

# Anabaptist World

Mennonite news, inspiring stories



*A Bible for all  
children in all places*

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VOL. 4 • NO. 5

April 14, 2023

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**ON THE COVER:** Jesus heals the woman who touched the edge of his robe (Luke 8) in an illustration from *The Peace Table*, a new storybook Bible for children published by Herald Press and Brethren Press. **Art by Clarissa Martinez**



BY DANIELLE KLOTZ

# The Easter bunny and zombie Jesus

**JESUS WAS CLEAR** that not only are children welcome in his presence, but he wants us to be like children. I sometimes struggle with knowing what that exactly looks like, but recently I've tried to think about my own children's characteristics. The ones that have stood out to me have been their curiosity, honesty and ability to be unapologetically present in the moment.

All of these have their moments when they aren't convenient or might even be maddening for a parent. If you've ever been on the other side of an endless "But why?", you know what I'm talking about.

As a parent in the thick of raising a family, I've found the articles in this issue on children's faith formation particularly helpful and thought-provoking. My eldest has always had a lot of questions about God and faith. One he brings up a lot is, "Why can't we see God?"

One of my favorite moments with him was an Easter a couple of years ago. We were into the pandemic at least a year, and the last time he had been in a Sunday school classroom was before he could talk.

As a way to go beyond Easter bunnies and egg hunts, I sat down with him and his children's Bible and read the Easter story.

When I finished, his eyes were wide. He said, "Jesus was a zombie?"

I was not prepared for that honest question.

Somehow in his mind — surely influenced by cartoons — he associated coming back to life with being a zombie.

It took me a few minutes to gather my thoughts. Once I did, we could process a bit together, and we made our way to the understanding that Jesus was not a zombie but that his return from the dead was a miracle and showed how great God is.

We talked about it a few more times together. Now, it's one of my favorite parenting moments and always makes me laugh when I think about it.

I share this story as a way of raising my hand and saying: I need all of you wonderful people to do this awesome children's faith formation work. I need the help!

As lovely, funny and precious as kids can be, we need support and tools of guidance as we navigate all their special qualities. ●



*This issue was mailed April 7.  
The next issue will be mailed April 28.*



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

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

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

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



## Pennsylvania state champs

The Lancaster Mennonite boys basketball team won the Pennsylvania state Class 2A high school championship March 24. The Blazers defeated the Aliquippa Quips 60-44 at the Hershey Giant Center. It was the school's first appearance in a boys basketball state championship game.



Lancaster Mennonite basketball players celebrate winning the Pennsylvania 2A state championship.

PHOTO: LANCASTER MENNONITE

## From disorientation to clarity of purpose

A culture shift has left the church disoriented, says Howard Miller in *Transforming*, the magazine of Virginia Mennonite Missions. He sees opportunity amid the confusion if we allow God to reshape the church for mission. We've been "shaped by the legacy of Christendom: the church aligning with political power to protect and maintain our position in society," says Miller, pastor of Huntington Mennonite Church in Newport News, Va. This is vastly different from "a missionary church whose calling is to be embedded as 'sent ones' in our own societies. . . . I pray for my own identity shift, that I would be formed as a missionary right where I am."

## Even the hometown crowd applauded

Novelist and satirist Andrew Unger was surprised when an audience in Steinbach, Man., applauded fellow Steinbacher Miriam Toews' name in the credits of *Women Talking*. He was shocked to learn the film based on her novel would be shown in town. He writes in *The Globe and Mail* that in his experience, Mennonites engage defensively with art about them. "Rather than reading simply to catalogue all the ways that 'Miriam got it wrong yet again,' we might do better to read her work more reflectively, acknowledging the similarities to our own experiences, and respecting the differences," he says. "When we get defensive, accuse an author of 'lying,' or focus our reading on how we might be seen by others, we miss the opportunity to be transformed by art and literature."



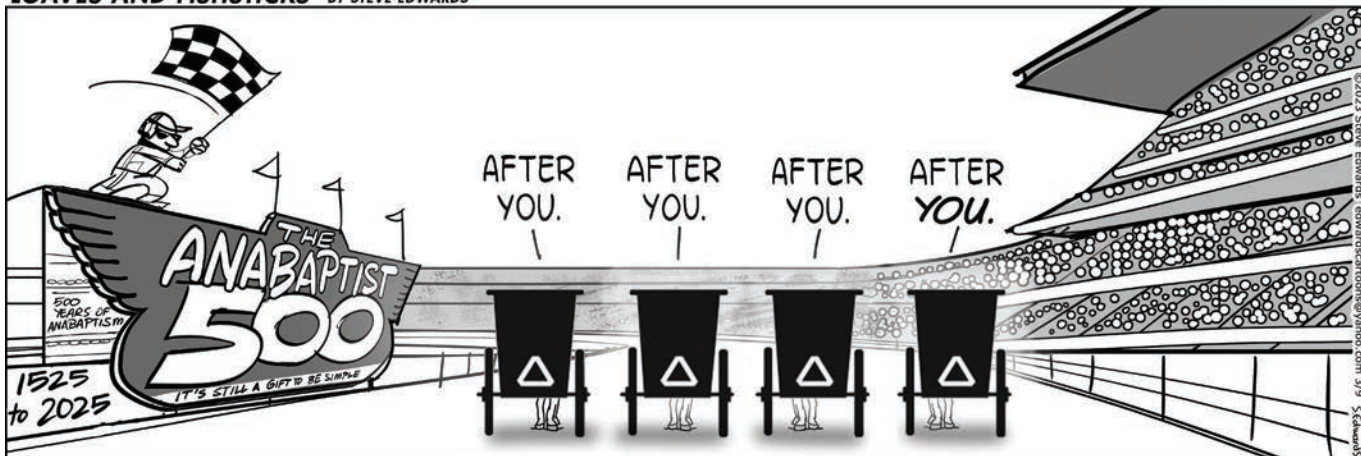
Rooney Mara in *Women Talking*.

PHOTO: MICHAEL GIBSON/ORION PICTURES

## Motive for mission: Bolivia's 'dark places'

International partners want to strengthen their ministries among Bolivia's Low German-speaking Mennonites. Sixty people from Canada, Mexico, Belize, Paraguay and Bolivia gathered in Bolivia on Jan. 17-18 and sensed a "passion for bringing the message of hope through Jesus to more Old Colony Mennonites," according to *The Recorder* of Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. Blaine Dueck, an EMMC pastor in Belize, encouraged prayer "for gospel breakthroughs in the dark places of the Mennonite colonies in Bolivia." The Academy Award-nominated film *Women Talking* — based on real events, rapes in Manitoba Colony — has made the reclusive colonies more widely known.

## LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS





# Letters & Comments

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

## Womanist theology for all

I strongly affirm *AW* for celebrating womanist theology (March 24) not only as a benefit to Black women but as a gift to all Anabaptists and other members of the Beloved Community. Thanks to Malinda Elizabeth Berry, Melody M. Pannell, Paul Schrag, Sarah Ann Bixler, Celmalí Jaime Okonji and Linda Gehman Peachey for contributing to our understanding of the story.

Black women, often more than the rest of us, have seen Jesus of Nazareth as the historic person-for-others, the only help to survivors of violence and oppression. I have particularly appreciated three sets of issues raised by womanist theologians: 1) identification with Abraham and Sarah's African-Egyptian servant Hagar as a model of strong, resilient womanhood in the face of serious emotional, sexual and physical abuse by Abraham and Sarah; 2) analysis of the Anabaptist concept of *servant-hood* (because of the centuries of forced *servitude* of so many Black women); and 3) critical analysis of peace as the absence of conflict without the presence of justice.

I have particularly benefited from Jacquelyn Grant's *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, Emilie M. Townes' *A Troubling in My Soul* and Delores S. Williams' *Sisters in the Wilderness*. I have also found J. Denny Weaver's *God Without Violence* to be a helpful bridge between Anabaptist and womanist theology. I hope future issues will focus on Indigenous, *Mujerista* and Asian-American theologies.

**Brad Yoder, Noblesville, Ind.**

## Empowered to serve, suffer

I have taught and mostly defended liberation theologies for 40 years, but this quotation from "Womanist theology saved my faith" by Sarah Ann Bixler (March 24) confused me: "I needed empowerment, not another call to serve and suffer." I thought empowerment and serving/suffering were, for all Christians, a both/and, not an either/or. As I understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, he empowers us to serve and suffer, and serving and suffering empower us to be effective citizens of the kingdom of God.

Bixler writes that "God saves out of empathy and compassion, not to make a sacrifice for human sin." Again, I see this

as a false either/or; God saves us through the death of Jesus Christ out of empathy and compassion by making a human sacrifice for human sin. To say otherwise is, it seems to me, to ignore, intentionally or unintentionally, much of the New Testament.

**Roger E. Olson, Aurora, Colo.**

## Women past and present

As I read the amazing articles by Malinda Elizabeth Berry, Sarah Ann Bixler and Linda Gehman Peachey (March 24), I recalled an article I wrote for *WMSC Voice* in June 1974, "The Anabaptist Woman: Our Role Model." There I shared stories of the faith of 16th-century Anabaptist women and stated, "We have a heritage in which women were free to serve Christ," even as they faced death. I'm glad to see these present-day connections of womanist theology to Anabaptism. The authors give important insights into the practice of a holistic faith that is true to the original Anabaptist message.

**Miriam E. Martin, Harrisonburg, Va.**

## Anabaptism inspires others

As John D. Roth guides our thinking around the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism — born in Europe, and, in spite of ourselves, flourishing in global context — I suggest he may be choosing a problematic understanding of identity markers ("2025: less triumph, more confession," March 24). As a Mennonite of European descent, I have never understood the markers that help me attempt to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus as securing my "moral superiority." I understand this framework as aspirational. I am often surprised that people find my faith identity inspiring. They see Anabaptists/Mennonites as people who *strive* to live as disciples of Jesus; who work, even if imperfectly, at discernment in community; and who understand witness to Jesus through the lens of reconciliation. We (Mennonites, Anglicans, Catholics, Muslims) complement each other as we work at reconciliation in interfaith, Indigenous and BIPOC contexts. We are striving to "gratefully acknowledge the acts of reconciliation and forgiveness that have restored our groups to fellowship," as Roth suggests. And we should not forget the drownings of martyrs in the Limmat River in Zurich. I praise God for distinctive identities that enrich us all. Let us not lose what some are longing to join: an inclusive, hope-filled spirit of striving. Were I to abandon the Mennonite framework that has shaped my Christian journey, my ecumenical and interfaith friends would be very disappointed.

**Suzanne Gross, Edmonton, Alberta**

## Filled with love and grace

Lucinda J. Kinsinger's columns speak to me pretty much every issue. But her March 24 column, "How my view changed and how it didn't," about sexuality and our response to how others deal with it in their lives, was a breath of fresh air filled with love, grace and possibility. Thank you so much.

**Jan Unzicker Buller, Silverton, Ore.**

## Cheering for Chicagoans

I am grateful to hear of Bethel Community Mennonite Church's efforts in the face of gentrifying injustice ("Chicago church organizes neighbors to hold leaders to housing commitment," March 24). As part of a neighborhood team working to survive rapid gentrification, I cheer heartily for this church and their allies. I hope they can get support from Chicago groups that work for a Community Benefits Agreement. This is a legally binding contract with a neighborhood coalition and a developer that must benefit the neighborhood in exchange for supporting the development. It seems there could be a strong case for the Department of Housing and Urban Development to be the developer with lower-income housing. Maybe this has been explored. I'm rooting for the church and every nonviolent means possible to win back housing for those who need it most.

**Mary Sprunger-Froese, Colorado Springs, Colo.**

## Suffering beyond Ukraine

During a Lenten series on peace and justice issues, a speaker questioned why we are focusing so much on Ukraine but not on other places of suffering. She cited the desperate situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has the largest number of Mennonites in any country. [*More than 5.5 million people have been displaced by militia violence over the past year in eastern DRC. — Editor*] She asked, "Is racism a possible reason?" There are a number of other places of suffering due to conflicts, climate issues such as drought and rising sea levels, and famine. Reading *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson makes me wonder if "unconscious bias" could be a factor. I grieve for those suffering in Ukraine, but I also grieve for so many vulnerable and hurting people around the world.

**Nancy A. Yoder, Harrisonburg, Va.**

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



# Scripture through a child's eyes

When generations connect over Bible stories, children are welcomed as Jesus wanted

**JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES** they would never enter the kingdom of heaven unless they became like children.

Why did he say this? As recorded in Matthew 18, Jesus was responding to a question that revealed the disciples' competitiveness and pride: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

What point was Jesus making? He was saying true greatness doesn't seek honor: "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

And then he added what sounds like an afterthought, because it doesn't seem to relate to humility: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

How can we do this?

Reading Bible stories to children is one of the best ways to welcome a child in Jesus' name.

This welcome is an invitation that lays the foundation for becoming a follower of Jesus.

The adult reader benefits, too, by seeing a story in a new way: like a child. It might even lead to becoming "humble like this child."

In a time when faith formation needs a boost after the pandemic interrupted church-based Christian education, there's a new resource for Anabaptist families: *The Peace Table: A Storybook Bible*, published by Herald Press and Brethren Press (page 8).

With sensitively chosen words and multicultural art, it improves the genre of Bibles for children.

For me, it brings back memories of sharing Bible stories as a child and as a parent.

**IN THE EARLY 1970s**, my mother read *Egermeier's Bible Story Book* to me and my siblings, just as her parents had read it to her (it was first published in 1922). We had the 1963 edition, "illustrated entirely with full-page pictures



## TELL ME THE STORIES OF JESUS

*Egermeier's Bible Story Book* (first edition 1922, updated 1955 and 1963); *The Bible for Children*, (2002); *The Peace Table* (2023).

in full color" (though the white skin tones are less than fully colorful). The 568-page text is comprehensive — devoting, for example, 56 pages to the section on "Joshua and the Judges," including "Because Achan Stole" and "Samson Angers the Philistines."

I dusted off *Egermeier's* to read to my own daughters in the late 1990s and early 2000s. When the Anabaptist publisher Good Books came out with *The Bible for Children* in 2002, we used that one, too.

Both of those volumes contain more stories than *The Peace Table*. But the types of stories its editors chose — favoring stories of peace — are far more important than the quantity (though I wished David slaying Goliath and the destruction of Jericho's walls with trumpet blasts had made the cut). A prime example of a peaceful story both older books omitted is "Abigail's Idea" from 1 Samuel 25, where Abigail convinces David not to fight Nabal,

and David commends her wisdom.

Because issues of justice are not just for adults, *The Peace Table* points out that "480 years after God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, King Solomon enslaved people to build a holy temple for God." The irony will not be lost on adults, even if children might need it to be pointed out. *Egermeier's* and *The Bible for Children* simply say thousands of "workers" built the temple.

## **The Peace Table improves the genre of Bibles for children.**

Does Song of Songs have a message for children? Yes, if framed age-appropriately. The two older volumes skip it, but *The Peace Table* offers "A Love Song" that isn't sexual. The text begins, "I am Black, and I am beautiful" — unlike older Bible translations that set dark skin and beauty in opposition: "Dark am I, yet lovely" (1:5, New International Version). The text concludes: "Love is as strong as death, as powerful as a fire's flame. No flood can drown love," paraphrasing 8:6-7 — a profound, poetic thought for a person of any age.

"A LOVE SONG" is just one example of *The Peace Table's* recognition that Scripture speaks to children in genres other than story. There's a "Song for Traveling" from Psalm 121 ("I lift my eyes to the hills . . . God will not fall asleep but will always watch over you"); "Lift the Valleys" from Isaiah 40 ("Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. This hard time will end!"); "All Are Welcome" from James 1 ("What good are words without actions?"); and many more.

The blessing that comes from adults and children experiencing Scripture together fits Jesus' idea of welcoming children and even becoming like them. ●



# A BIBLE FOR ALL CHILDREN IN ALL PLACES

*The Peace Table* is a new children's storybook Bible emphasizing peacemaking. It features the work of 30 artists to illustrate 140 stories. This illustration by LaTonya Jackson appears on an introductory page.

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BY TIM HUBER

## 'The Peace Table' spotlights Scripture's peacemaking themes

**T**HE ASSIGNMENT suggested a depiction of Jesus' crucifixion showing love and sacrifice but not violence and blood.

The final product illustrates one of Holy Week's key moments in *The Peace Table*, a new children's storybook Bible published by Herald Press and Brethren Press.

LaTonya Jackson drew on her art history background to create an image of Jesus cradled in the arms of his mother. Rather than focus on a solitary body hanging from a cross atop a bleak Golgotha, she thought of *The Pietà*, a Michelangelo sculpture of Mary and Jesus.

**"You're getting a more diverse representation of Christ because you have so many different illustrators."**

— LaTonya Jackson

"I wanted that same tender moment, and we are trying to not emphasize the violence since this Bible is for children," said Jackson, of Shreveport, La. "We didn't want to scare children and be gory, for lack of a better term. We wanted to capture the death of Christ in a way that still centers children. And then they can connect with the love of a parent. I wanted to make sure that was an overarching theme in that picture."

*The Peace Table: A Storybook Bible* is an extension of the *Shine: Living in God's Light* Sunday school curriculum. In addition to resources for Sunday school, the series has produced three



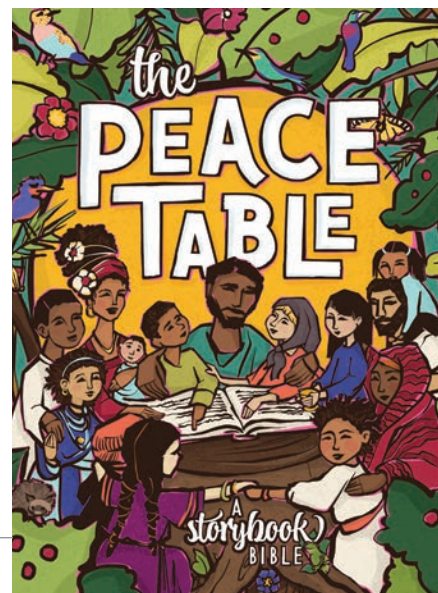
**A MOTHER MOURNS** — Mary holds Jesus' body after the crucifixion. Artist LaTonya Jackson, an educator and author-illustrator, uses textures to capture the multilayered lives of children of color. This picture illustrates the story "Jesus Suffers."

biblical storybooks — and now turns to something more comprehensive.

Weighing in at 384 pages, *The Peace Table* is one of the publishers' biggest projects. A team of writers and theological consultants — along with 30 artists from seven countries — worked for a year and a half to create a Bible inspired by Anabaptism specifically for children.

"I think this one is different," Jackson said. "Because you have several illustrators representing stories of the Bible, you get different representations of Jesus and his life. When we create art, that is filtered through our culture or our race, so you're getting a

Erin Bennett Banks illustrated the cover for *The Peace Table*.





more diverse representation of Christ because you have so many different illustrators.”

Stories from Genesis through Revelation are accompanied by illustrations in a wide variety of styles. Jackson appreciated the freedom she was given to insert children and symbolism into her heavily textured digital art.

The story of Jesus encountering Bartimaeus in Mark 10 highlights the crowd silencing the blind man. With the crowd and Bartimaeus, Jackson added a young girl and butterflies. These are subtle but significant touches.

“They have a layered meaning, not just metamorphosis or transformation,” Jackson said. “We as adults often overlook those small miracles happening around us. This girl is reaching out to the butterfly while the adults are trying to shush this man, and she sees the miracle right in front of her.”

“It’s just how connected children are. It’s probably one of my favorite images.”

## For the whole family

*The Peace Table* follows the curriculum’s *Shine On: A Story Bible*, published in 2014. Besides being bigger, the new book goes further to encourage family interaction.

“The COVID pandemic had a lot of impact as more and more families



(Top row, from left) **Chrissie Muecke**, **Jasmine Pittman Morrell** and **Teresa Kim Pecinovsky** are the writers of *The Peace Table*. Five Mennonite and Brethren theological advisers gave input.

(Bottom row, from left) **LaTonya Jackson** illustrated “Jesus Suffers,” “Bartimaeus” and an introductory page, “Welcome to the Peace Table.” **Ruth Goring** illustrated Psalm 23 and Psalm 91. **Clarissa Martinez**, an illustrator and painter who teaches at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, Texas, illustrated “Two Daughters,” the story of healings recorded in Luke 8:40-56. One of these, Jesus healing a woman who touched the edge of his robe, is on the cover of this magazine.

were doing faith formation at home with churches not meeting,” said project director Joan Daggett. “*Shine* worked with that to develop home resources for families.

“*The Peace Table* fulfills our mission to create curriculum resources for churches, but also something for families to share their faith with children.”

It can be preordered for 25% off

until June 1 at mennomedia.org before it is officially released in July.

Every story highlights the interactive nature by including questions for discussion, a prayer prompt and an activity suggestion.

Chrissie Muecke, editor and a member of the writing team, said peacemaking was emphasized not just in story selection, word choices and art but in additional resources.

“Peace Paths” gathers stories from the Old and New Testaments to show how peace is woven throughout the biblical story.

“One path, titled ‘God is Amazing,’ has miracle stories. The ‘I Am Special’ and ‘I Need Comfort’ paths help children think about how to have inner peace,” Muecke said. “‘Love Your Enemies’ and ‘Family Problems’ explore our relationship with others. ‘Nature Trail’ and ‘Let it Grow’ are two of the paths that look at how to have peace with creation. These paths help people read *The Peace Table* in a different way, not just front to back, so families or children can explore a particular peacemaking theme.



**EYES OPENED** — Jesus heals Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) by LaTonya Jackson.



**“We were trying to reflect the different types of texts in the Bible — poetry, song and prophecy. That was another way to include something that is often left out.”**

— Chrissie Muecke

“Some conversation prompts ask how characters responded to each other. How did they use or not use a peace strategy? And it points them to the back of the book, where there are examples of strategies for having peace with God, self, others and creation. It’s trying to give points of conversation for parents. Peace is more than just how to get along with other people.”

The title’s focus on a table represents the invitation to all people, even those who disagree or don’t look the same, to gather around God’s table.

“It was important to us to have this sense that Jesus is for all people, at all times, in all places, so children see the image of God in themselves,” Muecke said.

Focusing on children in kindergarten through fifth grade, age 5 to 11, the writers faced a challenge to strike a balance with violent or uncomfortable stories.

“We don’t want to traumatize a 5-year-old,” said Muecke, citing the stories of Noah and Job. “And we don’t want to sanitize for other children when they get older: ‘What? That’s not what I was taught.’ When is conflict essential for a story to make sense, and when is a violent or terrible thing a sidenote that is not core to the story children need to hear?”

“Because this has a peacemaking theme to it, we were trying to draw out specific elements to stories. People always choose an emphasis when they retell a story.”

Muecke pointed to Jackson’s crucifixion image as an example of conveying a story’s meaning without focusing on its brutality.



**DIVINE METAPHORS** — Ruth Goring illustrated Psalm 91, “Song of Shelter,” with a mother eagle sheltering her chicks, and Psalm 23, “Song of a Shepherd.” Goring, who attends Living Waters Community Church in Chicago, works in collage, mosaic and chalk pastels.

## Poetry, song, prophecy

One editing choice that sets *The Peace Table* apart from other children’s Bibles is the inclusion of poetry, not just from Psalms but also Song of Songs. A pastor on the theological consultant team suggested making a place for the occasionally racy book.

It became one of Muecke’s favorite parts of the new book: a celebration of love between people and the types of caring relationships children can develop with other people.

“We were trying to reflect the different types of texts in the Bible — poetry, song and prophecy,” she said. “That was another way to include something that is often left out and not considered. I think the poetry’s connection of love and the strength of love is worth children thinking about.”

Ruth Goring worked to capture that love in seven pieces of collage art she created to illustrate the Psalms. A member of Living Waters Community Church in Chicago, Goring uses layered fabrics, found objects and other materials to create images.

Psalm 23 dwells not on the valley of the shadow of death but on a shepherd caring for playful lambs. Psalm 91 depicts a mother eagle protecting her chicks.

“Those little chicks are made of packing plastic, a very slippery material,” said Goring, author of *Picturing God*. “But it reminded me of how mischievous little children can be.”

“It’s a picture of a relationship with God. We can be slippery and difficult to corral. The experience of making them was prayerful. It was an experience of getting closer to God.”

One of several Anabaptist artists who contributed to the project, Goring appreciated the opportunity. Herald Press is the book imprint of MennoMedia, an agency of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. Brethren Press is the publishing house of the Church of the Brethren.

“It feels good to be part of a project where I know that the Scripture and the movement of God’s work in the world are radiating out from Jesus,” she said. “Before Jesus and after Jesus, but Jesus is the center. That’s something I love so much about Anabaptist theology.” ●



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





BY JENNIE WINTERMOTE

# ***NOT AS IT'S MEANT TO BE***

**I understand sin and salvation differently than I did as a child. Now my daughter and I are growing in faith together.**

**T**HE FIRST TIME I held our daughter, I felt relief and then guilt. I had seen her miniature face for about 30 seconds before the neonatal intensive care staff whisked her away. It was 24 hours before I was allowed out of bed to see her.

At 34 weeks, Ellie was supposed to be nurtured safe inside me. Yet here she was struggling to survive in a bright and painful world because I had developed preeclampsia.

As I held that little slip of humanity, I was overwhelmed with a sense of “it’s not supposed to be this way.”

Isn’t that one of the deepest truths of our existence? We live in a world that isn’t supposed to be this way.

As a parent, I’m faced with the task of explaining to this precious little one

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Jennie Wintermote with Ellie on Mother’s Day 2022. PHOTO: MARJIE WARKENTINE



why some people don't have enough to eat, why addiction and betrayal destroy lives and relationships, why people live in fear and why her daddy's chronic pain keeps him from running and playing with her like other daddies can.

Life isn't supposed to be this way. God has a better plan.

At every stage of my daughter's faith formation, I've struggled with how to share about sin and salvation. I want her to understand that the world's brokenness is not God's plan and that Jesus offers healing and hope. I want her to know and love herself — the beautiful, precious, perfect person God created to bless our family and our world.

**AS A LIBRARIAN**, I am always looking for resources to share with her and to shape our language as caregivers to convey these essential truths. Unfortunately, I see a lot of language and ideas that fit my own childhood concept of sin and salvation but that now feel uncomfortable to me as a parent.

When I was young, I made salvation bracelets where each colored bead stood for something (black for sin, white for salvation is troubling on multiple levels), and I formed the idea that I was a bad person who needed Christ to save me because I was fundamentally bad.

I want my daughter to know that she is good and called to be as perfect as her Heavenly Parent but that we all are capable of destructive choices.

When I went to Hesston College, my understanding of sin and salvation was transformed by the definition of sin as the breaking of relationships between us and God, within ourselves, between us and others and between us and all of creation.

Suddenly I could see it: Sin was a part of my life not because I was a bad person but because I was a good creation who had the freedom to make bad choices — or good ones.

This is how I want my daughter to understand sin and Jesus' healing work.

As I write this during Lent, looking forward to the joy of Easter, I have been thinking about how we talk about Jesus' death on the cross — the "why" of this piece of the Easter story. I feel inadequate for the task. I wish I had

**Suddenly I could see it:  
Sin was a part of my life  
not because I was a bad  
person but because I was  
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choices — or good ones.**

just the right book to read with Ellie to share these truths without having to edit or add my own commentary (she's starting to read now, so she picks up on my verbal edits).

**I HAD A CHANCE TO SEE** the content for *The Peace Table* and stopped short when I got to the "Peace Paths." There it was: a way to help me share my understanding of sin and salvation with my daughter using the biblical stories she is already learning to love as her story. These paths include Peace with God, Peace Inside, Peace with Others

and Peace with Creation.

When we make poor choices that lead to brokenness (lack of peace) in these four areas, our God of peace calls us to be peacemakers (make positive choices) in these same areas.

Caregivers have many demands on our time and energy. For faith formation to happen at home, we need simple resources that align with our faith. I am thankful for this new tool to help me share my faith authentically.

Now, as I hold my sweet kindergartner for devotions and bedtime stories, I still sometimes think about the things in my life, and in her life, that are not as they are supposed to be. At the same time, I am thankful for the ways we are growing together into the peacemakers God wants us to be. ●

**Jennie Wintermote** is director of the Conference Resource Library of Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA and business manager for Anabaptist World Inc. She is a member of First Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan.



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# The miracle we didn't pray for

**When hope seemed lost, God showed up in a big way. God still works wonders, often in small ways.**

BY **TERESA AESCHLIMAN**

**IT WASN'T UNTIL** the ripe age of 7 that I gave any serious thought to how God shows up.

Even with all the Bible stories about miracles, it's not like I expected God to heal my sister.

But God is surprising like that.

It was 1972, and the family of Kenneth and Violet Aeschliman was either hard at work on our farm near Archbold, Ohio, or attending church. With cattle, pigs, chickens, crops, a large garden and the house to clean, there were plenty of chores.

And there were plenty of church services. If the Zion Mennonite Church doors were open, we were there: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, Sunday School, summer Bible school, Bible study, youth groups, children's church. All with the usual lineup of Scripture readings, Bible stories, hymns and, of course, prayers.

The prayers landed before every meal, every bedtime and every church gathering. As with most adult routines, I mostly ignored the specifics. Pinch your eyes shut and be quiet. When someone hits the Amen, you can go play or dive into the food.

This was the rhythm of life. But then, in September of that year, my oldest sister, Pauline Holsopple, who was 29, and her two young children, Conrad and Tonya, were slammed around the interior of their purple compact at a Fort Wayne, Ind., intersection. It was a scene no one should have survived.

After the sirens cleared and vehicles were towed, an emergency room doc-

tor put a few stitches into Tonya's hand and sent the kids home to heal. Pauline was admitted to Parkview Memorial Hospital with multiple broken bones.

What seemed likely to be a long recovery for Pauline took a sharp turn for the worse as doctors discovered her spleen had burst during the crash. Emergency surgery revealed the extent of the damage. Inside, Pauline's body was a train wreck, doctors said. She emerged from surgery in a coma, on life support and with a death certificate needing only the date and time.

**SUDDENLY I STARTED** paying more attention to this prayer idea and to what the adults were doing.

It was impossible not to. Prayers were everywhere, in earnest. Prayers over the phone, in circles, holding hands, on knees, in church, in the car, in the hospital lobby and chapel, with close family, extended family.

People were praying. All the time, everywhere. Announcements to pray were made in all the area Mennonite churches. Sunday school classes and

(Left) Pauline Holsopple and Teresa Aeschliman in 2022 at a book signing in Fort Wayne, Ind., for *What to Do When God Shows Up*.

(Right) Teresa Aeschliman in 1970.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TERESA AESCHLIMAN



**As we gathered, it was clear, even to me at 7, that God's will was the only desire.**

Bible study groups were praying.

As hope dimmed, the prayers intensified. Pauline was surrendered into God's hands, and an anointing service was planned.

Although healing could have been the point of the anointing service, surrender was the focus. As we gathered, it was clear, even to me at 7, that God's will was the only desire.

As we gathered in prayer, anointed and released Pauline to God, family visited her bedside for what would likely be the last time. But as each person came out of her room, they related seeing a small sign of life: An eyelid flickered. A finger moved. There seemed to be a slight shudder through her body.

The next morning, Pauline was no longer in a coma. By the following week she was taken off life support and returned home. Baffled doctors said she would make a complete recovery.

God showed up in a big way through

the healing of Pauline's body.

God also showed up in all sorts of little ways.

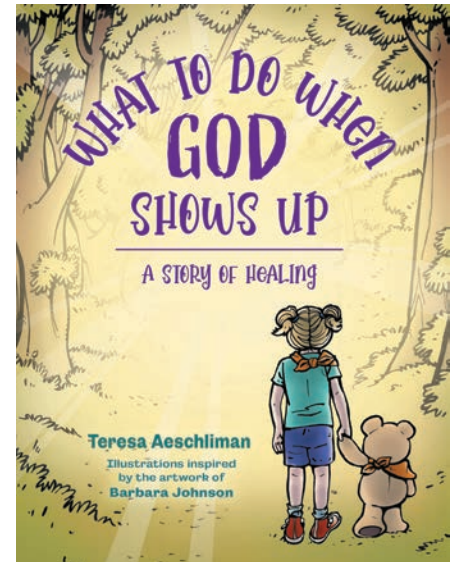
Joining in with church friends and family as we prayed, sang, read Scripture, cooked, baked, cleaned, babysat, told stories, colored pictures, played games, searched for lost toys, tucked kids into bed — all made a lasting impression of God in action.

Faith shows up and does whatever is needed, even when what is needed is sitting quietly with someone as they have a good cry. These are the small miracles that sustain faith.

**WHAT I EXPERIENCED** at 7 has been the foundation of my faith as an adult. And, yes, that big miracle of healing will always be a central feature. But so will being brought into the faith lives of the adults around me.

We decorate our faith with Bible stories and verses, hymns and choruses, prayers and litanies. We rely on wisdom and tradition to point the way further into the mystery. Although God does not reside in these decorations and routines, they help us remember that God is in every moment. God is in everything we do.

It is tempting to approach prayer



In the voice of her 7-year-old self, Teresa Aeschliman tells the story of her sister Pauline's car accident and recovery in the recently released children's book, *What to Do When God Shows Up*.

as a formula for what we want God to do. It doesn't work that way. Instead, prayer itself might just be the miracle: to quiet ourselves, alone or gathered with others, and recognize the mystery that is God. A God who wants to be in relationship with us.

It's tempting to approach children with a formula for faith development. There isn't one of those, either. Just as God desires relationship, so do children. We all do.

God shows up in the little things — a smile, a hug, a giggle, a note, a drawing, inviting someone to join in. These small acts might be the miracle someone else needs. This is what prompts us deeper into relationship.

There are big miracles, and these stories need to be told. But God also lives in the little miracles of our everyday lives.

No matter what stage of life we are in, or what joy or trauma we face, we can always ask ourselves: What do I do when God shows up? ●

**Teresa Aeschliman** lives with her husband and two sons in Asheville, N.C. She is a member of Circle of Mercy church and the Mennonite Fellowship of Asheville. She is the author of *What to Do When God Shows Up*, which offers a child's perspective on faith and healing. More information can be found at [NoWordsPress.org](http://NoWordsPress.org).

The Holsopple family in 1971: Paul, Pauline, Conrad and Tonya. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TERESA AESCHLIMAN







BY CAROL DUERKSEN AND DORIS UNRUH

Eve Buller, Hannah Adrian, Stephan Nickel, Peter Graber and Lydia Nickel with the donkey piñata. PHOTO: CAROL DUERKSEN

# Two old ladies and a time machine

**We had to be there for the fun. And the learning.**



**L**YDIA REMEMBERS HER dreams and happily shares them in detail. Stephan loves cats, and, with his lanky athletic body, he could be one. Cara's answer for the ice-breaker question, "I would trade \_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_," was "my brother for a horse."

Before those revelations, we wrote faith-building curriculum for children. That's fun. You brainstorm, research, imagine and sit at your computer to see what happens. If good ideas emerge, the Holy Spirit and you have succeeded.

But then we decided to teach what we wrote. We put ourselves in a classroom with fourth- and fifth-graders, which was scary, because we are two old ladies who would sometimes rather sit back and let the younger generation take over.

But there was the matter of the Eli Machine: a cardboard refrigerator box crafted into a time machine by one of our husbands. It's named for Elijah,

who got to pass from Earth to heaven in a chariot with fiery wheels. It's designed to transport the children back to Bible times.

With big black sheets on either side of the Eli Machine, the room was divided in half. Pass through Eli, and on the other side there's an inexpensive projector to turn a laptop into a video show. Bibles to read the story. Skits to act it out.

**Writing and planting the seeds are only the first steps. Somebody has to water and cultivate and fertilize. Somebody has to celebrate the Holy Spirit bringing it all together.**

Somebody had to get smelly tuna into the Eli machine for when the children passed through on their way to the story of Jonah.

Somebody had to give them a blind-by-the-light experience as they passed through to the story of Saul.

The time-traveling Eli Machine transports children back to Bible times. PHOTO: DORIS UNRUH



## Somebody had to give them a blinded-by-the-light experience as they passed through to the story of Saul.

Somebody had to paint neon foot-prints in the machine so the black light could do its thing. Somebody had to show old toes with neon nail polish. Well, you get the picture.

We had to be there for the fun. And the learning.

**WE HAD TO BE THERE** when, in a skit about Jesus calming the storm, Jesus said, “Chill! Enough already!” and one of the children commented, “Jesus probably didn’t say ‘chill.’”

We had to be there when different children, at different times, explained what had happened in that day’s story, and they knew not only the who and what but also the why and how. We had to be there to absorb their energy and enthusiasm for old stories becoming new again to us.

We had to be there, honestly, because writing and planting the seeds are only the first steps. Somebody has to water, cultivate and fertilize. Somebody has to celebrate the Holy Spirit bringing it all together.

And so, one Sunday, we gave witness. We told the children that when we wrote the lessons, we had no idea what the theme would be for the worship service that day. Then we told them that for three Sundays in a row, the themes matched up in ways that only the Holy Spirit could make happen. The children listened, and then they were ready to move on. It obviously meant more to the two old ladies, and that’s OK.

Because this Sunday, one of them is having a birthday. She will bring a donkey piñata. She will explain that as someone who loves donkeys and is a pacifist, she can’t bear to think of destroying it to get to the candy inside.

“So, children, come up with a plan for the donkey to give up its sweets while keeping its life.”

And they will. ●

Carol Duerksen and Doris Unruh are members of Tabor Mennonite Church near Goessel, Kan., and part of Springs Forth! Faith Formation Inc.



Teachers Doris Unruh, left, and Carol Duerksen, right, with Mia Hiebert, Hannah Adrian, Lydia Nickel, Eve Buller, Stephan Nickel, Peter Graber and Sophia Goerzen, at the Tabor Mennonite Church sign between Goessel and Newton, Kan. PHOTO: HARLIN UNRUH



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# Atlanta needs a forest, not ‘Cop City’

**ONE SUNNY AFTERNOON** on a busy downtown corner, about 40 people walk single-file down the sidewalk. One lifts a megaphone and begins a chant. “Protect Weelaunee, the lungs of Atlanta. Defend the Forest!” The sound bounces off the skyscrapers.

At each intersection, heavily armed police meet the marchers. Three blocks later, a large police presence more than doubles the march’s size.

This was the scene during a week of action in early March to protest the proposed construction of “Cop City,” a project to tear down hundreds of acres of public forest in Atlanta and build a shooting range and mock urban block. It would become the largest police training facility in the United States.

Corporations like Coca-Cola, Wells Fargo and Home Depot have funneled \$60 million to the project through tax-deductible donations to the Atlanta Police Foundation. A coalition of environmental groups, neighborhood associations, schools and racial justice organizations has worked for two years against this unholy alliance of policing and corporate interests.

Facing community opposition, Atlanta’s political leaders have responded with repression and police violence. Forty-two people face domestic terrorism charges on weak grounds. On Jan. 18, Georgia State Patrol officers fatally shot Indigenous activist Manuel “Tortugueta” Esteban Paez Terán, whose hands were up while the officers fired 14 times.

In situations of intense repression, different communities choose different strategies of resistance. Predictably, media attention has focused on acts of property destruction by some protesters. These acts have drawn criticism and concern but have not scared away Anabaptists who feel called to join in this witness for peace and justice.

Anton Flores-Maisonet, a member of Atlanta Mennonite Church’s interim pastoral team, told a group of clergy: “I’m hearing too many Christians focused solely on the reactionary acts of protesters. However, our prophetic cry should denounce structural violence,



Rev. Keyanna Jones and others protest in early March against plans to transform hundreds of acres of forest in Atlanta into a police training facility. PHOTO: RACHAEL WARRINER

including repressive policing, equating protest with domestic terrorism and using indefinite detention to suppress dissent and appease corporate interests. That’s what all concerned clergy should reject. I am thankful this faith-rooted coalition of experimenters with truth and nonviolence exists. Keep being creative in unmasking structural and repressive state violence.”

Jay Bergen, a pastor at Germantown Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, said in a sermon: “Much of the week of action to #StopCopCity resembled Mennonite Disaster Service: You chop vegetables and wash dishes. You help rebuild tents and pavilions destroyed by police. You shovel dirt and take care of trees. You pick up trash. You sort donations and drive them to nearby community members in need. You hang out, make small talk and drink endless cups of bad coffee.”

**OVER 20 ANABAPTIST** faith leaders joined their voices with 300 clergy signing on to a letter stating: “We declare with faith, commitment and hope that this land will be a part of healing, repair and the flourishing of all people in the greater Atlanta community and beyond. . . . We will not succumb to evil or systems or policies that bring

harm and destruction. We will continue our work with justice and love until the day we can all live in peace as God’s children.”

Though not able to go to Atlanta, Jonathan and Sarah Nahar of Mennonite Mission Network’s “Stir Up Peace” video series and Melissa Florer-Bixler of Mennonite Church USA’s “Defund the Police? An Abolition Curriculum” helped draft the letter and organize an interfaith press conference for the letter’s presentation to the City Council.

“No matter where you live, there are roles for everyone who wants to be involved at this crucial inflection point of struggle that brings together a reverence for creation and a vision for nonlethal, relational versions of security,” Sarah Nahar said. “We don’t want Cop City to be built in Atlanta, or anywhere.”

**THE STRUGGLE OVER** Cop City is far from over. As disciples of Jesus, we confess that we live in a broken world. We confess that we, too, are broken. Structural and interpersonal violence mar our fullness as God’s people. But we also confess that God’s wholeness envelops our brokenness. Jesus does not call us to only address brokenness when the conditions are perfect but to be in the brokenness, serving a kingdom that offers wholeness: where all shall build houses and inhabit them, plant forests and eat from them, be at peace and unafraid.

While some others in this movement may use tactics that do not align with our values, we know the movement’s majority has commitments to peace, presence and spirited nonviolent direct action. These have created positive ripples and helped heal historic divides.

For our siblings in Christ who express more concern for property than human life and well-being and the life of the natural world, we invite you to come and see the fullness of God’s spirit found in the struggle for climate justice. From Gethsemane to Weelaunee, we are seeking to obey Jesus’ call today: to remain, watch and pray in these intense times. ●



# Musical theater a faith-building activity for children and adults



Schoolchildren try to figure out the mission left for them in an anonymous note during the performance of *Mission Possible: Sharing the Gospel by Our Love* on March 12 at Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind. PHOTO: JASON POTSANDER

**KIDS' COMMUNITY THEATER** is a place where children grow in faith and friendship through musical theater.

The program began 12 years ago, sponsored by Sunnyside Mennonite Church and Belmont Mennonite Church, both in Elkhart, Ind. In 2022 sponsorship transferred to Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen.

Each year the program runs from January to early March, when the children share with their friends, family and community what they have learned together. Musicals are selected that help the children learn about their faith and how they can share their faith with others — which they

do in a big way with the end-of-season performance.

Musicals they've done include *Peace in the Kingdom*, *The Kingdom Connection*, *Life of the Party* (the story of Mary and Martha) and, most recently, *Mission Possible: Sharing the Gospel by Our Love*.

During each rehearsal the children learn the songs and script, talk about what God is teaching them through the musical and take time to support and pray for one another in groups.

Kids' Community Theater is a faith-building activity not only for the children but also for the adult volunteers. Watching the children

participate reminds them that we do not always have to learn about God in a certain way or with a certain energy. The children are eager to learn the songs and share them, not worrying about who is listening or how loud they might be.

Children and volunteers alike come ready to talk about how they shared the love of Jesus with others during the week and how they can pray for their friends.

Kids' Community Theater is much more than putting together a fun musical. It is a place where children and adults grow in faith alongside each other in a way that brings joy to others. ●



# MC USA advocates for Indigenous site

**Court rehears case to protect Oak Flat, Apache holy site in Arizona, from mining deal**

**THE MENNONITE CHURCH USA** Executive Board and Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference joined other religious groups by signing an amicus brief and calling for prayer in support of Apache Stronghold and the protection of Oak Flat, a sacred site of Native American religious exercise in Tonto National Forest in Arizona.

The amicus brief is a method of legal advocacy for religious freedom in the *Apache Stronghold v. United States* court case, heard March 21 in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Pasadena, Calif. Apache Stronghold is an organization that works against colonization and defends holy sites and freedom of religion.

Oak Flat, known to Apaches as *Ch'i'chil Bildagoteel* (Emery Oak Extends on a Level), has been at the heart of a 20-year struggle by Southwestern Indigenous people to prevent the site from being given to a foreign mining company for a new copper mine.

MC USA described the site in a release as the home of many important Indigenous religious practices, such as the coming-of-age Sunrise Ceremony for Apache women and sweat lodge ceremonies. It is considered the direct corridor to Apache religion and recognized in the National Register of Historic Places.

"Oak Flat is the unceded traditional homeland and territory of the Apache people," said Sarah Augustine, co-founder and executive director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, a ministry partner of MC USA and PSMC. "It is a sacred site to many Indigenous peoples, including the Yavapai, O'odham and my relatives, the Hopi and Zuni. It is a sacred place of worship. While the Apache were removed to a reservation along with hundreds of other Native American tribes, they have continued to care for it and worship there."

Other religious groups support-



A member of the Apache Stronghold group who traveled from Arizona paints a protest banner on March 20 in Los Angeles. PHOTO: DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP

ing Apache Stronghold include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, the Islam and Religious Freedom Action Team of the Religious Freedom Institute, the Christian Legal Society, the Jewish Coalition for Religious Liberty and the Sikh Coalition.

**"OAK FLAT IS WHERE** my people have come to connect with our Creator for millennia, and we have the right to continue that sacred tradition," said Apache Stronghold founder Wendler Nosie Sr. in a statement after the hearing. "Today we stood up in court for that right, determined to stop those who think that our place of worship can be treated differently simply because it lacks four walls and a steeple. We are hopeful that this time around, the 9th Circuit will save Oak Flat."

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 approved Resolution Copper to perform mining operations in Oak Flat in exchange for other land in Arizona. The copper mine would be the largest in North America, but

Apache Stronghold sued the federal government to protect Oak Flat.

In a 2-1 decision last June, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals denied the bid to halt construction, affirming that the site is "sacred ground" but denying that the group's freedom to practice religion was sufficient to overturn the land swap. The appeal was heard March 21 by a full panel of 11 judges.

MC USA's amicus brief argues that "the planned destruction of Oak Flat would impose a substantial burden on Apache religious exercise because that religious exercise is inherently tied to the sacred place where it occurs."

Stanley Green, Pacific Southwest executive conference minister, said: "These are our neighbors. We dare not stand mute as bystanders while the land is ravaged and their religious rights are trampled upon. Our scriptures call us to be a voice with the voiceless. To stay silent in the face of this callous disregard of their rights is a violation of our conscience." ●

*Religion News Service contributed to this report.*



# 3 Canadian MB churches expelled, another suspended for LGBTQ stance

**THREE CANADIAN** Mennonite Brethren congregations have been removed from that denomination due to their stance on LGBTQ inclusion and same-sex marriage.

On March 4, delegates to the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba annual convention voted to remove Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg from membership.

On Feb. 25, Southridge Community Church and FreeChurch Toronto were removed from membership in the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

That brings to four the number of congregations that have been removed or left the denomination over LGBTQ welcome and inclusion. Artisan, a church in Vancouver, left the British Columbia conference in 2021 before a vote could be taken to remove it.

Termination of membership in a provincial conference automatically results in loss of membership in the Canadian conference.

In addition to those churches, in February, River East Church in Winnipeg received a notice of suspension from membership. Unless the church reverses its decision to welcome and include LGBTQ people and affirm same-sex marriage, it will lead to removal as well.

The motion to remove Jubilee passed by a vote of 74%, exceeding the two-thirds majority needed.

After the vote, Jubilee's former pastor Ken Warkentin offered a blessing to the conference and then indicated that members of the church at the meeting would like to leave. As members of Jubilee left the meeting, everyone was asked to stand so they would not be so conspicuous in leaving.

Members from at least two other churches exited with them into the foyer to offer personal words of care and farewell.

In response to a request for comment, Jason Dyck, director of church



Delegates to the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba voted to remove Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man., from membership.

PHOTO: JUBILEE MENNONITE CHURCH

**The conference's task is to "maintain theological alignment among member churches." — Jason Dyck**

ministries for the Manitoba conference, acknowledged that members of the LGBTQ community have experienced exclusion and rejection in MB churches and that churches need to commit themselves "to a future where better stories are experienced."

At the same time, such care can "come into tension with our shared Confession," he said, noting that each church "has voluntarily joined the MBCM and committed themselves to the convictions outlined in our shared nationally held Confession of Faith."

The conference's task is to "maintain theological alignment among member churches," he said.

**IN ONTARIO**, a prepared statement from Southridge was read before the vote. In it, the church acknowledged

it understood that the Confession of Faith was something member churches were expected to align with and that there were consequences for being out of alignment.

However, it went on to say, the congregation has "never understood the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith to be an air-tight set of absolutes or the single center of what binds us together."

The statement went on to say that Southridge believes the conference to be a family and that divergence "on one or a couple articles of shared belief shouldn't result in full removal from the family, because we feel like our family identity is about more than this one or couple articles."

Motions to expel Southridge and FreeChurch passed. No vote totals were released, but later it was learned the vote to remove Southridge passed with 87% voting in favor.

**IN RESPONSE TO THE VOTE**, Southridge lead pastor Jeff Lockyer said he sympathized with conference leaders.

"They were in a bind with some churches threatening to leave if they created space for this conversation," he said.

As for Southridge, "we just want to incarnate Jesus in our community. We want to be for the people Jesus was most for," he said.

The congregation will continue to relate to the Ontario conference, Lockyer said, adding: "You can take the church out of the conference, but you can't take the conference out of the church."

Speaking personally, he added: "In my heart, I am Anabaptist. I see it as a wide-tent way of doing church, of welcoming all to the table."

No representatives from FreeChurch were at the convention to make any remarks. Neither FreeChurch nor Ontario conference leadership responded to requests for comment. ●



# MWC Indonesia connections lead to worship exchanges in Uganda



Left: Rashard Allen sings at the 2022 Mennonite World Conference assembly in Indonesia. PHOTO: KRESNA KURNIAWAN/MEETINGHOUSE  
Right: Allen visits with Mennonite Church Uganda members in January. PHOTO: SIMON OKOTH/MWC

**A CHANCE AIRPORT ENCOUNTER** allowed Simon Okoth to bring the cultural mixing of Mennonite World Conference to Mennonite congregations in Uganda.

Departing Semarang, Indonesia, after last summer's MWC assembly, Rashard Allen recognized Okoth, a bishop in Mennonite Church Uganda, by his event lanyard. And Okoth recognized Allan, director of music and worship at Neffsville Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania, who was part of the gathering's international ensemble.

"I was touched by the way he was singing and the way the international choir presented their songs," Okoth said.

Their boarding-lounge conversation ended with an invitation to Uganda.

Over WhatsApp, the Ugandan church leader and the American worship director made plans. Allen, who has a doctorate in worship studies from the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, arrived in Janu-

ary to conduct two three-day seminars for congregations in rural Uganda.

"Worship is a holy conversation," said Allen, whose goal was to help participants "worship plan so we can worship with greater understanding and so congregations can worship with greater intention."

Okoth added: "The people were proud, as Mennonites, to see a Mennonite from a distant land coming to join them in worship, in fellowship and to guide them in understanding worship."

Allen was struck not just by people's faith but by their talent for ministry and music. With a few parameters, participants separated into groups to compose a song from a psalm.

"The songs they came back with were remarkable. They were songs they could start using immediately in their churches," he said. "It was a wonderful blessing for me to see."

He also gave concerts of African American sacred music.

"Being able to share that part of the

African diaspora was a major blessing," Allen said.

Singing can last more than an hour at the beginning of a worship service in Uganda, and another period at the end.

"It is the moment when we get to meet," Okoth said. "What tunes our minds, what subjects us to the feeling of God is the singing."

In one congregation, people match their singing to background instrumentals from a cellphone plugged into a speaker. In another, a talented preteen supplies a drum kit, melody and bass line from a keyboard "like he's been there for 20 years," said Allen. Another congregation sings *a cappella* with accompaniment from three large drums.

"The sense of joy they bring when they sing and dance is rather striking to me," he said. "They sing in three or four different languages. They know the songs, they know the meaning, and they sing with gusto." ●



# Oregon snow turns eight-hour camp service project into five-day retreat

## A SMALL GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS

from Seattle arrived at Drift Creek Camp on Feb. 22 for an eight-hour middle school class service project. As the group arrived, snow began to fall. And fall. And fall.

Dustings of snow are not infrequent at the camp near Lincoln City, Ore., but typically it melts within a few hours due to mild coastal temperatures. However, this was a different kind of storm. The snow was wet and heavy.

In addition to the highly unusual foot of snow that fell on that first day, countless trees came down like pick-up-sticks across the road. For nearly three days, five men who were trapped at camp cut through hundreds of trees from morning until dark.

They worked to create a vehicle-wide path as additional snow buried branches faster than they could clear them. After three days of hard work, they had covered about three miles of a 10-mile access road that is the only path to the camp.

Staff found ways to put the kids to work in the lodge. They brought food for one day, leading to creative solutions using the *More-With Less Cookbook* to scrape together meals from what was left in the pantry.

Feeling weary, camp staff used Facebook to put out a call for help. A few longtime camp supporters saw the post and headed out. Along the way, they met a group of local folks who knew of “The Mennonite Camp” but hadn’t actually been to Drift Creek and also answered the call. The crew began clearing the road from Highway 101.

They cleared a narrow path through the tree debris, but the snow still prevented camp vehicles from getting out. Those who had driven up from town had better-equipped all-wheel-drive vehicles with higher clearance than the vehicles at camp.

A Lincoln City neighbor delivered tire chains for the trapped vehicles.



Above: The Drift Creek Camp lodge and vehicles sit under snow in February. PHOTO: LEVI EBERSOLE

Below: Dennis Kauffman plows through the night to create a path to the camp. PHOTO: BRENDA KAUFFMAN



An attempt was made to depart with the assistance of traction devices, but the snow was still too deep. By Sunday night on day 5, camp staff were discouraged and exhausted, although the Seattle group was able to ride in a truck over the snow to Lincoln City, where they could borrow a vehicle to return home.

**DENNIS KAUFFMAN** had mentioned bringing his tractor, so a call was made to him. He loaded his tractor and drove at least two hours to Lincoln City from his home over the coastal range and east of Salem. He parked at the bottom of the camp road and started plowing his way in.

Plowing all day Monday, Kauffman got within about a mile of the top of the hill, where the elevation is about

1,500 feet and the snow was deepest. He then drove to the lodge, spent the night at camp and began plowing again Tuesday, starting from the camp side.

He was only available for one more day. Early Wednesday he was back on the road. He worked nonstop until after midnight. With food supplies running low, camp staff was eager to head out and followed Kauffman for five hours, shining headlights on the snow as he plowed.

Finally, in the wee hours of the ninth day, March 2, Kauffman reached his starting point, and the road was clear enough to get out.

Since the February storm, Drift Creek Camp has lost six rental groups that had planned to use the facility. Two church retreats, the Drift Creek Spring Quilt Retreat and three outdoor education programs, were canceled due to the snow. The financial loss from these cancellations has been significant. Meanwhile, camp staff continues to chip away at the clearing work as the snow melts and more branches and fallen trees are exposed. The phrase “spring cleaning” has taken on new meaning this year. ●



# Ukraine's front line of compassion

**MB churches provide relief to neighbors whose lives have been upended by war**

**IT WAS EASY FOR** Rostik to see the resemblance to his own family as he visited a mother raising her children alone. Her husband was in prison, and they needed some extra support to get by. Rostik's mother also raised him and his five siblings alone without a source of income.

(All names are shortened or withheld for security reasons.)

As a volunteer with the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Ukraine, or AMBCU, he was visiting this family to bring them much-needed supplies, including a relief kit from Mennonite Central Committee as well as a wood stove funded by another organization.

The mother of four was living in a village near Uzhhorod in western Ukraine, without running water or electricity during the cold winter. They received some support from the Ukrainian government, but it wasn't enough.

Rostik remembered that in his own childhood, his mother also received support from the state, but it wasn't enough for his family. Then the church stepped in.

"When I started to attend church, the church supported me, and it drastically changed my life," he said. "Remembering how church influenced me then, and now I see the families who are in need. And if I have a chance to share or to give something to people in need, like I am a volunteer now, I want to do that."

AMBCU is one of MCC's local partners in Ukraine, a collective of Mennonite Brethren churches across the country providing relief to people whose lives have been upended by the war with Russia. AMBCU's director, Roman, sees a clear role for the church.

There's the military front line that everyone hears about in the news, but churches see their own front line as



Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine personnel — from left, Rostik, a volunteer; Roman, director; and Andriy, humanitarian coordinator — stand outside a Ukrainian shelter that is supported by Mennonite Central Committee. PHOTO: EMILY LOEWEN/MCC



Ihor and Natalia lived in Mykolaiv before their family fled to the western part of Ukraine.

PHOTO: EMILY LOEWEN/MCC

providing relief and care for people who have been displaced or harmed by the war.

"Our area is injured soldiers, injured people, people who fled," Roman said. "And this front, or area of work, will last even longer after the war is finished. It's long-term."

Each month AMBCU provides food packages to more than 200 families. Volunteers have distributed relief and hygiene supplies like MCC relief

**"Our area is injured soldiers, injured people, people who fled. And this front, or area of work, will last even longer after the war is finished." — Roman**

kits, comforters and canned meat. They have also started responding to psychological needs, providing equine therapy, massage and other supports to displaced children.

Food packages from AMBCU have made a big difference for displaced families, including Ihor, Natalia and their children, who used to live in a village near Mykolaiv. At first, they thought they'd be safe, but when the bombing got too intense, they fled to the western part of the country.

Natalia's mother Galina said the food helps sustain them, and they are glad to know they haven't been forgotten.

"We are grateful to all volunteers, people of faith from all countries who



are not indifferent to our suffering in Ukraine and who help us with what they can: medicine, food, clothes or just a word, just a prayer,” she said. “Pray for our Ukraine and let the war end.”

**AMBCU STARTED PROVIDING** emergency assistance after the 2014 Russian military invasion of Crimea. Roman had spent years providing help to others who had been displaced. But when the invasion escalated last year, Roman was suddenly on the receiving end.

As he and his family fled from their homes in Zaporizhzhia, they were supported by people from churches along the way.

“I experienced this moment when I was not a giver but a receiver,” Roman said. “And [through that experience] comes the understanding that the church is not just some local building that you go to every Sunday. It is something more.”

Now settled in the western part of Ukraine, Roman is back to coordi-



Residents living in a shelter in Mukachevo receive food packages from AMBCU.

PHOTO: EMILY LOEWEN/MCC

nating the work of AMBCU, helping organize distributions through 20 churches and nine shelters. Because

the war’s front line is always changing, they regularly have to adapt where they’re able to work and what they can provide, always taking precautions to keep volunteers safe.

Though the work can be hard, for people like Andriy, humanitarian coordinator for AMBCU, it also is a way to keep hope during a time of war.

“I believe it is really crucial not to lose hope in the dark time that we live in right now,” he said. “Knowing that you are really doing something can be of great help to people. Knowing this really lifts you up, encourages you to wake up every day and to know that you can be of help to others.”

For Roman and the churches of AMBCU, this is the calling of Christians. It’s what they’re meant to do.

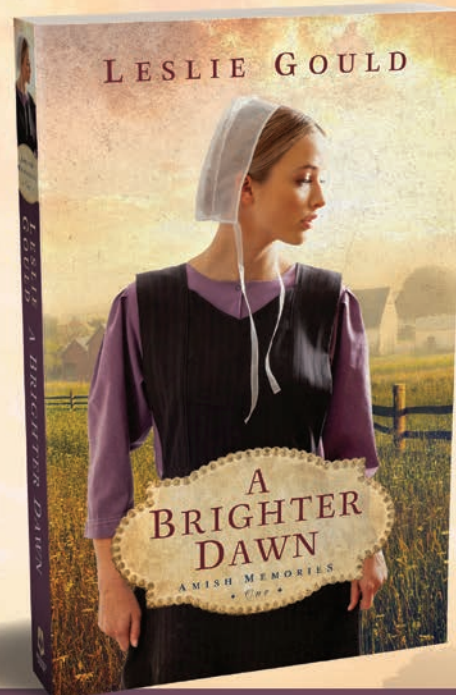
“I believe that this is our task, to be light for the world,” he said. “This is the only way not to break. This is the only way our faith gets strengthened. If I personally and we as a church respond to pain, only then does our life get meaning.” ●

## AN EVOCATIVE AMISH NOVEL SET ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR II AND PRESENT DAY

When Ivy Zimmerman’s Mennonite parents are killed in a tragic accident, her way of life is upended. As she grows suspicious that her parents’ deaths weren’t an accident, she gains courage in the story of Clare Simons, a woman who lived in pre-World War II Germany. With the inspiration of Clare, Ivy seeks justice for her parents, her sisters, and herself.

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A destroyed house in a Myanmar village.

PHOTO: MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

## Church members killed in Myanmar bombing

Mennonite World Conference issued a call to prayer to its member churches around the world the day after a military bombardment killed members of Bible Missionary Church, an MWC member church.

MWC reported an aerial bombardment of a village in Chin State killed a dozen villagers March 30, including several members of the congregation and the local pastor's daughters. Many villagers were

severely injured, including the pastor.

*Canadian Mennonite* reported last summer roughly half of Bible Missionary Church families were displaced. About 2,000 people had fled to jungles or mountainous areas for safety after the military seized power and civil unrest grew.

"Please pray for solace for all those affected," said MWC President Henk Stenvers. "Pray for an end to violence."

— *Anabaptist World*

## Reps from four Andean nations gather in Ecuador

About 130 Anabaptists from nine conferences in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela gathered to explore themes of reconciliation Feb. 18-21 in Quito, Ecuador.

The Andean regional gathering was originally planned for November 2020, two years after a previous event in Cali, Colombia, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meetings prior to the full gathering included *Red Latinoamericana de Estudios Anabautistas* (RELEA, Latin American Network of Anabaptist Studies) and *Movimiento de Mujeres Anabautistas Hacienda*

*Teología desde América Latina* (MTAL, Movement of Anabaptist Women Doing Theology from Latin America) focusing on gender violence, and a meeting with representatives of each conference to discern possibilities for theological education from an Anabaptist perspective.

Mennonite World Conference general secretary César García led Bible studies and reflections with an emphasis on working together in unity while recognizing distinctive gifts, challenges and perspectives of each conference.

Workshops focused on Anabaptist identity, creation care, mission and church planting, spirituality of peace, migration and hospitality, and including people with disabilities in communities of faith.

— *Mennonite Mission Network*

## Menno Simons Sermon Prize awarded to German pastor

The University of Hamburg department of peace church theology has awarded the Menno Simons Sermon Prize to Joachim



Leberecht

Leberecht, pastor of Evangelical Lydia Church in Herzogenrath, Germany.

The winning sermon will be delivered during the worship service Sept. 3 at Hamburg-Altona Mennonite Church, followed by the public award ceremony.

The sermon was originally delivered on Good Friday in 2022 as part of a Passion sermon series about dreams. Leberecht connects literary tales of dreams to the nightmare of war in Ukraine. The sermon recalls the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, concluding that "we should no longer sacrifice people. It is enough once and for all." Leberecht laments the attitudes of church leaders amid the war and recalls conscientious objectors' testimony.

"Through Jesus' death, we are freed and called to nonviolent resistance," the sermon concludes.

A pastor in Evangelical Churches in the Rhineland for 30 years, Leberecht introduced the sermon series to strengthen preaching culture. Since the war in Ukraine began, he has held a poster in Herzogenrath's weekly market calling on Russia and Ukraine to lay down weapons.

The prize encourages sermons that "bring the biblical testimony in the light of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition." The \$2,150 prize is divided between the award winner and their home congregation.

— *Mennonews.de*

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# Cyclone brings destruction, disease to Malawi, Mozambique

**ANABAPTIST MEMBERS** in Malawi and Mozambique were impacted significantly by Cyclone Freddy, an exceptionally long-lived tropical storm that battered Southeast Africa for more than five weeks in February and March with heavy rains and high winds.

Winds reached speeds of 165 mph, weakened over land but strengthened again in the Mozambique Channel. Catastrophic flooding in Malawi killed about 500 people. Madagascar was still reeling from the impacts of 2022 cyclones Batsirai and Emnati.

Water washed away houses, roads, electricity poles and bridges in Malawi. Brethren in Christ church members from Blantyre, Phalombe and Mulanje



Cyclone Freddy destroyed many structures in Mozambique. PHOTO: PATRICIO MILANGE

districts are displaced. A cholera outbreak was worsened by crowded conditions, lack of food and lack of sanitary facilities. Leaders in Phalombe reported more than a dozen Brethren in Christ church members died.

In Mozambique, collapsed houses forced people in Milange, Tete and Mocuba to shelter in Brethren in Christ church buildings or local schools.

Church buildings collapsed in Tete and Alto Mulocoe, and the district pastor's house collapsed in Sena District.

"We ask that you continue to pray for us. God [is] in charge of our lives," said Mubecane Filipe Manharage, national bishop of Brethren in Christ Church Mozambique. ●

## Brethren plan silent reflection, confession this summer

The Church of the Brethren is planning a "time of silent personal reflection and confession" at its July 4-8 Annual Conference in Cincinnati based on a recommendation adopted last year to hold a service of confession and repentance regarding relationships with one another and exclusion of LGBTQ people.

Church of the Brethren Newsline reported 19 of 28 members of the denomination's Standing Committee voted March 7 to read the recommendation at the Annual Conference and have quiet reflection.

The committee chose not to approve two other options to either proceed with the confession and repentance proposal or to admit that the denomination is not ready for such a service.

A motion to start a multiyear process of confession and repentance was voted down.

Discussion of the recommendation, adopted by the Standing Committee last July, has revealed sharp differences among district delegates.

The recommendation states, in part: "Theological differences around human sexuality have too often been manifested in bullying, violence and a general sense of

dismissal toward one another and specifically toward our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters. We must redouble our efforts to live out these differences, as individuals and through our systems of governance, in ways that preserve the humanity, dignity and deeply held spiritual convictions of all. Harsh, dismissive, unloving and unforgiving behaviors toward one another cannot have a home among us."

The March 7 online meeting was an unprecedented fourth meeting between Annual Conference gatherings. Annual Conference moderator Tim McElwee led the meeting and expressed gratitude for the work of the committee members, noting it is unusual for the committee to meet once between conferences, much less four times.

One of the committee's primary functions is to make recommendations on new business items and queries coming to Annual Conference.

A task force holding conversations with the denominational agency On Earth Peace presented four recommendations to the Standing Committee during last July's Annual Conference in Omaha, Neb.

In addition to the request for a

time of confession and repentance, the wide-ranging recommendations called for a review of Church of the Brethren's organizational structure to address "deep dysfunction."

The committee engaged in conversation about the state of the church at that meeting with general secretary David Steele and district executive representative Torin Eikler. Newsline reported questions "focused on the scope of the loss of congregations and the effect on the denomination, both emotionally and practically."

"Steele commented on the 'loss and pain' he has seen in visits with congregations and districts, the problem of misinformation being spread around the denomination and the unprecedented problem of having another denomination actively coming in and meeting with Church of the Brethren congregations."

The other denomination is Covenant Brethren Church, formed in 2020 by district executives, Standing Committee members and pastors who identified "failure of the denomination to stand strong on biblical authority" among their concerns. — *Anabaptist World*



## Grebel partners with AMBS, CMU to facilitate M.Div. work

Conrad Grebel University College has partnered with Canadian Mennonite University and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary so that master of theological studies students at Grebel can transfer credits and finish master of divinity degrees at AMBS or CMU.

The master of theological studies is a two-year degree in Bible, Christian theology, church history and the practice of ministry. Up to 16 courses can be transferred to AMBS or CMU for online or in-person studies.

Taryn Ferrede, a 2019 Grebel graduate, was the first student to complete the sequential degree with AMBS.

When she studied at Grebel, Ferrede learned biblical language studies in Hebrew. When she started her M.Div. at AMBS, she was enticed by the chance to continue her biblical language studies by learning Greek. This sparked a love for learning biblical languages.

"I am solidifying my Greek in a master of the theology program at the University of Toronto to be further prepared for potential

doctoral studies in the future," she said. "The M.Div. nurtured my faith by giving me opportunity to deepen my biblical knowledge. I also appreciated reflecting on current events with international classmates."

— Conrad Grebel University College

## Bluffton lecture looks at womanist theology, peace

Valerie Bridgman, dean and vice president of academic affairs and associate professor of homiletics and Hebrew Bible at Methodist Theological School in Delaware, Ohio, presented Bluffton University's annual Keeney Peace Lecture Forum on April 4.



Bridgman

Bridgman explored how studying the Bible from a womanist perspective can show the path to authentic peacemaking. The 11 a.m. presentation in Yoder Recital Hall was titled, "What Is Peace When You Feel Like Fighting? Reflections of a Womanist Biblical Scholar." — Bluffton University

## Tabor professor selected to communicate with graduates

Aleen Ratzlaff, Tabor College emerita professor of communications, will be the keynote speaker at the college's commencement on May 6.



Ratzlaff

Ratzlaff retired in 2022, capping 25 years teaching at Tabor. She continues to teach part-time.

A 1974 Tabor graduate, she received her master's degree in communications from Wichita State University in 1994 and briefly returned to Tabor as an

instructor. She then moved to Gainesville, Fla., to teach and complete her doctorate in mass communications from the University of Florida in 2001.

Ratzlaff is the only Tabor faculty member selected twice for the Clarence R. Hiebert Excellence in Teaching Award. She also delivered the Dr. Richard G. Kyle Faculty Lecture in 2010 and 2021.

— Tabor College

## AW call for submissions Holy Spirit/ Pentecost

**DEADLINE:** April 26

**LENGTH:** 600 to 1,200 words

*We encourage submissions of photos or art that symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.*

When the Holy Spirit descended on the believers at Pentecost, they saw flames of fire over each other's heads, and they spoke in different languages. What does an outpouring of the Holy Spirit look like today for an individual or a community?

Submissions will be considered for the May 26 issue.  
Send to [editor@anabaptistworld.org](mailto:editor@anabaptistworld.org)



# Bluffton's Spiritual Life Week speaker urges genuine conversation

**GEORGIA METZ** returned to Bluffton University March 19 during Spiritual Life Week to talk about how to truly listen. Now pastor of Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg, Va., the 2013 Bluffton graduate worked with students as they explored Proverbs 2:2-5, which says those whose ears are attentive to wisdom will find the knowledge of God.

Metz said the theme reflects conversations she's having about the polarization of society and the ways technology is changing and shaping people.

"It's concerning that many of our conversations are taking place in virtual spaces, where listening is not well received. Online spaces often do not reward genuine conversation. They reward engagement," Metz said. "But life is not about who is the most right or who gets the most points at the end or who has the largest following and the most stuff."

She encouraged students to be better listeners by listening with curiosity and not judgment, valuing relationships over ego and moving forward with humility.

The week's "Let's Listen" theme connected to Bluffton's yearlong civic engagement theme of creating space for authentic conversations. It followed the fall Spiritual Life Week theme, "Let's Talk."

During a question-and-answer session, Metz shared about her journey toward ministry and Bluffton's role in forming her identity as a person, a Mennonite and a global citizen.

"As a person who cares about what is happening in the world, a lot of those aspects of what I do now come from Bluffton," she said. "I hope future students will continue to be formed in that way [and] continue to wrestle with questions of Who am I as a person before God? Who am I as a person in the world? What is the larger purpose that holds all of this together?" ●



Pastor Georgia Metz, guest speaker for Bluffton University's spring Spiritual Life Week, focused on the importance of listening. PHOTO: BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY



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## FPU lectures highlight Black biblical interpretation

"The Gift of Black Biblical Interpretation" was the focus of Fresno Pacific University's Janzen Lectureship in Biblical Studies March 23-25.



Bowens

Lisa M. Bowens, associate professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, shared insights from her book *African American Readings in Paul: Reception, Resistance and Transformation*, which explores the contributions of Black biblical

interpretation in communities of faith.

Bowens is the first African American woman to earn tenure in Princeton's Bible department. She earned degrees from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Duke Divinity School and Princeton Theological Seminary.

Her three presentations were titled "African American Readings of Paul," "God Talk: Character of God in Black Biblical Interpretation" and "Use of Scripture in

Black Protest Traditions."

The lectureship promotes scholarship in biblical interpretation and the witness of the Christian church. — *FPU*

## EMU students learn from South African hosts

Students on Eastern Mennonite University's spring intercultural trip to South Africa are learning from activists, volunteering, spending time with host families, practicing the isiZulu language and visiting churches and historical sites.

Led by Andrew G. Suderman, professor of Bible, theology and religion, and Karen Suderman, the group recently concluded their time in Johannesburg and moved on to Cape Town.

Nathan Oostland recalled visiting Marikana, a mining town that was the site of a 2012 massacre where miners protesting for more livable pay were answered with bullets.

Napoleon, a local activist, welcomed the group into his four-room home.

"He was a gracious host who pushed us just outside our comfort zones physically and emotionally," Oostland wrote. "We learned the power of the everyday person

in a fight for justice and the importance of sharing stories together."

Student reflections from this and other experiences are at [emu.edu/now/intercultural](http://emu.edu/now/intercultural). — *Eastern Mennonite University*

## Goshen film investigates city's 'sundown' racial past

The Goshen College Film Production program premiered its documentary *Goshen — A Sundown Town's Transformation* March 21 at The Goshen Theater.

For most of the 20th century, Goshen was a "sundown town," meaning African Americans were excluded from living in Goshen or even staying overnight by social and cultural means.

The film explores Goshen's past as a racially exclusionary town and how the community is finding ways to acknowledge this history and move forward.

The documentary was made by sophomore film production major Silas Immanuel and advised by associate professor of communication Kyle Hufford.

A panel discussion sponsored and moderated by the Goshen Community Relations Commission followed the film.

— *Goshen College*

# Toronto theological center closing

**TORONTO MENNONITE** Theological Center will end operations this spring. The Conrad Grebel University College Board of Governors made the decision at its February meeting.

The center was founded in 1990 by a consortium of Mennonite institutions as a graduate teaching and research center, affiliated with the Toronto School of Theology. Grebel operated the center since 2000, when it assumed responsibility for it.

"Many factors fed into our decision to close TMTC, and ultimately our best judgment was that Grebel needs to direct its limited resources toward our in-house programs, including the Theological Studies Department," said Grebel President Marcus Shantz.

Shantz convened consultations with the TMTC Advisory Council in 2019 and has been in conversation about the center's future with partner institutions, including Canadian Mennonite

University and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Although TMTC's work convening Anabaptist-Mennonite students at Toronto School of Theology will end, Grebel will continue its academic affiliation with the Toronto School of Theology, maintaining an opportunity for students to engage with the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

"TST students will continue to be able to take courses offered in Grebel's Master of Theological Studies program, and Grebel professors may continue to teach and supervise students at TST," said Grebel dean Troy Osborne.

In recent years, TMTC's activities began to reach beyond Toronto. It is hoped that many of these activities will continue with the support of institutional partners. These gatherings have included a biennial graduate student conference, the Mennonite Schol-

ars and Friends forum at the annual American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature meetings, and the online Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network.

"TMTC has been formative for well over 100 graduate students who have in turn contributed important research, written influential books and shaped church and educational institutions," said Jeremy Bergen, TMTC director and Grebel professor. "Many serve as faculty members and church leaders. TMTC has brought an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective to conversations at one of the leading ecumenical centers of theological learning in North America and contributed to critical and challenging discussions within Mennonite communities. Even though this one institution is closing, its legacy is embodied in the lives of many."

— *Conrad Grebel University College*



# FPU faculty promote teaching math for social justice in Peru

## TWO FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

faculty members traveled to Peru in February to promote teaching math for social justice. The concept is simple: Students will be motivated to learn math if it helps them address societal issues they care about.

Manjula Joseph, who directs the Master of Arts in Mathematics Education program, and faculty member Alice Keeler made the trip to Lima. The visit was organized by EdTech Latam, which works in Latin American countries to support professional education for teachers. They told teachers about FPU's efforts in California with the concept of math for social justice.

"We talked about how it leads to more creativity in teaching and brings out the joy of learning in students," Joseph said.

Keeler added: "It inherently makes math class more engaging and meaningful, promotes critical thinking and develops soft skills such as communication that are valuable for employees."

In California's San Joaquin Valley — where many social justice issues persist — using math to address real-world problems offers exciting possibilities in classrooms.

Jeremiah Ruesch, who earned a master's degree in math education at FPU, said math education needs a revolution. For too long, it has asked students to memorize formulas with no context for their applications.

"Teaching math for social justice flips the script and allows students — especially from marginalized communities — to see that math has a purpose and gives them a voice to have quantitative conversations around qualitative experiences," he said.

Keeler travels internationally to lead professional development sessions for teachers. Her contacts led to an invitation for her and Joseph to speak in Peru.

Teaching math for social justice



Manjula Joseph, standing left, and Alice Keeler, standing middle, introduce a group of teachers in Lima, Peru, to math for social justice. PHOTO: FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

is possible from elementary to high school, though the complexity of issues will vary. It begins with teachers talking with students about what matters to them.

IN PERU, JOSEPH shared with teachers how Fresno students in one high

**"Teaching math for social justice flips the script and allows students — especially from marginalized communities — to see that math has a purpose and gives them a voice."**

— Jeremiah Ruesch

school decided to research backpacks. That exploration led to math but also to discussing workers' rights, fair trade and wages in developing nations where many backpacks are made. Using mathematical modeling to calculate wages, costs of living and other rele-

vant information, the students discovered an inequity between workers' wages and companies' profits.

"These students brought in data and then engaged with it by asking questions: What do we do with all these numbers? How can we better understand the numbers? How can we better understand our world?" Joseph said. "They were learning math and at the same time thinking about issues that mattered to them."

The math-for-social-justice approach empowers not only students but also teachers, who may have become discouraged due to administrative demands and other pressures.

"But they recognize that they have a voice and can make a difference in their schools and communities," Joseph said of bringing real-world relevance to math courses. "Math is all around us. Unfortunately, we don't often intentionally make that connection for students, and that's why some students can feel so isolated in their math courses."

Teaching math for social justice can bring new energy to classrooms.

"Young people care about saving the world, and this connects them to that idea through math," Keeler said. ●



# Relationships worth fighting for

**I LOVE WATCHING MOVIES**, and one that caught my attention this year is *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

When I read that it addresses the philosophical theme of our existence, depression, generational trauma and Asian American identity, I knew I had to see it.

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* tells the story of an Asian immigrant family in the United States struggling to find significance, love, connection, safety, hope and faith while defeating evil powers in the multiverse. It connects to me on many levels — as an Asian, as an immigrant and as a believer.

It is messy, chaotic and complicated, but at its heart is a simple story — a story of reconciliation.

I'm amazed at how this movie captured the chaotic reality of an immigrant family. Sometimes everything seems to happen all at once, and we are forced to adapt at a fast pace just to survive.

Living in more than one culture, as immigrants do, is messy, painful and chaotic. It might also be disorganized and disorienting. But then you will see things differently from another culture's perspective, and you will realize that something important in one's own culture is not necessarily important in

others.

The movie reminds me of the role of martial arts in different cultures. Every culture, especially in Asia, has its own martial arts discipline. And, contrary to what the media portray as a violent act, the martial arts offer conflict transformation in a peaceful way.

"True martial arts aren't about snapping your opponent's bones or forcing a humiliating surrender. Those results lead only to further conflict. They are about peace and nonviolence and a safe and honorable outcome for all," says Steve Thomas, a Mennonite minister who holds a black belt in Tae Kwon Do.

That is exactly the outcome of the martial art used by the protagonist, Evelyn Wang, played by Malaysian actress Michele Yeoh, in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. She fights to bring peace, nonviolence and reconciliation. She does this by using her powers to connect and understand the opponents' deepest longings and desires and then fulfilling them, causing all to stop fighting and be at peace.

**THIS MOVIE REMINDS ME** that we are in a battle against dark forces. There is a dark supernatural force in the movie that steals light, joy and hope and creates despair, affecting everyone around it — especially one person who wants to end all existence because that person is hurting. Hurt people hurt people.

This reminds me that "our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). The only way to triumph is to reconcile people through the way of love that Jesus Christ showed us.

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* tells a story of reconciliation between parents and their daughter. It is a reconciliation between cultures and

generations. We do need to fight for our relationships, and this movie shows us how.

All the fighting scenes between mother and daughter and the rest of the antagonists lead to a deeper understanding of each other's pain and trauma. At the end there is recognition that we are all human, broken and in need of redemption.

**It is messy, chaotic and complicated, but at its heart is a simple story — a story of reconciliation.**

The movie's theme of reconciliation reminds me of Luke 1:17, where an angel tells Zechariah that his son, John, will "turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

John prepared the way for Jesus, whose ministry is reconciliation. As Anabaptists, reconciliation is the center of our work.

**I INVITE YOU TO WATCH** *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and dive into a unique narrative that doesn't fit into one box. Get into the mind of Evelyn Wang and understand her struggle to reconcile her relationship with her daughter, father, husband, friends and others.

The movie won seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Actress. Michele Yeoh is the first Asian woman to win the Oscar for Best Actress. In her acceptance speech, she said, "For all the little boys and girls that look like me tonight, never stop dreaming. History is in the making."

The journey toward reconciliation between generations and cultures has a long way to go, but it's worth fighting for. Jesus, be with us all. ●



**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.



# To regain trust, the church needs to care about more than itself

**“WHAT DO YOU DO** for a living?” I often get nervous when people ask me this. Since becoming a pastor, I have discovered that trust is essential to my work. But the title of pastor does not always evoke trust — or even favorability.

Nor does the term church. Church brings up negative emotions for people who have felt and seen the harm the church can cause.

When I began my ministry in Salem, Ore., I made it a point to get involved in the community. I graduated from seminary with a certificate in urban ministry. One of the key things I learned was the need to connect the church with the larger community.

Soon I realized this task was going to be much more difficult than I had thought. Where I am located, churches are often the loudest voice in opposition to women’s rights, racial justice and gun control.

For my congregation to connect with the community, we had to be willing to show up. Much of this work included showing up to community meetings,

rallies, protests and worship events. This helped us gain trust within a community that can be suspicious of churches.

When I hear people critique the church, it’s for one of two reasons: The church is causing harm, or it did not show up when called upon.

You cannot be on the side of people

**I want people to see churches as good-faith partners rather than as opponents to organize against.**

if you do not show up when you are needed.

Churches are unique communities. We gather not solely for worship but also to fellowship and care for one another. We share prayer requests and needs. We create communities of grace and love because we want people to feel cared for within our church walls.

While this can be our main priority as a community, we need to reach out beyond ourselves. We do this not to gain power but to build relationships with people.

Community ministry allows for the voice of the church to be heard. It shows that the church cares about more than itself.

It is great for those within the church to love each other, but we need to always be thinking about how this love extends to others.

**WHEN WE LOOK AT** Jesus’ ministry, we see him not only caring for his disciples but also addressing needs within the communities that he comes across. The Samaritan woman at the well. The feeding of the 5,000. The healing of the man born blind. All are moments

where Jesus participated in ministry within the community.

Jesus showed up when called upon, and this was how he built trust with people.

The church is called to show up. This is how we share the light of Christ. We have to be willing to work alongside community members, Christians and otherwise, in order to create communities that reflect God’s love and peace.

We need to always be asking how we can best show up for our community right now. Are there people who need food? Is there an organization taking donations for community members? Are there activists in the community in need of our presence? How are we paying attention to the least of these?

I believe our churches need to practice the kind of community ministry Jesus modeled. We do not only care for those within the church walls or those who are Christian. No, we care for all the people our God cares for. We care for those in the towns and cities we live in.

**THE CHURCH SHOULD NOT** be a club that lives separately, comfortable and content, while our neighbors struggle. As followers of Christ, we are called to always be actively helping to meet the needs of the communities we are placed in.

So, keep your ears to the ground and feet to the pavement. Be open to new ways of participation. If there is healing that needs to be done, then enter into that process faithfully.

I long for people to see churches as a useful resource again. I long for them to see the church in a positive light. I want people to see churches as good-faith partners rather than as opponents to organize against. I want people to feel trust when I tell them I am a pastor. I want us to be the ones who show up when needed. ●



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# Getting old means needing help

*There will be enough of [my nephews and nieces], in all probability, to supply every sort of sensation that declining life can need. . . . I shall often have a niece with me.* — Emma Woodhouse

**IN MY 20s AND 30s**, conversations with my peers centered around concerns about children.

Are Cheerios OK? She isn't talking much yet. Public, private or magnet school?

I'll turn 45 this year and, while we still talk about our precious offspring quite a bit, I've noticed a new topic showing up more often.

This subject is more universal than kids. Not everyone has children, but everyone has parents.

He had no business getting up on that stepladder! She is unsteady on her feet, but I'd never dare suggest she use a cane. Should I be concerned that he told me the same story twice?

There is nothing more inevitable than growing old, and yet it is surprising when we watch our parents do it. What a shock to realize your mom isn't up for hosting the Christmas festivities anymore. How astonishing that your dad stayed back at the cabin instead of going on the five-mile hike.

Growing older is never a straight or obvious journey. Neither is caring for aging people. Personality, family dynamics, finances, health history,

cultural norms and expectations vary from person to person.

There is a unifying theme, however. We are all going to need help.

The chance of someone living independently until their 90th birthday and then dying in their sleep — bringing neither pain nor bother to them—

**Growing older is never a straight or obvious journey. There is a unifying theme, however. We are all going to need help.**

selves or others — is pretty much zero. We are all going to need help. Many of us will need help for years and years.

This was not so much the case for earlier generations. They died earlier. As one 80-year-old told me, "By the time I was your age [mid-40s], both my parents were gone. I never had to worry about taking care of them."

Mortality from heart disease fell in the United States by more than half between 1950 and 1995. With blood pressure medication and advanced heart care, the chance of dying quickly from a stroke or heart attack, common killers in decades past, is far less likely.

With all its benefits, modern medicine has perhaps given us a sense of invincibility. Living with a pacemaker for two decades won't save us from other frailties and mental decline.

We will need help.

Which brings me to my point.

Parents need to move geographically close to their children. (Sadly, no, the children will not move to you. They have jobs and maybe children still in school.)

Relocating is hard. It may feel impossible to leave your community and

start all over again. Frankly, you may not get along well with your kid.

All of those barriers will dissolve when you need rides to the doctor, someone to fill your pill box and get your internet working yet again. Studies have shown that the vast majority of caregiving is done by family members. Your next-door neighbor will not clip your toenails or help you transition to assisted living. When it is time for the hard stuff, you'll need your family.

On the other side, I've heard people my age say, "Oh, I could never live in the same town as my parents." Yeah, well . . . see how you feel when you are flying across the country every couple of weeks to deal with one emergency after another. Driving across town will be a dream come true.

**I DO ELDER CARE.** I'm officially a home health aide, but in actuality I'm a paid, surrogate daughter or granddaughter (depending on my clients' age).

I constantly communicate with children who live out of town, desperate for information about their loved one. What did she eat today? How is his mood? Is he using the walker? Is she hiding the toilet paper again?

Three years ago, my in-laws moved to a condo just five minutes down the road from us. They live independently but acknowledge it won't always be that way. They have given us the gift of allowing us to be there for them.

Jesus said only seven things while he hung in pain and mental anguish on the cross. Along with forgiving the world and committing his soul to God, he made sure his mother had someone to care for her.

Parents, your children love you and would like to follow Jesus' example. We know it is asking a lot. We know it is a sacrifice. But do us a solid and come over to our neighborhood. Let us take care of you. ●



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



# My peripheral vision

**MY HUSBAND AND I** lost our places of belonging on the same day.

It was Nov. 1, 2016, and I was on a retreat in Chicago. At the time, I was serving as the founder and director of a flourishing retreat ministry and having the time of my life.

Simultaneously, I had been sensing an unfathomable nudge from God to set it all down.

I went to the chapel to have it out with God for the final time, a show-down of sorts. After loud laments and lots of listening, I picked my knees up off the hard floor and slid back onto the pew. I had surrendered, and I would step down from my role.

My tear-stained eyes and I returned to my room, where I set down my journals and picked up my phone. A text message scrolled across the screen.

Call me. I just lost my job.

It was from my husband. Within minutes, we both lost our places, our people, our provisions and our passions. He was 60 years old.

What now?

Over the past six years, I've been chasing after a new place to belong. It's possible I've been chasing such a place since my birth.

It's certain that on that November

day in 2016, my husband and I were both moved from center stage to a peripheral place, and I've been longing for a return ever since.

Periphery means a marginal or secondary position. It involves a shift in power, place and proximity.

I wonder if, as we age, we feel more and more removed from the center of things. We're farther from the center of relationship roles or the busy work world.

Age is not the only thing to push us to the periphery. We can be flung far by health problems, disabilities, race, economic status, gender and more.

"He came and preached peace to you who were far away," the apostle Paul said of Jesus (Ephesians 2:17, NIV).

"The Great Preacher of peace and love came for you, and His voice found those of you who were . . . far away" (*Voice*).

He came for you. The great preacher of peace and love. He came. And his voice found you. You who were far away.

Peace to you on the periphery.

When I'm pushed to the periphery, all kinds of voices find me, and they don't all sound like peace and love to my aching ears. Mostly they sound like rejection and abandonment. Like you're not wanted. Like we've moved on. Voices informing me I've gone from being indispensable to inconsequential.

Peace to me on the periphery. And love.

Jesus was drawn to the outcasts, to those spun far from center. Could it be that this is the best place to hear his very good news?

Peace to you on the periphery. And love. The preacher has come for you.

For you.

## THE GOSPEL STORY OF THE WOMAN

at the well (John 4) has been showing up in numerous places around me the last couple of weeks. She was one who

knew the periphery well. One who had been moved from the middle to the margins, step by devastating step.

I'd been led to believe this was her own fault, caused by her immoral behavior. Then a preacher challenged that for me. She had five husbands, yes, but all that means is she lost her place of belonging five times.

Five times, can you imagine? Five times left. Five times abandoned

**When I'm pushed to the periphery, all kinds of voices find me, and they don't all sound like peace and love.**

through death or divorce. Five times moved farther from the middle of everyone else's bustling lives to the margins of inexplicable grief and loss.

And even now, the man she had was not her husband. Even here, she was denied a taking in, a belonging place.

I wonder: What voices did she hear there? Her own and those of others? Did those voices drive her even farther out and away? I imagine the sad answer to that last question is yes.

**HERE WE SEE IN ACTION** what Paul referred to in Ephesians 2:17. The Great Preacher of peace and love came for the Samaritan woman. His voice found her far away. His voice of compassion. His voice of love.

His voice restored to her a place in his kingdom and in her community. That was something this great preacher would do time and time again.

"Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord, and I will heal them" (Isaiah 57:19).

May we in the middle be moved to the margins and carry Christ's love with us there. ●



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# Sincere and simple — and sharp and savvy

**A FOLKSY PASTOR** visiting my congregation commented on my sermon after church. “Thanks,” he said. “You kept your cookie jar on the bottom shelf.”

Whether it’s true or not, I know the temptation of the top shelf, the allure of turning the fire hose on the congregation after you’ve dug three commentaries deep into a passage of Scripture all week.

I’ve got words. I’ve got ideas. I’ve got insights, people. It’s all too easy for some kind of erudition to overshadow the everyday call to live a sincere and simple faith in Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul speaks of his hope that the Corinthians will not lose their “sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” He uses a rhyming pair of Greek words that could also be translated “sincere and simple.”

What does it mean to live a sincere and simple faith in Jesus?

“Simplicity” is a sparkling word for us Anabaptists. We aspire to live simply and spend simply and dress simply.

Simplicity can take on anti-intellectualist hues that track back to Menno Simons, who complained that pastors from establishment churches were “greeted as doctors, lords and teach-

ers” while Anabaptists were slurred as “bootleg preachers, deceivers and heretics.” (Oh, to be called a bootleg preacher.)

Still today, some Plain groups eschew education beyond the eighth grade. I remember my traditional Mennonite grandparents asking me as I headed off to college whether they would still recognize me when I came home.

“Simple” can imply an intentional kind of naivete — sort of the King James version of “special.” That’s all I have to say about that.

But I wonder if there are ways to be sharp and savvy followers of Jesus, people who have read up on the world’s chutes and ladders even as they are judicious about the ones they choose to take.

**THE APOSTLE PAUL** was a towering intellect. True, he regarded all his credentials as nothing compared to knowing Christ and him crucified (Philippians 3:8; 1 Corinthians 2:2). And yet, Paul criticized the Corinthians for not being wise enough to work through complicated human issues in their congregation (1 Corinthians 6:1-6).

His letters, with their theological depth and artistic breadth, demonstrate how Paul saw his mind completed in Christ, who gathers up “all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).

“I may be untrained in speech,” Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians, “but not in knowledge” (2 Corinthians 11:6). And though, in the end, knowledge will pass away, the sincere and simple faith Paul commends is neither top shelf nor bottom (1 Corinthians 13:8). It looks like what he sought to live out for himself: a willingness to respond to Jesus’ leading in all aspects of his life.

Christ’s truth informed Paul’s

teaching (2 Corinthians 11:10). Christ’s strength gave meaning to Paul’s weakness (11:29-30; 12:9). Christ’s leading guided Paul’s decisions (12:14).

That’s a sincere and simple faith — one that’s supple and responsive to Jesus. It doesn’t intellectualize its way out of and around Jesus’ word. It’s

**A sincere and simple faith is willing to be stopped in its tracks, to be challenged, to suffer when the cultural currents shift.**

willing to be stopped in its tracks, to be challenged, to suffer when the cultural currents shift.

**THE MEDIEVAL MONASTIC** Thomas à Kempis wrote in his booklet *The Imitation of Christ*: “On the day of judgment, surely, we shall not be asked what we have read but what we have done; not how well we have spoken but how well we have lived.”

A sincere and simple faith is one that not only reads and speaks but lives. Like the blind man in John 9, a sincere and simple faith doesn’t need to interrogate all the hows and whys. It just knows that it’s received light from Jesus.

Learning and intellect, smarts and savvy — the whole portfolio of gifts that we’ve inherited or developed (or both) — they’re good and precious insofar as they’re deployed for the love of Christ.

In so many ways, the shelf is irrelevant. “This is what we pray for,” writes Paul, “that you may become perfect” (2 Corinthians 13:9). It’s sincere and simple faith, top to bottom. ●



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# Pacifists judged: great but misguided

**MANY AMERICANS** have internalized notions of a World War II “Greatest Generation,” a mythology infused with masculine sacrifice and heroism. Historians and memoirists have produced more nuanced accounts — exploring topics like racial segregation, anti-Asian sentiment, changing gender roles and religious dissent — that challenge the prevailing narrative.

Given the enduring fascination with World War II, it is perhaps inevitable that yet another “Greatest Generation” tome would appear, albeit with an argumentative twist: World War II-era pacifists who resisted racial and economic injustices were great, too. This is the theme of *War by Other Means*, which traces the lives of midcentury pacifists David Dellinger, Bayard Rustin, A.J. Muste, Dorothy Day and others. The author, Daniel Akst, asserts that their war resistance, while ineffective in reducing the global carnage, produced good fruit in the long term: “They were wrong about one very big thing, it is true, but they were right about many others, as time would tell.”

These pacifists led extraordinary lives, and their legacies are part of a rich historical tradition. Memoirs and biographical works help us to understand how the taproot of Christian nonviolence animated them. But in this book, the author’s appeal to readers conditioned to “Greatest Generation” tropes is duplicitous. Akst claims, but provides no evidence supporting his opinion, that while his subjects’ humanitarianism was laudable, their wartime pacifism was misguided; they were wrong to oppose the war.

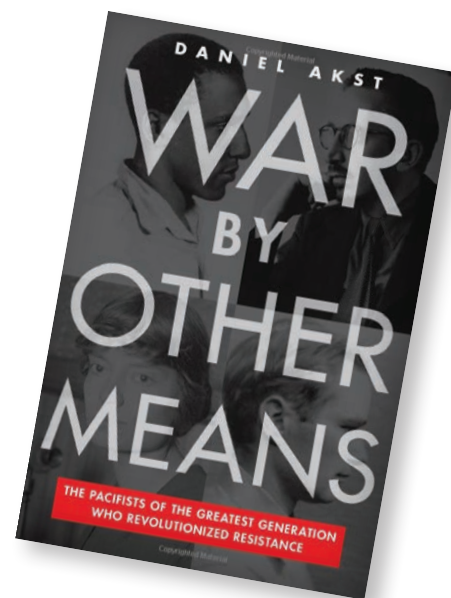
Akst, a journalist, understands that most Americans have scant knowledge of pacifist traditions. In broad strokes, he traces the expansion of religious and civil liberties from the American revolutionary period through the Civil War and into the 20th century. By 1940, the historic peace churches and other pacifist groups were advocating for conscientious objectors’ rights.

Enacted one year before Pearl Harbor, the Burke-Wadsworth Act conscripted millions of draft-age men and launched the Civilian Public Service program of work camps for religious war objectors.

*War by Other Means* takes a dim view of CPS, embedded as it was with the wartime federal government. Noting that the 12,000 men assigned to CPS put in nearly 6 million hours of work ranging from firefighting to dairy testing, Akst argues they were “exploited by a system that treated their labor . . . [and] their well-being all too cavalierly.” Apart from a nod to CPSers’ role in reforming psychiatric hospitals, Akst emphasizes the malaise of CPS assignees who became frustrated with menial tasks. Mennonite Central Committee’s role in administering camps is unmentioned, but the conflict-ridden Selective Service System camps — such as in Germfask, Mich., where men rebelled against work conditions until the camp shut down — illustrate what Akst terms “eroding support for the CPS program on all sides.” In his telling, CPS — which involved thousands of Mennonite, Amish, Hutterite and Brethren men and women — was a failed experiment, conducted by well-meaning but naïve idealists.

**GIVEN HIS PREOCCUPATION** with impact and legacy, Akst asks: Who were the most influential pacifists, and why? He argues they were the nonconformists who resisted conscription and went to prison, where they organized hunger strikes and other acts of nonviolent protest to defy racist, unjust treatment. Their uncompromising insistence on human rights received scant public notice at the time but gained momentum in subsequent decades, encompassing redress for Japanese-Americans’ wartime internment as well as broader desegregation and civil rights.

*War by Other Means* weaves together accounts of Dellinger and Rustin, whose critiques of capitalism and



*War by Other Means: The Pacifists of the Greatest Generation Who Revolutionized Resistance*, by Daniel Akst (Melville House, 2022)

structural racism in the 1940s, interlayered with antiwar activism, placed them among the most notable leftist thinkers in American life. Dellinger’s dissent while in prison for draft resistance led to integration of racially segregated dining halls. Rustin’s incarceration as a CO and courageous protests of segregated housing dovetailed with his early leadership of the Congress of Racial Equality. Later, Rustin became well-known for organizing the 1963 March on Washington, while Dellinger was a tireless critic of the Vietnam War.

The author rightly notes that these and other religiously motivated activists were exemplars in fostering nonviolent social change. Indeed, they had an impressive, if largely unrecognized, impact on American political and social thought in subsequent decades. But in dismissing their foundational antiwar beliefs, Akst belittles them and undercuts his own line of reasoning. ●

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# Faith guided Carter's life, policy

Former president embodied an evangelical heritage that predated the religious right

**SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT** in February that Jimmy Carter, at age 98, had entered hospice care, many leaders and writers have searched for fitting ways to name his legacy. Much attention has focused on his post-presidency life. A common narrative has been of a disappointing term in office followed by exemplary service as a former president.

Jonathan Alter's book, *His Very Best*, goes a long way to dispel the account of a Carter administration with few accomplishments. But, further, those with religious values have much more to honor as we reflect on Carter's legacy.

When President Carter spoke at the groundbreaking for the Bishop William R. Cannon Chapel at Candler School of Theology in 1979, Emory University President James Laney spoke with appreciation of Carter's "fusion of piety and pragmatism so characteristic of our region and still so enigmatic to the rest of the nation." Perhaps those of us who grew up in the South can appreciate more deeply than others the religious values that nurtured and shaped Carter.

The former president possessed an inner confidence in relation to his faith that may not be fully understood by many, even to this day. In welcoming the 1972 General Conference of the United Methodist Church to Atlanta, then-Georgia Gov. Carter said, "The most important factor in my life is Jesus Christ."

Claire Randall, at the time general secretary of the National Council of Churches, met with Carter in the midst of his presidency. She said afterward: "Many people — particularly those unfamiliar with the intensely personal and biblical nature of southern religion — find it hard to understand a president who is so publicly close to his God. Having seen this president in various situations and being familiar



Jimmy Carter receives a peace pin from Mennonite Church USA staff member Cindy Snider before his keynote address at the MC USA convention in Atlanta on July 3, 2003.

PHOTO: LAURIE OSWALD ROBINSON/MC USA

with such expressions of faith, however, I have no doubt that it is genuine."

Carter represented evangelical Christianity at its best, seeking to unite deep piety with a vision of justice and righteousness.

**Carter represented evangelical Christianity at its best, seeking to unite deep piety with a vision of justice and righteousness.**

"I have spoken many times of love, but love must be aggressively translated into simple justice," he said when he accepted the Democratic nomination for the presidency in 1976.

This understanding of evangelical Christian faith, rooted in the biblical witness, can remind evangelicals today of their rich heritage. Sadly, his ways of living the evangelical heritage are missing from the quasi-religious

groups that emerged in the 1980s and focused more on conservative politics than religion.

**BELOW ARE SEVERAL** areas where Carter's faith informed his policy.

**Human rights.** In his farewell address, Carter said, "America didn't invent human rights. Human rights invented America." A dimension of the evangelical witness he represented was that ever since Moses stood before Pharaoh, the people of God have been concerned about human rights. It is impossible to overstate the impact of Carter's declaration before the United Nations that the very heart of the U.S. identity as a nation is a commitment to human rights.

**World peace.** Carter accomplished several goals that sought to make the biblical concept of *shalom* less of a distant dream. He established full diplomatic relations with China, opening an important level of communication. He made good on a longstanding American promise to return control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians. The peace settlement between Israel and Egypt was a high mark of his leadership. His understanding of what was happening in Africa and Latin America gave renewed credibility to American foreign policy for many who had been suspicious after years of U.S. support for repressive regimes.

**Environment.** Carter worked to identify what was required for a sustainable future. He understood the need for sacrifice and simplified lifestyles, which few were ready to accept. Opponents made fun of the solar panels he placed on the White House roof (removed by his successor, only to be returned decades later). Generations will benefit from the early strides made during these years in areas of environmental stewardship such as clean air, clean water and protection of lands.



**Inclusiveness.** Since Carter was the first president from the Deep South in 140 years, the nation was watching to see what his record would be on racial inclusiveness. From the beginning of his administration, he practiced inclusiveness of women, people of color and people with disabilities in government service. Some of his successors have gone well beyond his record but, at the time, it was noteworthy. Perhaps one of the greatest tributes to this president from Georgia was that Black voters gave him the same overwhelming support in 1980 as they had in 1976.

When Carter was inaugurated as governor of Georgia in 1971, he declared “the time for racial discrimination is over. Our people have already made this major and difficult decision.” Surely he knew that what he was saying was more aspirational than descriptive. But he took steps to bend

the arc of history toward justice.

Carter grew up on the teachings of evangelical Christianity embedded in and distorted by racism. He learned to embody an *older* evangelical tradition of abolitionists and suffragettes and of those who crusaded for the poor and against child labor. Always he stood fast with his faith tradition and the U.S. Constitution regarding the separation of church and state.

In 1980, amid an erosion of support among the emerging religious right, Carter lost his reelection campaign, and his administration came to be defined by many as a failed presidency.

For the rest of his life, he attempted to model Jesus’ love in action through public service. His post-presidential commitments involved The Carter Center’s initiatives of fighting disease and seeking international peace and his private efforts of building homes

for Habitat for Humanity and teaching Sunday school.

During these days of remembering the life of Jimmy Carter, the words of his presidential farewell address are worth remembering: “If we are to serve as a beacon for human rights, we must continue to perfect here at home the rights and values which we espouse around the world: a decent education for our children, adequate medical care for all Americans, an end to discrimination against minorities and women, a job for all those able to work, and freedom from injustice and religious intolerance.” ●

**Lovett H. Weems Jr.** is professor emeritus of church leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. **Lori Amber Roessner**, a professor in the School of Journalism and Electronic Media at the University of Tennessee, contributed to this article.

## Jesuit spirituality shapes Francis’ faith

**AS POPE FRANCIS** reaches the 10-year mark of his papacy, his positions on issues deemed political still make headlines. But the framework from which his positions emerge gets little attention. Francis’ worldview is rooted in his spirituality as a Jesuit — a member of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order founded by St. Ignatius Loyola in the 16th century.

The “Spiritual Exercises,” written by Ignatius, is a guide to spiritual development that Jesuits and others have used for centuries. It encourages participants to pay careful attention to the inner movements of the spirit or soul that shape their decisions and actions.

The goal is to recognize oneself as a sinner, but — crucially — a sinner loved by God. A spiritual director helps the participant first to recognize brokenness in their life, then to perceive God’s love by contemplating the life of Jesus. Ultimately, the exercises lead people to deepen their relationship with Christ, so that they may discern how best to make decisions.

Like a spiritual director, Francis’ first step is to acknowledge a “presenting



Pope Francis kisses a child in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on March 8. PHOTO: ANDREW MEDICINI/AP

problem,” as a doctor might say: the symptom that is bothering someone. He then eliminates superficial solutions that don’t address the underlying “disease,” before calling for a more fundamental change.

**THIS ETHOS IS APPARENT** in Francis’ approach to climate change. In 2015, he issued the first papal document dedicated exclusively to ecological degradation. A superficial response is purely technological: Humans can gain ever greater control over the natural world and its changes. The structures resulting from that vision of domina-

tion stand at the root of environmental degradation, Francis argued.

To perceive the proper place of technological innovation, the world needs an “ecological conversion,” Francis wrote — a spiritual shift so that people perceive how “everything is connected,” from honeybees and supply lines to compost and impoverishment.

This idea comes from the New Testament: Because everything hangs together in Christ, the source of all creation, everything is interconnected. Indeed, the pope’s attention to interconnectedness and healing seems to guide his views on everything from homosexuality to economic inequality.

A few months into his papacy, an interviewer asked, using Francis’ given name, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?”

“A sinner,” he replied, echoing Ignatius’ “Spiritual Exercises.”

After decades of practicing Jesuit spirituality, Francis has spent 10 years applying those practices to a much larger audience, reflecting on the roots of brokenness in the world and urging people toward fundamental change.

— Timothy Gabrielli, RNS



# Are we going to protect children or guns?

**IT HAPPENED AGAIN.** This time seven people were killed, three of them 9-year-old children. The latest target was The Covenant School, a private elementary school in Nashville, Tenn., attached to the Presbyterian Church of America.

Guns are now the leading cause of death among children and teens in America. We're losing 120 lives a day — 40,000 per year — and many of those are kids.

Mass shootings like the one at Covenant School and Sandy Hook and Uvalde are horrifying, but they also make up less than 2% of the overall gun deaths in America. Gun violence is a public health crisis in Tennessee and in the U.S. In my lifetime of 47 years, we've lost more lives to guns than all the casualties of all of America's wars combined.

That's why anyone who says they are pro-life can't ignore gun violence.

In an average year, 1,385 people die by guns in Tennessee. The rate of gun homicide increased 110% in the last decade — even as Tennessee has refused to pass life-saving gun-safety laws. Gov. Bill Lee signed permitless carry into law against the advice of law enforcement experts. And now the legislature is moving a bill to lower the age of permitless carry from 21 to 18 — which means teenagers who can't buy a beer or rent a car will be allowed to carry loaded handguns in public.

There are folks who say we shouldn't talk about gun laws after a mass shooting, but that seems sort of like saying we shouldn't talk about train safety after a train wreck.

Think about cars. They aren't designed to kill, but they can be deadly. So we try to protect people from harm. In order to drive, you have to pass a test and get a license. We have traffic laws and speed limits. We've added airbags and require seatbelts. If you abuse your right to drive, you can lose your license.



Fitzgerald Moore leads a group in prayer at The Covenant School on March 29 in Nashville, Tenn.

PHOTO: WADE PAYNE/AP

We can't save every life, but we can save some. Even those who claim new laws won't make a difference know better. After all, many of the same folks against regulating guns are working hard to change laws on abortion.

"Well-regulated" was written into the Second Amendment for a reason.

**Access to guns has become a form of idolatry, and I don't use that word lightly.**

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "A law cannot make a man love me, but it can make it harder for him to lynch me."

We can make it harder to kill, and right now we are making it really easy.

The Nashville shooter legally purchased multiple assault rifles, the weapons of choice for mass shooters. They are designed for one purpose: to kill as many people as possible as quickly as possible. And that's what they keep getting used for.

Every country in the world has people who want to do harm — people

who are violent, racist, filled with hate — but the U.S. stands alone among our peer nations in our access to guns. It has become a form of idolatry, and I don't use that word lightly.

Over the past few years, several politicians have shared Christmas photos of their family posing with assault rifles in front of their Christmas tree. One of these is Tennessee Rep. Andy Ogles, whose district includes Covenant Church and school. It is sickening. It is idolatry.

My friend Andy Crouch says this about idols: "All idols begin by offering great things for a small price. All idols then fail to deliver on their promises, while ratcheting up their demands."

Idols are things we put our trust in. They are not God, but we treat them like they are. We hold them with a sacred reverence that should only be given to God. Idols are things we are willing to die for, kill for and sacrifice our children for.

**THE GUN AND THE CROSS** give us two very different versions of power. One is about being ready to die. The other is about being ready to kill. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot love our enemies as Christ commands and simultaneously prepare to kill them.

We must decide if we are going to protect children or guns. Isn't that part of what it means to be pro-life? Imagine if every Christian in America took the Sermon on the Mount as seriously as gun owners take the Second Amendment.

At the heart of the Christian faith is a Savior who suffered tremendous violence, who put death on display in order to subvert death with love and forgiveness and an empty tomb. That should change everything for us.

Having a victim of violence who died with love on his lips should radically reorient us. It should make us all the more compassionate toward the victims of violence. It should make us the enemies of death and violence and hatred and execution.

I'd love to see Christians not just offer thoughts and prayers but put feet on those prayers and change policies. Let's protect children instead of guns, in the name of Jesus and of those killed in Nashville. ●



# What's the real story on attendance?

**IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19** pandemic, religious leaders worried that lockdowns and the move to online services would accelerate already declining church attendance and usher in what some called a “religion recession.”

A new study from Pew Research suggests that's probably overstated.

The study found that the share of U.S. adults who generally say they attend religious services at least once a month dropped from 33% in 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak, to 30% in 2022.

That may be more consistent with a longer-term trend of gradual religious decline than a dramatic change in people's churchgoing habits.

The study's last survey, in November, surveyed 11,377 U.S. adults. Its margin of error was plus or minus 1.5 percentage points.

Beginning in July 2020, Pew began

asking U.S. adults whether they attended religious services in person in the prior month and, separately, whether they took part in services virtually.

In five surveys taken between July 2020 and November 2022, attendance remained consistent: 41% of U.S. adults said they participated in religious services in person or online in July 2020 and 40% said they participated in services in person or online in November 2022, when the last survey was taken.

Over the course of 2022, about 28% of Americans said they participated in religious services in person.

**BUT THE DEFINITIVE** answer as to the effect of the pandemic on religious service attendance may not yet be known.

Another national study of 20 denominational groups now being conducted by the Hartford Institute for

Religion Research looks at the question differently. It asks congregational leaders about attendance.

So far, that study, called Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations, or EPIC, has found that congregational attendance (both in person and virtual) is down 12% from 2019.

One reason for the difference in methodology: Researchers have long known that people tend to inflate reports of their religious attendance. In a 2014 study — humorously titled “I Know What You Did Last Sunday” — the Public Religion Research Institute found that “every subgroup of Americans inflates their levels of religious participation.”

“We ask pastors and church leaders what it looks like for them,” said Scott Thumma, the principal investigator. “What's the reality when they look out at the church pews?” ●



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# Classifieds

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

## EMPLOYMENT — CHURCH

**Deep Run East Mennonite Church** in Bucks County, Pa., is seeking a Senior Pastor to lead our multistaff ministry. More information about our church and a job description can be found at [deepruneast.org](http://deepruneast.org). If interested contact Mosaic Conference Minister, Josh Meyer, at [fmc.joshmeyer@gmail.com](mailto:fmc.joshmeyer@gmail.com). (5-12)

**Pilgrims Mennonite Church**, Akron, Pa., is a small, closely knit congregation of Atlantic Coast Conference that welcomes all to join us in following Christ and extending God's love and justice to each other and the world. We are seeking a half-time pastor with skills of listening, counseling, encouraging, teaching, collaboration and administration to help us to grow in creative ways of service, particularly in advancing work for justice and antiracism and working to protect the earth. Acquaint yourself with us at [pilgrims mennonite church.org](http://pilgrims mennonite church.org). Interested persons may contact the search committee at [inquiry@pilgrims mennonite church.org](mailto:inquiry@pilgrims mennonite church.org). (5, 7)

**Hopedale Mennonite Church**, a small Anabaptist congregation in Central Illinois, is seeking a full-time (negotiable) member of our pastoral team. Congregational priorities for pastoral leadership are biblical teaching and equipping the congregation for reconciling ministry in a rural community located between two urban areas. Salary is commensurate with MC USA guidelines. To learn more, please see our website ([hopedalemennonitechurch.com](http://hopedalemennonitechurch.com)) or contact Dale Thomas at [officehopedalemennonitechurch.com](mailto:officehopedalemennonitechurch.com) or 5192 Hopedale Road, Hopedale, IL 61747. (5-7)

**Lakeview Mennonite Church** is a small, rural congregation in beautiful upstate Pennsylvania within 30 minutes of two larger urban centers. We are looking for a part-time pastoral leader who walks among us, helping us grow in discipleship while encouraging the use of gifts by the members; who is committed to Anabaptist theological perspectives; who will share the preaching and teaching and assist us in our ministry to the community. For more information, please contact: Stephen Kriss, Mosaic Mennonite Conference, at [skriss@mosaicmennonites.org](mailto:skriss@mosaicmennonites.org). (5-7)

**First Mennonite Church**, Indianapolis, Ind., is seeking a 0.75 FTE paid pastoral team member (with benefits) to join our full-time pastor. We are a welcoming faith community committed to making peace, seeking justice and serving as the hands, heart and voice of Christ. Priorities for this pastor will be to support and equip

Church Life Commission (congregational Care Team, small groups, etc.), collaborate with Faith Formation Commission (Christian education for children, youth and adults) and to integrate persons of all ages, backgrounds and identities into the life of the congregation. For a full job description, visit [indymenno.org](http://indymenno.org) or email [drhpath@gmail.com](mailto:drhpath@gmail.com). (3-5)

**Zion Mennonite Church**, Archbold, Ohio, is seeking a full-time Collaborative Ministry Team Pastor. For more information on this opportunity, please contact Ohio Conference Regional Pastor Tony Doebrmann, 419-551-1107; [ocrpwest@gmail.com](mailto:ocrpwest@gmail.com). (3-5)

**Blossom Hill Mennonite Church**, Lancaster, Pa., is seeking a half-time Associate Pastor with primary responsibilities for junior and senior youth programming with inclusion of children's programming or oversight of social justice programming (depending on the gifting of the candidate). Seeking individuals grounded in Anabaptist theology. Seminary degree preferred or significant relevant ministry experience. Contact search committee chair, Jim S. Amstutz, at [BHMCSearch23@gmail.com](mailto:BHMCSearch23@gmail.com) for more information. (3-5)

## EMPLOYMENT — GENERAL

**Et Cetera Shop**, Newton, Kan., is seeking a full-time General Manager. For a job description and application, see [newtonetceterashop.com](http://newtonetceterashop.com). (5)

**Help us manage** the heart of our organization — our volunteers! Searching for a self-starter with the ability to work independently, prioritize and get things done as our Volunteer Manager at Care & Share Thrift Shoppes in Souderton, Pa. Let us know about your enthusiasm and can-do attitude by emailing your resume to Donna Zarbatany: [dzarbatany@careandshareshoppes.org](mailto:dzarbatany@careandshareshoppes.org). Full time, \$25 an hour plus, depending on your education and experience. (5)

## SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

**Reservoir Hill House of Peace**, Baltimore, Md., provides housing for asylum seekers and low-cost lodging for others living in community. Service assignments, internships, jobs can be pursued with one of the many nonprofits. Guest space also available, a few miles from downtown and Johns Hopkins Hospital. [ruthklemens@gmail.com](mailto:ruthklemens@gmail.com). (5, 7)

## COMING EVENTS

**Dave and Janice Yordy Sutter** will be concluding 35 years of ministry at Kern Road Mennonite Church of South Bend, Ind., on Sunday, June 11, 2023. All current and former Kern Road attendees and friends are welcome to celebrate. Celebrations planned Saturday evening, June

10, and Sunday. For information about events and to RSVP by May 10, go to: [dj-sutter-farewell2023.rsvpify.com](http://dj-sutter-farewell2023.rsvpify.com). Send inquiries: [djsutter.farewell2023@gmail.com](mailto:djsutter.farewell2023@gmail.com). (4-5)

## TRAVEL

**Next Christmas in Europe!** Holiday trip of a lifetime to Germany and Austria! Dec. 5-13, 2023: Scenic Alps, lodge in 12th-century castle, "Silent Night" chapel, Christmas markets and concert in Vienna. \$2,969 plus air. More information at [vimeo.com/790944746](http://vimeo.com/790944746) and [facebook.com/groups/847981909644550](http://facebook.com/groups/847981909644550). Brochure and registration at [pilgrimtours.com/groups/martensgroup2023.htm](http://pilgrimtours.com/groups/martensgroup2023.htm) or contact Pastor Weldon Martens, [weldon.martens@gmail.com](mailto:weldon.martens@gmail.com); 402-202-9276. (2-4)

## LODGING

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

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

# Obituaries

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

## Gladys Ella Harder

Gladys Ella Harder, 94, died Dec. 23, 2022, at Northwoods Village in Mishawaka, Ind.

She was born May 30, 1928, to Henry G. and Helen (Falk) Harder in Mountain Lake, Minn.

She married Leo J. Harder on Sept. 26, 1959, at First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake. Two daughters, Kathleen and Mary, were born to this marriage. They joined Gordon, Charles and Lois, Leo's three children from his first marriage.

She graduated from Mountain Lake High School in 1946 and subsequently attended Mountain Lake Bible School and Grace Bible Institute.

She was baptized by Pastor I.J. Dyck in 1945 at First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, where she remained an active, lifelong member.



Harder



She was a committed Christian, living her faith and interacting with others with kindness, understanding and grace.

For many years she worked in the administrative offices of the Basinger Clinic and then the Glick and Wiens Clinic. She then worked for a few years at the Christian Day School. She loved books and purchased the BookNook in Mountain Lake. After fire destroyed the building and snuffed out her years of work in the store, she retired and entered Mennonite Voluntary Service. She and Leo served with MVS for several years in Fort Collins, Colo., and at the International Guest House in Washington, D.C. Returning to Mountain Lake, she volunteered at the Ten Thousand Villages store (Care and Share Shop) in Mountain Lake.

She is survived by her children, Gordon (Eva), Charles, Lois (Steve), Kathleen (Merin) and Mary (Wes); six grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; and a brother, Leslie (Gladys Ann).

She was preceded in death by Leo, her husband of 58 years, on Dec. 9, 2017; a sister, Frances (Erwin); and her in-laws on Leo's side: Theresa, Harry (Anna), Jacob (Estella), Anna (Marvin), Lawrence (Kathy), Albert (Bessie) and Walter (Joyce).

A memorial service is planned for April 22 in Mountain Lake.

## Mary R. Schroeder

Mary R. Schroeder, 89, died Dec. 17, 2022, at Landis Homes in Lititz, Pa. She lived most of her life in Akron.

Born in Manheim Township, she was the daughter of immigrants from Crimea (1923), Henry H. and Anna (Neustadter) Rosenfeld. She was the wife of Vernon E. Schroeder, with whom she shared over 71 years of marriage.

She was a member of Forest Hills Mennonite Church and formerly Bethel Mennonite Church, where she enjoyed singing in the choir and teaching Sunday school.

A dedicated wife, mother and homemaker, she enjoyed quilting and playing organ and loved furry pets. She excelled in the gifts of hospitality and service as a foster parent, adopting a son, volunteering at Landis Homes, the local hospital and Akron Elementary School playground, as well as opening her home to board five international trainees for Mennonite Central Committee.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by two sons, Rick D. (Connie) Schroeder and Robert E. (Maryjane) Schroeder; a daughter-in-law, Dena Schroeder; six grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and a sister, Agnes Hacker.

She was preceded in death by a son, Ronald L. Schroeder; two infant sons, John V. and Timothy R.; and seven siblings, Henry Rosenfeld, John Rosenfeld, Helen Rosenfeld, Agnes Rosenfeld, Elizabeth Dillard, Tina Brink and Anna Fizkee.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Landis Homes Caring Fund.

## Jerry Shenk Breneman

Jerry Shenk Breneman, 78, died March 2, 2023. He was born Jan. 18, 1945, to Martin and Naomi Breneman on their Manor Township farm in Lancaster County, Pa.



Breneman

Growing up, he enjoyed helping around the farm and working with animals. He was involved in FFA at Penn Manor High School, where he excelled in steer judging.

He was a follower of Jesus, committed to living out his faith from an Anabaptist perspective.

An active member of Manheim Mennonite Church and, later on, Millersville Mennonite Church, he enjoyed teaching Sunday school and leading singing. He had a deep love of music and was a strong tenor. During the Vietnam War, his nonresistant convictions led him to alternative service with Mennonite Central Committee's mobile meat canner.

He graduated from Eastern Mennonite College with a degree in Bible and wore several different hats after college, including part-time pastoring at Mountville Mennonite Church,

teaching at New Danville Mennonite School and farming part-time up to the early 1980s. For more than 45 years, he served coal and fertilizer customers as a local truck driver for F.H. Kreider until retiring in 2020. He always had a ready smile and a wave and showed that he cared about others by sending greeting cards and offering gifts of food.

He married Miriam Metzler on June 9, 1979, and they shared more than 43 years together.

Surviving, in addition to his wife, are two sons, Kyle (Danielle) Breneman and Duane (Stephanie) Breneman; four grandchildren; and siblings David (Yen) Breneman, Rhoda Breneman, Rachel Breneman and Roseanne (Kevin) Stewart.

A funeral service was held at Millersville Mennonite Church. Burial was at Habecker Mennonite Cemetery.

Contributions may be sent to Eastern Mennonite Missions or MCC.

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

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# Photographs and stories needed!

Anabaptism at 500 invites photographers of all levels to submit inspiring photos capturing Anabaptist Christians living out their faith. Selected photos will be featured in a stunning full-color photo book. Contributors will receive a complimentary copy.

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Submit your photos or those from your faith community at [www.AnabaptismAt500.com](http://www.AnabaptismAt500.com). Submission deadline is June 30, 2023.



## WHAT WE NEED:

- Full color photos illustrating creative expressions of Anabaptist witness (select your top 3 photos to submit)
- A short paragraph with the details of the photo describing the context and story

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9 x 10 in.

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