Pastoral Ponderings: Forbearance for the Long Haul

The delegates to the MC USA Assembly passed the Forbearance in the Midst of Differences resolution. And...? As followers of Jesus, we've been forbearing with our brothers and sisters for centuries, since the early days of the Church. We have acknowledged “the personal integrity of the other person in the search for a resolution to our differing positions,” as C. Norman & Rhoda Kraus wrote recently. Paul brought the dilemma about uncircumcised believers to church leaders in Jerusalem within the first sixty years of the young church. Circumcision was the identity marker that made it clear to everyone who was a Jew & who wasn’t (in the case of males, anyway). Acts 15 records the disagreement, then the process of spiritual discernment that helped church leaders come to the radical conclusion that circumcision would not be required for Gentile followers of Jesus. They agreed to forbear with each other, and their Gentile brothers & sisters, as they sought to discern the Holy Spirit’s desires for the church in that time & place.

Paul's letter, Romans, includes an entire chapter on how & when to forbear with each other. The issue was whether or not Christians were allowed to eat meat that had been offered to idols. Did that make the meat unclean or not? There was no consensus, so Paul wrote, "Accept the person whose faith is weak. Don't argue with them where you have differences of opinion...let us stop judging one another" (Rom 14.1,13). Again, there were clear disagreements about how to most faithfully live out the Christian witness. Paul didn't choose sides; he invited all to bear patiently with one another.

Fast forward to recent history. Women who have sensed a call to pastoral ministry have been forbearing with brothers & sisters for at least a century who have continued to interpret scripture differently, & therefore do not allow women in their conferences to be ordained. Even though this goes against how I understand scripture & the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, I forbear. I trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the midst of this disagreement, too.

So, why get anxious about the Forbearance resolution that was passed in Kansas City? Our beloved denomination, as well as many other parts of the broader Christian Church, has not come to consensus on inclusion of people who are not straight in their sexual orientation. The resolution On the Status of the Membership Guidelines did not solve delegates’ disagreements as some hoped it would. We remain divided in our understandings of scripture & values on this subject. So, forbearing with each other in the midst of difference is the best we can do at this time, & it's biblical.

By now, eating or not eating meat sacrificed to idols seems like a non-issue, so forbearance is no longer necessary. For most of Mennonite Church USA, women in ordained ministry are welcomed & affirmed, therefore I need forbear with fewer brothers & sisters in my own denomination regarding this. I trust that someday, today's hot button issue of including or not including LGBTQ people in church life will also be a past issue. Then we will no longer need to patiently listen and carefully remember that people with differing views are also beloved children of God with personal integrity & deep commitment to scripture—at least not in relation to this issue. But, in the meantime, we do what we're called to do in the midst of difference: We forbear. We trust that even though some brothers & sisters are living out their faith differently than we are, that they are doing their best to be faithful to the way of Christ as they understand it. It's what the Church has been doing since the beginning.

--Pastor Kathy

Announcements

Memorial Funds from the Luella Bartel family have been used to purchase the following books:

- *Sensible Shoes* by Sharon Garlough Brown
- *The Love Letters* by Beverly Lewis
- *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch
- *Home to Chicory* by Deborah Raney
- *Two Roads Home* by Deborah Raney
- *A Harvest of Hope* by Lauraine Snelling
- *To Everything a Season* by Lauraine Snelling
- *Heartbreak Cafe* by Penelope Stokes
- *Circle of Grace* by Penelope Stokes

We are in the process of purchasing more books that will be coming soon. Come to the library for a good book to read!

"Save ‘N Share volunteers needed: perhaps YOU would entertain the thought of giving 3 or more hours a week to assist in the store. Ages 14 and up welcome. Right now a few good men are needed to help with heavier duties, and another 3-4 volunteers are needed on Saturday mornings. Newly retired – this work provides fellowship and the rewards of lending a hand in ministry. Please consider how you could serve others through this valuable ministry in McPherson County."

Silent Auction Fundraiser: Aug 9-30 we will be having a silent auction of goods & services. Tables will be set up in the church foyer. Each item will have a list for you to sign your name and bid amount. Check it often to see if you have been outbid! For more information, call Aaron Stucky or Pastor Kathy.

2015 Camp Sing: Aug 9, 6:00 p.m. Grace Hill Mennonite Church. Mark your calendars, practice your camp songs, and start counting down the days for this Camp Mennonites celebration!

Missions at the Airport: Aug 22, 9:30am - 6:00pm and Aug 23, 2:00 - 6:00pm. McPherson Airport. Come learn about Wycliffe Bible Translators & Jungle Aviation And Radio Services (JAARS), the group that flies them around the world. See demonstrations of special flying techniques, meet jungle pilots & translators, and take a ride in a missionary plane or helicopter! There will be concessions available, and special entertainment for children. We will be offering bierocks for sale.
**Swiss Mennonite Cultural & Historical Association Local Sites Tour:** Aug 29. Included will be sites in Marion, Harvey & McPherson Counties which are significant to Mennonites, as well as sites of historical importance. Brian Stucky will be the tour guide. All-day tour includes lunch, refreshments, & transportation. Cost: $50 per individual. For reservations contact LaVern Stucky at 620-983-2348 or lavern@powerw.net.

**Pine Village Garage Sale:** Sept 25-26, 2015. Donations will be accepted again this year. Clean out your store rooms & garages of those items you no longer use & donate them to this benefit Garage Sale. Adult clothes will not be accepted. All proceeds will go toward a new phone system. Contact Pine Village at 620.345.2901 if you have any questions.

**Hopi Mission School** is undergoing new governance & staffing arrangements. While the details are worked out, it is recommended that financial contributions be sent to Mennonite Church USA or the Hopi Mission School Foundation. Boxtops for Education & Campbells product labels should be sent to the HMS Foundation, 500 Main Place, Ste 150, Newton, KS 67114 or dropped off at Western District Conference office.

**thirdway.com** website was first launched in 1998 to offer more information on Mennonites to the general public. Individuals from churches, conferences, agencies or small groups are invited to sign up for the following FREE email subscriptions:

- **Daily Scripture** (daily short scriptures chosen for the Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective)
- **Media Matters** (weekly media review, rotating Mennonite writers)
- **Another Way** (weekly newspaper column on personal, spiritual, and family growth)
- **Living Simply** (twice monthly column by Celeste Kennel-Shenk)
- **Wider View** (twice monthly social policy issues from MCC Washington Office)
- **Stories of Peace** (monthly story of current peacemakers)

Most emails are sent Fridays or whenever a new item is posted. After signing up, you will receive an email asking you to verify your wishes. PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK IN THE EMAIL to complete your subscription.

**Prayer Requests**

- Pray for the vision of the church; that we will look to God for how to be mission oriented in our ministries.
- Pray for friends & neighbors to know the love of Jesus.
- Pray for our shut-ins and those struggling with chronic illness, grief or loneliness to experience God’s love.
- Thank God for continued blessing of the ReUse it Center, so this ministry is able to bless others. Pray for God’s leading as we transition to the new building.
- Pray for Phyllis Goering as she regains strength and mobility after back surgery.
By now, most people who are interested have likely heard the results of votes taken at Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City. While there were significant actions taken on several important issues, most attention has been focused on the two resolutions that speak to the role of LGBTQ persons in the church. Delegates affirmed the Forbearance Resolution that recognizes the diversity of perspectives in our church, and calls on us “to live in grace, love and forbearance” with one another. The same day, the delegate body also adopted the Resolution on Membership Guidelines that re-affirms the guidelines that prohibit pastors from performing same-sex marriages, and imposes a four-year moratorium on any action to change them.

The two statements clearly stand in tension with one another. Many would say that they are even contradictory. For WDC, the votes do little to help us clarify the potential impact of adopting or rejecting the resolution we face at our own Annual Assembly in October.

Much of what happened in Kansas City, however, is impossible to convey in news releases and brief reports. It was about much more than what the resolutions stated and how many people ultimately voted for and against each one. For several days, delegates sat around tables with sisters and brothers in Christ, seeking to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. There were more than 90 such tables, each with 8 or 9 delegates present.

At my table, we came together from many different places, theologically as well as geographically. We spoke from the heart, sharing our convictions regarding the truth of Christ to the best of our understanding. We listened to one another. We wept with one another. We prayed with and for one another. We laughed with one another. And we wept with one another some more.

The table thus became a sacred space where Jesus was palpably present. I am convinced that all of us are deeply committed to faithfully following Christ. And all of us are deeply committed to living within the church, the Body of Christ. I remember and understand more deeply that Jesus’ promise to be present wherever two or three are gathered in his name is a promise given in the midst of instructions regarding church conflict. (Matthew 18:20)

I doubt that any of us ultimately changed our minds regarding the significant topics we discussed and voted on. We may not have been right in all our decisions. But I hope that we all came to a better understanding of why our brothers and sisters hold different viewpoints. I know that was true for me. And I hope that we can continue to be the church together even in the midst of our differences.

I know it won’t be easy. It is difficult—perhaps even impossible—to extend the experience of the table across the denomination, or even across WDC. I know that many will choose not to come, or feel that they are unable to come, to the table. I know that some have felt unwelcome or even unsafe at the table. I know others are tired of the conversation and don’t have the energy to come back to the table. I know that many—including me—have felt pain, anger, sorrow and fear at the table. But it is my prayer that we will continue to seek out those with differing viewpoints and experiences as we seek to do our best to be the church that God is calling us to be. We will make mistakes. And we will need to continually practice humility, grace and forbearance with one another.

In introducing the Forbearance Resolution, Pastor Charlotte Lehman of Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston, IL declared, “Conflict is not the enemy. The Enemy is the enemy. We want to glorify God in both the outcome of our dialogue and the way we conduct our dialogue.”

As conference moderator, this is my prayer for WDC. May the way we conduct our dialogue give glory to God. May the outcome of our dialogue bring glory to Christ. And may our dialogue continually seek to reveal the glory of the Spirit.
Spiritual Directors Can Help Us Learn to Live in Peace

In times like these, people need spiritual directors to listen deeply to their stories.

Despite our best efforts to listen to God and to each other at the July delegate sessions of Mennonite Church USA in Kansas City, many people left the convention with deep hurts and pain. Our well-planned processes did not always work in ways to promote peace and love.

Some people felt manipulated, while others felt voiceless or victimized. Many were disappointed. Others truly sensed God’s presence in the decisions of the delegate assembly.

Our relationships with others – whether in our families, our churches or our denomination – can impact our relationship with God. Meeting with a spiritual director can be a resource for renewing and strengthening our faith, refreshing us for the arduous work of making peace with others.

Spiritual directors are trained to listen with compassion. We ask open-ended questions. We don’t try to solve problems or give advice or tell people what to do.

We listen and pray and hold space for others to listen for God in the midst of their lives.

We are often on the same spiritual journey, seeking to discern where God is showing up in the midst of the struggles and pain of life. We also help look for the joy and beauty that can be discovered when one sits in silence and listens for the still small voice from God.

Do you know someone who is questioning their relationship with God, with their congregation, or with the denomination?

Do you know someone who is trying to discern what wisdom God might be showing them through scripture? Do you struggle with what Jesus would say or do in 2015, if Jesus walked into the midst of our meetings? Are you grappling with questions of how the church uses power and authority or how we agree and disagree in love? Whether you feel unsure about how to pray or wonder where God is in the midst of the pain of our denominational process, spiritual directors are compassionate listeners who are willing to hear your questions. They are humble servants who meet us on the path, wherever we are, Liz Budd Ellmann, Executive Director of Spiritual Directors International says spiritual directors “help us learn to live in peace, with compassion, promoting justice.”

If you are interested in finding a spiritual director, check out the Mennonite Spiritual Directors Listing.

If you prefer to find a spiritual director from another faith tradition, start with Spiritual Directors International (SDI).

Both sites have a list of questions to ask a potential spiritual director during an initial conversation and recommend interviewing several people to find someone who feels like a good fit.

Mennonites need spiritual directors now more than ever.

The Mennonite Spiritual Directors Network hopes our church will discover these servants in our midst who can help us all learn to live in peace and unity, bringing healing and hope into our confusion and brokenness and into the pain of our world.

Jesus, help us live in peace
From our blindness set us free
Fill us with your healing love
Help us live in unity.

JD Martin
Equipping Newsletter, July 2015
Looking Back

On May 31, we welcomed Sam Banman as a new member, and Betty Stucky as an associate member.

Bible Blast to the Past was the theme for Vacation Bible School which was held in conjunction with McPherson Church of the Brethren, June 1-5. Co-directors were Sarah Hendricks and Sheryl Schrag. Seventy children enjoyed stories, crafts, games, and snacks. Assistants from MFM included Pastor Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Kerri Duree, Andrea Hundley, Marianne Miller, Heather Schriner, and Amber Stucky.

At dusk on July 4th, the church grounds provided a perfect setting for viewing the community fireworks display in Wall Park. Prior to the fireworks, a barbequed meal was served to the public as a fundraiser. Coordinators were Andrea Hundley and Amber Stucky.

Our delegate to the 2015 Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City was Bill Toews. Pastor Kathy Neufeld Dunn served as a district delegate.

On Sunday, July 12, Bill Toews presented “Walk Through Delegate Discernment” and Pastor Kathy Neufeld Dunn and Dayle Toews, who also attended the conference, shared “Glimpses of Blessing,” “Glimpses of Pain” and “Glimpses of Hope and Grace.”

Guest preacher on July 26 was Sara Blodgett, chaplain for Hospice and Home Care of Reno County.

Attending Mennonite World Conference in Harrisburg PA, were Stan and Marianne Miller and Fran Stucky.

– Janice Friesen, reporting for Mennonite World Review

Photos by Troy Wedel