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Faith freed from patriarchy

Angela Opimi, Mary Cano and Cindy Alpízar, coordinators of the Movement of Anabaptist Women Doing Theology from Latin America.

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ON THE COVER: Angela Opimí, left, of Bolivia, Mary Cano of Honduras and Cindy Alpízar of Costa Rica present a 20th anniversary cake for the Movement of Anabaptist Women Doing Theology from Latin America at a gathering in El Salvador on April 14-16. Photo by Linda Shelly/Mennonite Mission Network
Churchy patriarchy, and two remarkable women

TALKING WITH female friends a few years ago, I said I was struggling with a situation and felt that part of the problem was that I was a woman and the others involved weren’t.

One of my friends said, “Maybe. It also might not have anything to do with that.” That statement wasn’t wrong. But later, as I thought about it, I felt dismissed and made to doubt my instincts.

In other situations, I’ve had women say to me with arms crossed and eyebrows raised in full mockery attack mode: “Really? You think women are still oppressed?”

In our special way as Anabaptists, we are acculturated to make ourselves small. Humility is a virtue, especially for women. We have become so accustomed to this that it can be hard to distinguish between faithful humility and internalized gendered oppression.

Many women have difficulty naming it or believing other women when they name it.

Progressive Anabaptists are not immune to insidious sexism. On page 10 you’ll find a report about the experiences, both good and bad, of women leaders in Mennonite Church USA.

In Nice Churchy Patriarchy, Liz Cooledge Jenkins draws a line of comparison to John the Baptist, who, in speaking of Jesus, said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). She says many Christians have applied John’s statement to everyone equally. She writes: “John’s statement . . . was not necessarily intended to apply to all of us — and certainly not in a gender-blind, colorblind, oppression-blind kind of way. Equal application of this sentiment across very unequal conditions only furthers an un-Jesus-like kind of oppression. People on the underside of a patriarchal system, or any other structure of dominance, don’t need to decrease any more.”

This sentiment has been playing over in my mind. It’s challenging for me to show up in the fullness of who God has created me to be without minimizing my worth. That might seem strange coming from an executive director. But I offer it as an example to say: This is real, and if you’ve felt this way, you are not alone.

IN THIS ISSUE we celebrate the lives of two women I had the privilege of knowing and greatly admired. Lois Buckwalter (page 41) lived to be 102. She and her husband, Albert, worked in Argentina with the Toba-Qom people. They were part of a revolution in mission work that honored Indigenous culture and moved away from colonial practices.

Laurie Oswald Robinson (page 35) died in a tragic accident on April 8. A friend to everyone she met, Laurie wrote for AW often. In the days before her death, she was reporting a story for us about Frank Albrecht. We are grateful to Melanie Zuercher for picking up the project (page 36). We are honored to tell Laurie’s story and to publish the last article she worked on.
Release the tiger

The gospel message is a tiger, and the church its cage. Evana Network executive director Matt Hamsher writes in Pulse of the Anabaptist denomination Evana that God’s mission needs to be unleashed upon the world. “Too often, we seem more interested in building up the cage, making it more ornate, just as we are too consumed with the church’s institutional maintenance,” he says. “Are we trying to recruit committee members for the church to make sure it can survive for a few more years and thus continue to minister to our needs? Or do we truly desire to see people confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord and experiencing new life in Christ?”

Chibok, 10 years later

It’s been 10 years since the militant Islamist group Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from a school in Chibok, Nigeria, reports the Church of the Brethren Messenger. The majority of the girls, ages 16 to 18, were from families of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, or EYN. The abduction gained worldwide attention, and the hashtag BringBackOurGirls became a social media phenomenon. The incident was part of a violent insurgency in which more than 10,000 EYN members died. Within a few days of the abduction, 61 girls escaped. More than 100 were released.

A child shall lead — in giving

A child’s joyful giving warms a grand-father’s heart. In Shalom News of the Anabaptist denomination LMC, Bishop Tuyen Nguyen and Paul Pearce say that after family members showered a grandson with money on his 10th birthday, “he handed me $28 and said, ‘Grandpa, this is one-half of my one-tenth tithe, please put this into mission work, I will put the other half to my home church.’ I thought that was the best thing he ever said to me, even better than, ‘I love you, Grandpa.’”

Going, going, gone . . . and then back

Bruce Kaufman acknowledges a bidder April 13 at the Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale quilt auction. The sale included 24 quilts and comforters that had been stored away in 2020 when the COVID pandemic abruptly canceled that year’s sale. The items were stored so carefully they weren’t found the following year, or the year after that. Last June the lost quilts were found and now finally celebrated by being the first items auctioned at this year’s sale, which raised more than $500,000 for Mennonite Central Committee.

We know it says ‘the lion shall lie down with the lamb.’ So why do we still want different bunkmates? ... because they fall asleep counting sheep, they smack their lips when they snore, and they talk in their sleep about mutton chops, that’s why!
Letters & Comments

Write to: editor@anabaptistworld.org

Voices of hope

After reading the latest issue of AW, I am once again grateful for the voices that are active today in Mennonite Church USA and beyond. After spending a good part of my life seeking to lead and hold together the former Mennonite Church, it is refreshing to hear from a new generation of leaders from diverse backgrounds now writing and reporting on a wide variety of ministries in our church and world.

I have come to believe our unity is not grounded in thinking alike but in the Spirit’s movement among us. In the 20th century we invested much time and effort to clarify and strengthen our theological beliefs. While this was important work, it has not proved to be effective in holding the church in unity. The deeper unity is a gift of the Spirit of God, which I believe we see and hear in the many voices of both ongoing and newer leaders living out the Spirit of Jesus and Anabaptist faith in tangible ways. I am grateful to God and for these people. In this I find hope.

James M. Lapp, Lititz, Pa.

An in-between place

I want to thank the editors for their coverage of the Gaza conflict. The placement of the twin articles by Doug Hostetter and John Kampen on facing pages (April) was a profound choice. We need to remember the victims on both sides. The place for Mennonites is between.

Mitchell Brown, Highland Park III.

Abortion in a democracy

“An affront to the Creator” (April, page 5) quotes Don Morris, national director of the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches regarding abortion (summarizing an article in Christian Leader, the USMB magazine). My concern with trying to “eradicate this affront to the Creator” is the same problem I have with all the issues being pushed by the so-called “Christian right” (book bans, eliminating anything from the classroom that makes White people feel uncomfortable, etc.). Morris did not come right out and say “use your vote to help facilitate an abortion ban,” but the intent was there, as I read it. The United States is a democracy, not a theocracy. There is a reason for separation of church and state. Your religion does not prohibit me from anything; it prohibits you. As a Christian I can choose to not have an abortion, but I do not have the right to push for laws to reflect my religion. If we want the freedom to practice our religion, we must allow others the same freedom.

Sylvia Bartel, North Newton, Kan.

I have experienced two tubal pregnancies, and both needed to be surgically aborted. It is impossible for embryos to grow into viable fetuses within fallopian tubes. If allowed to go untreated, both the embryo and the expectant mother would die. My husband and I desperately wanted those two pregnancies to develop into viable babies. Losing those two pregnancies was one of the most difficult experiences of our lives. I cannot imagine how devastating it would have been if pregnancy care was not allowed or available. Although I agree abortions should not be used as a birth-control method, I cringe when hearing about strict, narrow abortion laws and wonder if the folks initiating those laws realize the potential danger to expectant mothers and embryos. Nonviable pregnancies are difficult enough. Let’s not stigmatize or make them even more difficult by denying necessary care.

Pearl Lantz, Harrisonburg, Va.

Not a difference of trust

I appreciate Harold Miller’s clarity (“When ‘agree to disagree’ is dangerous,” April) but reject his framing of conserva-tives like him who follow scripture and tradition versus progressives like me who follow popular culture by affirming our LGBTQ siblings in the church.

My difference with Miller is not about our trust in scripture but about how we interpret it. Miller appears to take a mathematical approach, tallying verses for and against a view before deciding whether to affirm it. He thus implies that he would more readily agree to disagree with pro-slavery Chris-tians than with LGBTQ-affirming ones, since “scripture presents competing views” on slavery but not on same-sex marriage.

My belief is that it is anti-Christian to own another human is based not on a tally of verses but on a holistic reading of the biblical narrative of a God who loves humanity from bondage. Likewise, my af-firmation of LGBTQ siblings is based not on a verse count but on the biblical narrative of the Spirit poured out on all humans and refusing to name anyone unclean.

Whether he likes it or not, Miller and I do not represent “separate religious communities.” We share a 500-year tradition of radical reformers who refused to stifle a new movement of the Spirit.

David Cramer, South Bend, Ind.

My prayer is that Harold Miller and I — fellow members of Virginia Mennonite Conference — remain unified and persevere in prayer, study and discerning together until we resolve our disagreements, even if that takes what might seem like forever. Instead of seeing this Spirit-driven process as distracting from our mission, we should embrace it as vital to our mission. We are called to be a lampstand for skeptics to see how followers of Jesus love each other as they work through their differences. Jesus prayed “that they all may be one, as I and the Father are one,” so that the world may know we are his disciples. The world is not impressed by a church where everyone is essentially the same.

There are instructions in the Bible about removing unrepentant individuals from a congregation, but I know of no mandate for congregations to separate themselves from other congregations. I believe Jesus would have us expand our circle of spiritual relationships, not subtract from them.

Harvey Yoder, Harrisonburg, Va.

Harold Miller proposes that scripture is clear about same-sex marriage, unlike other issues such as women in ministry, slavery and war. I’m wondering where he finds that clarity. Many folks have believed scripture to be clear regarding limiting women in ministry, supporting slavery and going to war as well. It is ironic that he re-fers to Matthew 18:17 as evidence to treat someone as an outsider. This verse follows Jesus’ story of the wandering sheep that is outside the flock, reminding us that God rejoices over the ones on the margins and does not want any to perish. Furthermore, it precedes the scripture to forgive 77 times. Scripture does clearly proclaim love for one another. To treat the LGBTQ community as less than or to restrict their rights is not an act of love. One does not have to look far to find an LGBTQ bro-ther or sister or family member who has suf-fered immense pain due to the dogma of many churches. What makes same-sex marriage so frightening that it forces many to ignore the real clarity of scripture?

Karen Loganbill, Moundridge, Kan.

See Letters, page 56
There is a line of women

In Anabaptist churches, patriarchy persists, even as its power has diminished

ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB. For centuries, these three names stood alone in sermons, songs and scripture. God was the God of the patriarchs, the forefathers who mattered most.

But without Sarah there would be no Isaac, without Rebekah no Jacob, without Rachel and Leah and their maidservants no 12 brothers to root Israel’s family tree.

Today we are learning to honor the matriarchs, the foremothers who begat God’s chosen people.

Today we sing, from the Anabaptist hymnal Voices Together, “There Is a Line of Women”:

There is a line of women extending back to Eve whose role in shaping history God only could conceive. . . .
So sing a song of Sarah — to laughter she gave birth; and sing a song of Tamar who stood for women’s worth; and sing a song of Hannah who bargained with her Lord; and sing a song of Mary who bore and bred God’s Word.

Today we are learning — perhaps as we read from The Peace Table, the new Anabaptist storybook Bible, with our children or grandchildren — that women like Sarah’s servant Hagar, the brave midwives Shiphrah and Puah and the peacemaker Abigail deserve no less esteem than the patriarchs we’ve traditionally honored.

In Mennonite churches today, patriarchy persists, even as its power has diminished. In the mid-1970s, the denominations that preceded Mennonite Church USA began ordaining women. Today women make up almost 35% of active, licensed MC USA ministers. Their experience reflects both progress and problems. According to a new study, which Amy S. Zimbelman describes on page 10, 96% are moderately or very satisfied with their work as a pastor (compared to 59% in 1992). Yet they also identify gender inequality as their top challenge. Examples include having their voices taken less seriously than men or encountering hiring discrimination when they learn that women need not apply for certain pastoral positions.

THE 50-YEAR STRUGGLE against patriarchy is far from over, say two women who’ve seen all the progress and disappointment of the era. In Proclaiming the Good News: Mennonite Women’s Voices: 1972-2006 (Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2023), Dorothy Nickel Friesen, co-author with Lois Y. Barrett, says Mennonites “share longstanding traditional attitudes toward the role of women in the home, church and society.”

These attitudes still shape some denominational policies. The U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches does not permit women to be lead pastors. LMC, the Lancaster, Pa.-based denomination, opened the role of bishop to women in 2021 but only as part of a team, not as the sole overseer of a district.

At a USMB study conference on women in ministry in 2019, people said they had lost women leaders to MC USA, which doesn’t restrict women pastors as a matter of denominational policy, though congregational practices vary.

The study conference showed the benefits of airing different views. Complementarians (who believe scripture mandates different roles based on gender) and egalitarians alike found value in hearing the counterpoints.

“I know this teaching is unpopular,” said Dan Doriani, a professor who made the case for complementarianism. “But so are a lot of things in Christianity.”

It is in this same spirit of hearing diverse voices that we include in this issue an article by a woman who holds the complementarian view (page 19).

DEBATES ABOUT gender roles raise issues about the weight of scripture and experience in discerning what is right. Was Jesus egalitarian? Perhaps not; full equality is an approach to gender that did not exist in the ancient world. Yet Jesus treated women with great respect, far exceeding the typical behavior of his time.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 that women should not speak in church but “ask their husbands at home” if they have a question. What would Paul say to a female seminary graduate who knows the Bible better than anyone else in the room?

Alongside scripture is the voice of experience: of congregations blessed by women pastors gifted to preach with authority and give care with compassion. And of women who’ve heard God’s call, as Marilyn Miller (one of the first ordained Mennonite women) did in her youth when she heard a preacher encourage the congregation to pray that God would “open more young men’s hearts for the ministry.” As Miller told Laurie Oswald Robinson (a dear friend and colleague who died tragically on April 8; page 35) in a 2013 article for The Mennonite: “After that service, I went to our backyard and looked up at the sky and said, ‘God, if you needed pastors so bad, why didn’t you make me a man?’”

Debates about gender roles raise issues about the weight of scripture and experience.

Nickel Friesen
ROWING UP IN Colombia, in a Catholic family with eight brothers, I had to deal with the patriarchal tradition that women had more duties at home than men.

I was not often allowed to go outside to play, and when I did, I could not go alone, because “women are of the house and men are of the street.”

When I was 10 or 11, I rebelled and told my mother I would no longer do all the housework. I would not make my brothers’ beds. They could take care of that.

My mother replied, “We women are tidier and know how to do it better. What would people say if they came to the house and saw unmade beds?”

I said I didn’t care. We could show the visitors my tidy room.

After that, my mother made my brothers’ beds.

Even as a child, I felt God’s call to ministry. I went to a girls’ primary school led by nuns and assisted the priest at Mass. Every time I went up to the altar to help the priest, my heart throbbed. I longed to do what he did.

ISDALIA ORTEGA SANCHEZ — “God heard my childhood prayer to serve as the priest did.”

COURTESY OF ISDALIA ORTEGA SANCHEZ
I asked him if I could study in the seminary and become a priest. He replied that I could not, since the Catholic church does not ordain women. He encouraged me to become a nun.

Later I went to a Catholic girls’ high school, where I had a close relationship with the priest and again helped at Mass. Knowing I longed to serve the Lord, he encouraged me to go to a meeting for those who make religious vows to see if my calling could be found there.

**Even as a child, I felt God’s call to ministry. The priest encouraged me to become a nun.**

I discovered that it couldn’t, because nuns did not have the same role as priests. They were support people for ministries, usually subordinate to men, priests or bishops.

When I was 19, my parents separated, and I decided I would no longer depend on them financially. I started university studies and got a job as a teacher. It was not easy to work and study, but I was able to do it and also to support my mother with what I earned.

Often, I had to leave home very early and return late at night. I was afraid of the risks that women and especially young girls face in a patriarchal society. Men think they have the right to possess women, abuse them, make “compliments” and even rape them.

Thank God nothing ever happened to me beyond a few unpleasant phrases. But for some of my classmates who had to work and study as I did, the story was different.

**In other denominations where we served, I would never have been ordained as a pastor.**

In other denominations where we served, I would never have been ordained as a pastor.

found a church where I was allowed to teach teenagers and develop a kind of youth pastorate.

Later I got married and went with my husband to serve in a community where we led some ministries and accompanied others. My husband had also been part of the Christian student movement. In a camp meeting, both of us felt God’s call to further ministry.

We began to look for a church that was more in line with our beliefs of how to follow Jesus Christ and that included both women and men in leadership. That is how we arrived at the Mennonite church.

In other denominations where we served, I would never have been ordained as a pastor. The Mennonite church received us as a pastoral couple. A few years later, the local community requested our ordination. They insisted we both be ordained, because I was also their pastor and I had been called to ministry.

God heard my childhood prayer to serve as the priest did.

The Mennonite Church of Colombia has recognized that God calls women for ordained ministry, but, in general, it continues to pay only the man when a couple serves together.

As a national church, many women have served as directors of ministries and institutions and been paid a salary, which is a great advance compared to many other denominations.

There is still a long way to go, but several women have left footprints so that many more can be recognized with authority as we serve the church.

**Isdalia Ortega Sanchez** is an ordained pastor, vice president of the Mennonite Church of Colombia and professor of theology and pastoral ministry at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia. She is married to Roberto Caicedo, who is also a pastor and professor. They are the parents of Ana Ruth and Juan Daniel.
Leaving the wilderness

HEN ANNE WAS in seminary, the environment was so hostile that she wanted to hide. (Names in this article have been changed to protect confidentiality.)

“The head of the class asked us to draw a picture of how we felt being in seminary,” she said. “I drew a picture of sitting in a seat with a blanket over me and peeking out over the edge to see if it was safe, because I had not experienced safety.”

For most of our 499-year history, Anabaptist women with leadership gifts have traversed an unsafe, desert-like wilderness. Church environments have been largely hostile to their leadership gifts, with reprieve only formally beginning in the 1970s as Mennonite women were finally able to seek ordination.

Research partner Elizabeth Johnson and I conducted a 2022-23 nationwide study within Mennonite Church USA exploring the characteristics of church-workplaces of women in ministry. We learned about women’s joys and struggles and the manna that keeps them going, and we found hope that our denomination might continue to find its way toward greener environs.

MC USA women in ministry: joys, struggles and the manna that keeps them going

Above: Elizabeth Johnson, left, a doctoral candidate at Duke University and member of Raleigh Mennonite Church in North Carolina, speaks at the 2023 Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City, Mo., on “Toward a Church in Which Women in Ministry Thrive.” Johnson and Amy S. Zimbelman, right, conference minister of Mountain States Mennonite Conference, conducted a nationwide study on the experiences of women pastors.
**Characteristics of the wilderness**

Our mixed-methods research study used both interviews and a nationwide web-based survey to learn more about the women who make up almost 35% of active, licensed MC USA ministers. We heard from women 29 to 91 years old from every conference. Our interviews overrepresented the voices of Black, Indigenous and people of color, lesbian and bisexual women.

The top challenge facing women in ministry today, as identified by the women surveyed, was gender inequality. This included interpersonal inequalities like persistent sexist language or having their voices taken less seriously because of their gender. It also included structural inequalities such as receiving lower pay or experiencing hiring discrimination when they learned that women need not apply for a given pastoral position.

Our study analyzed two other forms of harm: nonsexual workplace harm (for example, bullying) and sexual harassment. Compared to men, women were significantly more likely to report having been mistaken for a pastor’s spouse or another non-pastor role; to have been criticized for not conforming to gender stereotypes; to have been pulled into unwanted sexual discussions; and to have been touched in a way that made them uncomfortable (see chart at right). Laypeople were the most common offenders for nearly all the forms of harm.

However, perhaps surprisingly, women want to be in MC USA ministry roles. Job satisfaction has increased; 96% of women currently in MC USA ministry were moderately or form of harm. Job satisfaction has increased; 96% of women currently in MC USA ministry were moderately or
very satisfied with their work. In 1992, only 59% of women reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their pastoral role. Women love this work; they just don’t want to be harmed while doing it (see chart above).

The taste of manna

When the Spirit of God breaks through in a desolate wilderness, it’s often more dramatic than if the vegetation were already lush — like bread falling from heaven.

Our interviews asked about women’s call to ministry, and about 1 in 5 shared a story of the Spirit of God breaking through via dreams, visions or other miraculous events to convince an often-reluctant woman to pursue or continue in ministry.

Anne, quoted above, had miraculous theophanies (encounters with the divine) throughout her career in Anabaptist nonprofit and church settings. After feeling like she was under a blanket, she experienced a vision later in seminary of Jesus wrapping a robe around her and saying, “You are my beloved daughter; in you I’m well pleased.”

Then, once she was employed in an Anabaptist nonprofit setting. Anne remembers that the president “who was much more conservative than I am led us in a time of silence, and . . . I just felt this wave of warmth go from my head to my feet, and the words were just right there of: ‘The blanket you hid under became the robe that I wrapped you in, and it’s now become your mantle of leadership. Lead!’ I looked around at these men and thought, ‘Oh my!’ ”

She goes on to say: “I almost quit maybe five times over the next year.” One of the times, Anne says:

I felt like God was saying, “Can you stick it out to teach these men how to work with a woman? Can that be your goal?” And I said, “OK, if I can view myself as a pioneer for the other women coming after me, then that’s a frame of reference that maybe I can work with.” So I lived with that, and when I would go into a tough meeting that I knew my voice was not going to be heard, I would wear a shawl . . . that was a symbol of pulling the mantle

It appears that, for the first time in 499 years, a more hospitable environment might be in sight.


About 1 in 5 shared a story of the Spirit of God breaking through via dreams, visions or other miraculous events to convince an often-reluctant woman to pursue or continue in ministry.

around me, and nobody else needed to know what it meant, but I knew who I was and who God said I was.

Anne’s visions sustained her, and the shawl she wore functioned as an oasis of sorts — instilling a sense of belonging and psychological/spiritual safety, even when the workplace culture conveyed a different message.

The promised land?

Compare Anne’s story to Marie’s. Born in 1988, Marie said a female colleague from another denomination asked for resources to support women in ministry, and she was slow to find them because she had not needed them herself.

“I’ve never felt like I have to justify my presence as a woman in ministry,” Marie says, “and I am very aware that that is thanks to the good work that women have already been doing in our denomination.”

While Marie was the only woman interviewed who voiced this level of being accepted in her role, it does signify the beginning of a new era in Anabaptism. In a little over six decades, women went from having no formal ministry positions (and therefore no female pastor role models in their denomination), to wilderness-like hostile work environments, to at least one woman reporting that she truly feels like she belongs in ministry — and the structures surrounding her support that sentiment.

It appears that, for the first time in 499 years, a more hospitable environment might be in sight.

But we’re not out of the desert yet. To fully enter that new era, our study had another major finding: Supportive traveling companions are vital, both inside of and beyond the church.

Women described the importance of friends, therapists, spouses and colleagues in making their work possible. Professionally, we learned that workplace support structures make a tangible difference as well. When women in ministry have supportive relationships with their conference ministers, they experience fewer types of harm.

Additionally, women in ministry who have a Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee, or a team of congregants who serve as liaisons between the pastor and congregation, also experience fewer forms of harm.

Yet women reported that formal supports were often lacking. Having supportive relationships was one of their top three concerns (along with gender inequality and balancing ministry with family and self-care).

To support women in ministry, how can our churches and institutions do a better job of walking alongside them?

Women have been sharing the Good News ever since Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene to preach the first Easter sermon. They change the world around them as they preach, teach, care, protest, write and lead.

I may only see glimpses of true equality in my lifetime. But we can offer each other support in the meantime, like water in the desert. And perhaps, as we experience care and affirmation, our hope will take shape that it won’t take another 500 years to leave behind this wilderness.

The study was funded by Mennonite Church USA’s Women in Leadership ministry, Duke University’s Sociology Department, the Louisville Institute and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. The findings are reported only in terms of men and women because there are too few nonbinary clergy in the sample to report about those experiences while maintaining confidentiality.

Amy S. Zimbelman is conference minister of Mountain States Conference of Mennonite Church USA.
HREE YEARS AGO, when I started my practice as a process consultant, I wondered if I could ever shake free of the Anabaptist World article that potential clients often found when they googled my name.

The article reported on my resignation as superintendent of a Mennonite school, in which I cited the patriarchal assumptions of a group of people in the school community that became abusive and made my leadership unsustainable.

Before taking the role at the school in 2017, my husband and I had served internationally with Mennonite Central Committee since 1989. During those years, I’d observed the effective leadership of women in the countries where we lived. We’d worked under a woman’s leadership. After living outside of the United States for so long, I naïvely assumed that in my home community any questions about women’s ability and calling to lead had been settled long ago.

I assumed my generation was having a different experience than my mother’s. She lived through a time of squelched dreams for women who felt called to lead. As a child, I remember leaning forward between the seats of our VW hatchback to hear her vent to my dad on the way home from church.

The 1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith, Article 14, stated: “[I]n the order of creation God has fitted man and woman for differing functions; man has been given a primary leadership role, while the woman is especially fitted for nurture and service. Being in Christ does not nullify these natural endowments, either in the home or in the church.”

This was the Confession used by the Mennonite Church. By 1995, the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective — used at that time by the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church and now by Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada — reversed that way of thinking, at least on paper.

Article 6 states, “The rule of man over woman is a result of sin (Genesis 3:16) and is therefore not an acceptable order among the redeemed (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 7:4; 11:11-12).”

Men’s privilege in the workplace is so familiar and unquestioned that it may not even be recognized.

BY JEANNE ZIMMERLY JANTZI
Women alone cannot change the historic ranking system that places men at the leadership pinnacle. Men need to be committed to dismantling patriarchy.

Revised wording in a Confession of Faith cannot bring down a deeply engrained culture that stratifies women (and other intersecting identities) below men. Many men would say that they fully believe in women's leadership. The lack of tangible evidence of this support may be unintentional. Still, other men continue to affirm the sentiments found in the 1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith. The intent or motive is irrelevant when experiences of patriarchal behavior diminish a woman's ability to lead.

Men's privilege in the workplace is so familiar and unquestioned that it may not even be recognized. Take something as simple as asking questions. When a male leader asks a question, it can be seen as a helpful coaching tool, or a way to get people to explore something as simple as asking questions. When a male leader asks a question, it can be seen as a helpful coaching tool, or a way to get people to explore a new idea. When a female leader uses a question to engage thinking, men often assume she is asking because she doesn’t know the answer. Her teaching device is assumed to be an invitation to launch into a lengthy explanation.

From a position of unquestioned privilege, men have confidently written many books explaining how to lead. Few books by men recognize the variable in the leadership context if the leader is a woman.

There are men who want to learn about their blind spots and to change. My husband is one. We job-shared as co-leaders for 24 years in cultures that traditionally assumed the man would lead. We continuously analyzed our roles, giving and receiving feedback and striving to learn and grow.

I’ve also had opportunities to work with and observe men in the school context and in my other circles who work hard to support women's leadership. They don’t always get it, but they want to keep learning to do it better.

I share the following suggestions for men who want to do better. The list began with a blog post I wrote and expanded with suggestions from other women’s experiences.

1. Sit down. Consider whether this is the time to make space for a woman to step up in leadership instead of you. Are you ready to be in the No. 2 role? What changes would you need to make to support a woman leader?
2. Notice who is taking up the talking time in a meeting. Create space for a woman leader by turning to her and asking, “What do you think?”
3. Stop interrupting. You might not even notice when you do it. Be aware. Ask for feedback. Apologize. If a man and a woman speak up at the same time, encourage the woman to go first. Don’t accept her deferring to you.
4. Steer the conversation back to a woman if she is interrupted and the topic shifts off track. Intervene on her behalf. State to the group the facts just happened: “Sarai was speaking, and Michael interrupted. Let’s go back to Sarai.”
5. Reinforce what a woman leader says if the man in charge ignores her point. Make sure the woman gets the credit for her contribution.
6. Refer to and defer to a woman leader. Outsiders may assume the man is in charge. Correct their mistake immediately. Introduce the woman as your leader. Use titles in the same way it’s done for men. Sometimes you may need to leave the room to reinforce the woman’s leadership.
7. Quote what women leaders have said or written and publicly give them credit for it. Elevate and promote women’s voices, including famous people and your colleagues. What they have to say is worthy of attention.
8. Pay attention to the optics. In public, note whose name is listed first. It matters who comes to the podium and who communicates publicly. Notice who sits in what chair. Step back, even if moving forward comes naturally to you.
9. Encourage confidence and affirm women in their leadership. Privately, let a woman colleague know if you notice her apologizing for her input or being tentative when she clearly knows what she is talking about.
10. Base your promotion and hiring practices on substance rather than on style. Women’s leadership does not need to follow a male mold to be effective and powerful.
11. Stop protecting women leaders. It undermines a woman’s leadership when you withhold information that you assume will be too emotionally distressing. It disempowers a leader when you assume her plate is too full and you step in to handle what she should address.
12. Learn history. Recognize how men have shaped culture in ways that benefit men by disempowering women. Honor the ways women are rejecting this historic injustice.
13. Unlearn your tendency to take charge or to feel entitled to lead. Recognize that you’ve been shaped by a patriarchal system and that it’s possible to disrupt that system.
14. Engage in your own inner work to recognize that your value does not depend on being higher than a woman in our cultural caste system. A man with healthy self-confidence and self-respect will accept that a woman in leadership is not an attack on your value or masculinity.
15. Believe women when they tell you about their experiences of sexism. When they point out disempowering behavior or patriarchal assumptions by you or others, be curious rather than defensive. Don’t try to explain the “harmless” intent. Find out how it could be done better.
16. Join in women’s justified anger when their leadership is not respected. Let a woman see your anger at the injustice. Use the energy of righteous anger to learn, and carry that learning forward to help other men learn.

Good intentions aren’t enough. Men can learn to do better and call upon other men to change their hearts and actions. That’s the workload they carry. Women have their own work to do to thrive as leaders.

Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi is a process consultant, personal history writer and member of Orrville Mennonite Church in Ohio. She lives on the land of the Wyandot, Shawnee, Lene Lenape and others. She enjoys being outdoors in all seasons with her husband, three adult sons, three daughters-in-law and four grandchildren.
The quilters didn’t intend to challenge the status quo. Or did they?

The Movement of the Mennonite adults around me was focused and purposeful — housework, yardwork, the transit to and from work, school and Sunday services. Women’s work was especially attuned to the reproductive labor of sustaining the bodily houses of our souls.

Among a small list of socially acceptable reasons for leaving the sermon time was putting the potluck casserole in the oven and readying the fellowship hall. As I doodled on the bulletin, I noticed, too, how work could release one from the discomfort of sitting silently while the men at the pulpit monologued.

It was middle school, and I wanted to learn how to knit. “Why don’t you ask someone at church?” my mother suggested.

The next Sunday morning, with knitting needles and a skein of scrap yarn, I cozied up to one of the church ladies known for her quilting prowess. I slid into the pew, presented my supplies and asked for help. As the sermon murmured on, I got lessons in casting on, knit and purl, and by the end of the year had completed my first “scarf,” more closely resembling a place mat.

A few years later, when my knitting teacher erected a quilt frame in the back of the sanctuary, I was initiated into the hand-quilting tradition of my Swiss German Mennonite heritage. Sunday after Sunday while the (mostly) men were at the pulpit, the (mostly) women were humming away at the quilt frame, listening or not listening to the sermon, silently agreeing or disagreeing with what was preached.

As I became more uncomfortable with the gendering of God, I started to think of the busy quilters in the back of the sanctuary as the Subversive Sunday Sewing Circle. These were Mennonite women undermining patriarchal sermons with practical, comforting, communal, life-nourishing acts. Here they were maintaining the fiber art traditions that are some of humanity’s oldest technology.

The quilt tops that were produced got auctioned at the Mennonite relief sale. These quilts were not just works of art; they would raise funds to provide goods and services for people all over the world. These quilts were...
practical. These quilts supported lives.

It was nice that the sermons would still be preached and scriptures read. But, sermon or no sermon, women’s work must go on.

I doubt the quilters’ intent was to undermine a status quo in which all eyes, ears, hearts and minds were supposed to be fixated on the (usually) White cis-male speaker.

But also maybe it was.

The impact, at least on me, was a slight waft of subversion. And, where there is a waft, there is the potential for a whirlwind.

Despite European patriarchy, in early Anabaptist movements women could cross a boundary typically reserved for men by claiming divine inspiration. Prophesying was a role anyone could fill. As with the earliest Christians, direct access to the Divine was not ceded to men.

And, lest White cultural individualism confuses: This wasn’t just about individual relationships. This wasn’t about a church lady getting a personal prayer line. As historian Silvia Federici describes, Anabaptists and other “heretics” used prophecy as an organizing tool. This was about democratizing divinity for collective liberation.

THE SAME CHURCH MENTOR who taught me to knit and to quilt taught me to sing.

While many Amish and Old Order Mennonites continue to sing in the single-note, unaccompanied style, other Mennonites adopted singing in parts. Unaccompanied four-part harmony became a staple of worship.

My home congregation, started as a multiracial community in response to Southern segregation, was an eclectic mix of traditions. But I have memories of controversy about singing from visits to my grandparents in eastern Pennsylvania.

At their small-town church, “throw-up songs” — projected, or thrown up, on a wall because they weren’t in the hymnbook — were causing a fuss. Their name said it all. My grandfather spoke the words with a mix of disgust and urgency, as if he needed to get them out of his mouth quickly.

I had assumed his disgust was generational resistance to change. He cared about preserving traditional values, and new worship songs must have posed a threat.

Clues for dismantling patriarchy had been right under my nose — in the hymnal and at the back of sanctuary.

But then, years after my grandfather’s passing, my uncle offered me a different perspective.

“He generation were such troublemakers,” my uncle said, a glint of mischief in his eye. The elders of my great-grandparents’ generation were against singing in parts.

“What?” I asked. “Four-part harmony was new then?”

He told me the young people stopped going to church or were kicked out for their newfangled ways. The traditions my father grew up with, my grandfather had not.

The solutionary threads I’d been tracing in my lineage were shorter than I thought. (“Solutionary” is a term used by the late author and activist Grace Lee Boggs to describe “the real revolutionaries” who are co-creating alternatives to harmful systems.)

IN EUROPEAN CHORAL MUSIC, the soprano usually carries the melody. But my cool, younger aunt sang alto, my grandpa tenor, my dad bass. I loved the harmonies that resounded throughout our yellow brick sanctuary.

In other Protestant churches, a choir of the best voices carried the musical worship. Catholic Mass usually had a soloist. But in the Mennonite churches I frequented, entire congregations unpinned their coverings, let down their hair (metaphorically) and burst into glorious song.

Within the notes of four-part harmony, I sensed another waft of subversion. Singing binds people together. It creates a feeling of connectedness, belonging and collective intimacy.

While the four parts of harmony are gendered in theory, skilled singers can and do sing any part they please. Along with holding down the alto line, my knitting/quilting/voice teacher would frequently, mid-song, drop to the tenor. She might sing a different part for each verse. Our tiny congregation appreciated her strong singing voice, no matter which part she chose.

Four-part harmony presses against individualism and encourages interdependence. Each person has a responsibility to the group. Like community quilting, group singers create something beautiful, soul-enhancing and life-giving — collectively.

Though contemporary singing might include accompaniment, at its root it suggests resourcefulness: All you need is yourself, your body and each other.

IT’S IMPORTANT TO PLACE these wafts of subversion within the greater context of Mennonites for whom European traditions of quilting and choral parts might not resonate.

There are wafts of subversion there, too — in the disruption of Eurocentric traditions, in the wisdom of Anabaptism on the margins, in the unsettling of settlers, in the dynamic tension of dissonance.

Can we attune to the wafts of subversion among us? What can we learn from them? How will we nurture such wafts of subversion to be the solutionaries — the solutions-focused change agents — that we need?

I worked diligently to fit into the mold of a good Christian girl: compliant, supportive, small. My soul yearned to value the parts of myself I had suppressed as feminine — collaboration, leading in a way that makes space for others, exercising power with instead of power over.

Understanding God as genderless and affirming God’s feminine aspects — nurturing, gentleness, collaboration — grounds me. It helps me to be self-aware, authentic, connected to my values. I am able to speak and act with confidence while also making space for others. I learn from others while honoring my own knowing.

When I am grounded, I am better able to interact with others as I intend. I can be nonjudgmental, transparent and vulnerable. When I live authentically, without posturing or pretending, people can trust me.

Trust builds connections. Connections lay the foundation for change. As the People’s Supper organization says, “Social change moves at the speed of relationships. Relationships move at the speed of trust.”

RESISTING PATRIARCHY strengthens my desire for racial justice. I don’t want to conform to a culture that benefits some and oppresses others. I want to live in a world where healing, rather than shame, is centered.

Setting aside patriarchal understandings of God — logical, rational, linear, unemotional — allows me to honor my own sense of knowing, based on intuition and an embodied, real-world perspective. It frees me to be curious and to listen to others while seeking the Spirit’s presence and guidance. It makes space for creativity and wonder. It invites me to be open to new ideas for sticky situations.

Moving beyond patriarchal understandings of God helps us see new ways of addressing problems such as systemic oppression, climate catastrophe and war. Freeing our faith from patriarchy is key to creating a world where everyone can flourish.
A congregation that teaches biblical gender distinctions feels like home

For the first 50 years of my life, I attended churches that were patriarchal/complementarian: They believed men and women have different but complementary roles in marriage, family life and religious leadership. These churches were part of evangelical denominations. I do not recall any women wanting more gender equality.

Then, well into my sixth decade of life, my husband and I moved to a new community and joined a church that belonged to the Presbyterian Church of Canada. The denomination permitted ordination of women, but the congregation only had men as lead pastors while we were there. Occasionally, women studying at a nearby seminary would preach. Initially it felt uncomfortable to sit under the preaching of women when men were present.

Why would we want to go backwards, so to speak, when we had been part of a church that was egalitarian?

Then, in 2021, the PCC voted to approve same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing gay and lesbian people. This was more than just uncomfortable for me and my husband. We believed it was contrary to scripture and the historic Christian faith. We began to search for and pray about a new church home.

We believe God led us to an Anabaptist congregation: TriCity Church in Port Coquitlam, B.C., part of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

Anabaptism is not unfamiliar to us. Our grandparents were Mennonite Brethren in southern Russia (now Ukraine) and immigrated to Canada in the 1920s. To find a Mennonite Brethren church in our community has felt like we’re coming home.

It also feels like home in another way: The church is complementarian/patriarchal, something that we had moved away from for about 15 years.

Why would we want to go backwards, so to speak, when we had been part of a church that was egalitarian?

There are several reasons:

1. TriCity Church, only six years old, is thriving and growing. Average Sunday attendance is close to 600, with the majority being young families. The facility is not large, so there are three gatherings. We’re praying about when and where we may be able to plant another congregation to allow for further growth. By contrast, the egalitarian church we left has been without a pastor for nine months and has dwindled considerably, making it unlikely they’ll be able to afford a pastor’s salary.

2. While TriCity Church is open about its complementarian/patriarchal perspective, it welcomes people who hold other viewpoints. However, leadership has made it clear that their complementarian stance is firm and not debatable. That said, their position on this issue was not our primary reason for attending TriCity Church. It was their preaching of the gospel as found in the entirety of scripture — we’re all sinners who need to repent and believe in Jesus — that we found compelling.

3. After studying the biblical passages that address the topic of men and women in the home and church (Genesis 1-2; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-35; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 3:1-13; 1 Peter 3:1-7) and reading books by theologians and scholars on both sides of the issue, I’m convinced the Bible presents God’s wise plan for headship for men and submis-
Plain groups gather to ‘arrest the alarming desertion of our people’

PLAIN ANABAPTISTS gathered March 21-23 in Millersburg, Ohio, for the 18th Anabaptist Identity Conference to preserve and strengthen their faith, practice and witness. Conference speakers looked to scripture, Anabaptist history and the early church as the standard for radical Christianity.

The conference drew several hundred Plain Anabaptists from the United States and Canada. Estimated numbers ranged widely, from 400 to 800. This included Old Order Amish, New Order Amish, Nebraska Amish, Beachy Amish-Mennonites, Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonites, Nationwide Fellowship, Franklin and Washington Conference, Charity Christian Fellowship, Dunkard Brethren, Old Order River Brethren, Old German Baptist Brethren, Ohio-Indiana (Wisler) Conference, Weaverland Conference and other unaffiliated groups. Russian Baptists also attended. Depending on the day, 100 to 200 more listened through a phone conference line.

A conference flyer said the purpose was to “awaken the conscience and arrest the alarming desertion of our people from radical Christianity.”

For conference attendees, radical Christianity means straightforward interpretation of and obedience to biblical commands regarding nonresistance and swearing of oaths, outward separation through dress, head coverings for women, permanence of marriage, submission, church discipline and two-kingdom theology.

Nathan Overholt, a conference organizer and founder along with his brother Matthias, said that people come to this conference to work out what it means to follow Jesus and how to follow particular commands.

Overholt said in an email that “our people” are recognized by distinctive dress and their radical Christianity. Conference organizers are concerned that Plain Anabaptists are assimilating to evangelical Protestant theology.

The Overholts are also concerned about progressive Mennonites’ drift toward the larger culture, because these Mennonites are not recognizable on sight as Anabaptists and therefore lose their witness.

Speakers spent considerable time discussing history and peoplehood. Andrew Ste. Marie of Michigan gave an opening talk about why Christians should study history, focusing on Psalm 78. He recommended reading The Anabaptist Vision by H.S. Bender and suggested biographies of Conrad Grebel, Jakob Ammann and Michael Sattler. The living are to learn from the past and advance the kingdom of God.

In a devotional, Delbert Shetler of Ohio shared his experience of care from his Amish community after he was the lone survivor of a car accident that killed the driver and two of his children. His barn needed repair, but he could not manage the work himself because of his injuries. The community rebuilt the barn, and Shetler said he still doesn’t know who paid for the materials. The labor was donated.

“Friends, we daren’t lose what we’ve got,” he said. “We’re designed to need each other.”

John D. Martin, an adviser to the Anabaptist Identity Conference, said needing each other is necessary for salvation.

“God does not have in mind that we are saved individually,” Martin said in his presentation on the Sermon on the Mount. “It’s not about going to heaven after we die; it’s about getting to heaven while we live,” and this happens communally.

“WOULDN’T IT BE NICE if [all] Anabaptists lived alike?” asked one man during another devotional. “We are imperfect,” he admitted, but that should not keep Anabaptists from “striving to show the kingdom of God on earth.” It is the work of Anabaptists to show the world what this should look like, he said.

Speakers often expressed discomfort about the broader culture’s impact on
Plain Anabaptists. A presentation on Anabaptists and artificial intelligence by Chester Weaver recommended caution and resistance, noting that AI is already a part of everyday life for groups that use the internet.

In another presentation, Weaver showed and discussed a 1967 documentary, Mennonites: The Peaceful Revolution. The film included interviews with Goshen College students who had decided to leave traditional Mennonite life. Many comments from the audience ranged from frustrated to indignant.

"Don't engage with culture," one man said. "Create a counterculture."

But creating a counterculture does not mean withdrawing from the world. Hearken House, an Anabaptist-related ministry, reported on its work with returning prison inmates who had committed sex offenses. Blessings of Hope, founded by ex-Amish men, discussed hunger in the United States and how the organization collects and redistributes food that otherwise would be thrown away.

SUBMISSION AND AUTHORITY were themes. Justin Denlinger of Hartville, Ohio, spoke about women's head coverings as a symbol of authority in the God-man-woman hierarchy. Women wear head coverings to show they are submitted to men.

But men need to submit to God and to men in positions of authority in the church. Addressing men, Denlinger said that if children and women aren’t listening to them, perhaps men should be asking themselves, "Am I submitting to my authorities?" Even the Apostle Paul submitted.

He said Plain Anabaptists are often accused of being hypocrites and legalists. But the risk of hypocrisy is not a reason to stop practicing what is commanded.

"Can baptism save you? Can head covering save you?" he asked. "No, but our obedience [does]."

In a panel discussion, Ste. Marie reminded attendees that while head covering and modest dress may be biblically mandated, they do not protect women and girls from harm. He gave an example of Plain women who had been sexually abused by family members.

"Let this [sin] not even be named among us," he said.

Ray Miller, a member of the Old Order Amish in Ohio and a local conference organizer, added that any sexual abuse should be reported to the civil authorities. Some people may feel more comfortable reporting to a bishop, and he emphasized that the bishop will also call the authorities.

PHILIP SHOWALTER of Windsor, Ky., delivered a spirited critique of Plain Anabaptists buying into the broader culture's materialism. "We are seeking..."
things right with the world around us," he said. Plain groups have flourishing farms, businesses and bank accounts, but “our walk with God comes second.”

His talk prompted many comments and questions. Someone asked if he could trust Plain business catalogs for business advice; Showalter advised caution. In response to another question, Showalter suggested talking to church members for discernment before expanding a business.

“A businessman should not be consumed by business,” he said. “God owns the business.”

David Bercot, a member of an unaffiliated Mennonite congregation in Chambersburg, Pa., echoed Showalter’s critique by pointing to Dutch Anabaptists after the Netherlands’ independence from Spain in 1581. The Anabaptists received religious toleration, but then they became wealthy.

“The world couldn’t beat them with fire and the sword,” Bercot said, but it “got them with money.”

But money is also necessary. Toward the end of the conference, Nathan Overholtz, a local organizer, announced that the planning group had counted the donations, and they were $10,000 short of covering expenses.

He asked ushers to pass baskets.

During the concluding panel discussion, Ray Miller made another announcement: The money had been counted, and it was enough to break even. There might even be some left over. Any money beyond 2024 expenses would be used for the next conference.

Blessings of Hope feeds the hungry

Blessings of Hope is a ministry in Ephrata, Pa., begun by Aaron Fisher and friends in 2006. He started by packing seven banana boxes of food a week. Today Blessings of Hope has two warehouses and a ministry selection center in Lancaster County and packs 2,000 boxes a week.

The organization takes food that producers and retail stores would otherwise throw away and redistributes it to people in need. Blessings of Hope also has a satellite location in Kentucky.

John Higgins, who procures food for Blessings of Hope, offered statistics on hunger in the United States at the Anabaptist Identity Conference. About 50 million people, or 12.5% of the population, experience food insecurity. Food deserts occur when people without cars are unable to access food due to grocery store closures.

Blessings of Hope collects donated food, packs it into boxes and makes it available to churches and ministries. Blessings of Hope will also freeze and dehydrate food to make it usable and extend its shelf life.

According to its website, Blessings of Hope has distributed about 7 million pounds of food in 2024. In March, volunteers donated 16,056 hours of labor.

“Matthew 25:40 is the reason why we do this,” Higgins said, referencing a passage that calls for helping “the least of these.”

— Eileen Kinch
Canadian churches use portion of budgets for Indigenous reparations

IN MANY CANADIAN CHURCHES today, it is common to hear a land acknowledgment at the start of a service. It’s a way to recognize the First Nations who occupied the land.

Three Mennonite churches in Winnipeg, Man., and one in Kitchener, Ont., have taken that a step further by deciding to pay reparations to Indigenous people on whose land their buildings are located.

In so doing, they take inspiration from Adrian Jacobs, senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation in the Christian Reformed Church in Canada.

Jacobs is a member of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Grand River Territory in Ontario who also worked for Mennonite Central Committee Ontario. For some years he has proposed that churches pay a symbolic amount to work at reconciliation with Indigenous people.

“It would be a spiritual covenant with local Indigenous people, a treaty between people with respect to the land,” he said.

Jacobs suggests that churches do this by annually donating 1% of their budget, or of the value of their property, to local Indigenous-led organizations. It is a way to recognize what was lost by the original occupants of the land through broken treaties.

So far, four congregations, all of them part of Mennonite Church Canada, have taken up his call.

“Mennonite churches have been the most responsive,” Jacobs said.

In Winnipeg, Home Street Mennonite Church donates 1% of its budget to two local Indigenous organizations.

The church was built in 1920 on land once owned by a Métis family. Epp-Tiessen said the congregation seeks to acknowledge this context in a tangible way by paying reparations. The money is going to two Indigenous-led organizations. “They are groups we have a relationship with,” she said. “They are doing marvelous work in the community.”

“This isn’t about a charitable donation from our benevolence. It’s a powerful symbol of a commitment to be treaty people. It is money that is owing.” — Esther Epp-Tiessen

The church’s $3,600 payment is placed in the larger context of “settler colonialism, including the theft and dispossession of Indigenous land and the near-erasure of Indigenous people from that land,” said Esther Epp-Tiessen, who is part of Home Street’s Indigenous-settler relations committee.

In Kitchener, Ont., Stirling Mennonite Church has been paying 1% of its annual budget, about $4,000, since 2021.

“We had been talking about it for many years,” said Josie Winterfeld, pastor for missions, peace and justice and outreach. “We’ve been learning, growing and working into it.”

The church is located on Block Two of the Haldimand Tract, which was proclaimed in 1874. Indigenous people who were part of Six Nations were told they would receive lease payments from those who came to reside on the tract. That never happened.

“With the treaty, all the things that were forgotten,” Winterfeld said of the decision to pay reparations. Their payment is given to a nearby Indigenous-run organization that seeks to preserve and promote Indigenous knowledge.

The symbolic payment “doesn’t come close to what they lost. It’s about learning to live in a good way with Indigenous neighbors,” she said.

SINCE 2022, Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg has been giving a combination of 1% of the value of the rooms it rents at a local church, plus 1% of its budget, to local Indigenous organizations.

“We realize that reparations are something that we should and need to do,” said Lynell Bergen, lead pastor. The congregation contributes about $2,500 per year.

For the church, “this isn’t about a charitable donation from our benevolence,” she added. “It’s a powerful symbol of a commitment to be treaty people. It is money that is owing.”

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Also making reparations is Charleswood Mennonite Church, located on land in Winnipeg once used by Indigenous people for hunting and trapping. After adopting a statement of reconciliation in 2021, the congregation decided to act on it by giving 1% of its annual budget, about $3,600, to local Indigenous organizations.

“We decided to give it in an open-handed way,” said Jonathan Neufeld, co-pastor. “No strings attached.”

For the church, it’s a way to go beyond a land acknowledgment by “tangibly showing we have benefited from this land as a church and individuals,” he said.

Esther Epp-Tiessen is part of the Indigenous settler relations committee at Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Man. The congregation donates 1% of its annual budget to two Indigenous groups.

BY JOHN LONGHURST • for Anabaptist World
Holy Week events call for cease-fire

MORE THAN 1,000 DEMONSTRATORS across the United States and Canada highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Gaza as they called on elected officials to support a cease-fire during Holy Week events in late March.

At least 25 events coordinated by Mennonite Action called on U.S. senators and representatives and Canadian Members of Parliament to “Send Aid, Not Bombs,” denounced Israel’s siege of Gaza and demanded the release of all hostages.

Organizers collected donations to illustrate the message. Mennonite congregations in the Chicago area worked with Muslim and Jewish organizations — as well as Wheaton College students — to collect and spread out 1,400 pairs of shoes on Federal Plaza, each representing 25 Gaza deaths.

“The vast majority of our donations came from Awad, who works with Coalition for Justice in Palestine,” said Nathan Perrin, a pastor at Lombard Mennonite Church, who noted Living Water Community Church and Chicago Community Mennonite Church also played significant roles. “Our original goal was to gather about 300 to 400 pairs of shoes among Chicago-area Mennonite churches, but the local Muslim community wanted to contribute something, too. The Palestinian

“I grieve for infants who cannot survive because hospitals are being bombed.”

— Julia Gautsche

and justice-minded Jewish communities are wanting a public Christian voice, since most churches have been noticeably silent, so they really helped to amplify the work we were doing.”

Perrin said the group hopes to ship the shoes to Gaza when the border opens to more aid.

“We scheduled a faith-leader delegation with Sen. Dick Durbin, but his staff didn’t follow up with us,” Perrin added. “He’s been notoriously evading peace groups and accountability on this.”

In northern Indiana, about 150 demonstrators gathered outside Rep. Rudy Yakym’s Mishawaka, Ind., office March 27 in a “die-in” to symbolize the thousands of Palestinian civilians killed by weapons funded by U.S. taxes. PETER RINGENBERG

About two dozen participants lay outside Rep. Rudy Yakym’s Mishawaka, Ind., office March 27 in a "die-in" to symbolize the thousands of Palestinian civilians killed by weapons funded by U.S. taxes. PETER RINGENBERG

Demonstrators march for a cease-fire March 27 in Lancaster, Pa. CHRISTY KAUFFMAN
constituents in person on the issue, his
staffers had reiterated his support for
Israel’s military actions in Gaza and
nearby countries.

About two dozen participants lay on
the ground in a “die-in” to symbolize
the thousands of Palestinian civilians
killed by weapons funded by U.S. tax
funds.

“As a mother, grandmother and
retired nurse-midwife, I grieve for in-
fants who cannot survive because hos-
pitals are being bombed and cannot
provide the warmth, oxygen and care
these infants need,” said Julia Gau-
sche of Assembly Mennonite Church
in Goshen as she helped children write
messages of peace to Yakym during
the event. “I am asking Rep. Yakym to
support a permanent cease-fire to save
innocent civilian lives, especially these
vulnerable and defenseless infants and
children.”

AT OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS, people
decorated jugs of water or piles of
food and toiletry items with calls for
a cease-fire. More than 200 people
marched to Rep. Ben Cline’s office in
Harrisonburg, Va., with rice, beans,
flour, bread and other relief items. A
group in Washington, D.C., brought
food, medicine, water, shoes and a
quilt in a child-sized coffin when they
met March 27 with staff at Rep. Glenn
Ivey’s office.

Mennonite Action stated in a release
that the emphasis on relief comes after
the U.S. voted to defund the United
Nations Relief and Works Agency
through 2025 in the latest government
funding bill. UNRWA is the primary
organization that provides meals and
relief for those in Gaza. Famine looms
as nearly a quarter of children in
northern Gaza are malnourished.

After delivering bread, olive oil and
paintings to Rep. Judy Chu’s office in
Pasadena, Calif., a group sang hymns
and prayed during a sit-in outside her
office. Signs and quilts with messages
demanding an end to bombing were
unfurled outside political offices or
statehouses in Madison, Wis.; Denver;
Boise, Idaho; Saint Paul, Minn.; Phila-
delphia; Wichita, Kan.; New York City;
St. Catharines, Ont.; and Morgantown,
W.Va.; among other locations.

STUDENTS AT Conrad Grebel Uni-
versity College held a hymn sing on
the Waterloo, Ont., campus as they
urged the college to use its voice to
call for a cease-fire and pressure other
institutions to do the same. Students
at Eastern Mennonite University in
Harrisonburg, Va., and Bethel College
in North Newton, Kan., rang bells
in remembrance of the lives lost and
made similar pleas for an end to the
war (page 44).

The week of action was punctuat-
ed on April 1 by a military strike that
killed seven World Central Kitchen hu-
manitarian workers, prompting global
outrage and even admission of error
by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin
Netanyahu.

Mennonite Action is working to
expand local trainings after hold-
ing weekend events in February and
March in Indiana, Pennsylvania and
Virginia. It was awarded a $10,000
grant from Mennonite Church USA’s
Church Peace Tax Fund in February.
ONE OF DORIS HALE’S first memories as a little girl is of airplanes swooping low over cotton fields in Alabama.

“I was born Nov. 30, 1965,” she said. “My mother worked in the fields, and we stayed on people’s places.” Hale walks with a cane and recalls getting sprayed. And not just once. “The airplanes would come down real low and spray that cotton poison on you, and we were born with deformities — arthritis, allergies, stuff like that,” she said.

It’s an environmental disaster that has plagued generations of families in Selma. The effects of insecticide sprayed indiscriminately in the cotton fields when Hale was a child have been passed down from mothers to children who’ve never set foot in the fields.

A more visible disaster weighed on people in Selma on Jan. 12, 2023, when a tornado tore across the city, staying on the ground for almost 23 miles with wind speeds up to 130 mph. Hale stayed in her home and believes she received a message from God that it wasn’t time to die.

“It’s been 59 years, and every year that passes, I get closer and closer to the Lord, and you can see he gets closer to me,” she said.

But her small home, which sits only 50 yards from the railroad tracks on the edge of Selma, was nearly crushed. On March 20, she stood in the yard as volunteers from Disaster Aid Ohio, which works under the Mennonite Disaster Service umbrella, repaired her home. It’s the only home she’s ever owned, and it’s the only place she wants to be.

“The Lord not only gave me a house, he gave me a home, and words cannot express how I feel,” Hale said. A train rushed by, nearly drowning out her next words. “I’ve been listening to that train since I was a little girl. I’d say to my mama: I won’t go to bed until I hear the train.”

Gid Yoder, Disaster Aid Ohio project director, estimated that Hale, who is living with family members in Selma, will be able to move back into her house by summer.

She’s so happy she can’t contain it. “Lord, have mercy, if I had a million, trillion, zillion dollars and could be any place on this Earth right now, I’d be right here today,” Hale said.

The first thing she’s planning to do when she moves in is to kneel on the step and pray. “Then I’m going to fix a bacon cheeseburger, curly fries and a double glass of cherry Kool-Aid,” she said.

Yoder finished checking on the progress volunteers made in Hale’s house and turned to say goodbye. It’s not easy to leave Doris Hale, especially when she’s in a mood to pray.

“Someday, we’ll all meet up in heaven,” Yoder said.

“We don’t want to go just yet,” Hale replied. “But be ready. Stay prayed up.”
MWC president brings message of solidarity to pastors in Ukraine

MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE
President Henk Stenvers brought a message of solidarity through the act of footwashing in a February visit to Mennonite Brethren and Baptist pastors in Ukraine.

“Those who are involved in humanitarian projects and pastoral care are familiar with loneliness, anhedonia, weakness, despondency, cynicism,” said Denis Gorenkov, a Baptist pastor. “But all this was washed away with water and wiped off with towels.”

Dnipro Hope Mission convened about 25 pastors and spouses who work on DHM-supported projects for the gathering in western Ukraine. Many of the pastors serve in the east, close to the front lines in the war with Russia, some even as chaplains.

Stenvers visited Feb. 22-25 with a DHM team including trustee and founder Joshua Searle, American board members Rodger and Margaret Murchison and Baptist theology professor Max Zimmermann from Theologische Hochschule Elstal, the theological college of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany. Stenvers requested the group’s help to facilitate a meeting with the MB pastors.

“To pray, to listen, even to visit for three short days seems so little,” said Stenvers, “but the importance of knowing that there are people thinking of them and praying for them cannot be underestimated.”

The time together concluded with a worship service in which Zimmermann delivered a message from Ephesians 3:14. But the most powerful moment was an evening of footwashing and communion.

“We cannot walk in your shoes, but we can do as Jesus did and wash your feet,” Stenvers said as the five members of the DHM delegation washed the feet of each person in the room.

It was the first time for many to experience the intimate ritual.

“I introduced it as a symbol of serving,” Stenvers said. “After that, we shared communion, which symbolizes our being together in community and also our peace witness. It was a very emotional evening.”

The purpose of the visit was to give the workers a few days of rest and an opportunity to share their experiences. They spoke of giving food and shelter to the flood of displaced people in the early days of the invasion. Many serve as chaplains and shared about the pain of losing friends and church members to the violence of war.

They spoke of anger toward the invasion and the war, and broken relationships with Russian people. The relentless job of serving people’s physical and emotional needs takes a toll. But small, free churches have become more visible in society as assistance is offered to anyone who asks.

STENVERS CARRIED extra luggage to Ukraine containing 400 handwritten cards from Anabaptist churches in the Netherlands. Menno’s Global Village, a Dutch Mennonite youth initiative to connect young people around the world, initiated the collection.

Three Mennonite Brethren pastors who were part of the delegation spoke with Stenvers about Mennonites in Ukraine. The Association of Christian Mennonite Brethren Churches in Ukraine was established in 2004 and counts about 1,000 members in 18 congregations, six in Russian-occupied territory.

Churches mostly meet in homes. Communication with the main body can be difficult, and churches face government suspicion. The church and Mennonite center that MWC leaders visited in 2019 in Molochansk have been taken over by the Russian army and are now used for military goals or propaganda.

With assistance from European and North American Mennonite churches, MB churches have distributed more than 2,000 tons of humanitarian aid such as food, comforters and supplies. They work closely with other Protestant churches, like those of DHM.

“In times like these, differences are less important than helping the people in need,” Stenvers said.
SUMMERS ARE FULL of faith-building opportunities for youth in high school or middle school to attend camps and conventions. But those options dry up as life transitions quickly into college, service, work and family pursuits.

This June, young adults are both the planners and attendees of a conference just for them. It’s one of a variety of recent efforts to better connect with the leaders today’s churches will need tomorrow.

The Young Adult Anabaptist Conference for an Active Future will take place June 7-9 at Camp Squeah in Hope, B.C. Led entirely by people ages 18-35 from Mennonite Church British Columbia, the gathering will blend roundtable conversations with hikes and relaxation.

“We have all these youth retreats and camp, and then we’re just left to look after ourselves,” said Zachary Shields, an undergraduate peace studies major at Goshen College who is one of the event’s planners. “After we have our young adult baptism, we might be part of the church but not have many peers, especially as so many churches are dwindling in every denomination. Mennonite Church British Columbia identified with our call for action.”

The regional church of Mennonite Church Canada works to schedule young adult activities throughout the year — from dinner parties and sports to hiking and even murder mystery parties.

The conference this June is an outgrowth of those efforts, taking inspiration from a small gathering of young adults focused on climate change that took place last summer in Winnipeg, Man.

Climate change will receive attention from Ian Funk, along with keynote speaker David Cramer, faculty at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, speaking on issues of war and peace.

Other topics include restorative justice, Indigenous relations and inclusivity. Rather than formal lectures, the presentations are designed to take place in small group settings with a bulk of time reserved for conversation.

“It’s about connecting faith, activism and church and putting it all together on the ground and living our lives in Jesus’ radical call to action,” Shields said. “We’re trying to build community, provide networking connections, worship together, but my personal biggest goal of the conference is to give young adults the tools and the spiritual empowerment that they need to make a difference in the world. . . .

“There has been an oversight because the dynamics of young adulthood have shifted so much in the last few years. Churches haven’t pivoted to address their spiritual foundations.”

IN RECENT YEARS, the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches has tried to address a broad range of generations from ages 12 to 39 under the umbrella term NextGen. Kyle Goings, NextGen pastor at Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., is also USMB NextGen chair. He said lines have blurred as adolescence has expanded in American society and churches have been challenged to stay relevant.

“The older generations are having
a harder time understanding younger generations, just like every other time in history,” he said. “But we’re seeing these different values. They are looking at churches in different ways, and the church hasn’t paid enough attention to this, so the generation gap is getting wider as technology widens that gap.”

Millennials and Gen Z, which he defines as people now 28–42 and 7–27 years old, respectively, have grown up in an online world, which impacts how they form relationships with each other and with their faith. In broad terms, he said, younger people are not looking for a church where they suspect someone is putting on an act.

“They are going to value what is true and what they can experience first,” Goings said. “. . . We want them to experience the kingdom of God, not just hear about the kingdom of God.

“This is not new. If you look at Acts, there was teaching, fellowship, prayer. They call it more engaging. You’re not changing the message or preaching a stronger gospel. They need to see that the kingdom of God will drastically change your life.”

Over the past five years, USMB has noticed a shrinking pool of candidates for everything from pastors and conference leaders to mission workers and worship leaders. Goings said ministry preparation programs at colleges have diminished, resulting in fewer potential pastors as young adults look to other careers.

“We lost the art of shoulder tapping,” said Goings, who noted there are more pastors over the age of 55 than under the age of 40 in the U.S. The pandemic and increasing polarization have also contributed to burnout.

“Pastors are so overwhelmed with current responsibilities they don’t see how to look back to look at another generation coming,” he said.

USMB launched its Leadership Pipeline program in 2021 to promote ministerial inquiry in 10-week summer internships. Last summer saw five participants, and this summer 15 interns will be working in congregations in youth ministry, worship leading, graphic design, children’s ministry and general (lead) ministry.

“I see hope in the Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren world, just because there’s an awareness now,” Goings said. “We had a vision summit in January to discuss what we can do regarding the next generation. Even though there aren’t actual plans, there’s discussion — not just talking, but saying ‘What are we going to do about it?’ That’s a positive thing.

“I don’t know where God is leading us, but we are looking toward what the next generation can do for God.”

RACHEL RINGENBERG MILLER, Mennonite Church USA’s denominational minister of ministerial leadership, echoed the sentiment that young adults shouldn’t be waiting for their time to come a decade or two down the road.

“A challenge we face as churches is telling young adults that they are the future of the church, which isn’t the full truth. Young adults are the church now,” she said. “There are new ways and established ways of encouraging and welcoming young adults into full participation in the church.

“One newer way is Mountain States Mennonite Conference’s Future Anabaptist Leaders program, which allows 18- to 30-year-olds to explore leadership roles in churches and passion ministries throughout the conference.”

That program is a recent regional addition beyond MC USA’s more established Ministry Inquiry Program, a collaborative initiative of the denomination’s colleges and universities to provide financial scholarships and placements for students interested in exploring congregational ministry.

In late April, MC USA launched the podcast Lead/Follow for pastors and leaders, hosted by executive director Glen Guyton with inspiration and strategies from across the denomination.

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FOR THREE DAYS and three nights, Mary Laat ran and hid from her own family. The goal of their pursuit? To bring her to the altar to marry a man she didn’t know who’d paid his dowry and expected a wife in return.

Clinging to the upper branches of the tree she was hiding in at night, she says she could hear the hyenas below her, circling, hoping for an easy meal.

It wasn’t until she fell to her knees at the gates of Loreto Rumbek School South Sudan that she shed the tears that were burning within her. She was home now. Finally safe again.

Now 22, Mary uses “Laat” as her surname, but for most of her life, she was called “Ding.” Mary and her family are members of the Dinka people of South Sudan. The Dinka are perhaps most famous on the global stage for being the world’s tallest ethnic group. The Wikipedia entry for “Notable Dinka” includes seven NBA players and numerous fashion models.

But within the borders of South Sudan, the Dinka are strongly associated with their “cattle camps,” the nomadic family tribes of agro-pastoralists whose social and financial standing is directly tied to the size of their cattle herd.

Mary’s father was the chief of her camp, well-liked by most. Like all Dinka men, when he was a young man, a marriage was arranged between him and Mary’s mother, with a dowry of cattle paid as part of the exchange.

“In Dinka culture, each daughter in a family is expected to command a respectable dowry of cattle when she comes of marrying age. But firstborn daughters, like Mary, are also expected to recoup the dowry spent on their mother’s marriage.

So, as a reminder of the value she was expected to have for the men of her family, she was called “Ding,” after one of the cows spent on Akuach’s dowry — an emotional weight she was forced to carry and a constant reminder of her place in the social order of the Dinka.

The people of Mary’s tribe are, in her words, considered to be among the least educated people in South Sudan. The effects of British colonialism, which administratively separated the north and south of Sudan. The economic, political and educational impacts this split created would be major factors in the civil war that ended with South Sudan achieving its independence.

“The Dinka do not support girls’ childhood education, because they feel the only thing a girl is supposed to do is get married,” she said. “That is what they do best.”

In 2016, around when she finished her Primary 7 (an equivalent of seventh grade in the U.S. and Canada), she got her first period, signifying her as a marriable woman in the eyes of the Dinka. She was deeply frustrated, though not necessarily surprised, that her father wanted to keep her back from school and find a suitable suitor for her to be married to.

“You feel dictated with your plans — at any time, anybody can come up and terminate your plans, your goals, whatever you’ve set up for your future,” Mary said. “You feel like you’re being made property, to be given out in time. You feel like less of a human being. You feel like you’ll be sold at any time. You have less stamina to stand by what you want to do.”

With some advice from her mother, she convinced her father that getting her full education would be valuable — in her eyes, for her own well-being, and in his, to make her a more valuable bride. He reluctantly agreed, and Mary finished Primary 8 before successfully applying to start secondary school at Loreto Rumbek School, a Mennonite Central Committee partner in the area.

LORETO RUMBEK SCHOOL, near Rumbek, South Sudan, is made up of a primary school, a girl’s secondary school and a health care facility. A long-serving MCC partner in the country, Loreto is one of the most successful schools in the state. It focuses on creating a supportive environment for all students, particularly the girls of the secondary school.

MCC has supported a variety of programs at Loreto, including school feeding programs, canned meat, dignity kit and school kit distribution, a child vaccination program, greenhouse and garden infrastructure, fruit trees and many others.
When Mary arrived at Loreto, she was shocked. Many of the girls in the years above her seemed so free and happy. The nuns teaching them spoke often to them about understanding their power as women and knowing how to use their voice — in many ways the opposite of what Mary had heard her whole life. Her first year was transformative. Having control of her own life had once felt impossible, but it began to feel like something she was being empowered to do.

Then, in August, she went home for a holiday and everything she was working toward was threatened. With a weeklong break from school on the calendar, Mary made the 56-mile journey home near the village of Malueth, only to find bad news. Her father had accepted a dowry of cattle from a local man for Mary's hand in marriage, and she would not be allowed to return to school.

Furious, Mary confronted her father, making it clear she did not want this. Her father said the cattle had been paid and the deal was done.

Mary had no intention of giving up the future she believed she could have. She crafted a plan to get back to Loreto.

She came back to her father, pretending to have a change of heart about the marriage. That bought her a few days. She told her family she was feeling ill, and then, when night fell, she stole out of their encampment into the darkness.

“I moved only at night, and during the day I would climb a tree and hide in it,” Mary said. “I made sure I didn’t pass through anyone else’s property so that no one could tell anyone they’d seen me. If I saw someone on the road ahead, I would go to the bush on the side of the road. I would join a group if no one recognized me.”

For three days and three nights, Mary navigated her way back to Loreto, staying out of sight and avoiding danger, sometimes narrowly.

“At night I could hear the hyenas making noise, but I did not cry,” she said. “I was very strong. I felt that whatever happens, happens. If a lion eats me, no problem, I did not care. But once I saw the gates of the school, I fell to my knees and started crying.”

That was in September 2018. For her safety, Mary didn’t leave the walled grounds of the school until she graduated in 2022. But that didn’t mean her family had given up on trying to find her. Shortly after she returned, a group of her uncles arrived at the school, hoping to catch her where they believed she’d fled.

Mary wasn’t the first girl to experience circumstances like this at Loreto. On first sight of the group, Mary and five other girls in similar situations were ushered into a safe place, and the word was sent out to everyone at Loreto: Mary hasn’t been here. She left for holidays, and that was the last we’ve seen of her. Before long, the uncles left.

Mary’s friends rallied a community around her. More than one of her friends’ families made it clear that she was part of their family now. Mary didn’t know it then, but even though she would reconcile with her mother, she would never see her father again.

Much to the surprise of Mary and the Loreto staff, Mary’s mother showed up to the graduation ceremony. But Mary’s thrill of being reunited with her mother was tempered by the shocking news of her father’s death. One of Mary’s uncles had made a power play, seeking the chief’s seat by paying someone a small herd of cattle to assassinate him in his home.

Mourning her father’s death while celebrating her mother’s reconciliation, Mary’s life was fully under her control now. She had only to choose what her next step would be. Loreto had been so pivotal to her freedom that she decided to stay a little longer and signed on to Loreto’s postsecondary school internship.

The program gives young women the chance to participate in every part of Loreto’s operations — the clinic, the kitchen, the classroom and many parts of its administration. Over two years, the interns, all young women, can build a resume of experience far greater than anything else they could do over the same period.

Once graduated from the internship, Mary hopes she’ll be one of the handful of girls Loreto sponsors for a university education in Kenya. She hopes to teach one day at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi.
MC USA leaders face fears, share stories

THE MENNONITE CHURCH USA Constituency Leaders Council reflected on what it means to do church together March 21-23 at its biannual meeting at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind. Moderator-elect Marty Lehman introduced regional, racial/ethnic and constituency leaders to MC USA’s new strategic plan and invited them to participate in reinvention exercises.

Executive director Glen Guyton presented a new denominational strategic plan to reimagine church. The plan seeks to identify key markers and practices of the Anabaptist faith community, communicate in new ways, provide prophetic leadership in peace and justice, develop a streamlined and effective denominational structure and create a sustainable funding system.

Associate executive director Iris de León-Hartshorn led attendees in a workshop to reimagine church, analyzing how adaptive they and their organizations are to anticipating, designing and implementing change. Common fears included conflict/polarization, fragmentation, loss of identity, loss of resources and change. Many participants recognized they have considerable influence over their fears.

Marco Güete, director of Hispanic Ministries for Mennonite Education Agency, shared about growth and expansion of programs in Spanish.

Stan Shantz provided an update on the work of the Leadership Discernment Committee. With one exception, he said, “all conferences have representation on at least one agency board, just under 50% of our board members are women, and over 40% are BIPOC,” he said, referring to Black, Indigenous and people of color.

FAITH FORMATION through storytelling was a key part of the meeting. Worship leaders Joanne Gallardo, Nathan Luitjens and Randy Spaulding invited CLC members to share about what keeps them in church.

Sandra Montes-Martinez, associate conference minister for Western District Conference, said her calling to serve keeps her energized.

“We recognize now, as a denomination, that we are not monolithic,” she said. “We come from different cultures, backgrounds. We have different theologies, perspectives, and we are in different places in our spiritual journeys. But we choose to believe that diversity is now our strength.”

Three Goshen-area ministers shared stories about how God is working in their communities.

Kay Bontrager-Singer, pastor of Faith Mennonite Church, described how her small congregation purchased a hospitality house to provide safe and affordable short-term housing for neighbors in need.

Phil Waite, pastoral team leader at College Mennonite Church, shared about how his congregation is engaging with the local community, including partnering with Everence to walk alongside a local immigrant family as they purchased a home.

Luke Gascho, a member of Waterford Mennonite Church, spoke about how Waterford tends 84 acres of property as part of its faith practice.
Beloved journalist dies in accident

LAURIE OSWALD ROBINSON, 64, a Mennonite/Catholic journalist who wrote and edited for Mennonite publications and church agencies for 26 years, died April 8 in a hit-and-run crash in Newton, Kan. She was struck by a car while on a morning walk on a rural road southeast of Newton as she trained for the Kansas Camino Walk.

That evening, police arrested Samantha Maple, 23, of Hutchinson, on preliminary charges of failure to stop at the scene of a fatal accident.

Robinson's work appeared frequently in Mennonite publications, including Anabaptist World and its predecessors.

Her articles often explored themes such as forgiveness, reconciliation and community-building within the context of Mennonite faith and values.

"Laurie was a passionate journalist who excelled at stories of all kinds, especially personal profiles," said Paul Schrag, AW editor. "Her impact on the national church as a storyteller and reporter was immense. Her intense faith, enthusiasm and kindness touched countless lives."

Linda Shelly, a colleague at Mennonite Mission Network, said: "Laurie was genuinely interested in people and had a keen sense of curiosity, which contributed to her skill in asking questions that led to deep conversations, whether with friends or with people she interviewed for articles.

"She loved writing human-interest stories, sharing about people, their lives and ministry. She was guided by her own deep faith in God and helped strengthen the faith of others."

Robinson entered the world of Mennonite journalism in 1998 as assistant editor of Mennonite Weekly Review. She moved from New York City to Newton to join the MWR staff.

In 2002 she became news service director for Mennonite Church USA. Her assignments included covering the 2003 Mennonite World Conference assembly in Zimbabwe. From 2005 to 2008 she was editor for Mennonite Assembly in Zimbabwe. From 2005 to 2003 Mennonite World Conference

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"BROTHER" FRANK ALBRECHT of Lancaster, Pa., is having, by his own description, the best year of his life.

That might surprise anyone who knows that Albrecht, 65, was diagnosed in June 2023 with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, a progressive neurogenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

Then again, anyone who knows him is likely not at all surprised.

It’s probably safe to say no one has ever met Albrecht who didn’t experience his characteristic enthusiastic interest in them, for a minute or an hour. Now, he says, the love he’s shown to others is coming back to him “lavishly.”

“I feel blessed to be alive to be able to receive [from others] before I go to be with the Lord,” he said. “That’s why I say this is the best year of my life yet. I am able to process with very deep and special friends how good life is, how precious every moment is, and how every single day is an adventure.

“All the love I gave through my 65 years seems like it’s now coming to fruition. I really believe it’s faith that drives people to want to [care for] the least of these, and now I’m one of the least. It’s a very humbling experience.”

Albrecht adopted the moniker “brother” in the 1990s.

“All of the world are my brothers and sisters,” he says, greeting most people as “brother” or “sister,” too.

He began working in the School District of Lancaster in 1981. He left King Elementary for Colombia, where he served with his family for several years in the 1990s, and returned to the district’s McCaskey High School.

After his diagnosis, he planned to work one more year at McCaskey and then retire. He made it until the middle of March, greeting students every morning in his wheelchair. The district held a farewell party for him on March 29 that nearly 800 people attended.

“Many students let me know that the talks I had with them helped them turn a corner and regain hope that allowed them to graduate,” Albrecht said. “Many told me they were proud of themselves for starting college, for finishing college, for being in harmony with their families.”

He created his role of peer mediation coordinator after he developed the district’s first student mediation program in 1990, following a fight that led to a fatal stabbing at McCaskey. He has been training 32 student mediators a year for a quarter-century.

In 1987, he started REACH, a student-led after-school club that promotes practices for good mental health and still continues. A few years ago, he renamed the school’s in-school suspension classroom “McCaskey Reflection Center” and staffed it with peer mediators to help students in conflict.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Albrecht went every day to homes of 25 students at risk of not graduating. All earned their diplomas on time.

When he received a citation for exemplary service from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in March, a McCaskey junior told a reporter: “He changed my life. He changed everybody else’s life. You’ll never meet another person like him” — a sentiment echoed by current and past students.

ALBRECHT’S SPECIAL CONNECTION

with children and youth extends to his congregation, Laurel Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, where he has been a youth leader for decades.

Longtime friend Linda Shelly said: “In his roles at church and at McCaskey, Frank challenged youth to believe in themselves and their potential. He chose to continue in his roles as long as he could, and I can only imagine how inspiring it has been for youth to experience him continuing with such a positive approach to life, while dealing with his own rapid loss of health.”

Linda Witmer, a longtime Laurel Street member, said: "One of the Laurel Street youth was finishing high school and wanted to drive a truck but did not have the confidence. He studied and took the test but failed part of
it. Frank kept encouraging him to keep trying. He would have quit, but Frank kept telling him he could do it.

“Today he is a truck driver and doing really well. He is so grateful to Frank. There are many stories like this where youth felt Frank’s support and he motivated them with his love to keep working to accomplish their goals.”

Albrecht has a genetic variation of ALS (his sister Judy died of it in 2016) that progresses faster than some types. He is now confined to a wheelchair, needs a BiPAP machine to help him breathe and has little lung capacity for talking. He’s been able to dictate some of his thoughts to friends and family.

He is still at home with his wife, Elizabeth Soto, along with healthcare workers during the day and a network of volunteers around the clock to help with basic hygiene, eating and suction of mucus. Frank and Elizabeth’s two daughters are in Ph.D. programs at Pennsylvania universities and come as often as they can.

PHIL HOSTETTER, a former McCaskey counselor and longtime friend of Albrecht’s, organizes volunteer caregivers, whom Albrecht calls his angels.

“I choose to join him in [his] joy and celebrate the things we have, rather than the things we don’t have,” he said.

Shelly said: “I sensed that Frank’s angels wanted to give back a portion of what they had received from Frank and also to receive the inspiration that comes from a person so limited in what he can do for himself, who is still striving to encourage others.”

Witmer, a retired nurse educator, is one of the caregivers.

“It is a blessing to care for him,” she said. “I am blessed with his gratitude and positive spirit in the midst of losing control of his body functions and life.”

Albrecht said: “[The prophet] Micah said love God, love justice and walk humbly with your Lord. That’s the way I’ve tried to live and, boy, I really have to put into practice the humbleness now. My faith is only getting stronger, and it will take me to the throne of God, and I praise Jesus for that.”

This article completes a project that Laurie Oswald Robinson began shortly before her death.
Hutterite colony a fire truck hot spot

VISITORS WILL FIND DOZENS of fire trucks at Green Acres Colony, a Hutterite community on the Manitoba prairie. The colony has been producing fire trucks for 22 years.

“Our goal is to make 24 fire trucks per year,” Ryan Hofer said. “We aren’t there yet. Last year, we only produced 18 units.”

Hofer is a young Hutterite man who has been involved in production for several years. The production floor at Acres EV mimics an assembly line. He installs wiring harnesses in trucks and is passionate about the work.

“We are here to serve others, to serve our communities,” he said. “I need to complete a final checklist before the vehicle leaves our facility. I make sure that everything is taken care of and is as it should be.”

The venture started when an “English” non-Hutterite neighbor asked colony folks to repair his fire truck. They apparently did a good job, because the man returned and asked if they could build a fire truck for him.

Initially, the Hutterites here weren’t sure they could fulfill the request. “We had never built a fire truck before,” Hofer said.

There was a lot to learn. Getting certifications and licensing to produce specialized vehicles was an uphill climb.

“It wasn’t easy,” Hofer said. “Not many colonies would do this type of work, because of the hurdles involved. We are behind in our orders and could produce more fire trucks if we had a larger facility and more people.”

Truck frames arrive at Acres EV, located on the colony, and workers build upon the frame, adding lights, sirens, wiring harnesses, water tanks and other elements. Several weeks are typically required for the crew of 23 to complete one emergency vehicle.

“We have several ladies who help with this project,” Hofer said. “They mostly work in the shipping and accounting departments; one is involved in harness making. When we first started making fire trucks, we got everyone on board that we could.”

THE PROCESS BECAME more streamlined, and people from outside the colony were hired. Today, the majority of the workforce is from Green Acres.
“I am not trying to brag or sound boastful,” Hofer said with hesitancy in his voice. “We simply manufacture the best fire trucks in Canada. Whenever we attend shows and events, we have a line of people who want to place orders with us.”

Green Acres has produced fire trucks for Hutterite colonies throughout Canada and many municipalities in multiple provinces. Each unit should last 20 to 30 years.

“We are doing more than just building fire trucks,” Hofer said. “We are also boosting firefighter morale. Departments that buy our trucks find an increased number of volunteers will apply. People want to be involved in a fire department where our trucks are.”

Hofer noted the glory for a reputation of producing high-quality emergency vehicles should not be placed on any human.

“We want to give God all the honor for any successes,” he said.

Acre EV offers variety, building anything from tankers and pumps to rescue trucks and quick response units. Most Hutterite communities have their own fire trucks due to insurance reasons. The majority of the communities rely on a church-based fire insurance.

“Departments that buy our trucks find an increased number of volunteers will apply.”

— Ryan Hofer

GREEN ACRES COLONY farms 7,000 acres. The primary crops are wheat, barley and canola, with corn added last year.

A large hockey rink is located on the colony, as well as a swimming pool. While hockey rinks are a familiar sight on Manitoba colonies, they are much less common in Alberta and Saskatchewan, where more traditional Hutterite groups reside.

“Most of the traditional groups are not favorable to the idea of having their youth involved in sports or athletic activities,” said a Hutterite man from a neighboring Schmiedeleut community that comes from a more traditional branch of Hutterites.

“There is nothing like hockey that brings men together,” said Hofer, standing beside the area that gets flooded with water every winter to create the playing surface. “There have been many different colonies coming here to play hockey against us. We have found that when we play hockey with other groups, a sense of bonding takes place.”

For many years after a 1992 schism that splintered the Schmiedeleut group into two, this collaboration on the hockey rink would not have occurred.

“It is improving,” Hofer said of the relationship. “Recently, there has been much more collaboration between our two groups since 1992. We are called to forgive. We are called to put our hurts aside.

“There is a saying that I really like. You can only love Jesus as much as you love your worst enemy.”

A fire truck comes together on the assembly floor of Acres EV at Green Acres Colony.

Established in 1991, Green Acres Colony in Manitoba is home to 120 people in 32 families.

LEROY MARTIN/DMP
The first phase includes newly commissioned articles on each book of the Bible. These articles, written by 41 Anabaptist biblical scholars, contain essays on the books themselves with 100 supplementary essays on a variety of themes and issues. Essays include “Disciples and Disciple ship” (in John), “Political Power” (in Ecclesiastes), “War, Warfare” (in Isaiah), “The Elite” (in Lamentations), and “Women in Ministry” (in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).

The ADB is intended to serve Anabaptists and be a respectful conversation partner with those in other Christian traditions. “Editors from the Believers Church Bible Commentary series have worked diligently to populate this Bible dictionary with content that complements the commentary series,” said Amy Gingerich, publisher at MennoMedia and Herald Press. “Writers from the series as well as additional scholars have contributed to the dictionary. Readers will find that the quality of articles is equal to published Bible dictionaries, which tend to be very expensive.”

The ADB has its origins in the work of the Believers Church Bible Commentary series, published by Herald Press. In 2007, the editorial council of the commentary series discussed developing an online Anabaptist Bible dictionary. In 2010, the council asked Paul M. Zehr to develop a budget for the project and to seek funding. It also asked Douglas B. Miller and Loren L. Johns — Old and New Testament editors of the commentary series — to serve as ADB’s initial editors.

Hosted by AnabaptistWiki.org, it can be accessed by searching online for “Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible.” Editor Douglas Miller said the vision for the project is to expand to involve contributors in languages other than English. The second phase will add newly commissioned articles on biblical issues of Anabaptist interest and relevance. In a third phase, the ADB will look to add French and Spanish editors who can develop comparable essays in those languages, or translate English essays.

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**Online Bible resource growing**

**THE FIRST PHASE** of the Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible is nearing completion. This free online project on biblical interpretation and Anabaptist thought supplements the Believers Church Bible Commentary series. Seeking to cover all 66 books of the Bible, the ADB recently published an article that covers the 49th book toward that goal.

The initiative’s first phase includes newly commissioned articles on each book of the Bible. These articles, written by 41 Anabaptist biblical scholars, contain essays on the books themselves with 100 supplementary essays on a variety of themes and issues.


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**First Black woman ordained in Church of the Brethren dies**

Belita D. Mitchell, the first Black woman ordained in the Church of the Brethren, died Feb. 10 in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Mitchell grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. During a 30-year career as a sales executive in Southern California, she attended Imperial Heights Church of the Brethren in Los Angeles and began to receive affirmations of her call to ministry.

She enrolled at Fuller Theological Seminary and began serving as associate pastor at Imperial Heights in the 1990s. After being called as pastor of First Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa., she was ordained in 2003.

A vocal advocate for gun violence prevention, she worked for racial justice and peace. She served as moderator of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 2007, the first Black woman to do so.

She and her husband, Don, received the Revelation 7:9 Award in 2017 from the denomination’s Intercultural Ministries in recognition of leadership in making the Church of the Brethren an intercultural church. – Church of the Brethren Newsline

**Safe Church ministry offers background checks**

Mennonite Church USA’s Safe Church ministry is offering background checks for church employees and volunteers through an agreement with Safe Hiring Solutions.

“Background checks are important and necessary to protect our faith communities, especially children, youth and vulnerable adults,” said Nancy Kauffmann, interim director of church safety at MC USA. “They allow the church community to move forward with more confidence, confirming that their employees and volunteers do not have any previous sexual or criminal convictions.”

The new comprehensive background check package offers three key benefits: thoroughness, a trusted screening provider and a layer of confidentiality for the employee/volunteer.

If a Safe Church background check reveals something problematic, MC USA staff notifies the congregation of any red flags and, upon request, will share the full report with the candidate.

Based in Danville, Ind., Safe Hiring Solutions has decades of experience in law enforcement, criminal records and security.

The cost ranges from $28 to $74 per inquiry. Everence offers a grant that can help eligible churches cover or defray these expenses. For more information, visit mennoniteusa.org/background-checks.

– MC USA

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Buckwalter did mission in a new way

LOIS BUCKWALTER, 102, one of the first Mennonites to engage in mission that accompanied existing Indigenous evangelical churches in preserving their language and cultural manner of worship, died March 8 in Goshen, Ind.

From 1950 to 1993, Buckwalter and her husband, Albert, served among the Toba-Qom people in Argentina’s Chaco region, through Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor of Mennonite Mission Network.

Within a few years of beginning their ministry, the Buckwalters shifted from living and working on a traditional mission compound. They also moved away from the goal of planting a Mennonite church in the Argentine Chaco to embrace a more culturally appropriate ministry of encouraging the Iglesia Evangélica Unida (IEU, United Evangelical Church), founded and led by Toba-Qom leaders.

They made learning the Qom language a priority, welcomed Toba-Qom visitors into their home and, each weekend, traveled to one of the 51 IEU congregations.

The Buckwalters facilitated translation of the Bible into Qom and the related Pilagá and Mocoví languages.

“The Buckwalters gave leadership to a vision for ministry with a strong theological base and deep respect for Indigenous peoples and their spiritual lives,” said Linda Shelly, Mission Network’s regional director for Latin America. “Lois and Albert shared with the broader church their deep belief that we as Mennonites, and Christians as a whole, will understand God’s message more clearly and deeply when we seek to understand the insights of Indigenous peoples.”

Alfonsina and José Oyanguren, who have served with MMN since 2004, carry on the work begun by the Buckwalters. They said people remember her as Chidagna; an Indigenous name given to her. Chidagna’ was a Qom woman renowned for being fearless.

Born Oct. 2, 1921, in Chicago to Ada (Ramseyer) and Nelson Litwiller, Buckwalter grew up in Argentina, where her parents served with MBM. She graduated from Goshen College in 1944 and married Albert Buckwalter in 1947.

After Albert’s death in 2004, she and her sister, Beulah González, invested themselves in welcoming Spanish-speaking newcomers to the Goshen community.

She was a member of College Mennonite Church in Goshen, where a service of thanksgiving will be held at 2:30 p.m. May 21.

East African leaders collaborate

LEADERS OF CONFERENCES in four East African nations met in early April to discuss how they can collaborate to share the gospel in a changing world and in the African context.

The Ethiopian Anabaptist denomination, Meserete Kristos Church, hosted the April 2-5 summit at its seminary in Bishoftu. Leaders from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania attended.

The summit followed a meeting in August in Migori, Kenya, when church leaders were the guests of Kenya Mennonite Church for its national convention. MKC President Desalegn Abebe attended that meeting and invited the group to continue the discussion in Ethiopia.

The leaders shared a desire to form an East African Mennonite Conference as a way of bringing East African values to the global Mennonite church family. Relationships will continue in the next gathering, hosted by Tanzania Mennonite Church in late June, with agreement to meet quarterly to share experiences and pray.

Attendees agreed to collaborate on identifying areas to reach out and engage in mission work together. More young leaders, including women, will be invited to attend the next meeting.

In addition to future collaboration, the group discussed MKC’s Agenda 28:19, a five-year strategic plan focused on fulfilling the Great Commission, based on Matthew 28:19. The plan expects each MKC member to be involved individually and communally in spreading the gospel.

The leaders reached an agreement on how to implement Agenda 28:19 according to local contexts.

Abebe encouraged national leaders to send their young leaders to Meserete Kristos Seminary for theological studies. — Henok T. Mekolin

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Smithsonian exhibition showcases Amish quilters’ designs and artistry

THE ART OF AMISH QUILTS is highlighted in a Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibition running through Aug. 26 in Washington, D.C. “Pattern and Paradox: The Quilts of Amish Women” is accompanied by two public lectures in May.

The exhibition celebrates a gift announced in 2021 of Amish quilts to the museum by Faith and Stephen Brown.

The Browns began collecting quilts in 1977, four years after encountering Amish quilts for the first time at the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery.

The 50 quilts featured in “Pattern and Paradox” include 39 from the museum’s collection and 11 promised gifts. Around 100 additional quilts from the Browns’ collection are promised to the museum as a bequest.

“Faith and Stephen Brown assembled this extraordinary collection with care and devotion over some four decades after a revelatory visit to the Renwick Gallery. It comprises the largest and most widely representative group of Amish quilts ever to be acquired by a major art museum,” said Stephanie Stebich, the Margaret and Terry Stent director.

In the late 19th century, Amish women adopted an artform already established within the larger American culture and made it distinctly their own, developing community and familial preferences with women sharing work, skills and patterns.

The quilts in “Pattern and Paradox” were made between 1880 and 1950 in communities united by faith, values of conformity and humility and a rejection of “worldly” society.

No specific guidelines governed quilt patterns or colors, so Amish women explored uncharted territory, pushing cultural limitations by innovating within a community that values adherence to rules.

Styles, patterns and color preferences eventually varied and distinguished the various settlements.

BY THE MID-20TH CENTURY, Amish quilts were being shown in museums, a development that the Amish were not necessarily comfortable with. “These objects traveled into the art world in the late 20th century, but the Amish women who made them never intended them to be seen as artworks,” said Leslie Umberger, curator of folk and self-taught art.

“Audiences and collectors responded to the striking color combinations and inventive abstract patterns, but the Amish were uneasy with the idea of having made and possessing museum-worthy, valuable artworks and began divesting of these quilts.

“Seen here, hanging on the gallery walls like paintings, they prompt us to consider the subjectivity of words like ‘artist’ and ‘art’ and how cultural perspective can transform one’s understanding of an object.”

Janneken Smucker, professor of history at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, is the primary author of the exhibition catalog book and contributed to the exhibition. She is a fifth-generation quiltmaker of Amish Mennonite heritage.

Smucker will give a lecture on Amish quilts May 23 and a gallery talk with Umberger May 24.
MCC home repair program in Appalachia changes name

Mennonite Central Committee’s home-repair program in Appalachia changed its name to MCC Appalachia Build on April 2, replacing the former name, Sharing With Appalachian People.

Thousands of volunteers have come to Kentucky and West Virginia through the home-repair program known as SWAP. MCC Great Lakes, which oversees the program, decided to change the name after hearing requests from local staff, the community and board members.

“MCC Appalachia Build was chosen as the new name to reflect the goals of our program, which are to build relationships between homeowners and volunteers, to build understanding of the people and place, and to build safe housing for those in need,” said Kristin Overstreet, MCC Appalachia program director.

The focus of MCC’s program in Appalachia remains the same. MCC Appalachia Build provides volunteer service and learning opportunities through its home-repair program for low-income homeowners, many elderly, widowed or disabled.

— Jennifer Steiner/MCC

Suriname ends land deal with Colony Mennonites that would have impacted forests

The government of Suriname has scrapped plans to allow Colony Mennonites from Bolivia and other countries to purchase about 74,000 acres of land. Indigenous politicians and conservation groups criticized the arrangement on climate and transparency grounds.

Die Mennonitische Post and El Deber reported Suriname had approved a pilot project allowing the settlement of 50 Mennonite families, most from Bolivia. Delegates from colonies in Bolivia, Mexico and Belize traveled to Suriname almost monthly last year.

Thousands of acres had been purchased. The proposed settlement was based on a roughly 115-square-mile section of land, with the possibility of expanding to an area ten times bigger.

More than 90% of Suriname is covered by Amazon rainforest, and environmental experts warned about the risks of deforestation. The Suriname Parliament processed the issue and rejected the land deal in March after critics highlighted a lack of compliance with established rules.

Unidentified Mennonite sources told media outlets that information received from the government in recent months was different than what was promised earlier. Many decided to no longer participate in the project, which was facilitated by Dutch company Terra Invest. — Anabaptist World

MC USA initiative encourages climate-change actions

Mennonite Church USA is focusing on climate justice concerns through the “Learn, Pray, Join: Climate Justice: Seeking Shalom” initiative in April and May.

The campaign seeks to bring awareness to intertwining climate and social concerns, such as extreme weather events, agricultural challenges, species extinction and human suffering, while offering hope and ways to join in efforts to bring about climate justice.

MC USA has online resources at mennoniteusa.org to learn about the causes and effects of climate change, as well as innovations in energy efficiency, alternative energy sources and reduction of carbon emissions. Upcoming webinars are:

- “Faith, Food, Soil and Climate” May 13. Panelists Levi Geyer, Elana Gingerich, Yujin Kim, Jolene Miller and Heather Wolfe will explore how growing and preparing food can nourish mind, body and spirit, while building healthy soils, lowering greenhouse gas emissions and creating more just and resilient communities.
- “Energy Efficiency and Faithful Action” May 30. Panelists Amy Huser, Nelson Kilmer and Eric Sauder will share how they have sought justice and healing for their neighbors and planet by leading their congregations and communities toward energy efficiency.

Previous webinars focused on “Indigenous Justice and Climate Justice” on April 2 and “Love God, Love Your Neighbor: Spiritual Practices That Nurture Life” on April 15. — Jessica Griggs/MC USA
STUDENTS at Eastern Mennonite University and Bethel College called for a cease-fire in Gaza with their voices, bodies and two large bells in multiday demonstrations in March and early April.

Activities at EMU in Harrisonburg, Va., addressed not only Israel’s military response and siege of Gaza following an Oct. 7 incursion into Israel by Hamas militants, but also relative silence of EMU administrators. EMU’s Student Government Association had previously sent a letter to EMU administration and board members asking for a statement supporting a cease-fire. About 80 EMU students, faculty and staff walked out of EMU President Susan Schultz Huxman’s State of the University address March 18 because the institution had not made a public statement supporting a cease-fire. The group grew to about 100 people on Thomas Plaza who sang antiwar songs and shared stories as they called on EMU to speak out.

The demonstration marked the beginning of three days of ringing the campus bell every four seconds — each toll representing one of the more than 33,000 people killed in Palestine and Israel since the start of the war.

Schultz’s office released a statement March 19 condemning the violence in Palestine and Israel, calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, protection of all civilians and the release of all hostages.

Bethel’s Community for Justice and Peace, a student-led group on the North Newton, Kan., campus, invited community members to an April 3 protest and vigil to mourn lives lost in the conflict. Participants gathered on the lawn in front of the Administration Building to sing before three days of ringing Bethel’s historic bell.

Speakers at the event called on the U.S. government to support a permanent cease-fire, investment in aid to Gaza, release of all hostages and prisoners and divestment from weapons of war across the Middle East.

“In 1969, the Bethel College Peace Club, which at that time included my own grandmother, rang this bell for 48 hours to commemorate the 48,000-plus U.S. soldiers who had died in Vietnam at that time,” said Josué Coy Dick. “In doing so, they sought to make real a small part of the immense destruction that war had wrought. This week, we ring this bell again, and for the very same reason: to help us all feel in our bones the magnitude of 33,000 deaths — one hour of ringing for every thousand lives lost in the current conflict between Hamas and Israel.”

In a statement on social media, the college affirmed the student group’s position and asked the broader Bethel community to call on the government to “divest intelligently from weapons of war across the Middle East.”

“Concerning the current war between Israel and the Palestinian people in particular, we affirm that a lasting ceasefire, increased humanitarian aid, release of all hostages and political prisoners, and divestment from Israel’s weapons of war are an important yet limited and insufficient response to this multifaceted conflict,” Bethel stated on Facebook.
Public television highlights diversity efforts at EMU

Eastern Mennonite University celebrated the premiere of a short documentary focused on diversity, equity and inclusion practices with a glitzy watch party March 21 in the Campus Center.

Viewpoint with Dennis Quaid, a nationally syndicated public television program, features EMU in a four-and-a-half minute segment that is part of an episode distributed to stations across the United States in late April and early May. It is available online at viewpointproject.com.

The premiere included video appearances by Quaid and fellow actor Billy Porter. "While we’ve made great strides, there’s always room for improvement," Quaid said. "Advocates who are steadfast in their mission for inclusion can be found in just about every industry, as we’re about to see."

Viewpoint visited the campus in October to highlight how EMU advances DEI as a peace and justice university. Interviews included President Susan Schultz Huxman, vice president for DEI Jackie Font-Guzmán and 2019 graduate DeVantae Dews.

In comments at the event, Huxman shared about EMU’s DEI progress. A quarter of first-year students identified as people of color in 2017, and that figure rose to 44% last fall. Huxman said the producers of the Viewpoint series were motivated to "find the gems" where DEI has taken root in positive ways and chose EMU as an example. — Ryan Cornell/EMU

Fresno seminary dedicates new conversation space

A place to sit, think and talk at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary has been dedicated to Elmer and Phyllis Martens.

Elmer Martens was a writer, professor of Old Testament and former president of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary) and first pastor of Butler Avenue MB Church in Fresno. Phyllis Martens taught at Pacific Bible Institute, now FPU, an author and a counselor in local public schools.

They were married for 60 years after meeting when he was a student at the seminary and she was teaching at Pacific Bible Institute. Both died in 2016.

Friends gathered at the seminary April 12 to remember the couple. Speakers included two of the Martens’ four children, Fran Martens Friesen, associate professor of English and director of FPU’s writing program, and Lauren Martens, a former community organizer and Colorado state council director with Service Employees International Union.

"What I remember most was his desire to share his faith and his church with everyone around him," Martens Friesen said of her father. "He took countless neighbors to church and kids to vacation Bible school, and other kid-friendly events. He also regularly opened his home to neighbors for Bible studies and church families as well as missionary families. Church — the community of the people of God — was always, always forefront in his mind and heart."

Other speakers included former seminary presidents and faculty members Larry Martens and Lynn Jost, as well as Rhonda Dueck, who oversaw the project.

— Wayne Steffen/FPU
Inclusion advocate to speak at EMU commencement

Jose Koshy, a business leader and advocate for international students and diversity, equity and inclusion, will deliver the keynote address May 5 at Eastern Mennonite University’s commencement.

Koshy has held management roles at several telecommunications companies. He is executive vice president of Tribocor Technologies Inc., a specialty manufacturer in the energy industry based in Houston.

Koshy, an Anabaptist beliefs follower, is engaged in philanthropy and community activism. Their contributions to EMU have amplified the university’s diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, establishing scholarships for international students and fostering a culture of belonging through inclusive excellence grants.

President Susan Schultz Huxman described Koshy as “a great storyteller, and his own journey through EMU as an international student is one of those beautiful stories.” Koshy credits the mentorship of former Eastern Mennonite College academic dean Ira Miller and learning resources director Milo Stahl — who loved and nurtured students of all colors, faiths and cultures — as foundational to his advocacy.

Koshy attended Eastern Mennonite College for three years before transferring to James Madison University and earning a bachelor’s degree in communications, a program not then offered at EMC. — EMU

Tabor professors to address separate commencements

Tabor College professors David Faber and David Stevens will speak at commencement May 4 in Richert Auditorium.

The college is holding two ceremonies, recognizing undergraduate students at 10 a.m. and graduate students at 2 p.m. Faber will give the morning address, and Stevens will follow in the afternoon.

In his 40th year at Tabor, Faber is professor of philosophy and religious studies. He has chaired the humanities division and served as director for the Carson Center for Global Engagement and director of institutional research.

“I am honored to be invited to deliver the 2024 commencement address to our Tabor undergraduates,” Faber said. “This group of students began their college careers amid the COVID-19 pandemic and persevered through really difficult circumstances. I hope to convey my and my colleagues’ affection and admiration for these students’ accomplishments.”

Stevens arrived at Tabor in 2019 and taught in the teacher education department. He launched the college’s master of education program in neuroscience and trauma in 2021.

“I have been deeply moved by the unwavering support extended by the administration and faculty toward our graduate programs and students,” he said. “I hope I can convey the amazing opportunities that a graduate degree will afford them and an appreciation for their God-given gifts that can be used to change lives.”

Commencement is a ticketed event and not open to the public. — Tabor College

AMBS recognizing 22 graduates April 27

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is holding its commencement service at 3 p.m. April 27 in the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount on the AMBS campus in Elkhart, Ind. The service honors 22 candidates completing degrees and certificates.

Six students have earned a master of divinity degree, six a master of arts in theology and global Anabaptism, four a master of arts in Christian formation, one a master of arts in theology and peace studies, four a graduate certificate in theological studies and one a graduate certificate in spiritual direction.

Nelson Okanya of Lancaster, Pa., is bringing the commencement address. He is president of World Serving Leaders, the nonprofit division of the Center for Servicing Leadership in Pittsburgh; and chair of the Global Mission Fellowship, a 74-member global network facilitated by Mennonite World Conference.

Previously, he served as a pastor and as president of Eastern Mennonite Missions. A trained executive and leadership coach, Okanya holds a master of divinity degree from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Va., and a doctorate in intercultural studies from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif. — AMBS

Fresno Pacific breaks ground on baseball stadium

Fresno Pacific University broke ground on its field of dreams Feb. 21, signaling the beginning of work on Daniel Martin Stadium.

Funded by a $3 million gift the Daniel R. Martin Family Foundation and a lead gift from Valley Iron Inc. and the Briscoe family, the facility will include a new concession stand and restroom, covered stadium seating for 700, press box and locker room. The three-phase upgrade will be unveiled at the start of the 2025 baseball season.

“This facility promises to be much more than just a structure; it will stand as a beacon of opportunity, community and excellence for our baseball program and indeed for our entire university community,” President André Stephens said at the groundbreaking event.

Oscar Hirschhorn, head baseball coach at FPU since the team’s inception in 2006, has led the Sunbirds to seven regional postseason appearances, three World Series (NAIA and NCCAA) and back-to-back World Series championships. — FPU

Members of the Fresno Pacific University community celebrate the beginning of construction of Daniel Martin Stadium on Feb. 21. MEGAN LEBLANC/FPU
BEGINNING IN OCTOBER, Laban Peachey Center at Hesston College underwent renovations to serve the evolving needs of several departments, including visual arts and aviation.

The visual arts department needed a new home after the Friesen Center, named for program founder Paul Friesen, was repurposed to serve the budding School of Engineering in 2022.

“It was the best way we could maximize the space we have on campus,” said art professor Joshua Cross. “Friesen was the best fit for the needs of the new engineering program in terms of classrooms, office space, labs and the like, without scattering the entire program across campus.”

The renovated space includes two classrooms, one for 2D creation and lecture and the other for 3D creation; the relocated Regier-Friesen Gallery; and an outdoor patio.

The patio will primarily serve as an event space, but Cross has a vision to erect a sculpture garden around this space to honor Friesen’s love of sculpting.

“The layout of our new space is much more open and flows better between classrooms,” Cross said. “Tools and equipment can easily be shared between the studios, and the open concept will promote more collaboration between the 2D and 3D spaces.”

Laban Peachey Center now also houses a classroom for the School of Aviation. As aviation’s primary classroom, it gives the program a presence on campus.

The space will also be used to prepare for the National Intercollegiate Flying Association competition.

The renovations include storage space for performing arts and a golf simulator for the golf team.

The renovations were made possible by an anonymous donation.
Trump’s Bible and ours

I’M DELIGHTED to be on the advisory committee for MennoMedia’s forthcoming Anabaptist Community Bible. It's an edition of the Common English Bible with marginal notes from more than 500 Anabaptist study groups across North America.

There’s an introduction to each book of the Bible, in addition to topical essays on subjects many of us have questions about.

My hope is that the Anabaptist Community Bible reinvigorates our love for the Bible as we prepare to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism in 2025.

When we were imagining this Bible, we did not realize Donald Trump would be promoting an edition of the King James Version called the God Bless the USA Bible (page 54).

As it turns out, the Bible we’ve been working on is a perfect counter to Trump’s. There’s no cross on the cover of Trump’s Bible, rather, the American flag. This Bible includes the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Pledge of Allegiance and the lyrics to Lee Greenwood’s 1984 hit, “God Bless the USA” (also known as “Proud to Be an American”).

American civil religion — with its hymns, founding patriarchs and sacred documents — has always tried to mimic what authentic faith offers. Pandering to Christian nationalists, the God Bless the USA Bible marries American civil religion with Trumpism and patriotism. It’s a transparently cynical way to garner support from Trump’s most trustworthy voting bloc: White evangelical Christians.

The problems with this Bible are deeper than the political motivations. The God Bless the USA Bible is an affront to the very scriptures it contains. It places the United States and its founding documents (and a patriotic country song) on the same plane as scripture, though they have nothing to do with biblical principles and teachings.

It promises not to offer any critique of the nation’s sins — the displacement of Indigenous people and the occupation of their land, racialized slavery and the legacy of racism that has followed it.

Aside from the idolatry of plastering an American flag and U.S. founding documents on a Bible, the version of America that Trump is calling his followers back to is full of sin, prejudice and death. It victimizes LGBTQ people, immigrants, people of color, women and almost every vulnerable minority.

Trump is trying to marry Christianity with the worst parts of U.S. culture and history. His own statements and actions assault even the noble parts of American government and society: democracy, a free press, the peaceful transfer of power.

IT’S NO SIN to be proud of one’s homeland. I am proud of my mine: Egypt. But my pride in no way blinds me to Egypt’s problems. Nor does it cause me to believe in the supremacy of my homeland.

As a Christian, I do not think any nation is more worthy than another. More than that, I believe our true homeland is something we are partnering with God now to create — and also anticipating as we await the return of our Messiah.

Nationalism of any sort is an affront to the teachings of Jesus and the Bible to welcome strangers and love our neighbors and enemies.

Jesus’ offer of salvation and liberation cannot be tied to any nation-state. The legacy of Christendom in Europe — thoroughly secular societies where church-state unions once ruled — shows us Trump is leading Christians on a path of destruction.

Anabaptists have resisted nationalistic faith from our beginning in 1525. Our spiritual ancestors refused to participate in the state church and its sacraments. Some paid with their lives for their beliefs.

It is fundamentally Anabaptist to resist a Bible baptized into American civil religion and steeped in Christian nationalism.

I AM PROUD, then, to be part of releasing a Bible that highlights our anti-nationalist tradition. The timing of its release couldn’t be better.

The Bible is under enough assault as it is. Too often it is seen as an esoteric, outdated book. The Anabaptist Community Bible hopes to inspire people to engage with the Bible’s prophetic words, relevant for our time.

With the advent of the God Bless the USA Bible, I am even more excited that we are offering a Bible that tells a different and, dare I say, better story.
Chores and employment

The impressions of childhood are those that last longest and cut deepest.
— Virginia Woolf

I TOOK MY SON to the doctor a couple of weeks ago to make sure he wasn’t dying from what turned out to be hives. While we waited for the doctor, my son started reading educational charts on the wall, including one that outlined age-appropriate chores.

Starting with 2- and 3-year-olds (put toys away and feed the dog), the chart covered each age group up to 10 years old (help with laundry, clean bathroom, vacuum).

We were pleased to find that we did pretty well with this chart. Far better than the food plate. (Five to seven servings of fruits or vegetables a day? Be reasonable.)

Every source of parental advice, including the pediatrician, tells parents to include chores in our kids’ routine. Chores give kids a sense of agency and accomplishment. Chores teach children to be responsible and part of a community.

In recent years, as my eldest children leave home, I’ve discovered another reason to make kids do chores.

My daughters are preparing to enter the long season of life in which one has to make money. While mine are still finishing school, my children move in and out of jobs, exploring different things. I’ve heard frustrated parents complain that their young adult children won’t pursue certain jobs for one reason or another: boring, soul-crushing, stressful, unfulfilling, demeaning.

Sometimes these are absolutely legitimate reasons for refusing a job. Other times, the reasons seem to be a socially acceptable way of saying, “I’m too good for this.”

THAT SUPERIOR ATTITUDE doesn’t always start with the kid.

One mom, who on one hand complained that her son moved back home and didn’t have a job, rather pompously explained to me, “He didn’t go to college to work retail.”

Years ago, a mom told me something similar. When discussing our elementary-age children and chores, she proudly told me that her daughter “has better things to do.”

Indeed, in many ways, kids are told by their parents and society that they are too important to do menial tasks, such as taking out the trash and mopping the kitchen floor. When we encourage, even push, them to put their energies into schoolwork and extracurriculars at the expense of chores, they learn the constructed hierarchy of white collar over blue and the status of work.

This hierarchy includes physical labor. Consider that parents drive their children across state lines so they can play sports. Spending a weekend kicking the ball around a field is a worthy activity for them. Pushing a lawn mower around the yard is not; they have better things to do.

It becomes an even stronger message when nonfamily members are paid to do our chores. A child who grows up watching a stranger clean their toilet learns that this activity is not for them. As parents we can emphasize paying a living wage and the dignity of each human being. And yet . . . cleaning toilets isn’t for us.

When I see young people struggling to enter the workforce, it seems that sometimes their options are limited not by what they can do but what they are willing to do.

WHEN I SEE young people struggling to enter the workforce, it seems that sometimes their options are limited not by what they can do but by what they are willing to do. Perhaps it is a stretch, but I see a connection between job security and a childhood chore chart.

We are on this Earth to love God, our neighbors and ourselves. This means folding clothes, walking the dog, pulling hair out of the shower drain and constructing beautiful birthday cakes. Love is changing the diapers of our children . . . and our parents. Love is helping people in a classroom, hospital or courtroom. Sometimes we’re the receptionist or clerk. Sometimes we’re the teacher, doctor or lawyer. Sometimes we’re the janitor.

It is all important and worthy. It is all on the chore chart.

Sarah Kehrberg lives in the Craggy Mountains of western North Carolina with her husband and three children.
AS A PASTOR, I have become accustomed to trusting that the Holy Spirit will move. This trust becomes particularly strong on Saturday evenings when I am still working on my sermon.

While this trust works well when I am forced to meet my own deadlines for Sunday morning worship, I have noticed that I struggle to figure out what trusting the Spirit means communally. Trusting the Spirit in my own life sounds good, but how does that translate into trusting that the Spirit is moving in my church community, among the people?

Trust takes time to build. One unique thing about the church is that we are placing trust in a community. We are trusting others not to harm us. We are trusting them with our personal lives and spiritual well-being.

We also trust the church to make good decisions that will benefit the community and honor the divine. It takes a collective effort to discern how the Spirit is moving within the congregation and to trust that we are seeing the same thing.

WHEN THE COVID PANDEMIC BEGAN, the church I pastored had to change the ways we met together and served the larger community. One decision was to close our community center.

The center was a form of outreach that served as a safe place for neighborhood families to have a free meal and build community on Friday evenings. Several of our people were passionate about the center and saw the difference it made in people’s lives.

I was at the church for about eight months before the pandemic began, and I had not yet had the opportunity to build strong relationships with those who attended the community center.

Once things began to reopen, we had to decide if we would continue to put energy into the center. Many people were passionate about it reopening. I was skeptical. I did not know if it was the best use of our energy. I did not know if it would work out and if we would get the same buy-in.

I let my doubts be known, but the people wanted to keep it going. Eventually the center reopened and began thriving again. The families returned. More volunteers began to sign up. Things went well. The Spirit was moving, but I was standing in the way because of my doubts.

I needed to trust that the people who were passionate about the community center could see how the Spirit was moving. I needed to trust those who had seen the Spirit work in their own lives and communities.

There are times when skepticism is warranted. But even then, we need to be able to trust the communities of which we are a part.

The church is not about me. It is not about the pastor or the church chair. It is about the community’s wholeness. It is about serving God together and trusting that the Spirit is moving. It is trusting that we are all doing our best to discern how God is calling us to act.

THE BOOK OF ACTS has an amazing story about this. In Acts 10, Peter goes to see Cornelius, “a devout man who feared God” but a Gentile. Through an encounter with the divine, Peter and Cornelius meet, and Peter shares the good news of God’s inclusive love. The Holy Spirit falls upon all the people listening.

After this profound moment, Peter has to go and report what happened to the church at Jerusalem. He tells the apostles everything that has happened. I’m sure there was some skepticism, because the apostles had not seen this experience. They had not imagined the Holy Spirit would be given to Gentiles.

Instead of standing in the way, they praised God’s goodness.

“When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life’ ” (Acts 11:18).

The apostles trusted what Peter had seen. They trusted that the Spirit was moving, not only within them but within the world.

Church is about trust. It is about trusting the people we are with. It is about trusting that God is moving.

I have learned that I am not always the one who knows best. Sometimes the best thing to do is trust the Spirit and get out of the way. ●

Jerrell Williams is pastor of Shalom Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan. A 2015 graduate of Bethel College, he has a master of divinity degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.
Ushers, not bouncers

Then [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

— Luke 24:50-51

I FIND IT NOTEWORTHY that Jesus didn’t withdraw his blessing from these friends that failed him. No, he didn’t withdraw his blessing, he withdrew while blessing.

I suggest you read that again. Let it sink in a moment or two. Personally, this statement hits me like a punch in the gut. Leaves me breathless and doubled over by the sheer force of it. What kind of love is this?

Jesus was well practiced at blessing, which might explain his ability to end like he did. Throughout the Gospels we find him, with great regularity, blessing the Father, the food or the flock that was his. I suppose this final act should come as no surprise then. Heart and hands wide, words of love on his lips. But still, it leaves me in a puddle on the floor.

To bless can mean to praise or to speak well of. It also means to confer what is beneficial upon another. We’re told to do it to those who oppose us, as well (Matthew 5:44).

Most of Jesus’ blessings involved his hands, which I picture as the large, strong hands of a carpenter, but with a tender touch. I see his hands placed over the eyes of the blind, on the sweet heads of children, or pressed against the exposed skin of the leprous ones. I see them reaching down to raise and release an adulterous woman, stretched out to receive a drink from a Samaritan outcast, or used to restore the ear of the (perceived) enemy’s servant.

And I see Jesus’ hands holding Judas’ feet — oh, friend — washing and wiping them mere moments before his betrayal. I see them breaking bread and passing the cup, all for the life of others and us.

**If we’re going to position ourselves between others and Jesus, we ought to be opening the door, not closing it.**

and wiping them mere moments before his betrayal. I see them breaking bread and passing the cup, all for the life of others and us.

WHILE JESUS SOUGHT to bless, there was often countermovement from others, some in his own tight-knit Twelve, who sometimes served more as bodyguards and bouncers than blessers.

How often we do the same. We position ourselves as patrollers and policers, seeking to protect. But who and what are we protecting? Surely not Jesus. More likely than not, it’s our own agendas or theologies, our ways, wants or wishes.

We don’t always get this right. Two (out of many) scripture stories illustrate this for me.

In the first story, the disciples were preventing children from coming to Jesus to receive his blessing. They physically stood between him and the children. What a terrifying visual!

Eugene Peterson put Jesus’ response to this occurrence in no uncertain terms: “The disciples shoed [the children] off. But Jesus was Irate and let them know it: ‘Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me.” (Mark 10:13-14, Message).

“Don’t ever get between them and me.”

Let us be careful, friends, where we position ourselves. Jesus doesn’t need bodyguards or bouncers who keep people out. He needs openers and ushers who bring them in. If we’re going to position ourselves between others and Jesus, we ought to be opening the door, not closing it.

**THAT THOUGHT LEADS** to the second story where some bold and brave ones got it right. A group of friends carried a paralyzed man — who knows how far? — to where Jesus was (Mark 2:1-12). Unable to draw near because of the crowds, they were undeterred. They climbed to the roof, cut a hole, hoisted their friend up and then lowered him down, right at the feet of Jesus, right in the path of blessing. How pleased Jesus must have been!

It’s here I pause to ponder: What prevents us from coming to God? What stands between us and him? Is it a person, place or thing? Ideology or theology? Rules or regulations? Policies or protocols? Shame, fear, pride or pretense?

All I can tell you is I keep hearing Jesus say, as he did concerning the children: Let them come to me.

“Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37).

“We’re told Jesus is the intermediary, standing between the Father and us. Not as a bouncer to keep people out but a door to usher them in (John 10:7).

I am not the determiner of who God chooses to spend time with, lay hands on and bless. May I open the way, not stand in it. •

Jenny Gehman, East Coast representative for Mennonite Women USA, is a spiritual director, freelance writer and retreat facilitator. She and her husband, Dan, attend James Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pa., and enjoy hosting friends and strangers from around the world. To sign up for her blog, visit jennygehman.com.
Losing the sense of home

THE HOUSE FINCHES are scouting our eaves for a place to build their nest. The motion lights? The decoration by the door? They dart in, heads the color of a Kansas sunset, narrating their search to the neighborhood in trills and whistles. Spring is here, and the birds are hunting for a home.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the apostle describes what it looks like to be at home in the church. Christ opened the way for everyone — Jews and Gentiles.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:13). Jesus “is our peace,” and he has created “in himself one new humanity in place of the two” (2:15).

Through Christ we are welcomed into the eternal communion of the Trinity, all having “access in one Spirit to the Father,” and thus we are “no longer strangers and aliens” but “members of the household of God” (2:18-19).

It’s a living household, built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” with Jesus as the cornerstone (2:20).

In Paul’s description, belonging to the household of God means believing in Jesus and becoming a people in him. Jesus is at the center (verse 20). We believe “the word of truth, the gospel” of Jesus, and we are formed as a “new humanity” in him (1:13; 2:15).

Paul goes on in chapters 4-6 to detail how Christians are called to order their lives in light of their convictions. It’s the sociological trifection: believing, belonging and behaving, all holding together in God, the one in whom we find our home.

The language of finding our home in God runs all through the scriptures. The Psalms speak of God as our “refuge” (2:12; 26:1; 62:8). He’s our “fortress” and “strong tower” (59:16; 61:3). “A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” (84:10).

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’ ” (Psalm 122:1).

I was.

I LOVE CHURCH. It’s the place where I’ve found community and learned what it means to follow Jesus. I came to faith because of the church, not in spite of its foibles. Paul’s words about being “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” ring true to my life (Ephesians 2:22).

When I was a young guy making my way in a big city where I didn’t know anybody, I found a church. When my wife and I were first married, we discovered community in a gathering of young couples in church. Our little sons swam in a clinking sea of toy cars with the other kids on the back pew of church. My family and I have moved for church and studied (and took out student loans) for church and made quesadillas for the church potluck.

Jesus people are our people. The church has been our home, and I long for others to find their heart’s home in Christ’s church. It’s a many-roomed mansion (John 14:2).

Come on in.

Which is why it’s such a great sadness when, because of wounds or exhaustion or drift, church doesn’t work for everyone. My family and I have been there, too. In the wake of Mennonite Church USA’s redirection a few years ago with the Repentance and Transformation resolution, which declared biblical views on sexuality and marriage “violence,” we and many others suddenly found ourselves homeless.

One minute we were sitting in the living room of our church home, then — vote — the house picked up and crab-walked to the left, and we found ourselves outside. We’re still out there.

One minute we were sitting in the living room of our church home, then — vote — the house picked up and crab-walked to the left, and we found ourselves outside.

IT SEEMS TO ME that much of the anxiety and upheaval many of our congregations are experiencing has to do with that loss of a sense of home. I think we’re all longing for it, a home where we can belong and believe and walk the Jesus way together.

“Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself” (Psalm 84:3). Our hearts need that: a place to be at rest. It’s not unchanged — which is impossible — but it is stable. There’s no way back to what was, not together, not anymore. Nevertheless.

Of course, in all of this we’re longing for something deeper still, not so much a place, but the One in whom we can all be at home (Revelation 21:3). He’s still where he always was.

Flourishing by simplifying

ABOVE MY KITCHEN SINK is a window, as there was in each of my grandparents’ homes. When I’m washing dishes, among other times, I often think of my Plain Mennonite and Amish ancestors. Though I live in a major city and engage with a technologically interconnected world, the basics of my life are the same as theirs: I cooperate with my neighbors for the common good. I weave my life together with others in my faith community. I share in our household’s tasks of putting meals on the table, caring for our home and garden and enjoying times of rest and play.

Those basics are the same also in Brenda L. Yoder’s book Uncomplicated: Simple Secrets for a Compelling Life. She seeks to distill the wisdom of previous generations and current rural Mennonite and Amish communities for all of us who struggle with more diffuse and often harried lives.

For Anabaptist readers, the book can spark reflection on the shared values at the core of our tradition. Uncomplicated reminds us that our faith is countercultural, whether we are Plain-dressing or not. And it is a resource to meet the challenges of life today.

For example, we know that social media and advertising aim to make us dissatisfied with what we have and who we are. Yet we still need resources on resisting that. Uncomplicated has abundant practical advice for those who choose to engage with social media on countering the harmful effects. (And none of us is fully beyond the reach of advertising.)

Yoder advises readers on how to see through the false messages of consumerism and perfectionism. It is difficult to identify these notions and turn from them to the values that ground us. Living simply is challenging, as I saw from many facets during the 10 years that I wrote a column by that name for Mennonite World Review, a predecessor of Anabaptist World.

Uncomplicated is like a life coach in book form. Reflection questions in each chapter offer an opportunity for readers to see how we sometimes get in our own way as we try to live simply. With “scripture application” throughout the book, the exclusively male language for God can be an obstacle, but not an insurmountable one.

Yoder recognizes that living simply is much more than decluttering and minimalist decor. The chapter on interdependence was my favorite. Yoder draws on her training as a mental health counselor, distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy forms of relying on each other.

In Anabaptist communities, the ethic of service orients us toward the needs of others while making it difficult at times to ask for help when we need it. For women, it can be even harder to name our needs. Race and class too often guide how we think about who is serving and who is served. A more excellent way is to remember, as Yoder writes, “Love gives but also receives.”

AN INTERDEPENDENCE that encourages mutual flourishing requires daily effort not only in action but restraint: honoring our own boundaries and those of others. This is also an act of stewardship, Yoder notes. Sabbath rest is a core example of this. It is difficult to honor the sabbath, especially when for many of us Sundays can be filled to the brim with volunteer roles in our congregations. Yoder encourages times and seasons of rest, including from volunteering. Instead of getting stuck in an attitude of “If I don’t do it, no one else will,” she writes, “Interdependence says a person with a gift is waiting to take their part of the body of Christ while you step away and rest.”

A weaker aspect of this book is that Yoder overstates her case in contrasting our lives with the lives of our “wiser forebears” and Plain Anabaptists. As long as humanity has existed, we have found ways to harm ourselves and others and to focus on penultimate things rather than the ultimate. To say that past generations and current Plain Anabaptist communities have less-complicated lives doesn’t necessarily mean they have healthier ones.

Yet amid our varied struggles, the values that Yoder lifts up are excellent ones for us all to aspire to live out more fully. Uncomplicated can aid readers who want practical suggestions and guiding questions to help them create a life of flourishing in their homes and communities.

Celeste Kennel-Shank is a Mennonite pastor in Chicago and author of What You Sow Is a Bare Seed: A Countercultural Christian Community during Five Decades of Change (2023).
‘Christian America’ debate spreads

As Trump hawks Bible, religious leaders question his image as defender of faith

JIM WALLIS and Donald Trump believe in their own ways that the Bible can save America.

Trump, who recently endorsed the God Bless the USA Bible, a book that combines the King James Version with the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence, has characterized Christian scripture as both a symbol of power and a sign to his followers that their way of life is under threat.

“We must make America pray again,” the former president said in a YouTube and social media promotional video released in Holy Week.

For Wallis, the evangelical Christian minister and longtime social justice activist, the Bible’s substance, not its symbolism, holds the power to address America’s ills and save democracy. Speaking at a suburban Chicago bookstore on April 8, Wallis quoted a passage from the Book of Genesis that claims all human beings are made in God’s image. As such, he said, any attack on democracy is an attack on something holy.

Wallis agrees that American democracy is in crisis and needs to be saved, but it won’t be accomplished by Americans giving in to their “worst demons” and tearing each other apart.

“We need to go deeper than politics,” he told the 20 or so people who had come out to hear him talk about his new book, The False White Gospel. The book turns to a series of biblical stories — from Genesis’ creation account to the parable of the good Samaritan — largely calling to end the polarization and fear that divide the country.

Despite the decline of organized religion, faith and politics still make a volatile combination in a country where the Republican candidate, a thrice-divorced former reality TV star with a history of sexual misconduct, is running as a defender of the Christian faith.

That fact was apparent as Wallis’ book tour took him to cable news shows, yielding segments remarkable for their ardent questions about the meaning of Christianity, not from the evangelical Christian minister and longtime social justice activist, but from his hosts.

It’s just another cheap tchotchke to sell to his followers.”

Amanda Henderson, director of the Institute for Religion, Politics & Culture at Iliff School of Theology in Denver and host of the “Complexified” podcast, said Trump is one of a long line of politicians and leaders in history who understand the power of religion as political tool.

“At a time when so many people feel a sense of loneliness or disconnection, he is tapping into the desire we all have to be part of something bigger,” she said. “We can’t dismiss that underlying need that people have to feel a sense of connection and belonging.”

EVEN AS SOME religious leaders oppose Trump’s use of faith, said Henderson, they can’t afford to cede the discussion of faith to the candidate. The outrage expressed by Reid, Scarborough and others shows that the debate has spread beyond clergy to Christians in the media and other sectors.

Brian Kaylor, author of Baptizing America, a forthcoming book about mainline Protestants’ role in promoting God-and-country patriotism, said that, as a result, religion has become one more thing tearing the country apart.

That was not always the case. In the 1950s and 1960s, Americans rallied to a broad, consensual civil religion, reflected in the adoption of “In God We Trust” as the national motto and to add “Under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. When translators of one of the most popular English translations of the Bible, the Revised Standard Version, finished their work after 15 years on the job, Kaylor pointed out, they presented President Harry Truman with a commemorative copy of the new translation in a Rose Garden ceremony.

At the time, 90% of Americans were
Christians and largely viewed religion in a positive light, said Kaylor. Today, 80% of Americans say religion’s influence is on the decline, according to a new poll, while more than half of Americans rarely or never darken a church door.

“Civil religion worked in the 1950s and 1960s,” said Kaylor. “It no longer works today.”

Calvin University history professor Kristin Du Mez said the God Bless the USA Bible is an attempt to fire up those who remain devoted, though the number of evangelical Christians is declining.

“He’s going to need every one of those evangelical votes,” Du Mez said.

She said Trump may be appealing to “comfort food Christian nationalism,” a version of patriotism familiar to older Christian voters who remember the heyday of civil religion.

“It was this more inclusive kind of Christian America, though if you weren’t Christian you just had to be quiet and go along,” said Du Mez, author of Jesus and John Wayne.

In Trump’s hands, that idea has been turned into a weapon, with Trump’s Christian followers portrayed as the “real Americans” pitted against not only non-Christians but Christians who don’t share their political views.

In this sense, Trump is trying to turn a bygone Christian consensus into a source of power, a message he made plain at a meeting of evangelical Christian broadcasters: “If I get in, you’re going to be using that power at a level that you’ve never used before.”

TOBIN MILLER SHEARER, a professor of history at the University of Montana (and a member of the Anabaptist World Inc. Board of Directors), points out that civil religion traditionally linked Christian faith with the defense of democracy. Trump, Shearer argued in a recent essay, is instead using God to motivate people to undermine democracy.

“Regardless of the outcome of the 2024 election, the switch from historical claims of divine authority for democracy to divine authority to challenge democracy is already obvious and apparent,” he said.

Princeton historian Kevin Kruse, author of One Nation Under God, a study of Eisenhower-era God-and-country politics, said some of Trump’s supporters may recall the earlier version of civil religion and long for that era.

NPR political correspondent Sarah McCammon, whose book The Exevangelicals was prompted by her experiences covering Trump’s 2016 campaign, said: “I don’t think most White evangelicals are supporting Trump because they think he’s a devout Christian. It’s because they think he will be a champion for them. That distinction is really critical.”

Classifieds
classifieds@anabaptistworld.org

EMPLOYMENT — GENERAL

Eastern Mennonite Missions seeks a full-time development director. Requires a highly relational mission-minded individual who can effectively communicate God’s call to mission. Cross-cultural mission experience required. Development experience or willingness to undergo training is required. Apply by May 31 at emm.org/employment. Begins July 1. (5)

EMPLOYMENT — CHURCH

A welcoming congregation. First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, is seeking two pastors to fill a pastoral team. Applicants should be seminary trained, with some pastoral experience preferred. If interested, contact Sharon Witmer Yoder, Indiana-Michigan conference minister. (5)

Landis Valley Christian Fellowship (landisvalleyfellowship.org) in Lancaster, Pa., is looking for a 2/3 FTE or FT lead pastor to shepherd this Anabaptist congregation. Our current pastor plans to retire after being with us for 14 years. We are a small, growing and active community of believers involved in outreach and missions both locally (housing, food pantry, community breakfasts) and abroad (PROMESA Christian school in Cusco, Peru). Ideal start date of 09/01/2024. Contact Tom Gruber at pastorsearch@landisvalleyfellowship.org. (4-5)

Martinsburg Mennonite Church, a growing fellowship located in south-central Pennsylvania, is looking for a half-time pastor. We have deep roots in Anabaptist faith and are affiliated with Lancaster Mennonite Conference, whose guidelines will be used to determine a support package. Direct inquiries to judithott12345@gmail.com. (4-6)

Seattle Mennonite Church seeks a full-time Pastor of Faith Formation to join our pastoral team. Full job description and supporting documents can be found on our website. Contact Eric Massanari, Executive Conference Minister of Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference, if you are interested: eric@pnmc.org. (4-5)

Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship in Boise, Idaho, is seeking a full-time pastor. HPMF is a dynamic congregation of about 60 serving in local, state and international missions. We value peace, justice and simplicity. HPMF is a member of Mennonite Church USA and in the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference. Inquiries should be sent to Eric Massanari at eric@pnmc.org. (4-5)

North Newton, Kan., guest housing — 316-283-5231; vdazsander@cox.net. (1-11)

$1.80 a word. Send ads to classifieds@anabaptistworld.org. For information about display ads or online advertising, see anabaptistworld.org/ads. To inquire about display ads or online advertising, email advertising@anabaptistworld.org or call 316-283-3670.
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Pacifism still exceptional

John D. Roth helpfully recognizes that even Mennonites and Amish “cannot escape culture’s profound influence” (“Not as exceptional as we think,” April). Still, there remains one theological point of Anabaptist exceptionalism: the historic peace church tradition. However imperfectly preached and practiced, pacifism as a formally stated conviction is the most consequential line of separation. While Roth includes it as just one of the markers of distinction, in my experience of having worked within and across peace-loving, multifaith and ecumenical communities, conscientious objection to war is the clearest marker of a prothetic minority.

David L. Myers, Ocean Pines, Md.

The clear, natural reading

When I was growing up, evangelists came preaching premillennial, postmillennial and amillennial versions of Jesus’ return. Each believed they understood the clear, natural reading of scripture. I suspect Jesus will surprise everyone in how he returns. Later there was conflict about women in leadership. Again, each side believed they understood the clear, natural reading of scripture. Some stayed, and some left to form another church.

Later our church spent two years searching together as the body of Christ about LGBTQ people. Some started with the belief that the clear, natural reading of scripture meant there should be no LGBTQ members in the church. At the end of these years, I had to decide my own understanding of the clear, natural reading of scripture: What would Jesus do?

Some members left. Most of the rest agreed that LGBTQ is a Jesus-loved, God-given type of personality and that for them, as for the rest of us, sexual activity should be limited to marriage. When that became our decision, we found that there were members who had not previously been able to share about their lives for fear of rejection. Please look more deeply at how the scriptures are interpreted. You might be surprised at how this helps the hurting people in your congregations.

Albert J. Steiner, Evanston, Ill.

Complementary bodies

Homosexual relationships lack physical complementarity. Male and female bodies are complementary. Complementary things complete each other. Together, they make a whole. The experience of both types of bodies is important for the nurture of a child. (Physical complementarity is not to be confused with theological complementarianism, which defines men’s and women’s roles.) Exploration of the implications of these insights is the ongoing work of Christians in the church.

Brent A. Koehn, Elkhart, Ind.

The lonely crowd

Osiah Horst (Letters, April) says, “When everyone reaches out to his neighbor, there is no need for loneliness.” A better way to put it is that there is no need to be alone. There is a difference between being alone and loneliness. Loneliness is a mental health issue and is often hidden because people are afraid to say they are lonely. I would venture that there are lonely people in the Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference [of which Horst is a part]. There will always be lonely people in our congregations. Let's be alert for them.

Ruth Martin, London, Ont.

God’s image bearers

Regarding the April issue on welcoming people with disabilities: In early April we came back from a two-month stay in Sierra Leone, where our team of local Christians ministers to over 100 children with disabilities and their families. In an environment where people commonly consider children with disabilities to be demons and witches, we rejoiced as Ivril, a woman with Down syndrome, led our team in worship. On Easter morning we joined our friend Esther by the riverside to witness the baptism

Mideast two-state solution

Alain Epp Weaver exhorts us to “advocate for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, an end to Israel’s military occupation and peace and liberation for all the people in Palestine and Israel” (“Nakba redux,” January). I agree and think one way forward is to encourage and pray for a two-state solution for Israel/Palestine.

The United Nations approved a two-state plan, with Jerusalem under international control, in 1947; Israel accepted, while the Arab states rejected it, and war broke out. It again seemed within reach with the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, then fizzled. For most of three decades it has been shelved as opponents of a two-state plan have gained the political upper hand in Israel and Gaza (and colluded pre-Oct. 7). Their respective one-state designs for the lands between the Jordan and the Mediterranean have aimed to erase, not accommodate, their foe.

Israel’s present government claims “the Jewish people have an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel.” Beyond its military retaliation against Hamas, Israel’s famine-war on Gaza civilians and its settlers’ increasing bullying and killing on the West Bank stem from a dream of a Greater Israel without Palestinians, or their permanent, rightful, restive subjugation. Israel will and should forfeit outside sympathy and support, including from the U.S. government, if it continues this course.

Hamas, dominant in Gaza since 2007 and author of the barbarous Oct. 7 attacks, has its own one-state version: “Rais the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine” by wiping Israel (and non-Muslims) off the map. This strategy failed when used by the Arab states in 1948, 1967 and 1973 and then by the PLO: Israel only emerged stronger. It failed once more on Oct. 7. If tried again by another actor (such as Iran), it will likely bring down even more suffering, if that is imaginable, on the heads of Palestinians, while not destroying Israel.

Strong moral arguments exist for why a one-state-solution with full equality and rights for all citizens of an undivided Palestine — be they Jews, Muslims or Christians — is the ideal arrangement. This would require, however, that parties who’ve endured a bitter divorce now reconcile, remarry and live under one roof. There is “no glimmer of expectation, yet hope is strong,” in the words of the 2009 Kairos Palestine document.

The Israelis have built their state since 1948. If Palestinians are to achieve theirs, three things are needed. Israel, to save itself and to end its post-1967 occupations, needs a government that cooperates with, not subverts, Palestinians’ quest for a viable political entity. Palestinians must bridge internal divisions, abandon violence as the heroic, martyr-strewn path forward and find brave leaders able to say “yes” to less than the whole loaf. Finally, the U.S. should cosponsor, along with Arab states, a new U.N. Security Council resolution embedding a two-state solution in international law — and then tie future aid to progress toward that goal. This scenario requires the softening of hardened hearts and the cooling of fevered minds.

J Robert Charles, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Pastors oppose religious nationalism

A group of Christian pastors, theologians and scholars has signed a declaration committing to preaching on moral issues ahead of the 2024 election and opposing religious nationalism. “The very things that the prophets and that Jesus put at the center as primary are not being heard in the pews in this country,” said William J. Barber II, director of the Yale Center for Public Theology and Public Policy, during a conference that generated the statement. — Religion News Service

Protesters shut down Senate lunch

“Woe to you who eat while others go hungry,” shouted Christian pastors and laypeople. With arms linked, they stood between the food and cash registers in the U.S. Senate cafeteria and brought lunch to a standstill for about half an hour before Capitol Police completed arrests. Between 50 and 60 demonstrators demanding a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, as well as aid for the ever-shrinking food supply in Gaza, were arrested April 9 in the cafeteria. The protest was organized by Christians for a Free Palestine. Rabbi Alissa Wise, lead organizer for Rabbis for Ceasefire, told the protesters their actions were a “sign of solidarity and friendship” with Jews. — RNS

of Emmanuel, her 21-year-old son with cerebral palsy. To see him fully included in the church was a major step forward in our vision to see children with disabilities accepted as image bearers of God.

Jon and Heleen Yoder, Atmore, Ala.

Many ways to serve

I appreciated Eric Frey Martin’s article, “Are service programs dying?” (March). One of the photos highlighted Mennonite Voluntary Service volunteer Michaela Esau’s work with the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. As one of the coalition volunteers working with Apache Stronghold and Oak Flat, I saw the impact of Michaela’s work in mobilizing many other volunteers. Current MVS volunteer Deborah Yoder has continued that multiplying work.

For Mennonites, traditional service programs like MVS are just the tip of the iceberg. There are many other ways Mennonites volunteer. In the first seven years of the coalition’s life, it was led and staffed entirely by volunteers. Mennonite Action, a new Mennonite group working for peace in Gaza, has mobilized thousands of hours of volunteer time by Mennonites of all generations in the last five months. These are all part of our tradition of service.

Tim Nafziger, Ventura, Calif.

A coercive organization

My wife and I seek to be peacemakers as religious conscientious objectors to war and militarism. Despite our repeated responses in the negative, we continue to receive demands for funds to support a group that claims to be in the business of peace. We have been made aware that this group is involved in violent activities, including construction and use of bombs, murder of innocent people, probable complicity in genocide and degradation of the planet. We have received mailings asserting that if we are not willing to contribute voluntarily, they will help themselves to our funds. We are wondering whether other AW readers have had these experiences with the Internal Revenue Service and what they have done to stop this outrage.

Harold A. Penner, Akron, Pa.

Correction

In “Polio was painful. Exclusion was worse” by Eleanor Smith (April), the word “ableism” was missing in the following sentence: “Abled people thereby recognize that disabilities and chronic illnesses are not essentially personal misfortunes but rather — like racism, sexism, homophobia, classism — ableism can be changed.”

Join us at 7 p.m. EDT May 1 on AW’s Facebook and Youtube channels (youtube.com/@anabaptistworld) for our livestream with winners of The Voice, Girl Named Tom. Liechty siblings Bekah, Josh and Caleb will share about their life and music.
Donald Paul Foth

Donald (Don) Paul Foth, 90, of Harrisonburg, Va., died March 27, 2024, at Sentara RMH Medical Center. He was born on Dec. 17, 1933, in Hillsboro, Kan., to the late Jacob and Mary Plutt Foth. Don lived his childhood in Henderson, Neb., but was orphaned at the age of 16. He earned his B.S. from Friends University, Wichita, Kan., with a degree in accounting.

After his graduation, Don did alternative service as assistant accountant for Mennonite Central Committee in Akron, Pa., and served with Mennonite Church in Oregon. He completed his ministry at Salem Mennonite Church in Oregon, and he moved on to pastor Mennonite churches in Bloomington/Normal, Ill., Orrville and Hartville, Ohio. He taught Mennonite biblical studies. Through the rest of his life, he often taught classes in community colleges.

Foth was deeply affected by his experiences as he played a pivotal role in establishing Goshen College’s marine biology program. His contributions to marine biology and education culminated in the college naming the marine biology station and laboratory in his honor in 2009: the J.N. Roth Marine Biology Station. His influence extended beyond the classroom, as he mentored numerous innovative and easy-to-use microbiological testing methods and products. His products, methods and inventions are in use all over the world.

He is survived by his wife, Louise (Myers); son Jon (Shawn); daughter Jill (Nathan) Kletzing; seven grandchildren; and brothers Aaron and Galen. He was preceded in death by his parents and sister Ella Roth.

A memorial service will be held at 10:30 a.m. May 11 at Salem Mennonite Church. Memorial gifts may be made to the Southeast Keizer Community Center, in care of Salem Mennonite Church.

Jonathan N. Roth

Jonathan N. Roth, 86, professor emeritus of biology at Goshen College, died March 13, 2024, in Goshen, Ind. He taught at the college for 42 years, from 1962 to 2004.

He was born in the Willamette Valley in Albany, Ore., on March 2, 1938. He graduated Goshen College in 1959 before earning his doctorate from Oregon State University. He returned to his alma mater in 1962 and dedicated over four decades to shaping the minds of students and advancing scientific research.

His influence extended beyond the classroom, as he played a pivotal role in establishing Goshen College’s marine biology program. His contributions to marine biology and education culminated in the college naming the marine biology station and laboratory in his honor in 2009: the J.N. Roth Marine Biology Station. He invented and patented numerous innovative and easy-to-use microbiological testing methods and products. His products, methods and inventions are in use all over the world.

He is survived by his wife Mary Ann; his son, Steven Roth; his parents, Ruth and Urban Roth; and his wife, Louise (Myers); son Jon (Shawn); daughter Jill (Nathan) Kletzing; seven grandchildren; and brothers Aaron and Galen. He was preceded in death by his parents and sister Ella Newswanger.

A memorial service will be held at 10:30 a.m. May 11 at Salem Mennonite Church. Memorial gifts may be made to the Southeast Keizer Community Center, in care of Salem Mennonite Church.
parents-in-law, Orrin and Blanche Smucker.

A memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. May 5 at College Mennonite Church in Goshen.

Robert I. Schloneger

Robert I. Schloneger, 82, of Goshen, Ind., died March 25, 2024. He was born April 17, 1941, in Louis ville, Ohio, to Irvin and Irene (Falb) Schloneger.

On June 8, 1963, he married Enid Miller in Smithville, Ohio. She survives, along with three sons, Craig (Ann) Schloneger of Lititz, Pa., Kevin (Lisa) Schloneger of Indianapolis and Mark (Lisa) Schloneger of Indianapolis; one brother, David Sch loneger; and two great-grandchildren.

Other survivors include sisters Sandra (Jim) Bren nemann of Newburgh, Ind., and Faye (Marty) Bren nemann of Orrville, Ohio; a brother, Keith (Bev) Sch loneger of Dundee, Ohio; and a brother-in-law, Russ Hochstetter of Goshen.

Along with his parents, he was preceded in death by a daughter, Tricia Schloneger; a sister, Catherine Hochstetter; and a brother, David Schloneger.

He was a retired Mennonite pastor, teacher and mentor and had many hobbies and interests. He adored his wife and cherished time with his family. He was always happy to help others with his handyman skills. He was a master wood turner and enjoyed turning with friends Sherm Kaufman and Marion Yoder. He also enjoyed working on other woodworking projects and playing and watching sports.

With Enid, Bob served two years with Mennonite Voluntary Service in Puerto Rico, and he volunteered with Meals on Wheels in his retirement. He was an active member of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen.

A memorial service was held March 30 at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship. Memorial gifts may be directed to the Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship’s Outdoor Sanctuary Fund or Meals on Wheels, Goshen.

Leonard Carl Wiebe

Leonard Carl Wiebe, 94, of Goshen, Ind., died April 3, 2024, at Greencre st Healthcare. He was born March 29, 1930, in Newton, Kan., to Henry J. and Eliese (Regier) Wiebe of Wh itewater, Kan. He married Joan E. (Banman) Wiebe on May 28, 1957, in North Newton, Kan. He attended the University of Kansas and graduated from Bethel College in North Newton. He paused college two years to serve at a polio hospital in Los Angeles with the national alternative service program, and it was through this service assignment that he felt called to become a pastor. He earned a bachelor of divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and a master of sacred theology degree from Union Theological Seminary.

He and Joan pastored three churches over nearly 40 years. Two were urban church plants: Maplewood Mennonite in Fort Wayne, Ind., and Peace Community Mennonite in Aurora, Colo. In between, they served at Faith Mennonite in Newton. He also served the wider church in various roles. After retirement, he served six churches as either interim pastor or congregational coach, working in some pastoral capacity until age 90.

Leonard was an encourager, a good listener, a man of daily Bible reading and prayer, and beloved by many. He enjoyed gardening, camping, skiing, road trips and time with children and grandchildren.

Survivors include his children, Karen Wiebe (Anna Dennis) of Minneapolis, Brian (Brenda) Wiebe of Goshen and Jan Wiebe (Jonathan Andreas) of Bluffton, Ohio; six grandchildren; and his brother, Wil bert Wiebe of Whitewater. He was preceded in death by his wife in July 2023, as well as his brother Alfred Wiebe and sister Gertrude Roten.

A memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. May 5 at Eighth Street Mennonite Church in Goshen. Memorial gifts may be given to Mennonite Mission Network or Mennonite Central Committee.

Florence I. Zehr

Florence I. Zehr, 93, of Waverly, Iowa, died March 30, 2024, at the Cedar Valley Hospice Home. She was born Feb. 17, 1931, to Ira and Esther Elgsti in Princeton, Ill.

She graduated from Hesston Academy in 1949 and attended one year at Hesston College in Kansas, where she met Marvin Zehr. They were married on Feb. 17, 1951, and Manson, Iowa, was their home for 61 years before moving to Waverly.

She enjoyed being on the farm and tending her large garden. She developed a passion for sewing and made many outfits for the Manson school and community singing groups. She also made many wedding and bridesmaid gowns. She was passionate about making school bags and tying comforters for Mennonite Central Committee and was working on these projects until a week before her death.

Florence was a member of Manson Mennonite Church. She and Marvin were part of the church plant in Fort Dodge for seven years. She was active in the church, teaching Sunday and Bible School, serving as an elder and being involved in the sewing circle. For the last four years she enjoyed attending the service at Willow Springs Mennonite in Tiskilwa, Ill., via Zoom. Willow Springs was the church she attended as a child.

She is survived by her children, Barbara (Sanford) Yoder, Julia (Alan) Cowan, John (Jane) Zehr, Calvin (Carol) Zehr and Stanley (Jennifer) Zehr; 14 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband, Marvin; and infant daughter Elaine.

Memorials can be directed to Mennonite Mission Network.

Irene E. Gross

Irene E. Gross, 90, died April 4, 2024, at Goshen Hospital in Indiana. Born June 20, 1933, in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, to Walter and Jeanne (Geiser) Geiser, she embarked on a remarkable journey that included marrying T. Leonard Gross on April 9, 1957, in Switzerland. Her extraordinary gift was connecting with people. She embraced every moment with a spirit of adventure, infusing joy and warmth into the lives of those around her.

Blending her Swiss heritage with the welcoming embrace of American life, she was active in the Goshen community since 1957.

She shared her passion for languages and cultures as a beloved German teacher at Bethany Christian High School for 29 years, where she was fondly known as “Frau Gross.” She also taught French at Goshen College for three years.

A member of College Mennonite Church in Goshen, she shared her time and talents, serving on various committees. She exemplified the spirit of service and compassion.

She demonstrated her commitment to strengthening community by dedicating a decade to serving on The Window’s board, with a three-year tenure as president. Leonard survives her, along with their daughters, Suzanne (Robert Kirchner) Gross of Edmonton, Alberta, and Valerie (Tri Nguyen) Gross of Berkeley, Calif.; three grandchildren; sister Liliane (Paul) Widmer of Geneva, Switzerland; and brother Jean Walter (Marie-Christine Nabben) Geiser of Cabrières d’Aigues, France.

A celebration of life service will be held at 10:30 a.m. May 25 at College Mennonite Church.

Memorial donations may be made to The Window (thewindowofgoshen.com) or Mennonite Central Committee.
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