian-Germans — deportation, forced labor, loss of language — is so closely linked to war and its consequences, there cannot be two opinions. All other aspects, such as Ukraine’s history or NATO’s role, must recede into the background.”

“In various statements on the war, even from the Russian-German context, I miss the serious shock at the decades, if not centuries, of suffering created by this war. We Russian-Germans in particular must focus on understanding and reconciliation out of an awareness of our own history and build a bridge to the Ukrainian refugees with our knowledge of culture and language.”

— *Anabaptist World*

Fleeing violence in many forms, newcomers still need welcome

WHILE PLEDGES OF WELCOME to refugees of the war in Ukraine fill U.S. headlines, churches and institutions are quietly working to resettle and acclimate households fleeing other longstanding conflicts, one family at a time.

A steady stream of asylum seekers at the nation's southern border was joined in August by a spike in Afghan refugees after the U.S. military withdrew from Afghanistan. As the Taliban filled the void, people who had cooperated with occupying forces sought safety for their families.

"Within a few weeks, around 76,000 Afghans were evacuated. Various agencies around the United States were tasked with the monumental job of resettling them, and it's not done," said Charity Stowell, who was hired by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. in January for the new position of newcomer connections coordinator. "I believe there are about 20,000 to 25,000 Afghans still working their way through the pipeline. . . . That has needed a lot of church support."

"It typically takes someone three years to feel like a new place is home." — Andrea Cramer

Organizations such as Church World Service receive federal funding to work with refugee and asylum resettlement when newcomers arrive, but the funding expires after 90 days. Support beyond that period can be augmented with fundraising or by partnering with other organizations — often churches.

Stowell's role came about after MCC recognized it could help connect groups with Anabaptist congregations interested in lending a hand.

"Some of the churches I am talking to are becoming very involved in community sponsorship with a refugee



Neighbor to Neighbor volunteers and newcomers participate in a fall festival last year. The South Bend, Ind., organization helps immigrants get to know their new community. PHOTO: NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

agency in their area," she said. "Or, for churches farther away from an agency, they do fundraising and gift card drives for agencies."

Examples of recent activity include:

- Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Gainesville is supporting a family of asylum seekers from El Salvador with housing, health, school for children, legal aid and spiritual guidance.
- First Mennonite Church of Reedley, Calif., formed a support team to assist a newly arrived Afghan family.
- Springdale Mennonite Church was assisted by other congregations in Virginia Mennonite Conference's Southern District to sponsor Afghan families relocated through International Rescue Committee to the Waynesboro area.
- North Baltimore Mennonite Church operates the Asylum Seekers Housing Network with the Reservoir Hill House of Peace.

PARTNERSHIPS DON'T JUST HAPPEN with nationwide agencies. In South Bend, Ind., Neighbor to Neighbor fa-

cilitates local refugee support. It began with a grassroots desire to welcome newcomers.

"We're not doing the logistics of getting people here or even finding housing," said director Andrea Cramer. "We call our work either post-resettlement work or kind of the long welcome. To be fully integrated into a new community and culture takes much longer than 90 days. It typically takes someone three years to feel like a new place is home."

Neighbor to Neighbor helps people with language proficiency, intercultural education on things like using the bus system, legal services and advocacy.

"Folks find themselves trying to navigate these systems in isolation," Cramer said. "Neighbor to Neighbor works to walk with people to avoid the isolation that comes with culture shock."

"If the head of household — usually a man — is going off to work, they likely are the only one with a driver's license. The spouse stays at home with

kids and doesn't get out."

Cramer, a member of Keller Park Church and a student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, had been teaching English as a second language for about a decade when she realized she was more drawn to building relationships than teaching. Relocating from northern Indiana to Waco, Texas, for her husband David Cramer's doctoral program at Baylor University gave a taste of living in another culture.

"I started to do self-education around 2014, when the first wave of folks from [Central America] started coming to the border," she said. "We called Catholic Charities to ask if a family could serve for a weekend in McAllen. That was our first face-to-face interaction with new arrivals. And then in 2015 the Syrian crisis hit our media, even though it had been happening for a while.

"I realized I wanted to do the work of welcome with displaced people."

AMONG LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

that have worked with Neighbor to Neighbor is Kern Road Mennonite Church, which has supported asylum seekers from Uganda. Since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the organization went from a network of about 20 volunteers to training 80 new volunteers, mostly clergy and church members.

"Since the end of December, we've had 64 Afghans resettled here. That many in that short amount of time has been a lot," Cramer said. "Housing is a huge challenge, especially because some of these households are really large, like 10 people. Finding housing that is available and affordable on one income is a challenge."

With many agencies overwhelmed, congregations are more valuable than ever. Stowell said even small actions go a long way.

"Churches are usually encouraged to take the baby steps first," she said. "Build relationships. It can be as simple as putting together hygiene kits or cleaning kits. That can really help mobilize a congregation to welcome refugees or to realize refugees are settling in the community. Something tangible can be a good way to start." ●

Colorado church finds friendship in welcome

RHODA BLOUGH, a member of Glen-non Heights Mennonite Church in Lakewood, Colo., first met Fatima (last name withheld for security) in her neighborhood. With two children in tow, Fatima reminded Blough of her own daughter.

Fatima noticed the sign in Blough's front yard that said, "No matter where you are from, we're glad you're our neighbor." She told Rhoda how much she liked that sign.

After exchanging phone numbers, the relationship grew as they shared food, laughter and stories — to the point that Fatima, originally from Afghanistan, told Blough, "You are my first American friend!"

Late last summer, Fatima needed a friend when the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan. At that time, Fatima's father was visiting the United States, but Fatima's mother was still in Afghanistan, along with her brothers and sisters. Fatima was desperate to help her family find safety.

"The texts I received from her were just heartbreaking," Blough recalled.

At first, there was nothing to do but pray that her mother and other family members would find a way into the Kabul airport to join the mass evacuation. Despite a traumatic experience navigating the airport, Fatima's mother, nephew and two sisters-in-law safely made it there together. A few days later, with about 600 men, women and children crowded into a military aircraft, Fatima's family was airlifted to Mumbai and then the U.S.

Throughout this stressful time, Blough witnessed Fatima and her husband do everything they could to help their extended family. Not only were they hosting evacuated family members in their home, they were also trying to find ways to help fam-



Fatima, Rhoda Blough, Fatima's mother Zahera and her nephew Faisal. PHOTO: RHODA BLOUGH

ily still in Afghanistan who had lost livelihoods as a result of the Taliban coming to power.

"I knew there was no way I could turn my back on this family that I had grown to love," Blough said.

COMPELLED BY FAITH and friendship, Blough reached out to her family and church to join Fatima's efforts. Once the members of Glen-non Heights learned of the situation, they immediately responded with a desire to be a part of welcoming the newcomers.

With Fatima's direction, Blough, her family and the church came together to pay the sponsorship application fees for Fatima's extended family members. When apartments were located for family members, the church mobilized to furnish them.

"They needed things like desks, chairs, furniture and bedding, and the church just opened their arms," Blough said.

Deeply touched by the church's generosity, Fatima and her family were surprised that people who didn't even know them would help in so many ways.

In every community, there are opportunities to surprise newcomers with love and compassion. To learn how to welcome refugees, asylum seekers or other newcomers, contact Mennonite Central Committee at welcome@mcc.org. ●

MVS units enjoy camaraderie, cable cars



Mennonite Voluntary Service participants Erin McWilliams, Anna Lubbers, Eden George, Polly Carlson, Claire Waidelich, Pamela Ortiz, Ashley Neufeld, Jillian Neufeldt and Elizabeth Breckbill in San Francisco. PHOTO: ERIN MCWILLIAMS/MMN

MOST OF THE Mennonite Voluntary Service unit houses were quiet March 3-6, with locked doors and darkened windows. The San Francisco unit apartment, however, was fuller, louder and livelier than the pandemic had enabled it to be in years.

MVSers from across the country gathered in San Francisco to learn, share and worship together. The San Francisco unit introduced two other units — from Alamosa, Colo., and Chicago — to their church, community and culture.

Three other units — Washington, D.C., Tucson, Ariz., and Puerto Rico — are on sabbatical.

While the group was able to enjoy some quintessential San Francisco experiences — including a day trip to Chinatown, a seafood lunch at Pier 39 and a cable car ride — the trip also was an opportunity to support one another.

Participants were able to share joys, commiserate in struggles and swap stories with some of the only other people with an immediate understanding of MVS's unique fusion of service and communal living.

"No one truly understands the MVS experience unless you live it," said Polly Carlson, an MVSer with the San Francisco unit.

Naomi Leary, administrator for MVS and Service Adventure, described the MVS units as a close-knit community, bound together by their shared commitment to a year or two of service.

"Especially in a season [of the pandemic] when community and relationships can be so challenging to navigate safely, it felt valuable for the units to find ways to connect," she said.

THE GATHERING WAS made possible, in part, through a grant from the

Fidelia E. Plett Foundation, based in Inman, Kan. Dave Balzer, one of the foundation's board members, said the foundation works to support programs and organizations with ties to the former General Conference Mennonite Church, as well as those that promote service and support mental health, all things that Plett was passionate about.

On the last day of the gathering, the MVS group attended worship at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco. The congregation has been central in supporting the MVS unit since its creation almost four decades ago.

"It was wonderful to meet some of the members of [the San Francisco unit's] supporting congregation," said Erin McWilliams, a member of the Alamosa, Colo., unit. "It was beautiful to see the support and love that the people of the congregation have for each other." ●

What does a mother want? More than one meal a day for her children

In Lebanon, MCC partner helps families buy food that inflation had put out of reach

AMERICANS CONCERNED about inflation can be thankful they don't live in Lebanon.

Since 2019, the value of Lebanon's currency has collapsed by nearly 90%, and food prices have quadrupled, but salaries have remained the same.

The country was further shaken in 2020 when a massive explosion of improperly stored ammonium nitrate in Beirut left 300,000 people homeless and thousands injured or dead.

Add political turmoil, the COVID-19 pandemic and decades of resource mismanagement, and the combination has caused poverty rates and humanitarian needs to skyrocket.

Aziza Samir Al Lahham, a 29-year-old mother living in Beirut, spends almost all her husband's income on hospital visits, oxygen and medication to treat her 6-month-old son's lung disease.

The family, who lives in a one-room house with a leaky roof, had funds for little else, including food, until they started receiving monthly food vouchers. Mennonite Central Committee's Lebanese partner Popular Aid for Relief and Development, or PARD, distributes them.

"The quantity of food we're eating increased, and there's more variety in it," said Al Lahham, expressing the relief of being able to feed her five children, all under 8 years old. "What does a mother want other than seeing her children eating and feeling happy?"

She is one of many people in Lebanon whose kitchen cupboards have emptied as economic hardships have devastated the country.

The vouchers enabled Al Lahham to buy things she previously could not, like chicken, milk and cheese — important sources of protein for her



Aziza Samir Al Lahham of Beirut, Lebanon, receives a food voucher from a staff member of Popular Aid for Relief and Development, a Mennonite Central Committee partner. (PHOTO: PARD)

children. The food vouchers also have allowed her to save some money to pay for her son's medical care.

When PARD's staff surveyed Palestinian and Lebanese households in six areas of Lebanon, they discovered that most families reported eating only one meal a day, with children getting slightly more, said Mira Moussa, the humanitarian aid project coordinator at PARD.

Many families couldn't afford meat or even fruits and vegetables.

"In each area you find stories of people who are really suffering," she said.

SEEING THE NEED, MCC and PARD applied for and received a grant worth \$761,844 from the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human-

itarian Affairs.

Since October, PARD has been distributing monthly food vouchers, each worth about \$19 per family member, to 900 households. Recipients also attended nutritional awareness sessions in the beginning of the program.

In addition, PARD provides locally purchased hygiene kits, infant care kits and elder care kits to 1,701 Lebanese citizens and 3,159 Palestinian refugees. (MCC and PARD help Syrian families through other programs.)

Lebanon hosts the largest per capita number of refugees globally, most recently from the continuing influx of Syrian refugees. They joined existing Palestinian refugees who found refuge there since the Palestinian-Israeli war in 1948 and subsequent conflicts. ●

MCC award to encourage those who work for peace as Sharp did

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

has established the Michael J. Sharp Global Peacemaker Award to recognize and encourage courageous peacebuilders across the world.

The annual award will be open to a person or organization that is an MCC partner involved in peacebuilding. It will include a monetary prize and will be stewarded by the MCC United Nations Office. The first awardee will be announced in October.

The award is named in honor of Sharp, who served in the Democratic Republic of Congo with MCC and later with the United Nations. Sharp and U.N. colleague Zaida Catalán of Sweden were ambushed and murdered by unknown assailants on March 12, 2017, in DRC. A U.N. expert on armed groups, Sharp was on his way to meet with a new militia group and to document human rights abuses. He was 34.

Sharp and Catalán's interpreter, Betu Tshintela, also may have been



Michael J. Sharp, center, participates in a 2013 meeting at a camp for internally displaced people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. At left is Mitterrand Aoci Lwitela of the Church of Christ of Congo's Ministry of Refugees and Emergencies, an MCC partner organization. At right is Patrick Maxwell of MCC. PHOTO: TIM LIND/MCC

killed, but today he and three motorbike drivers are still missing, according to conflicting news sources.

Prior to Sharp coming with MCC in 2012, courageous Congolese were

working for many years, risking and sacrificing their lives for peacebuilding. They welcomed him, educated and connected him to networks and encouraged him. Their peacebuilding work continues.

MCC consulted with MCC Congolese and African representatives, who support the award in the name of Sharp, given his commitment to peacebuilding, anticolonial work and Mennonite peace witness. As Sharp was a young adult, MCC hopes the award will be an inspiration to young adult peacebuilders.

Mulanda Jimmy Juma, MCC representative for DRC, worked closely with Sharp. From a Congolese perspective, he said, "an award in Michael's name is warmly welcomed. His name in this country has value, is respected, is honored, even in government circles. They have come to understand what he stood for, defending human rights of the people." ●

MMN transitions with new directors

MENNONITE MISSION

NETWORK welcomed six new directors to its leadership team during the past year.

Jennifer Hayes is director of marketing and communications. She attends Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Mishawaka, Ind.

Ana Alicia Hinojosa is director of constituent engagement. She is co-pastor of New Life Christian Center in San Benito, Texas.

Joani Miller is director of training and resources. She attends East Union Mennonite Church in Kalona, Iowa.

Aaron Shenk has risen to director

of finance after serving previously as a finance manager at MMN. He attends Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany, N.Y.

Marissa Stewart is director of human resources. She attends Pathway Church in Middlebury, Ind.

Andrew Suderman is director of

global partnerships. He attends Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg, Va., and maintains ties at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church in Ontario.

The six new directors join Karen Horseman, director of donor relations, and Tim Yoder, director of information technology. ●



Hayes



Hinojosa



Miller



Shenk



Stewart



Suderman

'Concern' reaches a new generation

IN THE 1950S AND '60S, a group of American Anabaptist graduate students got to talking about the place of Mennonites in the modern world. One product of this conversation was an influential series of pamphlets.

With Mennonites asking similar questions today, Laura Schmidt Roberts, professor of biblical and theological studies at Fresno Pacific University, has worked with Wipf and Stock Publishers to republish the original pamphlets, adding contemporary voices to continue the conversation.

Shaped by "The Anabaptist Vision," H.S. Bender's influential 1944 essay, and critical of Mennonite practices at odds with it, between 1954 and 1971 the group — known as the Amsterdam

Seven for the location of their first meeting place in the Netherlands while all were getting their education or doing postwar relief work in Europe — began a process that led to a series of 18 pamphlets with contributions from



Roberts

more than 50 authors called "Concern: A Pamphlet Series for Questions of Christian Renewal," that took up important Anabaptist themes that shaped a generation of thinking. The original group included Irvin B. Horst, John W. Miller, Paul Peachey, Calvin Redekop, David A. Shank, Orley Swartzentruber and John Howard Yoder.

The new publications include material from the original pamphlets and add new articles by contemporary writers. In all, there are seven books: four edited by Roberts, two finished more than a decade ago by Virgil Vogt and one started by Vogt and completed by Roberts. The last volume was completed in April.

The series addresses issues — belief, structure, governance, witness and engagement with the world — that are still concerns today.

"The call issued to discern what it means to be a faithful church in and for the times — ever the church's call



The Concern group at Koningslaan, the Netherlands, in 1958. Front row, from left: Domine van der Zippe (Dutch pastor), Paul Peachey, David A. Shank. Back row: Orley Swartzentruber, John W. Miller, John Howard Yoder, Arnold Regier, Calvin Redekop, Irvin B. Horst. PHOTO: MENNONITE CHURCH USA ARCHIVES

— is one we face with growing urgency," Roberts said. "What theology, imagery and practices are adequate to the work and witness of disciples in this time and place? What is church for?"

"[Concern was] a place to test ideas, raise questions, challenge practices, even change one's mind. This example of dialogue across difference as a shared path toward renewal is welcome in the current increasingly polarized context, where disagreement seems more likely to end a conversation than begin one."

The four books Roberts edited are:

■ *Concern for the Church in the World: Essays on Christian Responsibility, 1958-1963*. Amid postwar relief and rebuilding efforts, reconsideration of views on nonviolence and civic engagement was under way for Mennonites. What peace theology could recast the church's role in the postwar world, including its economic and political systems? Melissa Florer-Bixler's contemporary response pursues the intersection of peace theology, economics and political ideology, calling for critical self-reflection on our participation in economic systems.

■ *Concern for Church Renewal: Essays on Community and Discipleship, 1958-1966*. Do existing structures help or hinder the church's need for renewal? Contemporary responses by Suzanne Guenther Loewen and César García reflect current iterations of

these questions, shaped by concerns over the exercise of power and the role of structural, systemic inequalities.

■ *Concern for Church Mission and Spiritual Gifts: Essays on Faith and Culture, 1958-1968*. These writings explore the role of culture in the church's mission and lived faith through the global church and the ecumenical movement, Christendom's legacy of colonialism and cultural accommodation and critique of rigid ecclesial structures. Contemporary responses by Hyung Jin Kim Sun and Andrés Pacheco Lozano offer postcolonial critique, demonstrating that such topics continue to be of critical concern.

■ *Concern for Church Polity and Discipline: Essays on Pastoral Ministry and Communal Authority, 1958-1969*. The initial group viewed the increasingly hierarchical church structure and the emergence of a professionalized pastoral ministry as incompatible with a believers church. Essays discuss pastoral and communal authority and the assertion that reclaiming a disciplined priesthood of all believers is the path of Christian renewal. Contemporary responses by Kimberly Penner and Isaac Villegas discuss what institutional forms might best structure the leadership, authority and shared life of congregations, marked by particular concern about the exercise of power within communities of faith. ●



Maria Cortes and Samuela Ndongosieme, students at Freeman Academy, earned the grand prize and honorable mention in Mennonite Central Committee's 2021-22 high school essay contest. PHOTO: MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Freeman Academy students win MCC essay contest

Maria Cortes won the grand prize for her essay on the U.S. immigration experience in the annual Mennonite Central Committee U.S. National Peace & Justice Ministries high school essay contest. Samuela Ndongosieme earned an honorable mention for her essay on the impacts of

climate change. Both are in 12th grade at Freeman Academy in South Dakota. They will receive \$250 and \$100, respectively.

Cortes listed the reasons for immigration in "The United States of America: Land of the 'Free,' " from poverty to violence to global market pressures, as she highlighted her father's immigration story.

"I have experienced firsthand how hard it is for immigrants to find jobs, friends and security when it feels like the whole country is wishing for them to fail or trying to send us back to the 'hole we crawled out of,' " she wrote. Immigrants have human rights, and "no one should ever be treated as just another 'problem' to solve."

She encouraged Christians to draw from the immigration stories in the Bible and Jesus' example of welcoming the stranger to shape response to immigrants.

Ndongosieme explored the impact of global warming on wildfires in "Climate Change Is Consuming Our Homes." As the U.S. is a major greenhouse gas emitter, she emphasized the nation's responsibility to prevent further warming. Anabaptists also have a responsibility to help.

"Our beliefs teach us that it is our duty

to take care of the earth and respect it," she wrote. "... We should take care of God's work of art." — *Kirstin De Mello/MCC*

MB Foundation sets record for charitable distributions

Mennonite Brethren Foundation set a record in 2021, reaching \$13 million in gift distributions by donors. The 427 charities and ministries designated by donors included educational institutions, mission organizations, MB conferences and congregations.

Assets under management grew to more than \$327 million, a 9% increase from 2020. The loan portfolio ended the year over \$100 million for the first time. In 2021, loan financing helped three churches purchase their first facility.

The foundation gave \$180,000 to the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and \$67,000 in financial health grants to MB pastors. The financial health program promotes financial awareness and good stewardship habits for pastors and churches. — *MB Foundation*

Haitian kidnappers' leader extradited

THE LEADER OF A GANG that kidnapped 17 adults and children affiliated with Christian Aid Ministries in Haiti is now in the custody of U.S. law enforcement.

Haiti's National Police said in a statement that Germaine Joly was extradited to the United States on May 3 aboard an FBI plane.

Reuters reported Joly faces charges in the U.S. for weapons smuggling and "ransom of American citizens." The U.S. Department of Justice alleges Germaine has directed the 400 Mawozo gang from a Haitian prison since 2018. The gang has allegedly shipped concealed weapons and ammunition purchased in Florida to Haiti and engaged in armed kidnappings of U.S. citizens for ransom since at least Jan. 12, 2020.

Twelve adults and five minors associated with CAM were abducted after visiting an orphanage on Oct. 16. The group included 16 Americans and one Canadian.

The gang originally demanded \$1



Christian Aid Ministries workers and family members who had been abducted reunited on Dec. 18 in Florida, along with the father (back right) of one of the kidnapped families. PHOTO: CHRISTIAN AID MINISTRIES

million per hostage. Some were freed for medical reasons in November, before an unidentified person paid an undisclosed amount for the release of others in December. Former hostages

have maintained that the remaining 12 escaped Dec. 16, although other accounts suggest the gang let them go as part of a ransom deal.

— *Anabaptist World*

Disabilities network creates accessibility assessment tool

Anabaptist Disabilities Network has created a tool to help congregations assess their accessibility level and celebrate these forms of welcome.

ADN's Congregational Assessment Survey assists churches to assess levels of accessibility to people with disabilities, including mental illness. The survey, available at anabaptistdisabilitiesnetwork.org, registers and tracks results to generate an ADN accessibility seal for use on congregational websites.

The seal has symbols representing five categories of accessibility for which churches can apply:

- **Mobility:** accessible parking, entrance, interior, restrooms and worship area;
- **Hearing:** assistive listening devices and other aids provided for people hard of hearing;
- **Sign language:** adequate sign language interpretation provided;
- **Vision:** aids provided for people who have difficulty seeing;
- **Support:** support given for inclusion of people with disabilities and mental illness through awareness-raising events, educational activities, support groups and provision for differences in gifts, behavior and learning style.

— *Anabaptist Disabilities Network*



Anabaptist Disabilities Network has created a seal for congregations to share areas of accessibility that have been confirmed.

GRAPHIC: ANABAPTIST DISABILITIES NETWORK

MC USA appoints peace and justice minister

Mennonite Church USA has named Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz as denominational minister for peace and justice, starting May 23. She will provide conference ministers, conferences and pastors with opportunities to strengthen Christ-centered peace and justice and serve as a liaison and coordinator for peace and justice initiatives throughout MC USA.

Stutzman Amstutz was coordinator of Mennonite Central Committee's restorative justice program for over 25 years. She most recently served as foster care supervisor for COBYS Family Services in Lancaster, Pa.

Stutzman Amstutz graduated from Eastern Mennonite University and has a master's degree in social work from Marywood University in Scranton, Pa. She replaces Sue Park-Hur, who has been appointed director of racial-ethnic engagement.

— *Mennonite Church USA*

Facilitators to lead MC USA delegate session discussions

Mennonite Church USA has engaged professional facilitators to help create a comfortable and safe environment for discussions at its May 27-30 special delegate assembly in Kansas City, Mo.

Sidney Morgan and Matt Tibbles will lead facilitated discussions.

Morgan is a facilitator, mediator, speaker and consultant specializing in diversity,

equity and inclusion work, restorative justice practices and conflict transformation. She holds a master's degree in transformational leadership and restorative justice from Eastern Mennonite University.

Tibbles is an organizational development and conflict transformation professional. He has a master's degree in conflict transformation from EMU.

By May 11, 476 delegates were registered. — *Mennonite Church USA*

MWC raises Indonesia assembly attendance limit

Planners of the Mennonite World Conference assembly in Indonesia have decided to raise the attendance limit for the July 5-10 gathering from 700 to 1,250.

COVID-19 cases in Indonesia remain low, so the Indonesian government has lifted quarantine restrictions for travelers.

"Anyone can register until we reach the limit," said Liesa Unger, MWC chief international events officer, on May 3. "Our registration team is happy to put in the extra effort to facilitate these late registrations and General Council arrangements."

If the gathering size is increased later, more local participants may join the closing worship service at Holy Stadium, the meeting place of a Mennonite congregation in Semarang.

The expanded number of participants allows for the General Council, MWC's leadership group, to take place on site instead of online. — *MWC*

MC Canada donates \$50,000 to MWC assembly fund

Mennonite Church Canada is donating \$50,000 to help Mennonite World Con-

ference meet expenses for its assembly in Indonesia July 5-10 and calling on its congregations to help match the donation.

Due to COVID-19 measures, MWC is limiting on-site attendance to 1,250 people, compared to the more than 8,000 who gathered in Harrisburg, Pa., in 2015. This means income generated by on-site registration is much lower than in the past, while costs for running an online and in-person assembly remain the same. MWC asked its member denominations for contributions to help meet expenses.

— *Mennonite Church Canada*

Saskatchewan pastor to lead MB mission agency

Bruce Enns has been appointed general director of Multiply, the mission agency of U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren churches, effective May 16.



Enns has served for 17 years as lead pastor of Forest Grove Community Church, a multisite church in Saskatoon, Sask. Under his leadership, the church developed numerous global partnerships with Multiply's missionary teams. Enns served as a member of the Multiply Board for 12 years and more recently as moderator of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

Multiply board chair Wendi Thiessen wrote in a May 6 letter announcing the appointment that the board voted unanimously to approve Enns for the role.

Interim general director Vic Wiens will retire from Multiply in August. — *Multiply*

BY ANNETTE BRILL BERGSTRESSER • Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

AMBS grads urged to learn from Moses



Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary graduates toss their caps in the library after the commencement service on April 30. PHOTO: JASON BRYANT/AMBS

MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

general secretary César García invited participants at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's April 30 commencement in the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount to look to Moses for insight to face today's leadership challenges.

Of the five times Moses questions God's call to serve, only one of them upsets God: Moses' refusal to act.

"A leader takes responsibility and acts. If you see a need, probably God is calling you to be part of the solution," he said. "... God does not do it for us; God acts through us!

"True leaders do not just manage.

They create the conditions through which God's purposes can be fulfilled."

Eight of the 21 graduates earned a master of divinity degree; five earned a master of arts: theology and peace studies; and three earned a master of arts in Christian formation. One student is the first to graduate with a master of arts: theology and global Anabaptism, a program launched by AMBS in 2019. Four students received a graduate certificate in theological studies.

The graduating class includes 14 women and seven men from seven countries — Canada, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Nigeria, Tanzania and

the United States.

Eleven of the graduates are members of Mennonite Church USA; one is from Mennonite Church Canada; and three are from other Mennonite denominations around the world. One graduate is from the United Methodist Church, and five represent other denominations or nondenominational churches.

Mennonite colleges and universities with graduates in the Class of 2022 include Bethel College, Columbia Bible College, Conrad Grebel University College, Eastern Mennonite University, Fresno Pacific University, Goshen College and Hesston College. ●

Goshen grads guided to the good life

RETIRING HISTORY PROFESSOR John D. Roth answered the big question during Goshen College's commencement on May 1 and encouraged graduates to live with love, truth and healing.

Speaking on "What Is the Good Life?," he encouraged graduates to contemplate the guiding force in their lives.

Roth, a 1981 Goshen graduate, called on graduates to pursue what will give their future a focus, making choices meaningful instead of impulsive or random.

"What understanding of the good life will enable you to align your one precious life with what really matters as you seek to close the gap between the world as it is and the world as you yearn for it to be?" he asked.

Roth reminded the 214 graduates in Roman Gingerich Recreation-Fitness Center of the nature of the good life they were taught while at Goshen.

First, he said, the good life is the embrace of God's unconditional love.

"The Christian language for this love is grace, in which we cannot pretend away all of our imperfections, our flaws, our weaknesses, our anger, our self-loathing, our fears, all of the bad things we've done," he said. "Yet we still are loved."

Second, the truth sets us free. Third, the good life offers healing for the



Goshen College graduates celebrate after commencement. PHOTO: SETH SMITH KAUFFMAN/GOSHEN COLLEGE

"You can't fully experience the power of healing in your own life until you are ready to offer yourself in the healing of others."

— John D. Roth

wounds of the world.

"The good life calls us into the world to participate in the healing work of reconciliation and peacemaking," he

said. "Indeed, you can't fully experience the power of healing in your own life until you are ready to offer yourself in the healing of others."

Roth has worked at Goshen since 1985, where he also served as director of the Mennonite Historical Library and editor of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*. He is founding director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism and secretary of the Mennonite World Conference Faith and Life Commission. He is moving into the role of project director for MennoMedia's "Anabaptism at 500" initiative. ●

Hesston, Bethel team for 'Bluestem U'

HESSTON COLLEGE is joining with Bluestem Communities and Bethel College in a new lifelong learning program. Bluestem U will provide learning opportunities for people 55 and older, hosted by Hesston College and Bluestem's Schowalter Villa campus.

The inaugural semester will begin in September, with some courses also available by Zoom.

Courses will be taught by former and current instructors from Hesston and

Bethel colleges, along with community experts on topics such as history, creation care, spirituality, psychology, arts, wellness and technology.

"We are excited to offer this program, which will open our campuses to the community and to those who want to learn more about specific areas of interest," said Ariana Kauffman, Bluestem Communities vice president of marketing and communications. "We are looking forward to working

in collaboration with our neighbors at Bethel College and Hesston College."

Bluestem U will begin with a fall semester hosted by Schowalter Villa and Hesston College, followed by a spring semester with Kidron Bethel Village and Bethel College. Each semester will offer several four- to eight-week courses for \$50 per course. Classes will be held on the Bluestem Communities campuses.

— Hesston College

Biola vice president to lead FPU

FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY has selected André Stephens, vice president of student development at Biola University in Los Angeles, as its next president, beginning July 1.



Stephens

Stephens succeeds Joseph Jones, who will complete five years of service. FPU board chair Joshua Wilson said Jones' work, including partnerships built with area agencies such as community colleges and the completion of the Warkentine Culture and Arts Center, have put FPU in a strong position.

"We have greatly appreciated the time Dr. Jones and his wife, Yvette, have spent with FPU and the progress the university has made under his leadership," he said. "We wish them both all God's blessings in what I'm

sure will be an active retirement."

Stephens has 30 years of experience in Christian higher education in California, most recently as vice president of student development at Biola.

Before moving into the vice presidency, he was associate vice president of university admissions. A member of Biola's enrollment management team since 1991, he started as an admissions counselor and was promoted to increasing roles of responsibility. Under his leadership, Biola saw 12 consecutive years of enrollment growth.

"Dr. Stephens has the knowledge, experience and commitment to take Fresno Pacific University into the future, with a focus on students," said FPU board chair Joshua Wilson. "Student success has always been the heart of our mission, and changes in the lives and needs of people heading into and attending college, either right out of high school or as adults, call for new ideas."

He and his wife, Beth, a Biola alumna, have three children.

"Beth and I were drawn to Fresno Pacific because of its clarity of mission, partnership with the church and commitment to students," Stephens said. "We are thrilled to join the FPU family and look forward to contributing to the ongoing success of the institution."

Stephens completed his bachelor's degree in communication with a public relations emphasis from Biola, a master's degree in speech communication with an emphasis in intercultural/interpersonal communication from California State University at Fullerton, and his doctorate in education with an emphasis in higher education administration/student affairs from Claremont Graduate University.

He was president of the North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals and received the group's Admissions Officer of the Year Award in 2012. ●

EMU commencement honors lawyer

EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY conferred its second honorary doctorate in its history — to human rights lawyer Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative — during commencement May 8.

EMU awarded 408 degrees, including 260 undergraduate degrees, 92 master's degrees, 54 graduate certificates, one doctorate and Stevenson's honorary doctorate. Among those were 29 graduates of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding and 10 graduates of Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

With the honor, Stevenson joins Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee, a Liberian peace activist who graduated from EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding in 2007.

"You are unique among college graduates around this country because you have committed to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God, and I just believe that we've never



Eastern Mennonite University graduates and guests celebrate May 8 following commencement.

PHOTO: RACHEL HOLDERMAN/EMU

needed people to take seriously that commitment more than we do today," he told graduates.

EMU also hosted a lavender grad-

uation for LGBTQ graduates. It is the first Mennonite academic institution in the U.S. and Canada to celebrate such an event. ●



Students process to Bluffton University's 122nd commencement. PHOTO: ALISON KING/BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY

Bluffton graduates build plans for life

BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY graduates received blueprints for building a successful life May 7 during commencement in Sommer Center. More than 150 students received undergraduate and graduate degrees.

"I know you are prepared to make a living, and I know you are prepared to build a life," said commencement speaker Peter Strange, chairman emeritus of Messer Inc. "Most build for money or to play the game. The master

builder builds for love, for friends, for family and God above."

Strange, who has worked in the construction business his entire career, advised: Good ideas don't come from job titles. The most valuable strategic advantage in any marketplace is trust. New eyes are needed to solve old problems.

"Every problem that could have been solved by a good speech from an old white man has almost probably been

solved by now," he said. "It's time to move from speeches to action. Your energy, your insight and your ideas will help us take action against the challenges of our businesses, our communities and our world."

Graduates included a student whose great-great-grandfather graduated from Bluffton in 1908 and the first class of bachelor of science in nursing students who completed all four years as Beavers. ●

FPU grads called to follow their story

VONG MOUANOUTOUA advised Fresno Pacific University graduates to understand where they came from in order to know where they are going on May 7 at Selland Arena in Fresno, Calif.



Mouanoutoua

"Find out your original story, otherwise you are lost," the Clovis City Councilmember told a crowd of about 6,000 people. "Tell that sto-

ry over and over again. All these stories are special."

Some 714 students were eligible to participate in graduation: 310 from bachelor's degree-completion programs, 244 from graduate programs (including Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary) and 160 from traditional undergraduate programs.

Mouanoutoua's story has both danger and joy. Coming to the United States as a child in 1976, he was one of more than 150,000 Hmong refugees who fled Laos after the "secret war," in

which Hmong people put themselves in danger to support the U.S. Though a third of Hmong people died in the war, those who fled did not despair. "Our people chose freedom; our people chose life," Mouanoutoua said.

Mouanoutoua is director of external relations and project development at Community Medical Centers and a lecturer at Fresno State University. After studying at UCLA, he obtained his juris doctorate degree from San Joaquin College of Law.

— Fresno Pacific University

‘Beauty of the Earth’ gives Bethel graduation speaker words to share



Bethel College President Jon Gering, right, and members of the faculty applaud graduates May 15. PHOTO: JAKE SMUCKER/BETHEL COLLEGE

BETHEL COLLEGE’S commencement speaker, William Eash, drew his inspiration from familiar topics to those who know him: birds, stars, shoulders.

Eighty-one students graduated from the college May 15 in Memorial Hall.

Eash, retiring professor of music, spoke on “Of Birds, Stars and Shoulders.”

He was inspired by conducting John Rutter’s arrangement of “For the Beauty of the Earth” this spring and by the Bethel seal with its words from 1 Corinthians, including faith, hope and charity (love).

Eash said he learns about faith by watching birds, such as the migrating goldfinches that come to his backyard feeder.

Goldfinches live in large groups, and “remind me of the joy of our Bethel College community, the pride of well-delivered presentations or concerts, the success of athletic teams and support and encouragement when things don’t go as planned.”

He continued, “I learn about hope from observing and wondering about stars. I usually get up at 4:30 a.m.,

make coffee and head outside.

“Life is a continuum. Remember the past people who saw the same stars in the heavens: the founders of Bethel College; the Kaw and the Wichita [peoples]; the very earliest people on Earth. There is hope in this continuity of life.”

Eash said, “I learn about love by being in community. I stand on the shoulders of my teachers, colleagues past and present, family and many more.



“Build your own community. Let others stand on your shoulders. Work so all can flourish and grow.”

He concluded, “May you find your own birds, stars and shoulders. May your lives be hymns of praise. Thank you for being part of my journey, part of my joyful hymn of praise.”

Before the speaker and awarding of degrees, Robert Milliman, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, presented the Ralph P. Schrag Distinguished Teaching Award to Peter Goerzen, assistant professor of Bible and religion.

Earlier in the day, three graduating seniors — Jadin Kaltenbach of Wichita, Antonino Mangiapane of Solingen, Germany, and Landon Barnes of Ashland City, Tenn. — told “stories of hope and resilience,” the theme of the baccalaureate worship service. ●

Seniors Mia Loganbill, left, Hesston, Kan., and Evelyn Manresa Lozano, Tampa, Fla., place candles in a sand tray for a candlelighting ritual at Bethel College’s baccalaureate service May 15. PHOTO: JAKE SMUCKER/BETHEL COLLEGE

Hesston grads pushed to keep focused

HESSTON COLLEGE GRADUATES were called to continue strengthening their double vision during a commencement ceremony May 14 in Yost Center.

Mennonite Church USA director of racial engagement Sue Park-Hur addressed graduates with a message, “It Takes All of Us.”



Park-Hur

“Where is God showing you in the long vision of your life?” she asked, playing on the metaphor of bifocal lenses and double vision. “And what do you see in the tangible now that will help you to get there?”

“How do we zoom in to see and build interpersonal skills and zoom out to see how systems and structures limit or free us to do the work we are called to do?”

President Joseph A. Manickam and vice president of academics Carren Moham also briefly addressed the class of 2022.



Stephanie Ayala of Hesston, Kan., Shinju Baxter of Sedgwick, Kan., and Sarah Bianchi Muscio of Trento, Italy, prepare for Hesston College commencement. PHOTO: LARRY BARTEL/HESSTON COLLEGE

Manickam conferred 38 bachelor of science in nursing degrees, one bachelor of science degree to a student majoring in aviation professional pilot, and 74 associate degrees.

The graduating class includes mem-

bers from 16 countries, U.S. territories and sovereign nations.

The 38 nursing program graduates were honored at a nursing pinning ceremony earlier in the morning at Hesston Mennonite Church. ●

Lecture confronts health disparities

J. ALEXANDER SIDER, professor of Bluffton University, shared “Shalom as Equity: Disability, Health Care Disparities and Social Justice During COVID-19” as the C. Henry Smith Peace Lecture on April 12 at Bluffton University and April 19 at Goshen College.



Sider

Sider explored how the pandemic deepened inequalities for people with disabilities. He used the Hebrew Bible’s idea of shalom, often translated as “peace,” to think about structural justice, health, well-being and equity.

“In the early stages of the pandemic, we knew health disparities were affecting minoritized and marginalized populations of people,” he said. “What I wanted to look at was how were those health disparities affecting people with disabilities.”

Sider identified a phrase often used in media reports — “the elderly and disabled are the most at risk for dying of COVID-19” — as a way of “othering” people.

“For audiences who weren’t elderly or didn’t have disabilities, it created a kind of relief: You’re not talking about me, so I don’t have to worry,” he said. “We as a society ran smack dab into our willingness to warehouse people in nursing homes, prisons and medi-

cal facilities as a way of not having to ask big, community-based public and theological questions about what it means to live together, what we owe each other and how we care for vulnerable people.”

Sider recommended committing to describing what’s going on truthfully and carefully, recognizing causes of vulnerability of people with disabilities, confronting politics and ideologies that maintain vulnerability, and practicing solidarity.

Sider is the Harry and Jean Yoder Scholar in Bible and Religion at Bluffton. He chairs the history and religion department and directs the peace and conflict studies program.

— Bluffton University

Sprunger inspired ‘fellow historians’

KEITH L. SPRUNGER, Oswald H. Wedel Professor of History Emeritus at Bethel College, died April 24 after a short illness. He was 87.

A native of Berne, Ind., Sprunger had a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College and master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Illinois. He began a 38-year teaching career at Bethel in 1963.

In 1972, the Danforth Foundation awarded him the E. Harris Harbison Award for Gifted Teaching. Bethel honored him with the Ralph P. Schrag Distinguished Teaching Award in 1985 and the David H. Richert Distinguished Scholar Award in 1991.

Generations of students remember him for the class History of Civilization, where he influenced careers.

"I became a history major because of Keith Sprunger's History of

Civ II course," said Valerie Schrag, who teaches U.S. history and



Sprunger

African-American history at Lawrence High School in Kansas. "It is a decision I've never regretted. After learning of his passing, I found myself looking around my own classroom for evidence of his presence. I found it

in a poster on my wall, purchased on [a] 1993 [college] trip to Russia. I found it in my History of Civ I and II textbooks on my bookshelves. . . .

"And it can be heard in my classroom at the start of every class period as I greet my students with 'Good morning/afternoon, my scholars!,' which echoes the way Sprunger started every

class: 'Good morning/afternoon, my fellow historians!'"

Darrel Knoll, who teaches history, government and English and coaches basketball at Hillsboro High School in Kansas, said: "Each time I talked to Dr. Sprunger, I came away feeling blessed. He had a way of inspiring, guiding and encouraging me. He was one of the most influential professors/teachers in my development as a student and as an educator. I am thankful that he encouraged me to teach."

AMONG SPRUNGER'S areas of scholarly interest were Puritanism in the Netherlands and Anabaptist-Mennonite studies, with a particular focus on the history of printing and publishing, as well as the history of Mennonite church architecture.

He is the author five books, as well as articles, reviews and professional papers about English, Dutch and church history. Among his books are the 1997 centennial history of Bethel College Mennonite Church and *Bethel College of Kansas, 1887-2012*, written for the college's 125th anniversary.

Along with other Bethel faculty and students, Sprunger was active in oral history, especially in building a collection of interviews with conscientious objectors from the First and Second World Wars.

Sprunger and his wife, Aldine, are the parents of three children, who all graduated from Bethel and went on to careers in academia: David at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn., Mary at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., and Philip at Lycoming College in Pennsylvania.

At Sprunger's memorial service on May 7, Sondra Bandy Koontz, retired librarian and Bethel advancement officer, said Sprunger was the best teacher she ever had.

"Countless other Bethel students would also claim that statement," she said. "Keith Sprunger is Bethel College to me. He changed my life and the lives of many other students. His lessons will last for our lifetimes." ●

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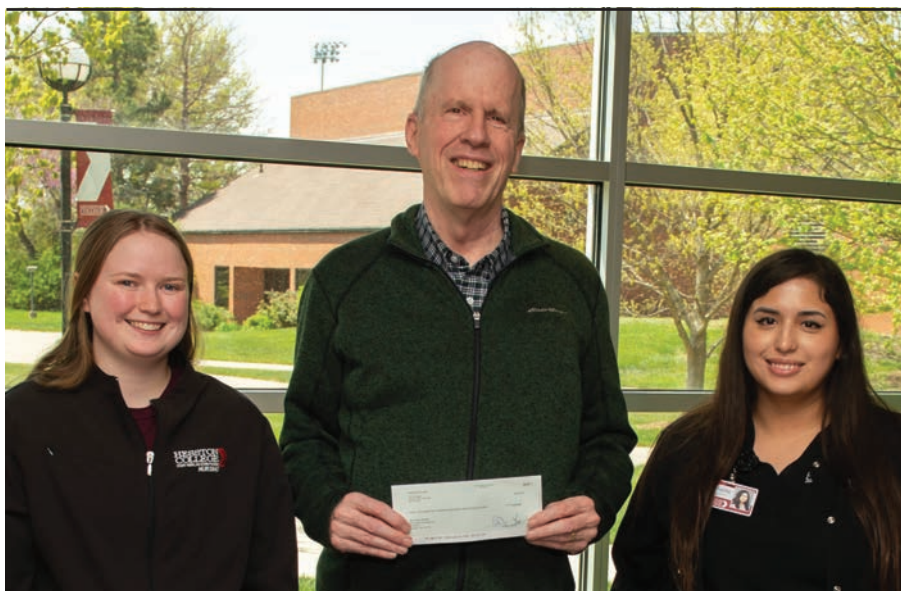
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Hesston College senior Delaney Lawrence, left, and junior Michelle Ramos-Carreno present a check to Brian Bisbee, executive director of New Hope Shelter in Newton, Kan. PHOTO: LARRY BARTEL/HESSTON COLLEGE

Hesston nursing students raise funds for shelter

Hesston College junior and senior nursing students extended care beyond the classroom to the unhoused population of Harvey County by raising more than \$4,500 for New Hope Shelter in Newton, Kan.

"During a nursing club meeting, we learned that Wichita was having a fundraiser called Sleep Out ICT that encouraged people to give up their bed for one night as an act of solidarity and fundraiser for the homeless community there," said Michelle Ramos-Carreno of Salina, a class leader in the nursing club. "We discussed doing something similar. To try to raise as much money as we could, we turned it into a friendly competition between the junior and senior nursing classes."

That competition raised \$4,618 for New Hope, which serves unhoused people from Harvey, Butler, Marion and McPherson counties. — *Hesston College*

Former prof's gift creates fourth Bethel scholarship

A gift of \$500,000 from the estate of Rupert K. Hohmann has established a fourth scholarship bearing the Hohmann family name at Bethel College, this one to promote orchestral music.

Pam Tieszen, vice president for institutional advancement, announced the new endowed scholarship May 1 at the Masterworks concert. It will be given to one or more members of the Bethel orchestra.

Hohmann, who died in 2018 at the age of 90, was a familiar figure on campus. He was a collector of aluminum cans, and

often "checked in" with the advancement office or dropped by to see a faculty or staff friend. He lived just south of campus, in the house in which he and two sisters grew up as the children of Walter H. and Elsbeth Hohmann.

Walter Hohmann taught music and directed choral groups at Bethel from 1923 to 1962, founding the mixed *a cappella* choir now known as the Bethel College Concert Choir. He co-edited the 1940 *Mennonite Hymnary*.

Rupert Hohmann graduated from Bethel in 1949 and earned a doctorate from Northwestern University. A violinist, he was the first Newtonian to join the Wichita Symphony Orchestra. He taught instrumental music from 1957 to 1962 at Bethel, from 1963 to 1966 at Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio, then spent 23 years on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

He established other scholarships at Bethel in honor of his family: a keyboard scholarship, the Rupert K. Hohmann String Scholarship Fund and a conducting scholarship. — *Bethel College*

CMU commencement honors largest graduating class

After two years of outdoor ceremonies and air hugs, the Canadian Mennonite University community gathered April 30 at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man., to celebrate this year's graduates in a more familiar way.

CMU returned to an indoor convocation ceremony, also streamed online. The class of 108 graduates is CMU's biggest. Many graduates completed a significant portion

of their degree during the pandemic.

Terry LeBlanc received the CMU PAX Award, along with his wife, Bev LeBlanc, and delivered the commencement address. LeBlanc, a Mi'kmaq-Acadian, is an educator, community organizer and founding chair and current director of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community, formerly known as the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies. President Cheryl Pauls preceded LeBlanc with an apology on behalf of CMU for declining an invitation of partnership from NAIITS in 2001. — *Canadian Mennonite University*

Conrad Grebel returns to in-person graduation

Conrad Grebel University College returned to an in-person graduation convocation service April 10 after a two-year hiatus.

Mary Brubaker-Zehr gave the address. She is retiring in July after serving the Grebel community for 26 years as director of student services.

Brubaker-Zehr focused on five gifts, including a Grebel mug, peace dove and Lego. She encouraged students to hold on to hope, keep building on what they've started, seek meaning over happiness and determine their own unique gifts.

— Ashitha Mantrawadi/
Conrad Grebel University College

EMU professor performs with famous classmate

Pianist David Berry, professor of music at Eastern Mennonite University and incoming artistic director of the Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival, was a member of the Gateways Music Festival Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on April 24. The orchestra is composed entirely of professional classical musicians of African descent.

Berry was a member of the festival's artistic planning committee. The event was hosted by Berry's undergraduate *alma mater*, the Eastman School of Music, and celebrated the contributions of musicians of African descent.

The program showcased the premiere of *I Can*, a new Gateways commission from Jon Batiste. The Oscar- and five-time Grammy-winning composer and artist, who is music director of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, joined the orchestra as piano soloist.

Batiste was a classmate of Berry at The Juilliard School, where Berry earned master's and doctor of musical arts degrees.

— *Eastern Mennonite University*

Will our peace convictions stand the test of war at our doorstep?



Members of Frankfurt Mennonite Church carry a banner during a peace rally March 13 in Frankfurt, Germany. The banner proclaims, "Peace does not grow from violence." PHOTO: ULRICH LEUTBECHER

"PEACE DOES NOT GROW from violence." A few days before Russia invaded Ukraine, we discovered a banner with this message in our new position as pastors in Frankfurt, Germany. Originally made for peace marches against the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the banner expresses a seemingly simple and uncontroversial statement. Yet, when we took it to a big peace rally in town, we were stunned to realize the biggest applause was reserved for those who called for military aid to

Ukraine and a NATO-backed no-fly zone.

While I support solidarity with the Ukrainian people against Russian aggression, I worry that my country is turning to the old ways of military deterrence without considering alternatives.

I also worry for our Mennonite community: Will our peace convictions stand the test of war at our doorstep? Or will we turn out to be "vegetarians between meals," as the Catholic

antimilitarist Ammon Hennacy called pacifists between wars?

The bitter truth is, Mennonites in Germany have not always been a peace church. In fact, in 1848 a Mennonite delegate to the first constitutional assembly at the Paulskirche in my hometown of Frankfurt argued that Mennonites should not be granted exemption from military service in the future democratic state, since equal rights entail equal responsibilities.

This line of thought became the

How resilient will our peace witness be in the face of this new militarization? Will we find ways to evangelize for creative nonviolent strategies, or will we return to being the quiet in the land?

dominant German Mennonite position. By the time of the World Wars, there were virtually no Mennonite conscientious objectors in Germany. Mennonite pastors regarded objection to military service and war as an antiquated custom. They joined the theological mainstream praying for a speedy German victory.

IT TOOK THE DOUBLE TRAUMA of total military defeat and confrontation with the horrors of the Holocaust to break the spell of militarist nationalism. The void was filled by the Pax boys and Mennonite Central Committee workers whose relief work in feeding and housing thousands was a concrete example of the power of a peace conviction coupled with action.

The new peace theology crafted by the Concern group (see page 23) contributed to a theological denazification. This theology told a new story, in which the church exists as a nonviolent witness to a world at war, an experimental plot in which alternative ways of engaging conflict could be tried out and others invited into.

This story fit the mood of a nation weary of war and a world in which a militarized Germany was not welcome. While it was never uncontroversial to be a total pacifist or a conscientious objector to all wars, at times the burden of proof seemed to lie with the hawks.

The wars in the Balkans in the 1990s led some to argue that “Never again Auschwitz” and “Never again War” were in tension. But doing reconciliation work and opposing bombings was still seen as a force for good, albeit a naïve one.

The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were hugely unpopular in Germany, so the work of Mennonites in helping GIs exercise their right to conscientious objection was lauded by many. And while the German weapons industry always contradicted the facade of our pacifist national self-image, the shock of Putin’s invasion has caused a seismic shift back to the mantra of peace through strength.

HOW RESILIENT WILL our peace witness be in the face of this new militarization? Will we evangelize for creative nonviolent strategies, or will we return to being the quiet in the land? Will we build on the 100 years of witness built up through MCC and its German sibling organizations? How do we recover the inner freedom to nonconform boldly and make alliances for peacebuilding?

I was heartened that the leaders of the Associated Mennonite Churches in Germany not only drafted a statement condemning the Russian

invasion and calling for nonviolent approaches but also joined a broad coalition of secular and church groups denouncing increased military spending as a robbery of the poor and calling for investment in a transition away from fossil fuels.

In a world on fire with armed conflicts and the climate crisis, we need to scale up our efforts to heal the wounds of those caught under the wheels of militarism and fossil-fueled economies. Our mission is nothing less than to nonviolently throw a wrench into the wheel of death itself. ●



Benjamin Isaak-Krauss co-pastors Frankfurt Mennonite Church with his spouse, Rianna. He graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2019 and serves on the steering committee of Community Peacemaker Teams.

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If community doesn't come naturally, we can practice

We're all in the same boat, and we're all seasick. — G.K. Chesterton

WHEN I LIVED IN KENTUCKY, I joined a women's ecumenical Bible study where many of the participants came from evangelical churches. As a new participant, I found myself quite the belle of the ball.

Strangers came up and asked me about myself, my family, my origins. The end of these friendly encounters always went something like this: "It has been so nice to meet you. I'd love to get to know you and your family better. Why don't you come to our church sometime?"

After the second such conversation, I got annoyed. Clearly, I was just church bait to them. They didn't want to get to know me, they wanted to get me to their church.

At the time, in my immaturity, I believed you couldn't genuinely desire both.

Remembering those women 12 years later, however, I appreciate what they were doing. No, I didn't need a church

No, I didn't need a church home, and yes, their attempts at evangelism were awkward and sometimes felt scripted. Still, they did seek me out.

home, and yes, their attempts at evangelism were awkward and sometimes felt scripted. Still, they did seek me out. I wasn't walking the halls alone and ignored.

MORE RECENTLY, my family started attending a new church, which is not evangelical. Perhaps that is why I waited weeks for someone to come up to me and initiate a meaningful conversation. Paid staff sought us out, of course. People greeted us casually in the pews before or after the service, but those greetings were of the hi-and-good-to-see-you variety. None of those interactions made me feel part of the community. I'd see the cliques chatting in the aisles and walk by alone, aching to be seen.

I realize some people feel awkward and uncomfortable in social situations, some painfully so. It is challenging for them to connect with other humans. But surely they still need to.

This goes both ways. Extroverted people like me have challenges, too. God created me socially intense. I talk loudly and often; I gesture largely. I become deeply invested in subjects and issues, which in conversation can be perceived as aggressive. As one person

told me, "Sarah, you're just a lot."

There are plenty of folks who relate well to me just the way I am. But over the years I've encountered times when my natural self creates discord, even hurt.

Creating community is perhaps the most vulnerable work we do as humans. We put ourselves out there, knowing we'll be judged. A first line of defense is to hide behind what comes naturally for us: I'm shy. I can't handle conflict. I just tell it like it is.

JANE AUSTEN wrote about this in *Pride and Prejudice*. The interchange begins when Elizabeth, who has been playing the piano, accuses Mr. Darcy of being a social snob.

"I certainly have not the talent which some people possess," said Darcy, "of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done."

"My fingers," said Elizabeth, "do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. . . . But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault — because I would not take the trouble of practicing."

I share Elizabeth's hope for better things. We can embrace the beautiful creations that we are while celebrating the strength we have to behave differently for the sake of others. We can love our neighbors as ourselves, put their needs first and do the difficult work of acting unnaturally.

For me, this means attempting to make myself smaller in certain situations. More gentle, less sharp. Another person might need to force herself to cross the street and initiate a conversation with a new neighbor.

And when any of this is hard for us, we can always practice. ●



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

If young people don't come to your church, don't worry

EVERYONE DREAMS of a multigenerational church. A church where there are old people, middle-aged people, young people and children running around the pews.

This is what many people want to see. But the reality is that this does not reflect many churches out there. Many churches in the United States are facing a crisis of people no longer attending. This has created panic in churches with a lot of older members.

Churches feel forced to ask, "How do we get more young people here?" They're forming committees to prioritize bringing in a younger crowd.

Many churches have tried changing up their worship styles. They have tried adding special ministries to reach out to younger families. All as a last-ditch effort to save the church community they cherish.

I get it. The future is scary without young people to pass your traditions to.

As a pastor, my job security depends

on making sure there are people in the pews. Also, as a 30-year-old, I am the exact type of person many churches are trying to attract.

People often ask me for advice on how churches can get more young people involved. While I value congregations thinking about how to cater to younger audiences, I believe we are asking the wrong question.

People stop going to church for many reasons. Some have suffered from church trauma. Some see church as a waste of time. Some (my parents, for example) work long shifts throughout the week, and Sunday is their chance to sleep in.

CONSIDERING ALL OF THIS, what should the church focus on to grow our numbers and get younger people involved?

It's simple: Focus on who shows up. Be the best version of who you are. Don't be like the churches that completely change their identity as they try to attract younger people.

Now, I am not saying we should never change. Churches should always be open to change. But constantly trying to change who we are because we think that's what it takes to attract a new audience can lead us to lose focus on those who actually show up.

What does the 90-year-old woman who always sits in the fourth pew on the left side need from this church community? What about the couples who have been a part of the congregation for 40 years? What does your church offer to them?

Yes, it is important to be open to change and growth. But if we are busy worrying about numbers, we lose sight of the people who have already chosen to be a part of the church body.

WE MUST REMEMBER THAT the church exists to serve Christ and our

neighbors. This is our motivation.

We care about social issues not because we hope to attract more young people but because we follow Christ, and he calls us to care about the marginalized. We care about the poor not because they might decide to go to church with us but because Jesus calls us to serve them.

Yes, people may become more interested in your church because of these things, but that is not the goal.

Focus on who shows up. Be the best version of who you are. Don't be like the churches that completely change their identity.

Our purpose is to focus on Christ and people's needs. Church growth is a potential result of fulfilling our purpose, not the purpose itself.

If you are a part of an older and smaller congregation, please don't hit the panic button. Focus on caring for the people around you. Focus on how your congregation can follow Christ, though you are small in number. Ask: How can we make a lasting impact in the lives of the people in the community?

To survive, the church needs a younger generation to replace the older. But institutional survival cannot be our motivation. If we take care of the people, survival will take care of itself.

No, the 30-year-old hipster couple with two kids might not come to your church. But the 90-year-old widow will be there every Sunday. Make sure your people's spiritual needs are met, and continue to follow Christ the best way you know how. ●



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.

Don't burn your boats or bridges

OUR FAMILY RECENTLY had a visit from friends from Indonesia. They brought us a lot of *oleh-oleh* (gifts). It is a custom for Indonesians to bring gifts when traveling from far away.

But their most precious gift was their presence. Zoom or social media can't replace this genuine experience. We are grateful that even though we live 10,000 miles apart, we haven't lost our relationship and connection.

Our family came to the United States in 2016. You could say we are still fresh off the boat, if that means "not yet assimilated."

The phrase could be derogatory, but I don't mind. We do bring something fresh. There is much that others can learn from us without traveling across the world.

For us immigrants, living in a new country means we need to comply with certain standards. It is necessary to do some things differently than we did back home. Failure to change could cause harm. For example, some immigrants need to learn to drive on the opposite side of the road than they are used to.

But the host culture should make some adjustments, too. In the U.S.,

some things need to be redefined, reworded, restructured. I'm grateful that two states, California and Colorado, have changed their laws to replace the word "alien" with "noncitizen" or "immigrant." To me, "alien" feels negative, in the same way that if you type "alien" into your Google search engine, a

Living as an immigrant can be lonely. We desperately need connections and relationships. There is a culture of fear that benefits from a segregated way of life.

picture of an ugly monster from outer space pops up.

When we make adjustments for each other, we reject the culture of fear that has become common today. We adopt a culture of love: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

There is much work to do in bridging cultures. I believe it starts with a relationship. Then we can make a brave cultural crossing and be transformed together.

We need to learn from other cultures, not only tasting their food but learning their ways, like trying their approaches to solving problems or handling tensions.

I'M GRATEFUL THERE IS an initiative from churches in my conference, Mosaic Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA, to have a combined service with the Indonesian churches in South Philadelphia.

"We can't all go to the Mennonite World Conference in Indonesia, but

we can take a short trip and worship together while learning and sharing experiences and a busy life," said Sonya Kurtz, lead pastor of Zion Mennonite Church in Souderton, Pa. I'm grateful to be one of the hosts.

Living as an immigrant can be lonely. We desperately need genuine connections and relationships. We need to be intentional in making those connections.

And we need to be countercultural, because there is a culture of fear that benefits from a segregated way of life. Let us unite and let the spirit of God work in our communion.

The Apostle Paul said, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

MAYBE YOU HAVE HEARD a quote that says, "To be successful, you have to burn your boats" (or bridges). Meaning you should never look back. You should even make it impossible to go back.

But, in the intercultural context, burning our boats or bridges is unnecessary, even wrong. We will need those boats or bridges to connect two worlds — the past and the present, the old and the new.

Each of us needs to seek our identity in Christ in our time and place. Yet, we know we were created in God's image from the beginning. No matter how far we may have come — by physical distance or by the passage of time — we carry a sacred connection within us that can't be broken.

There is a saying in Indonesia: "Don't become like nuts that forget their shells." In other words: Don't forget your roots. Remember where you came from. Don't be ashamed of your identity. Embrace it, and be transformed with others along the way. ●



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.

A tale of two birds

IT WAS A YEAR AGO now that a bird found its way into our home. It was a sweet little Carolina Wren that had chosen one of our hanging porch plants in which to nest.

One early spring evening, my husband brought the plants inside to protect them from a dip in temperature. No sooner had he set one of the plants down in our foyer than the bird shot out of its bedding. In its confused state, it began a panicked flight through the rooms in our home.

Quite surprised ourselves, we gave chase. The wren darted this way and that with us in hot pursuit, our son's butterfly net in hand.

After 30 minutes of flurried activity, the bird and my husband were shut into a one-windowed bedroom. The show-down intensified and ended, finally, with the bird's escape to the great outdoors.

We were tuckered out from all of the commotion. I can only imagine

how the poor wren felt. While we had her best interest in mind, I think our methods must have traumatized the dear thing, and I don't blame her if she went in search of a new place to nest.

Last week, a friend told me of a bird who had recently found its way into her home. I expected a harried tale not unlike ours, but that is not what unfolded. Her bird was a finch, nesting in a wreath on her front door. When my friend opened the door to allow the breeze to flow, the finch took flight.

Unlike my husband and me, my friend's response was to sit still. For 30 minutes she sat in silence. As she watched the bird fly this way and that, she didn't pursue. She didn't panic. No butterfly nets were needed. As my friend sat still as stone, the finch found its own way out.

Two birds. Two houses. Two very different stories. In this tale of two birds, the difference is this: My friend offered a nonanxious presence to her visitor. My husband and I did not. Where my friend was silent and still, we matched our little bird's anxiety and thereby likely increased it. We didn't mean to. We wanted to help. But our help wasn't very helpful.

The outcome for both birds was the same, but the means by which it came, the energy exerted and the trauma levels experienced were vastly different.

I LONG TO BE a nonanxious presence to all who come my way. Not only birds, but people. Not only people but thoughts, feelings, grief or pain. Things I'd rather shoo out the door as quickly as possible.

Can I be in their presence in a nonanxious way? Can I allow them space, trusting they will eventually find their path out or through? By engaging in a panicked chase, am I

only intensifying the negative experience? (The answer to that last question is yes.)

I read recently that the best way to help someone deescalate or regulate intense emotions is to put them in close proximity to someone who is calm. Like my friend and her finch.

JESUS IS MY CALM presence, the host whose home quiets me. This leads me to wonder if, when God seems silent and still, God is offering a gift to me.

I long to be a nonanxious presence to all who come my way. Not only people but thoughts, feelings, grief or pain.

I don't always experience it as such. I want God to get as riled up as I am. Doesn't God care? Surely God will get up and do something!

But people in a panic rarely need someone to panic with them. What if God is present to me, like my friend to her finch? With feathers unruffled.

My thoughts turn to the story of Jesus asleep in the boat while a storm raged.

The disciples were incensed. How could he? Why wasn't he matching their level of distress? Didn't he care?

I used to side with the disciples. But I am beginning to see it differently now. Might Jesus be to us like my friend to the finch?

Edwin Friedman, a Jewish rabbi and therapist, coined the term "nonanxious presence." He used it to describe a person who won't be drawn into the fray of anxiety.

I want to be like this. Like Christ in the storm. Or my friend to her finch. A peaceful presence in a panicked world. ●



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.

Are we content with our thorns in the flesh?

I HAVE LOTS OF WEAKNESSES.

Spiritual, emotional, physical, relational. Spending time in my garden, the weakness that's on my mind is my knees. After multiple surgeries from too much soccer, my knees don't let me do what I want to do. They are a weakness, a frustration — a thorn in my flesh, to borrow an image from the Apostle Paul: "To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7).

We don't know exactly what Paul was talking about. Biblical scholars have plenty of ideas, but all we can say with any certainty is that Paul has weaknesses — maybe physical, perhaps spiritual.

The point isn't an investigation into the nature of Paul's weakness but simply the fact that his own life, his own body — something about himself — gets in the way of what he wants to do. And it doesn't interfere with just a hobby, like playing soccer, but something more like an existential commitment, something that matters, his purpose for life.

This weakness is a nagging irritation

in his commitment to the gospel, an impediment to his work in organizing communities around the message of Jesus.

Part of him prevents another part of him from his full-throttled pursuit of doing the work he has been called to do. He can't heal himself. He can't set himself free. He can't overpower his weakness. This isn't a matter of self-improvement or behavior modification.

Paul recognizes that what he wants is beyond his grasp. He can't just change his mind about what he wants, and he can't get rid of what's blocking him. He's stuck with this thorn. He's stuck with himself, with his weaknesses.

This doesn't mean he's going to give up — as if that's possible, because, as I said, this is existential. This is not a matter of modifying what he wants, as if our psychologies were that simple, like flipping a switch in our heads.

Paul will continue to live according to the purposes God has given him. Because that calling is who he is. To follow this calling will lead him to confront his powerlessness — a stubborn reminder of the gap between what he can do and what he wants to make happen.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, as Paul describes it, involves recognition of our weaknesses. This is not to say we should get over our disappointments and resign ourselves to accept the way things are. Or lower our expectations of what God can do.

Instead, Paul doesn't let us sidestep the fact that, at some point, we're going to have to deal with ourselves. Our frustration with the world is also a frustration with ourselves.

We aren't as convincing as we think we should be. We aren't as effective as we'd like to be.

The Christian life, according to Paul, has everything to do with being willing to admit our weaknesses: to acknowledge them, to refuse to look away from them, to stop ourselves from blaming others as a distraction from the maddening fact that we also get in our own

The Christian life, according to Paul, has everything to do with being willing to admit our weaknesses.

way, that we stumble over ourselves, that we've all got thorns in our flesh.

"I AM CONTENT WITH weaknesses," Paul says, "for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). This strength comes from Christ, from the Christ who knows weakness, from the power of his spirit in our spirits.

That's the crux of this passage. Our weaknesses become an opportunity to confess our need for others to offer us God's grace. We depend on one another for the strength of Christ's spirit.

All of us are wounded. All of us have weaknesses we try to hide — to protect ourselves, perhaps, or to safeguard the remnants of power we've worked so hard to acquire.

To admit weakness is to render ourselves vulnerable — which can feel like our undoing if we present ourselves as in control of our little corner of the world.

The Christian life involves a conviction that we depend on the grace each of us holds for the other. The church is a community where we learn to boast, not in ourselves but in the grace of Christ's presence when we share our lives together. ●



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

A house of faith, rebuilt better

AS A YOUNG CHRISTIAN, I was taught faith is constructed from the ground up. At the foundation is belief in objective, universal truth, grounded in philosophical arguments. The next level is belief that theism is more rational than atheism, constructed with scientific evidence and moral arguments. A third level is belief that not just any theism, but Christian theism, is true, constructed with historical evidence for the veracity of the biblical stories, especially the resurrection narratives. At the peak of this edifice is the gospel, proclaimed with confidence, knowing it rests on a well-built structure.

If Christian faith is something to be constructed, then there is no bigger threat than deconstruction. Critics who identify weaknesses — philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche or Jacques Derrida — are enemies of the faith. The biblical imperative to “always be ready to make your defense” (1 Peter 1:15) indicates Christians should be equipped with arguments to ward off these enemies. After all, any weakness in the structure threatens the gospel, which rests somewhat precariously at the top.

But what if the structure really does have weaknesses? Then the critics aren’t so much enemies to be vanquished as friends from which to learn. Deconstruction isn’t so much a threat to the gospel as a step toward a more authentic expression. So argues Brian Zahnd in *When Everything’s on Fire*.

While Zahnd is not affiliated with the Anabaptist tradition, he has earned a reputation as something of a neo-Anabaptist guru. He is the lead pastor of the nondenominational Word of Life Church in Saint Joseph, Mo., and author of popular books like *Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness* and *A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor’s Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of Peace*.

In this book, his Anabaptist sensibilities shine through in his insistence that the foundation of Christian faith

is nothing other than Jesus. “The foundation the church is built on is not the Bible or theology or reason or historical evidence or apologetics,” he writes, “but the divinely given revelation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

With Jesus as his foundation, Zahnd is free to engage critics like Nietzsche and Derrida as conversation partners who help him identify structural weaknesses in “the beautiful cathedral of Christian faith.” Such conversations might entail deconstruction, but Zahnd insists that deconstruction is not so much demolition as extreme home makeover. “Renovate what needs to be renovated, throw out what needs to be thrown out, deconstruct what needs to be deconstructed, and even let some of it burn,” he counsels, “but don’t burn it all down.”

For Zahnd, such renovations included tossing out narrowly fundamentalist beliefs about creation, the Bible and the end times, along with “sectarian certitude, Western individualism, American consumerism and religious nationalism.” He reconstructs his theological house with a more open framework he identifies with historic Christianity. He accents this renovation with mystical encounters with God, a return to Scripture with a “second naïveté” that allows him to appreciate the narratives without getting hung up on contradictions or scientific inaccuracies, and a focus on love over fear and divisiveness.

ZAHND WRITES THAT his mission is “to help make Christianity possible for [his] grandchildren and their generation” — a mission that provides a helpful lens to assess this book: Does it help make Christianity possible for the next generation?

As pastor of a church with many millennial and Generation Z congregants, I regularly encounter people who would identify with Zahnd’s journey. To such people, I would recommend this book to help see how the



When Everything's on Fire: Faith Forged from the Ashes
by Brian Zahnd (InterVarsity Press, 2021)

fires of deconstruction can refine their faith rather than burn it down. At the same time, in Zahnd’s focus on his intellectual journey, he fails to adequately address why so many in younger generations are disillusioned. It isn’t just that they don’t find young-Earth creationism tenable; it’s that they feel betrayed. The faith that taught them to love their neighbors has been weaponized to support oppressive and dehumanizing laws and policies. Zahnd makes passing reference to such political realities but names the problem as one of “enflamed division” rather than injustice. In his caution to avoid politicizing the faith, Zahnd may undercut his mission to make Christianity possible for a generation who will either see Christianity side with justice or let it burn to the ground. ●

David C. Cramer is pastor of Keller Park Church, a Mennonite Church USA congregation in South Bend, Ind., managing editor at the Institute of Mennonite Studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and co-author of *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence*.

Abortion: personal as well as political

Many people hold sincere values in tension and see the issue in shades of gray

FOR 50 YEARS, abortion has been one of the most contentious issues in American political life. But as the constitutional right to abortion is in doubt — according to a leaked draft of a Supreme Court decision — religious Americans have a surprising consensus on the issue.

Most believe abortion should be legal. Most believe there are times when it should not be. And no matter what their views, religious Americans are willing to help friends or family who choose abortion.

Tricia Bruce, a sociologist and researcher affiliated with the University of Notre Dame's Center for the Study of Religion and Society, says some Americans practice "discordant benevolence" when it comes to abortion.

Though they may believe abortion is immoral and should be restricted, they are also willing to help a friend who chooses to end her pregnancy. This can range from giving emotional support or helping arrange for an abortion to providing financial help.

Bruce said public polling about beliefs on abortion sometimes misses the real people who hold those views. Those people, she has argued, often have a series of sincerely held values, such as believing human life begins at conception, and also that they need to stand by their friends.

"Sometimes we take a shorthand approach by using statistics to represent people's views, and we forget that behind those views is a lot of complexity," she said.

In 2019, Bruce and a team of colleagues conducted more than 200 face-to-face interviews with people from six states — California, Colorado, Indiana, North Dakota, Tennessee and Pennsylvania — about abortion. Each interview lasted more than an hour and was designed to get a deeper view of how Americans see the issue.

A report based on those interviews

found that for many people, abortion is personal as well as political. About a quarter of the females interviewed had had an abortion, while three-quarters of interviewees knew someone who'd had an abortion. Among them was a 58-year-old woman who believes life begins at conception and opposes abortion but also drove a friend to a clinic to get an abortion.

Some people would call that hypocritical. Instead, Bruce sees it as being human and trying to do one's best in a difficult situation.

DATA FROM THE 2018 General Social Survey shows that Americans from a wide range of faiths say they would be willing to help a close family member or friend who has decided to have an abortion.

The only religious group that overwhelmingly opposes abortion is white evangelicals, 74% of whom say abortion should be illegal in most or all cases.

Half of evangelicals (53%), for example, say they would help arrange a ride or childcare for a friend or family member who was having an abortion, while more than a third (38%) would help pay for travel costs. Many nones (the religiously unaffiliated), people from non-Christian faiths, Catholics and Mainline Christians as well as many Black Protestants would do so as well.

Almost all faith groups say they would provide emotional support — from 93% of nones to 81% of evangelicals.

Providing emotional support could

also mean trying to talk someone out of having an abortion and offering them support to choose a different option, said Bruce.

"They may deeply believe the best form of help they can give is to talk their friend out of the abortion or to say things like, 'I will adopt the baby' or 'I'll find someone who can help you' or 'I'll give you money to raise the child,'" she said.

In the interviews, almost no one took the issue of abortion lightly. Those who had abortions told researchers it had been a difficult experience. They did not regret it, but it was not trivial.

Researchers also found that people wanted to talk about ways to prevent abortion — better sex education, access to birth control, addressing economic inequality and providing more support for struggling families.

"None of the Americans we interviewed talked about abortion as a desirable good. Views range in terms of abortion's preferred availability, justification or need, but Americans do not uphold abortion as a happy event or something they want more of," according to the report.

THE POSSIBILITY THAT the Supreme Court may overturn *Roe* comes after decades of falling abortion rates. In 1973, the year *Roe v. Wade* was decided, 616,000 abortions were reported to the CDC by medical facilities. The figure increased to 1.43 million in the 1990s, before steadily dropping to 612,719 in 2017, with a slight uptick to 625,346 in 2019. Data from the Guttmacher Institute also shows abortion in the United States has been in decline for decades.

If *Roe* is overturned, state legislatures, rather than the federal government, will play a major role in future regulation of abortion. Some states, like Texas and Tennessee, have already



People demonstrate outside the U.S. Supreme Court on May 3 in Washington. PHOTO: JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP

passed so-called trigger laws that would go into effect immediately if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned and would ban most abortions.

Those laws would likely be commonplace in Bible Belt states, which are controlled by Republicans, many of whom are evangelical Christians. Less restrictive laws would likely be passed in states controlled by Democrats, where evangelical Christians are less prominent.

The only religious group that overwhelmingly opposes abortion is white evangelicals, 74% of whom say abortion should be illegal in most or all cases, according to Pew Research Center. Yet only 1 in 5 white evangelicals (21%) say abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. That's higher than other faith groups, such as Catholics (10%) or Black Protestants (6%), but still well short of a majority.

The largest Protestant denomination in the United States, the 14 million-member Southern Baptist Convention, passed a resolution at its

2021 annual meeting calling for the abolition of abortion. It states “unequivocally that abortion is murder, and we reject any position that allows for any exceptions to the legal protection of our preborn neighbors.”

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST misconception about religious groups is the widely held view that Catholics universally oppose abortion rights. While the Catholic Church has consistently opposed all forms of abortion — and the U.S. bishops have made it a defining teaching of the church — the Pew survey shows that 56% of Catholics say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Only 44% of Catholics said they were “extremely” confident that life begins at conception.

“The bishops have been trying to convince their own people and have failed,” said Thomas Reese, a Jesuit priest and senior analyst for Religion News Service. “Catholics don’t listen to the bishops.”

Among all religious groups, as

among all Americans, few took an absolutist view on the legality of abortion. Even the most anti-abortion said there are some cases where abortion should be legal, and even those most supportive of legal abortion said there are times when abortion should not be allowed.

“One commonality across these groups is that sizable numbers in all of them see the issue of abortion in shades of gray,” the Pew survey found.

Americans of all backgrounds are more open to restricting abortions later in pregnancy.

Ryan Burge, assistant professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University, said many churches don’t talk much about abortion. That’s in part, he said, because Americans don’t want to talk about it. No matter what position church leaders take, someone will be upset.

“It is such a divisive issue,” he said. “In the vast majority of religious contexts, there is no value in bringing it up.” ●

After years of debate, conservatives split from United Methodist Church

THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH, a theologically conservative denomination splintering from the United Methodist Church, launched May 1.

After decades of debate over the ordination and marriage of LGBTQ United Methodists, a special session of the United Methodist Church's General Conference and three postponements of a vote to formally split the denomination, the schism finally came.

Keith Boyette, chair of the Transitional Leadership Council of the Global Methodist Church, said the launch was "driven by practicality and the fact that the postponement of General Conference moved many people to say they were tired of waiting and tired of the conflict



Boyette

not being addressed and resolved."

Delegates have debated sexuality at every quadrennial meeting of the United Methodist Church General Conference since 1972, when language first was added to the denomination's Book of Discipline saying that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

That debate came to a head in 2016, when bishops announced a special session of the General Conference devoted to the topic.

Delegates to the 2019 special session ended up approving something called the Traditional Plan, which strengthened enforcement of language in the denomination's rulebook against the ordination and marriage of LGBTQ members.

Progressive United Methodists pledged to disregard the results of the special session. Conservatives, frustrated by the continuing debate, threatened to leave anyway.

Finally, a group representing all



Logos for the Global Methodist Church, left, and the United Methodist Church, right.

GRAPHIC: RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

different theological viewpoints within the denomination brokered a deal to create a separate "traditionalist" Methodist denomination that would receive \$25 million over the next four years.

Delegates to the 2020 General Conference — which gathers delegates from around the world — were prepared to vote on that proposal, called the Protocol of Reconciliation

The denomination brokered a deal to create a separate "traditionalist" Methodist denomination that would receive \$25 million over the next four years.

and Grace through Separation, when COVID-19 swept the globe, canceling their meeting not once, but three times. Currently, it is set for 2024.

THE THIRD POSTPONEMENT earlier this year was the last straw for members of the Global Methodist Church's Transitional Leadership Council, which already was laying the groundwork for a new denomination. The council immediately announced it would launch the new denomination on May 1.

The date was driven by practical reasons: If clergy, churches and regional annual conferences want to join the Global Methodist Church, it first needs to exist.

United Methodist conferences in the U.S. hold their annual meetings in May and June. Over the coming weeks, some may consider pathways to allow churches to leave with their properties. Others may vote for the entire conference to disaffiliate.

Already, the Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference has voted to leave the United Methodist Church and join the Global Methodist Church.

Boyette did not have numbers for how many clergy, churches or conferences had joined the denomination with the launch, but he believes hundreds of churches across the U.S. already have begun the process to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church, and most will land in the Global Methodist Church.

Some may wait to see what the United Methodist General Conference decides in 2024.

THE PROGRESS TOWARD a new denomination is bittersweet.

"I don't think anyone is dancing with joy that we are in this place in Methodism. I think there is a sadness that we have come to this," Boyette said.

Bishops echoed that sentiment at the spring meeting of the United Methodist Council of Bishops.

"While I will always wish we could all remain in this church, I'm clear some cannot," said Bishop Cynthia Fierro-Harvey, outgoing president of the council. "I am a big-tent church person who believes that every voice is important to the whole, sometimes as annoying as that might be. . . . I also realize that it might be time to bless and send our sisters and brothers who cannot remain under the big tent." ●

Report implicates boarding schools

Churches are investigating their roles in forced assimilation of Indigenous children

THE UNITED STATES operated 408 boarding schools for Indigenous children across 37 states or then-territories between 1819 and 1969 — half of them likely supported by religious institutions. That's according to the first volume of an investigative report into the country's Indian boarding school system released May 11 by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"Our initial investigation results show that approximately 50% of federal Indian boarding schools may have received support or involvement from religious institutions or organizations," Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland said at a news conference on the progress of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.

The report revealed nearly 40 more schools than the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition previously had identified in the U.S. — and nearly three times more than the number of schools documented in Canada's residential school system by that country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It also recorded the deaths of more than 500 children and identified marked or unmarked burial sites at more than 50 schools across the Indian boarding school system. The department expects those numbers to go up as it continues to investigate.

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative was announced last summer by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. That announcement came as Indigenous groups across Canada confirmed the remains of more than 1,000 Indigenous children buried near former residential schools.

From 1819 through the 1960s, the U.S. implemented policies establishing and supporting Indian boarding schools across the nation. The boarding schools supported a "twin United States policy" to culturally assimilate Native American, Alaska Native and



A makeshift memorial for the dozens of Indigenous children who died more than a century ago while attending a boarding school that was once located nearby is displayed under a tree at a public park in Albuquerque, N.M., on July 1, 2021. PHOTO: SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN/AP

Native Hawaiian children and to seize Indigenous land, according to Newland, a citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community (Ojibwe).

THE SCHOOLS ATTEMPTED to assimilate children in a number of ways, including giving Indigenous children English names, cutting their hair, even organizing them into units to perform military drills, according to the report. They discouraged or prevented children from speaking Indigenous languages or from engaging in their own spiritual and cultural practices.

Many children endured physical and emotional abuse. Some died.

"The consequences of federal Indian boarding school policies — including the intergenerational trauma caused by forced family separation and cultural eradication, which were inflicted upon generations of children as young as 4 years old — are heartbreaking and

undeniable," said Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary.

Deborah Parker, chief executive officer of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, said: "This is a historic moment as it reaffirms the stories we all grew up with, the truth of our people, and that often immense torture our elders and ancestors went through as children [was] at the hands of the federal government and religious institutions."

The Roman Catholic Church and a number of Protestant denominations already have begun investigating their own roles in the boarding schools.

Several Catholic groups and Protestant denominations have called for the United States to establish a Truth and Healing Commission similar to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which issued its final report in 2015. ●

Classifieds

classifieds@anabaptistworld.org

EMPLOYMENT — CHURCH

Lindale Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., is seeking a youth pastor (FTE: 0.5). There may be opportunity for candidates with proper credentials and gifts to increase to a full-time position. For more information visit lindale.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Youth-Pastor-Job-Description.pdf or contact Sara Nafziger, 540-282-1246, ksnafziger5@gmail.com. (7-8)

Shady Pine Church, Willow Hill (Franklin County), Pa. Need: pastor. Support level: part-time, 50%-75%. Congregation size: 40-45. Congregation type: rural. Contact: Wilma Brown, wb96026@gmail.com, 717-860-1514. (7)

Hebron Mennonite Church of Hagerstown, Md., is a friendly, caring and service-oriented congregation. We seek a full-time pastor to join us as we support each other, reach out to our community and invite all people into a growing relationship with God and the church. All interested candidates contact Ed Poling at elpoling1@gmail.com. (6-8)

Half-time paid pastoral position (with benefits) to join a full-time pastor as part of a team. Full job description at MC USA pastoral openings, indymenno.org or through drhpath@gmail.com. (5-10)

East Petersburg Mennonite Church, East Petersburg, Pa., seeks a 3/4-time Equipping

Pastor. The position will focus on providing vision/leadership along with an elder team, discipleship, worship ministry collaboration; faith community care facilitation, preaching/teaching and equipping people for ministry in the church and beyond. For more information, visit eastpetemc.org/equipping-pastor-search. (5-7)

EMPLOYMENT — SCHOOL

Fresno Pacific University invites applications for a Faculty in Chemistry. Complete job description and requirements at fresno.edu/careers. (7)

Fresno Pacific University invites applications for a Faculty in Criminology. Complete job description and requirements at fresno.edu/careers. (7)

Bluffton University invites applications for the following faculty positions: social work: visiting, one year; nursing: half time, ongoing; assistant professor of music and marching band director: full time. See bluffton.edu/employment for details. (7)

EMPLOYMENT — GENERAL

Living Branches, a senior care and retirement community in Montgomery and Bucks County, Pa., seeks a Director of Pastoral Care and Services. livingbranches.org/job-opening/director-of-pastoral-care-services. (7)

Eastern Mennonite Missions seeks a full-time Church Partnership Coach to nurture partnerships and missional initiatives in congregational settings. Required: ability to communicate, teach, coach and relate cross-

culturally in a variety of settings. Apply by June 3 at emm.org/employment. Begins July 1. (7)

Menno House, a guest house in New York City, is seeking a manager. View job description at mennohouse.org/employment. (7)

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Phoenix Menno Guest House, Ariz., seeks volunteer SOOP program hosts for October 2022 through March 2023. Responsible for overall Guest House and SOOP program management. Room and board provided. Hosts serve under Hospitality Services Center (HSC) board. Contact: Cheryl Paulovich at cjpaulovich@gmail.com or call 602-448-8754. (6-9)

TRAVEL

Visiting New York? Interested in biblical archaeology? Visit BiblicalArcheologyAtTheMet.org. (4-7)

LODGING

North Newton guest housing — 316-283-5231; vadasnider@cox.net. (14-9)

\$1.50 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

Elmer J. Brunk

Elmer J. Brunk, 83, died April 8, 2022, in Royersford, Pa., in the home where he was born and lived his whole life.

He was born Nov. 9, 1938, to Paul W. and Minnie (Good) Brunk. He graduated from Christopher Dock Mennonite High School in 1957 and began taking classes at Millersville College while serving his 1-W service there. He later graduated from Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pa.

Throughout his life and until his death, he was an accountant for several local businesses and the treasurer at Methacton Mennonite

Church, where he was a member, for 41 years. He was an avid sports fan and reader.

He is survived by his sister, Ellen A. Moyer and husband Donald of Telford, Pa., 19 nieces and nephews, 72 great-nieces and nephews, 37 great-great-nieces and nephews and two-great-great-nieces.

He was preceded in death by brothers Wilson and Melvin Brunk and sisters Beulah Brunk and Grace Ramer.

Memorial contributions may be made to Methacton Mennonite Church, 3081 Mill Road, Norristown, PA 19403.

Jim Mullett

Jim Mullett, 82, of Wellston, Ohio, died April 17, 2022. He was born Oct. 12, 1939, in Niagara County, N.Y., to Benedict B. and Fannie Mast Mullett.

He grew up near Grantsville, Md., until the age of 12 and then moved with his family to Greenwood, Del. He served his country as a

conscientious objector for two and a half years at the Bethesda Hospital in Cincinnati. In 1963, he and his wife, Isabel, moved to Jackson, Ohio, to pastor Hillside Chapel Church, where he served for 24 years.

He was also a former employee of Willis-Sellers in Wellston, former CEO of Mullett Family Farms Inc. in Delaware and retired from the United States Postal Service with 22 years of service, having been a rural mail carrier for Wellston.

He was a foster parent for seven children in the Jackson County community. He was a member of Mennonite Church USA, Christ United Methodist Church in Jackson and the Jackson Rotary Club. He enjoyed woodworking, reading, singing with a barbershop quartet, studying nature and tending his "garden of Eden."

He was preceded in death by a son, Wendell Mullett; and siblings Ernest Mullett, Mary Schrock and Verda Robertson.

He is survived by his wife of 62 years,

Isabel Steckly Mullett; daughter Wanda (Dale) Whetsel of Jackson; son Doug (Rose) Mullett of Hilliard; nine grandchildren; sisters Ruth (David) Teneffos of Shreve, Ohio, Martha (Floyd) Brubacher of Stayner, Ont., Esther (Clarence) Hawk of Seaford, Del., Mildred (Jim) Sherman of Greenwood Del., and Miriam Boychuk of Kitchener, Ont.; and brothers-in-law Truman Schrock and Tom Robertson, both of Greenwood, Del.

A celebration of life service was held at Christ United Methodist Church in Jackson. Burial was in the Fairmount Cemetery in Jackson. Memorial contributions may be given to Christ United Methodist Church Feed My Starving Children Fund, 150 Portsmouth St., Jackson, OH 45640.

Keith Sprunger

Keith Sprunger, 87, of North Newton, Kan., died April 24, 2022, at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita following a winter of declining physical health.



He was born March 16, 1935, in Berne, Ind., to Arley and Lillian (Mettler) Sprunger. Upon confession of faith, he was baptized as a member of First Mennonite Church of Berne.

He was educated at Wheaton College in Illinois and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, earning a Ph.D. in history in 1963.

In 1959, he married Aldine Mary Slagell, and they had three children, all of whom became college professors.

He taught history at Bethel College in North Newton for 38 years, earning national and institutional awards for his teaching and scholarship. Thousands of students took his History of Civilization classes, featuring lively lectures illustrated from an extensive personal slide library. His travel seminars to the Soviet Union and European capitals brought history alive for many students regardless of major. He retired from full-time teaching in 2001.

A prolific scholar, he published five books and over 25 scholarly articles. His academic interests centered on English Puritans in the Netherlands, printing history, church architecture and Mennonite studies. He was active in organizations that promoted history, including the Harvey County Historical Society and Kauffman Museum. He wrote institutional histories of Bethel College and Bethel College Mennonite Church. Wanting to know his community from the inside out, he and Aldine walked every block of every street in Newton and North Newton, not once but almost three times.

Exploring the roads and towns of Kansas was an annual tradition. They traveled extensively in Europe and enjoyed trips to Hong Kong and Morocco. On sabbaticals, the family lived in Amsterdam and London. Hobbies included

collecting books, reading, gardening and socializing with friends.

He was predeceased by siblings Ardu Gene (Lauren) Sprunger and Hugh David (Janet) Sprunger.

He is survived by Aldine, his wife of almost 63 years; three children, David (Charlotte Siemens) Sprunger of North Newton, Mary (Rachid Nouri) Sprunger of Harrisonburg, Va., and Philip (Elizabeth Yoder) Sprunger of Williamsport, Pa.; seven grandchildren and a great-grandson.

The family suggests memorial gifts to Bethel College or Bethel College Mennonite Church.

Duane Allen Shank

Duane Allen Shank, 70, died April 20, 2022, under hospice care at his home in Goshen, Ind.

He was born Jan. 18, 1952, in Chambersburg, Pa., to Luke J. and Anna Metzler Shank, and was



Shank

raised in Lancaster, Pa. He graduated from Lancaster Mennonite High School and attended Eastern Mennonite University.

Living in Washington, D.C., he was an organizer and administrator in peace and justice movements for more than 40 years.

Shank was featured in the book *The Path of Most*

Resistance: Stories of Mennonite Conscientious Objectors Who Did Not Cooperate With the Vietnam War Draft. Melissa Miller and Phil Shenk wrote, "Duane felt that if he was to be consistent in renouncing his own participation in war, he also had to oppose everybody's participation in war."

In Shank's January 1970 letter to the Selective Service System on his 18th birthday, he wrote that conscientious objector classification would be "an acceptance of the system of conscription and the militarism for which it stands and would also be a way of effectively silencing my conscience."

FBI agents arrested him at Eastern Mennonite. He was sentenced to three years probation and service at the Virginia Community Development Organization, where he was working as a community organizer.

He continued his career working against conscription, nuclear weapons, war and poverty. He coauthored *Empire and the Word: Prophetic Parallels between the Exilic Experience and Central America's Crisis* (1988) with Philip Wheaton. From 1995 until his retirement in 2014, he worked for the progressive faith-based organization Sojourners, including as senior policy adviser.

He was a member of the Community of Christ ecumenical congregation in D.C. and Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

His colleagues and family remember his integrity and humility. He was a good listener and enjoyed mentoring young people, who saw in him a gentle spirit and bold faith.

He is survived by his wife, Ellen Kennel;

daughter Celeste (Josiah Groff) Kennel-Shank; two sisters, Calliope (Deborah Fort) Shank and Debbie (Terry) Miller; and a brother, Dan (Louise) Shank. He was predeceased by his parents.

Mary Kathryn Yoder

Mary Kathryn (Hartzler) Yoder, 95, died Nov. 14, 2021, at her home in Harrisonville, Mo.

She was born in rural Cass County, Mo., on June 27, 1926, the daughter of Clarence Vernon (C.V.) and Nellie Elizabeth Hartzler.

In 1949 she married Lester Yoder of Garden City, Mo., who preceded her in death.

She started teaching in 1943 at age 17 after just 10 weeks of college preparation. While

teaching in one-room schools, she attended summer school and eventually completed her degree in elementary education. In 1973 she completed her master's degree. She taught almost 40 years. In retirement she volunteered in the library at Harrisonville Christian School for over 25 years.

Several years after retirement she relocated to Harrisonville. Many remember eating at her table and benefiting from her hospitality. She hosted many guests from all over the U.S. and internationally.

She loved people and was a busy farm wife, mother, Bible school teacher, 4-H leader, Sunday school teacher, grandma and hostess. She never quit dreaming of places she wanted to see or thinking of things she wanted to do. Her quick wit never left her, and laughter was always a part of her day.

She was known for her dill pickles sold at the Mennonite Central Committee sale and made hundreds of comforters and quilts for family and friends and the MCC auction. She organized the preparation of thousands of MCC school kits. She was a charter member of Harrisonville Mennonite Church.

She is survived by her two children, Doyle (Jennette) Yoder of Garden City and Reita Yoder of Harrisonville; four grandchildren; a sister, Esther Hartzler of Harrisonville; two brothers-in-law, Marvin (Judith) Kenagy of Archie, Mo., and Maurice Smith of Goshen, Ind.; and sister-in-law Vema Buerge of Hesston, Kan.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Lester, in 1986; a brother, J.T. Hartzler; a sister-in-law, Martha Hartzler; and three sisters, Ethel Hartzler, Evelyn Smith and Helen Kenagy.

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

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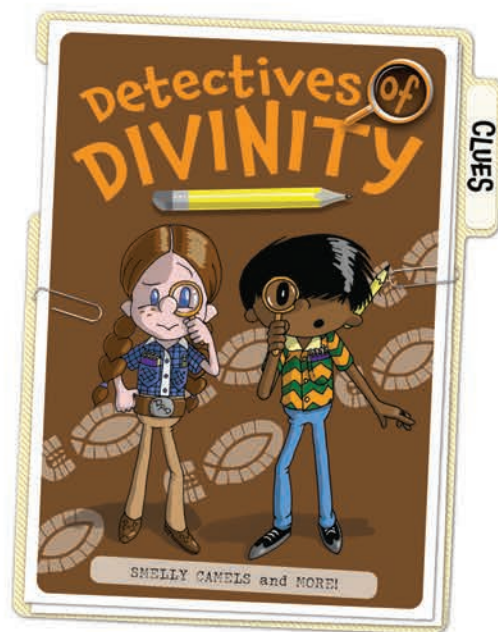
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