

*Stories, Singing,  
Friendship*

## 2003 Conference Another Success

“We are called to discern the practices that will call us into peace-making and shape us into peacemakers, to make us signs of God’s desire for peace in the world.”

With these words **Marlene Kropf**, director of the Office of Congregational Life for the Mennonite Church USA and a member of the Bridgefolk steering committee, opened the 2003 Bridgefolk Conference at Saint John’s last July.

The theme of the 2003 conference was **Spiritual Practices for Violent Times**. It was the second conference to be held at Saint John’s Abbey, the large Benedictine monastery in Collegeville, Minnesota.

The sessions began Thursday evening with small group scripture study (or *lectio* as it is known to Benedictines) on a passage from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. This passage was discussed several times in small groups during the conference.

**Abbot John Klassen** of Saint John’s was the opening speaker Friday, and with great frankness described the struggle he experienced when several serious incidents of sexual abuse were exposed at the abbey—and the spiritual practices he drew on in dealing with this very difficult situation. The major lesson learned, he said, was that “the only way through is to focus on the healing of the survivors.”

**Andrea Bartoli** of the Community of Sant’Egidio, an international group of lay Catholics founded in Rome in 1968, described the ways his community connects spirituality and peacemaking. Sant’Egidio is widely known in Europe for its peace-making activities and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. **Marilyn Stahl and Dirk Giseburt**, a Mennonite couple from Seattle who were part of a Bridgefolk delegation that visited Sant’Egidio in Rome, followed with a report of their visit.

**Marg and Weldon Nisly** described their experiences when Weldon went to Baghdad in March 2003 as part of a Christian Peacemaker Team to be pre-sent during the bombing that opened the war. Weldon described the decision-making process that led up to his trip, which involved the entire membership of Seattle Mennonite Church where he is pastor, and Marg reported on the family’s struggle.

**Mary Oyer**, the well-known Mennonite Church musician, opened each session with Mennonite-style hymn singing. Her Saturday evening hymn sing brought numerous positive comments from both Catholics and Mennonites.

Most conference participants also participated in the daily monastic prayers in the abbey church.



The Saturday evening footwashing service, followed by a Mennonite-style hymn sing led by Mary Oyer, the dean of Mennonite musicians, was a high point of the 2003 Bridgefolk conference.



Mary Oyer's hymn singing was a popular part of the 2003 conference. One Catholic participant said with amazement, "She would just say a number and they all knew how to sing it!"



Small groups met to discuss the lectio passage from Ephesians that was the spiritual theme of the conference.

Large blocks of free time allowed Bridgefolk to explore Saint John's beautiful grounds, to talk with other participants, or spend time in thought. For many this was a major part of the conference.

*"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."*

*—from the lectio passage used at the 2003 conference*





## Comments from the evaluation forms

"Mary Oyer was stunning. Her encyclopedic knowledge, thorough preparation, quick wit and enthusiasm were amazing. I was so grateful that she enabled us (Mennonites) to share her with Catholics."

*"We could probably have used another small group session. Getting to know one another is so extremely important. It helps to break down the division among us, sweeps away suspicions and pre-conceived notions."*

"The best part of this kind of gathering is the connections made with others."

*"I am so gratified at the way our prayer was handled. It seemed a great balance, drawing on the resources of both traditions."*

"I hope we study the Mennonite-Roman Catholic International Commission Report together, and pick up theological topics from this, and from our dialogue on Bridgefolk issues as well."

*"I especially enjoyed the Agape meal and the foot washing—and the hymn sing, which tied a musical bow around a festive evening."*

"A wonderfully nourishing weekend... How delighted I am to share in this conversation."

*"The program was well conceived, with ample time for intense encounter and relaxation, for...person-to-person interchange, for worship and encounter."*

"I look forward to next year."

## "Questions Out of the Hat"

Participants in the 2003 conference were asked to anonymously submit questions about each other's traditions. The questions were drawn from a hat at the beginning of the sessions and answered by volunteers.

Some examples from this popular part of the program:

***"Do the Mennonites follow the liturgical year in their worship?"***

***"When do Benedictines have to wear robes, and when can they dress like normal people?"***

***"Could we Catholics get a quick rundown from the Mennonites on the top 10 or so Mennonite last names?"***

***"What kinds of spiritual accountability for faith and life are required of members of the Saint John's monastic community?"***

***"Are the Mennonites connected to the Anabaptists? If so, how?"***

***"How do Catholics feel when people from the so-called Free Church speak about the 'believer's church'?"***

## Who Came?

32 Mennonites

26 Catholics

12 Mennonite pastors

7 Benedictines

3 Members of the International  
Mennonite Catholic Dialogue

4 Europeans

6 Canadians

**There's lots more  
on our website . . .**

**More photos,  
conference presentations,  
details about  
next year's conference.**

**Be sure to check it out.**



Reports of the 2003 conference appeared in both national Mennonite periodicals, *The Mennonite* and *Mennonite Weekly Review*, written by Melanie Zuercher. Her story in *The Mennonite* is available online at [Bridgefolk.net](http://Bridgefolk.net).

*In Honduras*

# Mennonites, Catholics March Together

**Mennonite and Catholic youth from what was once considered the country's most dangerous neighborhood, marched together under banners celebrating "peace with the risen Christ" calling for an end to gang violence.**

**The Aug. 31, 2003 march in San Pedro Sula, inspired hundreds of residents to spontaneously join the march.**

Until four years ago, La López was wracked by gang warfare. The efforts of the Peace and Justice Project of the Honduran Mennonite Church to help youth leave gangs and find their place in the community has helped change that. It was the idea of a former gang member to hold the march.

Five MCC workers participated in the march. They joined the 300 people assembled, some of whom were holding two large banners reading, "Let's build peace with the risen Christ." Each banner was carried by three ex-gang members. Prayers were said and the march began.

People at the front of the march led in chanting prayers: "Yes to love, no to violence!" "Yes to peace, no to revenge!" "We want La López Arellano to be peaceful and harmonious!"

As marchers passed through the neighborhood, people came out of their houses to watch and listen. What those at the front of the march did not realize is how many of them also joined the procession, MCC workers reported. Near the end of the march as the leaders came to the top of a hill, someone said, "turn around." When they looked down the hill they saw the street packed with people marching for peace.

When the group reached the community hall, where there was to be a prayer meeting for peace, the march had grown to about 800 people. When the 500 chairs inside the building were filled, people remained outside to listen. The meeting opened with singing and scripture. The local Mennonite pastor and Catholic priest offered reflections on the words of Christ.

The joint participation of their churches in the march reflected a new level of cooperation in La López between Protestant and Catholic churches. Throughout most of Latin America Protestant-Catholic relationships are strained or even hostile.

The youth of the two churches had jointly written a prayer reflecting the reality of their neighborhood, their history and an emerging peace theology. After invoking the name of Jesus, they told God their history and everyone gathered confessed:

"Forgive us, Lord, for our indifference, because many times we have been deaf and blind to the injustices; because we have not valued the life that you have given us. We ask for forgiveness for the violence which we have provoked in our hearts, in our families and in our community.

"Give us peace, the most precious gift of your hands. Help us to build that peace, first, in our own hearts, by doing your will. May we build this peace being sensitive to the pain of others, and seeing your holy face in that of others. Do not allow us to immerse ourselves in the sea of selfishness. Make us strong and courageous builders of peace and freedom."

—from an Mennonite Central Committee news release by Marion Meyer, MCC's emergency response coordinator in Central America and Mexico

*Father José Canales, Catholic parish priest in La López Arellano holds a yellow sign saying, "Halt: Don't shoot your brother!" At right is Pastor Elvin Villalobo, of the Mennonite church in La López. (Photo by Ricardo Torres)*



*Pat and Tom Crotty*

# A Mennonite Catholic Marriage

**Tom Crotty, a Catholic who discovered Mennonites through his marriage to Pat Zeiset, tells the story of his journey across the bridge—and Pat adds what she has learned from the Catholic community**

I grew up in a Catholic family, and was largely educated in Catholic schools. I attended graduate school in Philadelphia where I met my wife Pat, a Mennonite. We were married in Pat's home church, Bally Mennonite, and we lived in Lancaster County, real Amish and Mennonite country, for the first six years of our marriage.

Thirteen years and 2 children later we currently attend a small Catholic church in eastern Kentucky where we now live. I work as a psychologist and Pat teaches nursing at our community college. Daniel, aged 11, and Anna, aged 9, attend a Catholic elementary school in our town.

The Mennonite church experience started for me during my courting days with Pat. Visiting from Philadelphia on weekends I frequently attended Sunday worship with her family. I felt warmly welcomed and accepted. I shared meals, attended small group meetings with Pat, went on an overnight hike with the men of the church, went on a young adults retreat with Pat, participated in a foot washing ceremony, and of course shared several times in the Sunday worship.

Coming from the impersonality of Philadelphia's big and old Catholic churches, I found a worshipping community that was somehow familiar to me, in the literal sense of that word.

I saw and heard people I learned were truck drivers and electricians and school teachers during the week standing at

the pulpit to lead worship services. They led with an ease and grace that I can understand only as inspired. As a Catholic used to formulaic prayer even by the ordained clergy, I remember feeling astounded at their confident eloquence in spontaneous prayer—talking simply and prayerfully to God of the needs of the congregation, the community, and the world.

The pastor came to the pulpit to preach in the context of this



shared calling, shared leadership, and shared responsibility. As a Catholic, I grew up thinking presiding over worship required years of formal preparation in schools and seminaries—not to mention celibate commitment. In this Mennonite meeting I clearly saw evidence of years of spiritual formation, though obviously not in seminaries.

My second experience was at Philhaven, a mental health organization where I worked during the early 1990s. It was founded as a psychiatric hospital in the 1950's by Mennonites who did alternative service as conscientious objectors during World War II. From working in the frequently inferior conditions of state-run psychiatric facilities, many came back looking for another way to provide for emotional healing. This way of service at Philhaven has continued for over 50 years, serving thousands of people.

I completed my psychology internship at Philhaven as one of the very few facilities in the country that offered psychologists in training an opportunity for integration of Christian faith and psychology practice. Through the challenges of that intensive



training year I and the three interns with me (none of us Mennonite) struggled to find ways our faith could make a difference in the work of healing.

How wonderfully Mennonite that struggle was! It was full of fellowship, service, prayer before staff meetings, and good food from the Philhaven kitchen. It was an experience marked from beginning to end by a shared commitment to the service of others. That experience continues to shape my professional life.

Paul Miller, a retired Mennonite seminary professor from Goshen College helped lead some of our intern seminars. He was an inspiration—open and curious in his seventies the way few of us are in our twenties, always searching for how he could be faithful to God’s calling, how he could serve. Pat and I got to know Paul and eventually participated in a small group with he and his wife and three other couples.

Both Pat and I remember Paul’s observation about our marriage as a Catholic and a Mennonite. He would move his hand vigorously up and down, enthusiastically describing the “vertical” character of my Catholic tradition. Then he proceeded to wave his arm across his chest proclaiming the “horizontal” character of the Mennonite spirit embodied in Pat’s Mennonite traditions.

We were joining our lives together in marriage and family, he said, integrating these horizontal and vertical traditions—the right fellowship of Mennonite witness and the sacramental vision of Catholicism.

Early on Pat and I often experienced our differing traditions as painful crosses to bear. We faced difficult issues of where to worship on Sunday, experiencing Pat’s exclusion from the Eucharist at Mass, wondering where and when children would be baptized—dilemmas our Mennonite and Catholic family and friends did not have to confront. Yet Paul made our bridging of these two traditions seem to be the most exciting adventure a Christian could hope for! His wonderful, expressive vertical and horizontal motions were an unmistakable gesture of blessing to me as a Catholic.

Pat and I have no doubt that God calls us to share our lives together as husband and wife—Catholic and Mennonite as those labels may apply. Sometimes we lose our way, and those are frightening and painful times. But sometimes as we travel along the margins, we come upon bridges that span impossible divides.

Our family’s Bridgefolk experience at St. John’s last July was such a delight. Sharing the wisdom, yearning, and openness of many minds and hearts to life at the margins—Mennonite and Catholic—was a wonderful consolation and encouragement. The metaphors of the bridge and life on the bridge were very much a part of our words and imaginations over those days at St. John’s.

Bridges are mostly for crossing, I think. My Catholic sensibility reminds me that there is a cross to take up in the cross-

ing, at least if we are the followers of Christ we say we are. But what I now think of as a Mennonite sensibility grows in me, too.

I have come to know the joy of Christ’s promise in the music of song, a communion of many and varied voices. As I listen and sing, I am inspired beyond mere knowing that we are one body, one family of brothers and sisters—Catholic and Mennonite and beyond. How can I keep from singing? How can we keep from singing?

—Tom Crotty

**Pat Crotty and Diane Yoder Hardt, both Mennonites, are the music leaders at the parish in Kentucky where their families are members. Mennonites are about 5% of the congregation most Sundays at St. Luke’s.**



It took more faith to go on with this into the unknown than to do the comfortable, predictable thing. I realized we weren’t going to be able to figure this all out before we took the leap of faith.

I would often sit and cry at Eucharist because I felt left out—something I couldn’t do with Tom. As a result Tom stopped going to communion. We tried different combinations. My experience of the Catholic Church was big formal churches in Philadelphia. They felt very foreign to me, although I was always comforted by the scriptures.

When we moved to Kentucky we asked, “What are we going to do about Church?” We prayed about it, and then soon after we arrived someone from St. Luke’s arrived with a cake to welcome us and now we feel we have found a place that takes the best of both and puts them together—community, discipleship, service, family, and scripture from the Mennonite tradition, added to liturgy and Eucharist from the Catholic tradition.

Sister Mary Catherine, the woman in charge of our little parish at the time could explain things in a way that helped me to understand, and St. Luke’s helped put Catholicism in context for me, by providing a sense of community. It is a context where it was so familiar, where it makes complete sense to me.

How can you not affirm the Catholic Church when you belong to St. Luke’s—made up of people who live out their faith in their work? I’ve become comfortable with the liturgy, with the comfort of a predictable form, which I’ve learned from being music leader each Sunday

I’m still a Mennonite in my heart, I’m just practicing my Mennonite faith in a Catholic church. I focus on the things in the Catholic mass that we have in common. I’m not troubled by that.

—Pat Zeiset Crotty

*Katharine Drexel*

# Anabaptist Catholic Saint

**The American woman recently added to the list of Catholic saints had a mother and grandmother who were members of the Church of the Brethren, an Anabaptist community that has much in common with Mennonites.**

*On Katharine Drexel's feast day the celebration of the Eucharist begins with this prayer:*

Ever-loving God,  
you called Saint Katharine Drexel  
to teach the message of the Gospel  
and to bring the life of the Eucharist  
to the African American  
and Native American peoples.

By her prayers and example,  
enable us to work for justice  
among the poor and the oppressed,  
and keep us in undivided love  
in the eucharistic community  
of your Church.

Grant this through our Lord  
Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

March 3 is now observed by Catholics in the U.S. as the feast day of St. Katharine Marie Drexel. She was added to the list of Catholics who are officially recognized as saints in 2000, the second U.S.-born person so recognized.

What makes this new saint important to Bridgefolk is that her mother was a Dunkard—what is now known as the Church of the Brethren—a major Anabaptist Christian community, very similar in history and belief to the Mennonites.

Katharine's mother married into a wealthy Philadelphia Catholic family, and so Katherine entered the Catholic Church at birth, but her mother never became Catholic and was buried in the Germantown Brethren cemetery.

Only a month after Katharine's birth in 1858 her mother died. Her father later remarried, but Katharine remained in close contact with her maternal grandmother, who still wore the plain dress similar to what many conservative Mennonites still wear today.

As a young woman Katharine inherited a very large fortune from her father, which she decided to use for the benefit of Native Americans and African Americans. At age 28 she made a trip to Rome where she had an audience with Pope Leo XIII, asking him to send missionaries to serve the Native American and African American people, to whom she was already donating large sums.

Instead the pope challenged her to form a religious community to carry out this mission herself, and within five years she had done so. Philadelphia was amazed when this former debutante became a nun, adopting the habit then in use—which was even more plain than what her Dunkard grandmother had worn.

For the rest of her long life Katharine devoted her entire energy and inheritance to building schools for Native American and African American children. When she died in 1955 at age 97 there were more than 500 sisters teaching in 63 schools nationwide. She had founded Xavier University in New Orleans, and her order continues to serve poor children in 12 states and Haiti.

We can't claim Katharine Drexel as a Mennonite Catholic, but surely we can claim her as an Anabaptist Catholic, in the best sense of the term. As a Catholic she was deeply devoted to the Eucharist—the order she founded was called Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament—but she was equally devoted to practical service in the world, in the way Mennonites and other peace church members have been and still are.

The gospel for daily mass on St. Katharine's feast day last year (which fell on the third day of the third month of the third year of the third millennium) was the story of the Rich Young Ruler. Surely there could be no more appropriate reading for the day set aside for remembering her life. She was a rich young woman who followed Jesus' counsel literally.

There are articles on Katharine Drexel in both *The Catholic Encyclopedia* and the *Brethren Encyclopedia*. And there is a good article about her life online. See the link on *Bridgefolk.net*.

— Ivan Kauffman

## Bridge Quotes . . .

“I was doing a service orientation in Boston with some young adults. While on break, we entered a big cathedral just to look around. I studied the ornate carvings, the flickering candles and a statue of Mary holding a single eyeball. ‘What a bunch of ptooeey!’ I thought.

Then I noticed the young adults with me—all of them fine Christians, all of them Anabaptists, with some understanding of their ancestors who struggled against meaningless ritual and a magical understanding of God. These were people impassioned for discipleship, service and faith. They were saying, ‘Wow, isn’t this beautiful.’ ‘I wish we did more anointings in my church.’ ‘There is something holy here.’

‘No,’ I told myself, ‘there’s nothing holy here, just some weird symbols of some tenuous theology.’ Fortunately I kept my mouth shut. These young adults were experiencing something that was holy, even though they knew better than to worship a statue of Mary. They needed the art. They needed the moment of transcendence. They needed this experience to complement the lessons on discipleship we would do that afternoon.

In that moment I knew it was worth the risk—the risk to live in the tension.”

—Michele Hershberger  
who teaches Bible at Hesston College,  
a Mennonite institution in Kansas.  
From *The Mennonite*, July 16, 2002.

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“One concept Catholics share with Mennonites in a common witness for peace is the ‘universal call to holiness’, a central tenet of Vatican II. All Christians, not just a select few, by virtue of their baptism are called to sanctify the whole of their lives. A similar belief motivated the radical wing of the Reformation to which the Mennonites belong.

As the Bridgefolk meeting concluded last summer, Saint John’s abbot, John Klassen, O.S.B., led the assembly in *lectio divina*, a classic monastic way of praying over the Scriptures. In the petitions voiced during the pauses between the Scripture readings, one could sense a longing for holiness.

‘What really brings us together here,’ I thought to myself, ‘is just this: the yearning for a holy life in community witnessing to an increasingly profane world.’ ”

—Drew Christiansen, S.J.  
associate editor of *America*,  
and a member of the international Mennonite Catholic dialogue.  
From *America*, March 3, 2003



## *First Mennonite Catholic ecumenical dialogue*

# **International Dialogue Publishes Its Report**

When Mennonites and Catholic leaders joined in an ecumenical dialogue in 1998 it was an historic watershed in their relationship—which began with the persecution of the Mennonite founders by Catholics in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

This spring the dialogue participants published a report of their first five years of conversation.

They entitled it “Called Together to Be Peacemakers.”

For the past five years seven Mennonites appointed by the Mennonite World Conference have met with seven Catholics appointed by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity for sustained conversation. They talked about what unites their two communities, what divides them, and what can be done to create better relations between them.

The 14 participants came from around the world—Africa, Europe, Central America, and North America. They held weeklong meetings at places ranging from Assisi, Italy to the headquarters of Mennonite Central Committee in Akron, PA.

They discussed the major issues that divide their two traditions—the persecution of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, differing beliefs about baptism and communion, differing beliefs about the nature of the church, and differing beliefs about peace.

This spring they published a report of their discussions, entitled “Called Together to Be Peacemakers.” The report was presented to the Mennonite World Conference General Council and has been approved by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The MWC has forwarded the report to its member churches for their “study and reaction”. The Vatican has published the document in its official *Information Service*.

The report contains 215 numbered paragraphs, the equivalent of a small book. It was written in English, and has been translated into French, with a Spanish translation underway. It is available on the Bridgefolk website.

Several participants in the dialogue have also participated in Bridgefolk events, including Helmut Harder, Peter Nissen, Drew Christiansen, and Neal Blough. Helmut Harder gave a brief report on the dialogue at last summer’s conference, and will speak again this year.

Neal Blough, a U.S. Mennonite theologian who teaches in Paris, says the dialogue was “nervous in the beginning,” but very quickly became “honest and forthcoming.” He adds, “I vividly remember the occasions when we were tense or angry with each other, and then went to a meal together and finished the day in prayer. Knowing each other allowed this kind of honesty. It wasn’t always easy, but we may have found a model for how to speak when we have important disagreements.”

Mennonite World Conference executive, Larry Miller, says “Catholic delegation members asked ‘forgiveness for any sins which were committed against Mennonites.’ Since the Catholic Church is a world church, the positions taken by the delegation will be considered seriously by Catholic leaders both in Rome and around the world, and thus can be useful for Mennonites everywhere in improving relations with Catholics.”

Miller adds, “As a ‘peace church’ honest and careful conversation with ‘adversaries’ should be the normal thing for us to do. Yet we haven’t done that with the Catholic Church at the international level since the beginning of the Anabaptist-Catholic conflict” in the sixteenth century.

“In this context Mennonite delegation members asked forgiveness for their frequent failure to demonstrate love towards Catholics, and for thoughtlessly perpetuating hostile images or false stereotypes of them,” Miller says.

“I hope,” he adds, “that this exchange at the international level will be useful for Mennonites and Catholics who desire to build good relationships at the national and local levels. By God’s grace it will be.”

— from a Mennonite World Conference release

## Excerpts from “Called Together to Be Peacemakers”

### History

“The experience of studying the history of the church together and of re-reading it in an atmosphere of openness has been invaluable...We have been reminded that we share at least fifteen centuries of common Christian history. The early church and the church of the Middle Ages were, and continue to be, the common ground for both our traditions.” (26)

“Approximately 5,000 persons were executed for their religious beliefs in the course of the sixteenth century. Of these, between 2,000 and 2,500 were Anabaptist and Mennonite men and women, the majority of them in Catholic territories.” (46)

“As Mennonites and Catholics begin discussion after centuries of separate institutional existence, we need to be aware that we have developed significant aspects of our self-understandings and theologies in contexts where we have often tried to prove that we are right and they are wrong.” (49)

### The Church

“Catholics and Mennonites agree on conceiving of the Church as the people of God...that the faith of the Church is founded on the authority of the Scriptures...and is expressed in the early creeds of the Church... that through baptism we become members of the Church, the body of Christ...The Eucharist and the Lord’s Supper...draw believers together in the Church by nurturing their communion with the triune God and with one another...Mennonites and Catholics agree that mission is essential to the nature of the Church...We agree that the Church is a visible community of believers originating in God’s call...prefigured by the formation of the Old Testament people of God, and... renewed and expanded as the one new humanity...Together with other disciples of Christ, Catholics and Mennonites take seriously the Scripture texts that call Christians to be one in Christ.” (93-98)

### Baptism and Communion

“The Catholic Church and the Mennonite Church agree that baptism and the Lord’s Supper have their origin and point of reference in Jesus Christ and in the teachings of Scripture. Both regard the celebration of these sacraments/ordinances as extraordinary occasions of encounter with God’s offer of grace revealed in Jesus Christ.” (128)

“Catholics and Mennonites agree that the risen Christ is present at the celebration of the Eucharist/Lord’s Supper. Christ is the one who invites to the meal; he is present in the faithful who are gathered in his name; and he is present in the proclaimed Word.” (134)

“In the Catholic practice of infant baptism, a profession of faith is made on behalf of the child by the parents, the godparents, and the whole assembly. ...In the Mennonite churches...a person being baptized who does not at the moment of baptism realize the basic meaning and implications of his or her baptism, is not acceptable.” (137)

### Peace

“The Church is called to be a peace church, a peacemaking church...We hold in common...that the Church, founded by Christ, is called to be a living sign and an effective instrument of peace... We affirm that...by virtue of their baptism into Christ, all Christians are called to be peacemakers...and the Church has a special role in overcoming ethnic and religious differences and in building international peace.” (175)

“We agree that the Gospel’s vision of peace includes active non-violence for the defense of human life and human rights... A peace built on oppression is a false peace.” (178)

“The cross is the sign of God’s love of his enemies. For both Catholics and Mennonites the ultimate personal and ecclesial challenge is to spell out the consequences of the cross for our teaching on peace and war. We acknowledge suffering as a possible consequence of our witness to the Gospel of peace.” (182)

### Conclusions

“Together we...recognize and regret that sixteenth century Christians, including Catholics and Anabaptists, were unable to resolve the problems of the church of that time in such way as to prevent divisions in the body of Christ that have lasted to the present day...We commit ourselves to self-examination, dialogue, and interaction that manifest Jesus Christ’s reconciling love, and we encourage our brothers and sisters everywhere to join us in this commitment.” (205-06)

“Although we are not in full unity with one another, the substantial amount of the Apostolic faith which we realize today that we share, allows us...to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.” (210)

“Can we not increase our efforts to create new relationships today so that future generations may look back to the twenty-first century with positive memories of a time in which Mennonites and Catholics began increasingly to serve Christ together...We believe that one should not underestimate the importance of what it means for our two families of Christians, separated for centuries, to enter into conversation.” (212)

## Personal reflections by dialogue participants

### Helmut Harder

**What was the major achievement of this round of dialogue?** “I believe the overall title of the Report, “Called Together to be Peacemakers,” and the three statements in the final section of the Report, paragraphs 199-206.

“These paragraphs are articulated with integrity, and they reflect the significant extent to which we have come close to each other.”

**What has been the greatest surprise for you personally in working on this project?** “One has been to realize the considerable extent to which Catholics have respect for the Mennonite Church, for what they stand for and for their witness in the world.

“Another has been to see that bilateral dialogue with Catholics need not take on a defensive posture in the sense that a small Mennonite Church would feel threatened by a ‘take-over.’ I sensed nothing of this in the discussion.

“It is rather a matter of living alongside each other in mutual respect and in a learning mode.”

**How have you personally benefited from this experience?** “Through the dialogue experience I have come to feel at ease in dialoguing with Catholics, and, together with Catholics, I have begun to discover the ‘middle ground’ where we can have fruitful interchange on questions of theology and matters of faith.

“All kinds of opportunities have arisen for interchange on the national, regional and local levels because of my personal involvement in the international dialogue. I have had opportunity to share about the dialogue in several contexts of the Canadian Council of Churches, in several Catholic parishes, in Mennonite congregational settings, in college and university classes.

“My sense of the importance of ecumenical dialogue has been heightened.”

**What do you see as the next steps?** “I await the response of the churches to the suggestions made in the final pages of the Report, regarding the possibility of new relationships.

“My hope is that in many places around the globe there will be not only cordial relationships between the Mennonite Church and the Catholic Church, but that there will also be significant dialogue and joint projects.”

**What can interested Mennonites and Catholics do to move this process of dialogue forward?** “Perhaps our experience in Winnipeg could provide one viable model for how Mennonites and Catholics could engage each other in many places.”

### Drew Christiansen

**What was the major achievement of this round of dialogue?**

“The three major achievements I would name are:

- (1) Identification of a common vocation to peacemaking;
- (2) Recognition of what the two traditions held in common in the period between Constantine and the Reformation; and
- (3) Progress in the purification of memories.”

**What has been the greatest surprise for you personally in working on this project?** “How much we hold in common in our beliefs about the church, and in the theology of ordinances / sacraments.”

**How have you personally benefited from this experience?**

“Most remarkable for me was how much more progress in mutual understanding and common agreement we made in the last year, as we drafted the final report. It proved to me the value of sustained dialogue.

“Secondly, shared prayer in the context of the common work, and experiencing together each other's holy places and religious centers contributed to a growing sense of charity and community.

“Thirdly, on the Catholic side, from the beginning the Vatican leadership showed a positive disposition toward peacemaking as an area for possible agreement. The approval of the report by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith represented the validation of an interpretation of Catholic social teaching on peace as primarily just that—limiting just war to an exceptional status.”

**What do you see as the next steps?** “As the first stage of this dialogue is appropriated by both communities, I look for a quick resumption of the formal dialogue. I would hope that future discussions will examine nonviolence and ‘just policing’ in more detail, and that even before an end for the next round of discussions there would be occasion not only for a purification of memories but for a prayerful expression of repentance and reconciliation.”

**What can interested Mennonites and Catholics do to move this process of dialogue forward?** “I imagine the report will go directly from the Mennonite World Conference to Mennonite congregations. In the Catholic Church in the United States, I would look to the National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers to develop programs, especially, though not exclusively, in areas where Catholics and Mennonites are intermingled.

“I would also hope that the report will achieve wide discussion, with the help of the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, at a national level, so as to promote theological and popular reception.”



## Neal Blough

**What was the major achievement of this round of dialogue?** “First of all, that it simply took place. In spite of a strong emphasis on peace witness, Mennonites have not been strong players in terms of ecumenical dialogue. Somehow peace between divided Christian families has not been a priority.

“Mennonites in North America have adapted quite well to the denominational arrangement of Christianity, which favors coexistence between different churches without necessarily asking the questions of why there are so many divided groups of Christians. Protestants and Mennonites in North America don’t deal with the 16th century split since it is assumed to have been the right move. Some of us who live as Mennonites in an overwhelmingly minority context, where Mennonites are unknown or considered as a sect, have been pushed into relating to other Christians without necessarily choosing to do so, and then discovered the theological issues involved as we move along.

“Secondly, the report itself can be a helpful document in many contexts where Mennonite and Catholics are neighbors. Although it is certainly not a perfect document, and much more work needs to be done on many levels, it seems to me to be a good starting point to introduce people to the basic issues involved.

“Thirdly, the Mennonites who participated in the group were forced to think of major issues among Mennonites: Why are we so divided? Does that have any theological significance? What is the theological significance of separations that took place in the 16th century? Are there not serious weaknesses with our congregationalist ecclesiology?”

**What has been the greatest surprise for you personally in working on this project?** “First of all the seriousness with which the Catholics approached the dialogue was quite impressive. They do care about the visible unity of the church and feel the pain of separation from other Christians.

“Secondly, important relationships were developed both among and between the two dialogue teams. Being together for a week at a time for five years in a row, sharing meals and praying together twice daily, helped the dialogues to move toward a spiritual level that helped us to face the more difficult questions that were discussed.”

**How have you personally benefited from this experience?**

“I have learned a lot about Catholic theology and Catholic history; I have made good friends; I have been fed spiritually; challenged theologically; and I have found new directions both for teaching church history and for ecumenical possibilities in France.

“I also have a greater appreciation for the work of Mennonite World Conference and the importance of Mennonites

working on their own international-catholic identity. I can no longer envision Mennonite ecclesial reality without taking into consideration the importance of moving beyond that which divides.

“I have become both more Mennonite and more ‘ecumenical’ because of the whole experience.”

**What do you see as the next steps?** “I hope and pray that the national Mennonite bodies will read, discuss and react to the report in a way that will allow the dialogue to continue. I hope that dialogue will happen between Catholics and Mennonites on the national, regional, and local levels throughout the world. I hope that those who have reservations about the dialogue will openly express their points of view, and that serious exchange may happen with them.

**What can interested Mennonites and Catholics do to move this process of dialogue forward?** “Encourage those responsible to move the process ahead to do so; volunteer to be a part of the ongoing movement.

“For Mennonites: serve as “bridges” with Mennonites who have difficulties with the process. I.e., be as serious about dialogue among ourselves and those who disagree with us as with dialogue between churches.

“Those who are in teaching positions (history/theology) can attempt to make ecumenical contacts and dialogues a part of their curriculum. I have been invited to teach in several Catholic institutions, to work on history together with Catholic historians and theologians. Could this not be done in Mennonite institutions as well?”

## What You Can Do

### Read the Report

It's available on the Bridgefolk website.

### Discuss it with someone else

If you're a Mennonite find a Catholic to discuss it with. If you're a Catholic find a Mennonite.

### Organize or suggest a local dialogue

This document opens the door for dialogue on the local level that has not existed before.

### Send your comments to *The Bridge*

Your reactions and thoughts are important to others. Don't keep them to yourself.

## EDITORIAL

## A Groundbreaking Document

The publication of “Called Together to be Peacemakers” is an extraordinary event. The very fact that representatives of Mennonite World Conference and the Vatican began serious ecumenical dialogue in 1998 was significant enough. But the report they have produced marks a new stage of theological engagement between Mennonites and Catholics.

The document does not blur differences. In fact it sets out an agenda we can expect to spark Mennonite / Catholic theological conversations for decades to come. Parishes, congregations, seminaries and universities can all use it to initiate dialogue, particularly in places where people from both traditions live as neighbors.

The document reveals surprisingly large areas of convergence, which even those who drafted it were not sure they would identify when they began. The first and last sections of the document show how far estranged Christian communities can move toward “a healing of memories” when they commit themselves to forging a historical narrative that both can share.

In two areas the document is nothing short of groundbreaking. Mennonites have stretched their language concerning baptism and the Eucharist quite far in a sacramental direction, without giving up core concerns. Catholics have equally stretched their language concerning peacemaking in order to affirm nonviolence as normative for all Christians, in all but the very last resort.

But Bridgefolk is also about many other extraordinary events: A Mennonite/Catholic couple gathering members from both their communities for a prayer service to name their first child. Another such couple committed to living weekly with the pain of Eucharistic division, and finding their ministries richer for the pain. Scattered pilgrims writing with gratitude at finding they are not alone.

Despite having been part of Bridgefolk from the beginning, I experienced wonderment at reading the mix of articles, stories and letters in these pages. Nothing we have published or posted at [www.bridgefolk.net](http://www.bridgefolk.net) has conveyed the Bridgefolk “charism” so well.

Recognizing the hard work our traditions still need to achieve honest and mutual understanding... exploring fresh ways to embody both traditions at the grassroots level... rejoicing at every step to witness so many unexpected signs of hope, and to walk with so many extraordinary companions—by God’s grace, this is Bridgefolk.

— Gerald Schlabach

### *The Bridgefolk Prayer*

O Lord our God,  
eternally living and giving,  
a Trinity of persons,  
may all your Christian people  
come to share in truth  
the table of your Son Jesus Christ,  
unified and peaceable,  
joining in the communion of saints,  
martyrs, apostles and bishops  
who have beaten their swords  
into ploughshares.

Empowered by that very grace  
of your Holy Spirit  
who unites the Trinity in mutual love  
they have been a bridge  
to your coming Kingdom,  
already present in our broken world.

By that same grace and love,  
empower us then we pray—  
empower us here today—  
to be a bridge to that future  
of unity and peace  
which you ever yearn  
to give to your Church,  
yet ever give in earnest  
through your Church,  
as you set a table before us,  
making present the life and death,  
body and blood,  
faith, hope and love of your Son,  
in whose name we pray,  
Amen

For more information  
about Bridgefolk  
visit our website



*“For forgiveness to occur,  
the past must be reconstructed  
and acknowledged.”*

## Second Martyrs Conference at Saint John's

A group of prominent  
Mennonite and Catholic  
theologians and historians  
will meet at Saint John's Abbey  
again this summer, prior to the  
Bridgefolk conference,  
to continue a joint study of  
sixteenth-century martyrdom.

This conference is a result  
of both the International Dialogue  
and of Bridgefolk, whose members  
organized it.

This year's conference is entitled “Sixteenth Century Martyrdom in Ecumenical Perspective.” It will be held July 26-28, and is open to the public.

The initial conference, held in July 2003, received widespread international attention, with news reports in many religious publications, Protestant, Catholic and Mennonite. The first conference focused on the Anabaptist martyrs of the sixteenth century, and was motivated by the international ecumenical dialogue.

This second conference will expand the scope of this project to incorporate all martyrdom during the Reformation era. Martyrdom in that period is unique in church history in that it consisted of Christians being persecuted by other Christians. Both Protestants and Catholics executed each other for their beliefs, and leaders of both groups participated in the execution of Anabaptists, who are the founders of the Mennonite tradition.

All three post-Reformation traditions have kept the memories of their own martyr deaths alive, but there have been few attempts to understand why this pattern of mutual persecution occurred.

Margaret O'Gara, a prominent Catholic ecumenist and a Bridgefolk participant, will give the keynote address at this summer's conference. Other Bridgefolk participants include C. Arnold Snyder, who will present a case study of one of the early Anabaptist martyrs; and Peter Nissen, dean of the theology faculty at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, who will present a case study of a sixteenth-century Catholic martyr.

Brad Gregory of the University of Notre Dame will comment on Snyder's paper. Gregory is author of the first comprehensive study of martyrdom in the sixteenth century, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*. Gregory's book was the focus for the initial conference.

John D. Roth, editor of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* and a Mennonite historian of the Reformation era, will respond to Prof. Nissen's paper. Roth is a member of the recently concluded U.S. Lutheran Mennonite Dialogue.

Peter Erb, professor of Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont. will present a case study of the Schwenkfelders' persecution, entitled “Martyrdom and Religious Identity.” Peter has played a leading role in organizing the martyrs conferences at Saint Johns.

Helmut Harder, Mennonite co-chair of the International Dialogue will also speak, as will Drew Christiansen, SJ, a Catholic member of the International Dialogue.

Abbot John Klassen of Saint John's Abbey will conclude the conference with an after-dinner speech on Wednesday evening. Saint John's has been a major supporter of the martyrs conferences.

In his welcoming address to the conference last summer Abbot John compared this effort to South Africa's Commission of Truth and Reconciliation. He quoted Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “For forgiveness to occur, the past must be reconstructed and acknowledged.” The Abbot added, “For Mennonites and Catholics, an analogous process is utterly essential.”

Ivan Kauffman and Dirk Giseburt will also present plans for a proposed institute to continue the process of ecumenical martyr studies long-term.

Registration forms, a detailed program, and further information are available at the martyrs conference website [www.MartyrsConference.org](http://www.MartyrsConference.org).



Mary Schertz

# Recovering Mennonite Spirituality

**“I have a deep, warm appreciation for the monks... But their greatest gift is a renewed appreciation for my own tradition, my own disciplines of faith.”**

One of my early thoughts during my sabbatical with the Benedictines was “Wow, I haven’t prayed so much since I moved off the farm.” Growing up on a farm in Central Illinois, attending and then becoming a member of a small, Mennonite congregation, I was immersed in a vital spirituality—that had some things in common with the Benedictine spirituality of St. Johns, although at that time we would probably have resisted the comparison.

“Devotions” were a large part of our life. My parents had their private devotions before we got out of bed. They were completely unostentatious about this part of their lives. Were it not for the chance encounter passing through the kitchen to get a drink of water, the occasionally left open Bible with new markings, or the casual comment on a scripture text from the morning’s reading, we children would hardly have known they were doing their devotions.

We also had family devotions, either at breakfast or supper, depending on the season of the year and the demands of farming. Part of setting the table was putting the Bible and *Rejoice Magazine* at my father’s plate. We met for family meals three times a day and always prayed before meals. The morning prayer was the long one—always remembering the church and the world as well as our own family concerns. The other two were short graces or sung graces.

In the evenings before bedtime we had recreational reading and then prayers before bed. My parents always ended the day

kneeling beside their bed in prayer. Again, had it not been for those sleepy trips to the bathroom after we’d been asleep awhile, we would never have known.

I do not remember having much of a sense of obligation, guilt or legalism about these habits.

As we came into adulthood, there was a gentle expectation that we would adopt a devotional, or “quiet” time of our own. The church adults gave us some help occasionally. We discussed several times the values of reading through the whole Bible. We were introduced to the ACTS prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication)—one that I still find useful.

For all our struggles as a people with legalism—with all our attempts to live non-conformed lives by attending to matters of dress, entertainment, the pledge of allegiance, voting and many other issues—we did not name our devotional lives as non-conforming to the world. But I would suggest that the quiet joy these devotions gave our lives, and the non-legalistic but obedient priority we gave them, were in fact our finest act of non-conformity.

Wednesday evenings were prayer meeting nights at our church. After a bit of singing and scripture, the concerns of the community were mentioned and then we “entered into a time of prayer.” Silent prayer and intercessory prayer were both used. Sometimes prayer was discussed a bit.

Some pieces of advice that I remember from those meetings included the following: Prayer should not be entered into lightly. Humility and self-examination are encouraged. Prayer is not to be used against people, or as “sanctified gossip.” Since prayers will be answered, we need to take responsibility for our requests and be willing to be part of the answer to the prayer.

What my encounters with Catholic spirituality have done for me is “hand me back myself.” I have a deep, warm appreciation for the monks. I have learned much from their expressions of faith, their liturgy, their practices and disciplines. I love them. But their greatest gift is a renewed appreciation of my own tradition, my own heritage, my own disciplines of faith and a renewed determination to lively freely and practice fully following Jesus in that way.

It is not that Mennonite spirituality is superior to Catholic spirituality. Any expression of faith has its strengths and weaknesses. But Mennonite spirituality is well worth our loving attention. The extension of that grace to me may have been Benedictine hospitality at its finest.

**Mary Schertz is Professor of New Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, IN. She spent a sabbatical year at the Ecumenical Institute at Saint John’s Abbey, and participated in the past two Bridgefolk conferences, as well as the 2003 Marytrs Conference.**

**These are excerpts from an essay that will appear in the Autumn 2004 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine*. The full text will be available online at [www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com](http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com) in October**

Fall 2004

# The BRIDGE

Newsletter of the Bridgefolk Movement

Inside . . .

Grassroots Dialogue in Iowa

Miracle in Japan

Anne-Marie Visser Reflects

Letters, Stories, Personals

Bridgefolk • Catholics and Mennonites Bridging the Divide

## 2004 Bridgefolk Conference

# Singing, Stories, Worship, Friendship

*Mennonites and Catholics wash each others feet  
at this summer's Bridgefolk conference at Saint John's.*



The Bridgefolk conference this summer both continued a tradition and broke new ground. It continued the tradition of holding annual conferences and it broke new ground by being the first conference attended by more Catholics than Mennonites.

This year's theme was "Spirituality and Discipleship" and it again brought together Mennonite and Catholic traditions in sometimes surprising ways.

This was especially apparent in the stories told by Abbott Eoin de Bhaldraithe, head of a Trappist monastery in Ireland, who discovered the Mennonite peace witness as a contemplative monk. In the same session Biff Wiedman, a Mennonite pastor from Elkhart, IN recounted his lifetime struggle to live out his "monkish" calling in a Mennonite context.

Michael Joncas and Ken Nafziger, two nationally known church musicians, one Catholic and the other Mennonite, sang together Joncas' hymn "On Eagles Wings"—a powerful example of the way music bridges our divisions.

The Saturday evening session combined a festive banquet provided by the monks of Saint John's, a Footwashing service that united Mennonites and Catholics in the ancient rite of mutual service, and a Mennonite style hymn sing led by Ken Nafziger.

Attendance this year was 60, about the same as the previous two years, but what was unique was that 32 of them were Catholics. At the first 1999 meeting only 6 of the 25 attendees were Catholic. At the first Saint John's conference in 2002 the number increased to 36% Catholic, and in 2003 it increased to 45%. This year it was 53%.

The percentage of repeat attendees has also increased each year. At the 2002 conference 24% had attended the previous conference. In 2003 the percentage was 55%, and this year it was 62%.

Ten attendees this year were from Canada, and one from Europe. 19 states and provinces were represented, from coast to coast. 31 of the 60 attendees were from the Midwest, 11 of them from Minnesota.

There are now 118 persons who have attended at least one of the Bridgefolk conferences. Of that number 63 are Mennonites and 54 are Catholics. The Bridgefolk mailing list now has over 200 names.

**For more details see the Listening Committee  
Report on the Bridgefolk website.**





*Drew Christiansen, SJ, a national leader in Catholic thinking on issues of war and peace, speaks to the Bridgefolk participants during open discussion.*



*Michael Joncas, composer of the hymn "On Eagle's Wing" sings it together with Ken Nafziger, Mennonite musician who led the worship at this year's conference.*



*Mennonites and Catholics meet around the tables at a banquet hosted by the monks of Saint John's, for whom hospitality is a vocation.*

## Questions from the Hat

Again this year conference participants submitted anonymous questions about each other's traditions. Some examples:

***"Does Abbot Klassen have Mennonite ancestors?"***

*(Answer: Yes, but he didn't know it until Bridgefolk.)*

***"What has been the evolution in Anabaptist theology and practice in the last 50 years?"***

***"What does 'concelebration' mean?"***

***"What is the significance of bowing during the creed?"***

***"What is the Mennonite position, doctrinal and practical, on homosexuality?"***

***"At Mass some people take the bread only and pass by the wine. Is there a theological reason, or is this personal preference?"***

***"How do the two faiths differ sacramentally and in church services?"***

***"Do Catholics vote in the presidential elections? If so, what teachings, rules and values guide their votes?"***

***"What translation of the Bible is used in Catholic liturgy or homes? Who decides that?"***



*“Right Remembering”*

## Second Martyrs Conference

Mennonite and Catholic scholars met for a second time this year prior to the Bridgefolk conference for joint study of the persecution of Christians by other Christians in the Sixteenth Century. This year they laid plans for a permanent institute to carry this project forward.

*Historians Brad Gregory of Notre Dame, Arnold Snyder of Conrad Grebel College, and Ivan Kauffman of Bridgefolk discuss a new study of the Inquisition recently published by the Vatican.*



The conference was entitled, “Sixteenth century martyrdom in ecumenical perspective,” and was organized by Bridgefolk members Peter Erb and Ivan Kauffman. Sixteenth-century martyrdom became a topic of ecumenical discussion in 1998 when the Mennonite World Conference entered into a five-year dialogue with the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Two major contributors to the international dialogue, Drew Christiansen, S.J., and Helmut Harder, spoke at this year’s martyrs conference.

The importance of martyr history in ecumenical dialogue was emphasized in the keynote address by Margaret O’Gara, a leading Catholic ecumenist and theologian at the University of Toronto. Both Dr. O’Gara and Abbot John Klassen, spiritual leader of St. John’s Abbey, noted Pope John Paul II’s repeated call for repentance of past sins of violence and intolerance.

The purpose of the ecumenical conferences at St. John’s is to carry forward what the Pope calls the “purification of memory.” Others call it a “right remembering” of not only the Anabaptist martyr experience but also the persecution and hostility faced by Catholics and other Christians in other contexts.

C. Arnold Snyder, Mennonite professor of history at Conrad Grebel College in Ontario (Canada) and author of *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Spirituality* (Orbis 2004), presented a case study of an early Anabaptist martyr, showing how his willingness to die for his faith followed directly from Anabaptist spirituality—*gelassenheit*, a heart surrendered or yielded to God’s grace and the Holy Spirit,

Brad Gregory, Catholic historian at the University of Notre Dame and author of the leading study of 16th-century martyrdom, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Harvard 1999), commented that the most striking element of Snyder’s account “was the primacy of place that this martyr gave to the work of the Holy Spirit.” Gregory said this analysis was remarkable because it breaks down some firm, traditional scholarly distinctions within the Radical Reformation “between ‘spiritualists’ and biblically literalist, ethically radical Anabaptists.”

In a second case study, Professor Peter Erb of Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario (Canada), presented a paper on the Schwenkfelders, an eighteenth century German group that emigrated to Pennsylvania for religious freedom and has developed a strong martyr tradition.

Participants at this summer’s conference agreed that religious martyrdom deserves much greater study, especially in an ecumenical setting, so that the various Christian traditions can achieve a shared “right remembering” of historical facts. Further study of this kind was specifically recommended by the report of the international dialogue, “Called Together to Be Peacemakers”.

In urging the formation of a permanent institute Kauffman said, “The church today stands between a past marred by extensive violence and a future committed to peacemaking. We must somehow connect our historical past to our very different future.”

Conference participants endorsed the formation of an organizing committee to plan an institute dedicated to the ecumenical study of Christian martyrs.

— Mennonite World Conference release  
from a report by Marilyn Stahl and Dirk Giseburt

*In the heartland*

# Mennonite Catholic Bridge in Rural Iowa

**A Mennonite pastor  
whose great-grandparents were  
Mennonite and Catholic  
is now building a bridge between  
the Mennonite congregation he leads  
and the local Catholic parish  
in their rural Iowa farm community.**

**David Boshart at his great-grandparents' grave marker,  
one born Catholic, the other Mennonite.**



When David Boshart, pastor at West Union Mennonite Church in rural Iowa, looks out his living room window, he sees the tombstone of his once-Catholic great-grandfather, John Doolin, in the church cemetery.

Boshart, who grew up Mennonite in nearby Wayland, is part of a Mennonite family that has Catholic roots. His great-grandfather was one of the first Mennonite converts at West Union. And the congregation he now leads has shared strong friendships over the years with their Irish Catholic neighbors in this close-knit farming community.

Boshart treasures these ties and wants to do whatever he can to strengthen them. How Boshart came to be a part of this unlikely “communion of the saints” is a story he loves to tell.

“My great-great grandfather Tom Doolin settled here and went to St. Michaels, a Catholic church down the road in Holbrook,” Boshart says. “He was an alcoholic who became abusive when he was drunk and one night he was abusing his wife. When my great-grandfather, age 16, attempted to intervene, his father chased him off the property with an ax.”

“He ended up boarding at a Mennonite home, where he met my great-grandmother. It was not okay for a Mennonite gal to date a Catholic, so they passed notes back and forth in an empty fence post and eventually eloped in a bobsled. They gave birth to several girls—including my grandmother, Erma.”

“So here I am, the great-grandson of a Mennonite convert, who is now pastor of his former church. I didn’t realize how significant that was until I started here and sensed the importance of these roots—and the present-day relationships that they foster. They become more precious to me every day.”

He is especially touched by the fact that John Doolin forgave his father and reconciled with him. “When my great-grandfather heard that his estranged father could no longer care for himself and was in the county home, he brought him to live in his own home for his remaining years,” Boshart says.

This early interconnectedness between these rural Catholic and Mennonite communities also appeared in the spiritual family trees at the local Catholic parish, St. Michael’s, and West Union.

“Years ago, Bishop Abner Yoder at West Union and the priest at St. Michael’s were good friends,” Boshart said. “When that bishop died, the priest came to the funeral home for visitation. When he walked in there was dead silence, no pun intended.”

Over the years, that silence has turned into dialogues that in turn have turned into friendships.

Each year West Union Mennonite Church shares services and events with the Catholics from St. Michaels. They include a Thanksgiving service at West Union, a Christmas Eve service at the Catholic Church and a hog feed at West Union.

“One of my main priorities is to build bridges from our faith tradition to other traditions,” Boshart says.

“I ask the people in my congregation to follow their passion and I need to do the same. And I am passionate about these ecumenical relationships.”

— from a Mennonite Church USA news release  
by Laurie L. Oswald



*In Japan*

# A Mennonite Catholic Miracle

**A Japanese Mennonite is invited to Rome to participate in the canonization ceremonies for a Catholic missionary to China who, unknown to him, had been asked to intercede for him as a young grad student who was facing death from leukemia.**

***Jun Yamada presents the relics of Saint Joseph Freinademetz to Pope John Paul at the canonization ceremony for the new saint in Rome last fall.***



Photo by Br. Zbigniew Toczek, SVD

Jun Yamada is a university professor in Japan. His father is a Mennonite pastor in southern Japan, and he was raised a Mennonite.

In 1986 Jun had gone to Nagoya University for graduate studies in ancient Christian art, but only a few months later he was hospitalized, diagnosed with acute leukemia. He became very weak, his kidneys began to fail and he was often delirious or unconscious.

His parents and sister came from Kyushu to be with him, and his older brother, who was then studying at a Mennonite college in the US, also came.

A Catholic missionary priest from the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) who had been helping Jun with his research, often visited him in the hospital and prayed with him. Jun says, "I could see the tower of the seminary chapel from the window of my hospital room. Sometimes Fr. Fausone would turn on the lights in the tower during the seminarians' evening prayers as a sign that they were praying for me. That encouraged me."

What Jun did not know was that Fr. Fausone, as well as two other priests, were praying for him through the intercession of Blessed Joseph Freinademetz, a nineteenth century European SVD missionary to China who was already on the first step toward recognition as a Catholic saint.

The priests did not tell Jun they were asking Blessed Joseph to pray for him out of respect for Mennonite beliefs which do not include asking for the intercession of saints.

Jun's condition continued to deteriorate and plans were being made for his funeral. And then suddenly he began to recover. Six months later he left the hospital and has been healthy ever since.

It was not until fourteen years later that Jun learned of the prayers to the Catholic saint. That was when Catholics in Japan who wanted Joseph Freinademetz to be made a full-fledged Catholic saint opened an investigation into Jun's healing to determine if it could be attributed to the intercession of the prayers to Blessed Joseph. To be named a saint in the Catholic Church at least one miracle brought about by his or her intercession must be proven.

The investigation proclaimed Jun's healing a medically verified miracle in 2002. A year later, on Oct. 5, 2003, Saint Joseph Freinademetz was officially added to the list of Catholic saints, in a ceremony in Rome officiated by Pope John Paul.

Jun was asked to come to Rome to participate in the ceremony, presenting a relic of Saint Joseph's body to Pope John Paul.

Asked afterward whether he considers it paradoxical for Catholics to claim that a Mennonite was healed through prayers to a Catholic saint, Jun says, "I do not see a paradox in the fact that Catholics look upon my cure as a miracle. The ways of God are mysterious and open to many interpretations.

"I see my illness as a loving manifestation of the goodness and kindness of God. I hope those who prayed for me when I was ill will continue to pray for me. The Lord gave me a new lease on life, and I want to follow God's will during these extra years I have been granted."

***—from an interview with Jun Yamada in  
Together in the Word, magazine of  
the Society of the Divine World***



*John Thiesen*

# A Mennonite Catholic Family Story

A major reason from my interest in Bridgefolk is that I've been living on this familial bridge that's older than I am, and I would hope to better understand my experience and find out if there are others with similar long-term 'bridge' experiences.

My grandparents and my mother were Mennonite refugees from Crimea during the Russian Revolution. They fled to Germany, where my uncle was born, and then in 1926 emigrated to Chicago, and then to Newton, Kansas in 1936.

My story revolves around my Uncle Jake. The family was poor and my grandfather was an alcoholic, so Uncle Jake grew up at the bottom of the economic and social status hierarchy.

Uncle Jake ended up in the Army Air Force. I'm not sure whether he volunteered or was drafted. He was eventually posted to an island in the Pacific (from which the atomic bomb was launched to Hiroshima) as ground crew chief for a B-29.

Although Uncle Jake had been baptized at First Mennonite, Church in Newton his religious identity seems to have been fairly weak. On his Pacific island, he recounted, the only chaplain who reached out to the men, who came to them in sometimes hazardous settings, was the Catholic priest. This was the beginning of a longer process, about which I don't really know all the details, but sometime in the next few years he converted to Roman Catholicism.

He was married in 1950 and they had two children. My older cousin went through parochial schools in Wichita from kindergarten through a couple of years at the local Catholic college, Sacred Heart. My aunt was a graduate of Sacred Heart and was public relations and development director there.

When I was born in 1959, the relatives with whom I interacted the most were my uncle's family in Wichita. This means that I grew up well aware of a different format of doing religion. I would have gone to Mass an average of maybe 2 or 3 times a year with my cousins.

I thus grew up with this big gap in what otherwise would have been a sort of hermetically sealed Mennonite environment. (I found out a couple of years ago in a conversation with my cousin that the same was true for him. His Mennonite uncle and aunt provided a big hole in his pre-Vatican II Catholic world picture.)

In my home congregation it was legitimate to ask whether Catholics were "saved" and even to class Roman Catholicism among the "cults." These were alienating things to hear when Catholicism was part of my lived experience. I also heard quite a bit of open anti-Catholic bigotry, connected to racism against a significant Mexican population in town.

Living on a Mennonite-Catholic family boundary has made much of Catholic practice seem routine, distinctly un-exotic. The vocabulary of piety, the wide variety of forms the liturgy can take (from Latin to mariachi to suburban mega-church wannabe to stifflingly mundane going-through-the-motions to deeply moving funerals), the parochial school stories, the material culture—these are all familiar/familial. When my cousin's best friend grumbles, "It's going to take nine novenas to get this car fixed," I know exactly what he means and can laugh with him in his exaggerated frustration.

I understand, at least intellectually, the aesthetic attraction of the liturgy and spiritual practices of Catholicism for some Mennonites, and also the attraction of a tradition of peace-mindedness of the Mennonite world for Catholics. But living on a Mennonite-Catholic boundary has made me aware that lived reality in both worlds can take on a certain harshness, and also that it can have an old-shirt comfortableness that is something different than the more ideal attractions of either world.

From my personal theological or experiential "location" which is more centrally in the Mennonite world than the Catholic (as a denominational archivist, I'm one of the keepers of Mennonite collective memory, after all), I feel the value of ritual and liturgy in life, and find relatively little of it in Mennonite life, especially of any contemplative variety. I enjoy the sounds and rhythms of traditional religious language, while at the same time I want to avoid the doctrinal baggage that comes along with traditional language.

I intend to have it both ways: to take pleasure in the tradition while holding it lightly as the metaphor that it is, while also saying that there is something ineffable but real behind the metaphor. Maybe you would say that this is just going through the motions, but going through the motions is better than not having any motions to go through. And I don't believe that there is such a thing as *just* going through the motions.

**John D. Thiesen is archivist and co-director of libraries at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, and webmaster of the Bridgefolk website.**

**This is a condensed version of a longer essay available on the Bridgefolk website.**

## EDITORIAL

## Where Is the Bridge Going?

Reflecting on the purpose and future of Bridgefolk as we drove to the airport after last summer's conference, Ken Nafziger offered me a new way of understanding our call. He observed that what Bridgefolk are doing is creating a bridge to a new location none of us has yet inhabited.

The image of a bridge, however, seems to suggest that one can cross from one side to another. What is becoming clearer as we meet and share our stories is that one cannot really leave one's home and make a new home; in fact, most who attend the Bridgefolk gatherings are not seeking to do so. Yet we are intensely committed to these joint conversations—in the persistent hope that something new will one day be possible. As we worship, fellowship and challenge one another, we are creating a bridge to a new destination—a place where the divisions of the past will be healed and where a new expression of the body of Christ can become visible. We do not have to know how or when this will happen; we only need to be faithful to the call to begin building.

If I needed more affirmation of that call, it came in a retreat I led recently on "the spirituality of Mennonite singing," in which a number of retired Catholic sisters as well as pastors and others from the nearby community participated. We had a rich time together exploring what happens when Mennonites sing, singing together, and sharing our faith. The participants, particularly the sisters, asked a great many questions about Mennonites, and were astonished to learn about Bridgefolk. One of them asked incredulously, "What would Catholics and Mennonites talk about together for three days?"

At the end of the day in our reflection circle, an elderly sister said, "What I got from this day is a question: Why aren't we together in the body of Christ? Mennonites and Catholics aren't really that different from each other. Wouldn't we be much more effective in the world if we all came together?"

I believe I heard Jesus speaking his dream through her.

— Marlene Kropf

For more information  
visit our website

**[www.Bridgefolk.net](http://www.Bridgefolk.net)**

Save the date !

Next summer's  
Bridgefolk  
Conference

July 21-24  
2005

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*Author  
Washington, DC*

## CNVS Mader Award

# Catholics Honor Mennonites for Voluntary Service

The Catholic organization that promotes voluntary service nationwide gave its annual award to Mennonites this year—the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Mennonite VS program. In many ways the present movement of voluntary service in the Churches was pioneered by Mennonites after World War II.

For the first time since it began making the award 15 years ago, the Catholic Network of Volunteer Service this year gave its Father George Mader Award to a non-Catholic group—and the group was the Mennonite Mission Network, an umbrella group of Mennonite organizations engaged in mission and service throughout the world.

Jim Lindsay, executive director of CNVS said, “For six decades Mennonite voluntary service has been serving the poor and marginalized in hundreds of communities throughout the world. It has been a powerful influence on the church.”

He added, “Thousands of Mennonites, and increasingly people from other denominations, have served the marginalized people of North America and the world. In the process they themselves were served and transformed by the oppressed and hurting people among whom they lived and worked.”

The Catholic Network of Volunteers was founded in 1963 by Rev. George Mader of the Diocese of Newark and his sister, Pat Stalker, to introduce voluntary service to Catholics following Vatican II. The organization now includes 206 member organizations with 12,000 people in service positions in the US, Canada and 108 other nations..

CNVS publishes an annual directory of service opportunities which is distributed to 19,000 Catholic parishes and about 10,000 Protestant congregations. The directory is also available online at [www.cnvs.org](http://www.cnvs.org).

Over the past ten years CNVS has expanded from an all-Catholic organization to an ecumenical one. About 20% of its member organizations are now Protestant, including Mennonite Mission Network. A Mennonite representative of MMN now serves on the CNVS board.

Mennonite Voluntary Service began at the end of World War II, when Mennonite conscientious objectors began looking for ways to express their faith in a positive ways. Many early volunteers went to Europe to participate in post-war relief and reconstruction efforts, and in the decades since voluntary service has become an integral part of Mennonite life.

Almost 2,000 MMN and Mennonite Central Committee volunteers now serve in more than 60 countries, doing direct relief, peacemaking and community development, sustained by a budget of about \$73 million (USD) per year.

Del Hershberger, director of Christian Service for MMN, accepted the award at a banquet at the CNVS headquarters in Takoma Park, MD in suburban Washington on Nov. 13, 2004.

In his remarks Hershberger reflected on the changes voluntary service has brought to the Mennonite community, “We have become engaged with the needs and brokenness of the world,” he said. “We have gone from being a rural people in close-knit communities to being more urban and integrated into mainstream society.”

“We have also become engaged in more ecumenical conversations, and have built bridges to other Christian groups who are seeking to follow Jesus daily in life, and to be vessels of healing and hope in this broken world.”

*At the award banquet Del Hershberger of MMN accepts the award plaque from Rev. George Mader. Others from l. to r. are Jim Lindsay of CNVS, James Krabill of MMN, Pat Stalker, co-founder of CNVS, Michele Hershberger of MMN, and Scott Siemens of of MMN.*





## At Notre Dame

# Mennonites and Catholics Honor Early Christian

A group of faculty and students from the Mennonite seminary in Elkhart, IN spent two days last fall walking 20 miles to Notre Dame, where they joined members of the Catholic Peace Fellowship in honoring an early Christian conscientious objector whose remains are preserved in the basilica church on the Notre Dame campus.

In the year 298 A.D. a Roman military officer named Marcellus, stationed in what is now the city of Tangers, stood up at the annual banquet honoring the emperor, threw the military belt which was his badge of authority on the floor and said to his superiors, "I serve Jesus Christ the eternal king. I will no longer serve your emperors."

He was immediately arrested, and three months later put on trial before a military court. When he was asked what madness possessed him, Marcellus answered, "There is no madness in those who fear God." When asked why he had thrown his arms away he answered, "It was not right for a Christian man, who serves the Lord Christ, to serve the armies of the world."

As a result Marcellus was condemned to death by the sword. On the way to his execution Marcellus said to the officer who had ordered his death, "May God be good to you."

After his death the early Church recognized Marcellus as a martyr, and commemorated the day of his death each year on October 30. The records of his trial were carefully preserved, along with the remains of his body. Some of his remains (officially called relics) are now housed in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the Notre Dame campus.

When he was on the faculty at Notre Dame—which has a large ROTC program—the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder pointed out the remains of an early Christian who believed military service was incompatible with being a Christian were housed in the campus basilica.

This year 24 students and faculty from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in nearby Elkhart made a pilgrimage along public roads to the Notre Dame campus to honor St. Marcellus. When they reached the campus they joined members of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, which was holding a conference to commemorate St. Marcellus. The CPF is led by Fr. Michael Baxter C.S.C., a member of the Notre Dame faculty.

After the conference session the Mennonite and Catholics involved worshiped together in the Notre Dame basilica. One Mennonite participant said, "Singing in that space was a powerful way to end our experience, and to know the significance of Marcellus' witness." Another said, "It was powerfully moving to be together in that way."

The Mennonite pilgrimage was organized by Arthur Paul Boers, a member of the AMBS faculty and a Bridgefolk participant. Nelson Kraybill, AMBS President, participated in the walk and began and ended it with an account of Marcellus' life.

Pres. Kraybill said, "The whole pilgrim walk experience is a metaphor of the Christian life. As a group traveling through busy communities of people going about their daily lives, we were viewed with bemusement and bewilderment.

"People thought we were odd, but we had a clear sense of destination, and a reason for what we were doing. That reason was worship. It's a reminder of the way the community of faith functions in the world."

— from an Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary release

*Mennonite pilgrims approach the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the University of Notre Dame campus, where the relics of St. Marcellus are housed. They are holding the cross they carried from the nearby Mennonite seminary.*



## EDITORIAL

## Taking the Leap

The gathering of Bridgefolk at Collegeville for our first three annual conferences has been a source of blessing for me personally, as well as for the monastic community of Saint John's Abbey. At the same time, I heartily support the decision to hold this year's gathering at a Mennonite institution. For me, this change in venue is a sign of how we have matured in understanding ourselves as partners in dialogue.

I hope and trust that Saint John's will continue to be a "home" for Bridgefolk and that we will be able to welcome you all here at regular intervals. At the same time, I believe it is important that we gather in different parts of the United States and Canada so that more people may have an opportunity to take part in our yearly exchange of gifts. It is also valuable for all of us to experience both the giving and the receiving of hospitality.

The planning committee has proposed that the 2006 conference be back at Saint John's. That is the year we begin our sesquicentennial celebration. The School of Theology is planning a larger than usual Monastic Institute for that summer to look at the phenomenon of "new religious movements" (for example, Sant'Egidio or Taizé) and the relation of these movements to the monastic tradition. Having our conference in conjunction with or alongside the 2006 Monastic Institute would provide us with an opportunity to profit from that event as well as contribute our experience to it.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in our desire to heal the wounds we have inflicted on the Body of Christ and to draw us all closer together and closer to God. I look forward to continuing our sharing in the work of the Spirit at Eastern Mennonite University in July.

— Abbot John Klassen, O.S.B.

For more information  
visit our website

**[www.Bridgefolk.net](http://www.Bridgefolk.net)**

## What you can do

Last summer it was suggested  
each one of us  
visit a church of  
the other tradition  
before the meeting  
this summer.

It's a wonderful way  
to extend the bridge  
into new places.

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*Author  
Washington, DC*

## Death of a pope

# Mennonites Join Mourning for John Paul

There was an unusual outpouring of appreciation for John Paul in the Mennonite community following his death last spring. Reprinted here are two pages of selections from statements by Mennonite leaders, and from commentary in the national *Mennonite Weekly Review*.

*These two editorials in the nationally distributed Mennonite Weekly Review were typical of the stories that appeared in Mennonite periodicals following Pope John Paul's death.*



*Mennonite World Conference officials, President Nancy R. Heisey and Executive Secretary Larry Miller, sent a letter of condolence on the death of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. For more than five years, MWC and the PCPCU have engaged in an International Dialogue. The letter was addressed to Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of PCPCU; Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary; and Monsignor John Radano, Head of the Western Section. Following is the full text:*

"Dear Brothers in Christ, On behalf of the Mennonite World Conference, we extend heartfelt sympathy to you and, through you, to the Catholic Church as we join in mourning the death of Pope John Paul II.

At the same time, we give thanks to God for the gift this man has been in so many ways for the peoples and churches of the world. We are grateful in particular for his service on behalf of reconciliation.

We believe that the International Dialogue of the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, with its joint recognition that we are 'Called Together to be Peacemakers,' stands as a tribute to John Paul II's exemplary spirit of repentance and his deep desire to heal divisive memories.

Please be assured of our love and prayers for each of you and for your church in these days of momentous transition. We will pray especially for you and your colleagues, Cardinal Kasper, as you enter the Conclave in several days. May God grant you extraordinary wisdom and discernment as you choose a new leader called to be a servant of God and of unity in the Body of Christ."

Along with the leaders of other Christian World Communions, Miller attended the funeral of John Paul II as a fraternal guest.

*Rev. Dan Nighswander, executive of Mennonite Church Canada, devoted his monthly newsletter distributed to Mennonite churches nationwide to an essay entitled "On the Death of Pope John Paul". It included large portions of the Bridgefolk Brief distributed shortly after the pope's death. Selections from his essay are quoted below:*

"Mennonites have not always had much appreciation and respect for the Roman Catholic pope. With other churches that emerged in the 16th century Reformation, our spiritual ancestors rebelled (protested, hence "protestants") against various practices in the Roman Catholic Church, including the authority given the Bishop of Rome. Harsh things have been said: it has not been uncommon to refer to the pope as the Antichrist. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for Mennonites to refer, usually without cynicism, to various leaders as 'the pope of the Mennonite Church'.

The abstract idea of a pope, however, is not the same as a particular person who holds that office. The late Pope John Paul II was a pope who contributed positively to the witness of the whole Christian church. Many evangelical Christians found him to be an ally in their ethical and political concerns.

During the time of his papacy many Mennonites have grown in their appreciation of the Roman Catholic Church. We have adapted Catholic liturgies, studied Catholic writings, worked together to address moral issues that challenge our society and church. The formal dialogue between representatives of the Mennonite World Conference and the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has furthered John Paul II's passion for reconciliation, forgiveness and the lived expression of the gospel of peace.



We don't agree with every conviction or practice of the Roman Catholic Church. Many Catholics don't agree either. There are many great issues and challenges that all churches and in particular the Roman Catholic Church need to face.

We must recognize that these are sisters and brothers in Christ with whom we need—for our sake, for their sake, for the sake of the Gospel and the glory of God—to be in relationship.

This may be a unique moment in the history of relationships between parts of Christ's body that have been separated from and hostile toward each other for 480 years. Let us engage this moment by praying for the successor to John Paul II. Pray that God will guide those who are choosing the next pope and pray for the person chosen. Pray that God would draw the Roman Catholic Church and all churches into the light and truth of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

***The national Mennonite newspaper, Mennonite Weekly Review, published two editorials following Pope John Paul's death. The first was by Robert Rhodes, the associate editor, entitled "John Paul: A pope Protestants loved". Selections are reprinted here:***

"That John Paul was revered by many Protestants for his stances and leadership is testament as well to his authentic faith and abilities. But what made him so appealing to those outside the Catholic Church?

Throughout his papacy, John Paul was an exemplar of issues that transcended his own church. Perhaps never before had a Christian leader stood as such a symbol of freedom and authentic change. Even at great personal risk, the pope continued to travel to those oppressed places and, without hesitation, spoke out for the way of nonviolent resistance and change.

Even during his waning years the pope was a brave and outspoken advocate for peace, the sanctity of life, compassion for the suffering and sick, and ecumenical openness.

Perhaps most inspiring about this pope, however, was his appeal to the young. Almost from the start, wherever the pope went, throngs of young people followed. According to one witness those young people even touched John Paul in his last moments. As they completed a round of choral prayers for his welfare, the pope raised his hand as if to bless them, then, after a great effort, uttered a final Amen.

That he ended his time in this world with a prayer and a benediction for the next generation says a great deal about the true character of this man and what he has meant to the world."

***The second MWR editorial appeared two weeks later, written by Paul Schrag, the editor, and entitled "Pope's legacy draws Christians together." Selections below:***

"After the death of Pope John Paul II, one sensed that more was happening in hearts and minds around the world than merely a fleeting interest in an important person. Catholics

surely experienced the deepest emotion, but Christians of all kinds could claim him as their own.

The ecumenical embrace that John Paul extended to other Christians, even to people of other faiths, was reciprocated. Non-Catholics embraced him as the world's leading representative of Christianity. And, by all accounts, most were pleased with how he filled that role. Many even loved him.

It's a landmark change in Christian history: Today you don't have to be Catholic to love the pope.

This has a lot to do with the charisma and warmth of the man born Karol Wojtyla. But it also has much to do with positive changes in how Christians see themselves and each other.

It's been a 500-year journey up from the depths of intolerance. The Reformation was necessary, but the animosity that endured for centuries was not. [John Paul] proved that loyalty to historic convictions is fully compatible with ecumenical cooperation. Dialogue, he said, is a means of seeking truth and sharing truth.

In life and in death, he united people of faith as never before. He set an example of unity and respect for Christians of all denominations."

***Longtime MWR columnist Elaine Sommers Rich devoted her column in the May 16 issue to John Paul. Selections are reprinted below:***

"Stalin asked scornfully, 'How many divisions does the pope have?' Would that Stalin could have seen some of the pope's 'divisions' from all over the world when John Paul II died!

The late pope demonstrated what incredible influence one man can have, not through military power but through moral courage and spiritual strength.

Count me among his admirers. Granted, I disagreed with him on important issues, such as the right of the clergy to be married and women to be ordained. Also, I believe that neither women nor the world itself can sustain an unlimited number of births.

But I appreciated many of his beliefs and actions. He opposed the war in Iraq and capital punishment. He stood up to Communism in his native Poland. He believed in young people, understood their spiritual potential and challenged them to be dedicated to God. He forgave the Turkish terrorist who tried to assassinate him, and he visited the man in prison.

Here is one of John Paul's many published prayers: *To you, Creator of nature and humanity, of truth and beauty, I pray. Hear my voice, for it is the voice of the victim of all wars and violence. Hear my voice, for it is the voice of all children who suffer and will suffer when people put their faith in weapons and war."*

***MWR also carried a front page story by Bridge editor Ivan Kauffman on John Paul's relationship with Mennonites. Most items are available online at the MWR website.***

## *A lasting legacy*

# John Paul and the Mennonite Community

Relationships between Mennonites and Roman Catholics changed fundamentally during John Paul's papacy. One reason was his own interest in the Mennonite community and especially in its peace witness. This report by *Bridge* editor Ivan Kauffman is based on observations made while covering international affairs for the Catholic press during John Paul's papacy.



Surprising as it is to many—both Mennonites and Catholics—Pope John Paul II knew about the Mennonite community and cared about it. Coming as he did from Poland where there are no longer any Mennonites this was not the case when he assumed the international leadership of the Catholic Church in 1978, but over the years as he came learn about the Anabaptist Mennonite community and its longstanding commitment to peace his admiration grew and so did his gestures of friendship for Mennonites.

The most significant of these took place only three years before his death, at the 2002 World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi. This was John Paul's response to the 9.11 attacks, and drew hundreds of world religious leaders. It was broadcast live in several nations and covered by hundreds of reporters.

It concluded with all the participants jointly making a 12-point pledge to peace. Each point was read by one of the participants, including the head of the World Council of Churches. The readings concluded with a final summary—and the person selected to read it was a Mennonite pastor from Indonesia who was then the president of Mennonite World Conference.

Although I witnessed this as a reporter it moved me to tears. The day had been filled with indications that its deeply symbolic events had been planned personally by John Paul, and assigning this final event to the Mennonite participant hardly seemed accidental.

Sixteen years earlier at the first Assisi day of prayer for peace I had also been present. Then the executive secretary of Mennonite World Conference had been present but not as a participant in the program. He exchanged an embrace of peace with the pope at one point, but his seat on the platform had been the most distant from the pope of all the Christian leaders.

But now something had changed. The Mennonite representative had literally been moved from the foot of the line to the head of the line.

Pope John Paul never spoke publicly about his relationship to the Mennonite community, but his involvement in the ecumenical dialogue between the Mennonite World Conference and the Catholic Church which began in 1998 also indicated his personal appreciation of the Mennonite tradition.

When a formal dialogue with Mennonites was first proposed some Catholic leaders questioned whether the Vatican should devote its limited resources to a conversation with such a relatively small group. This would be only the eleventh international dialogue the Catholic Church had engaged in, and would involve a major commitment of time and resources.

John Paul not only gave his approval to this dialogue, he gave his personal support as well. When we first began hearing reports of his interest, both Mennonites and Catholics found them hard to believe. Why would someone of John Paul's international stature care about Mennonites? But after Assisi 2002 it seemed obvious this was the case.

Other gestures followed. Later in 2002 a Mennonite laywoman and her son who were visiting Rome were greeted by John Paul at his regular Wednesday Audience, an unusual honor, especially for non-Catholics. **(Photo at left)** The next year the Vatican sent an official delegation to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Bulawayo.

Less than a year before his death Pope John Paul invited the Bruderhof, the Anabaptist communal group, to visit him in Rome. He said to them, "You share a tradition in which Christ's call to discipleship finds expression in common life in the Spirit, and in daily witness to the evangelical law of love. Christians always need

to hear anew the radical summons to holiness, which is the heart of our savior's message." He added, "I greet you with affection in the Lord and I pray that the growing contacts with the Catholic Church which you are fostering will bear fruit in ever greater mutual understanding, respect and cooperation."

Why did Pope John Paul care about the Anabaptist Mennonite community? There appear to be three features of the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition that would have been attractive to him:

*The peace tradition.* John Paul knew war and tyranny from the inside, as few people have. He risked his life as a seminary student during the Nazi occupation of Poland. He lived most of his adult life under Communism. From those experiences he became a vigorous advocate for peace. He never became a pacifist, but when he discovered a small but long-established community of Christians who had always rejected violence he reached out to them.

*The Anabaptist martyrs.* John Paul had known many Christian martyrs personally. As pope he knew about the many thousands of Christians throughout the world who continue to risk their lives for their beliefs, and of the hundreds who have died. He asked that a list of all twentieth century Christian martyrs—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—be compiled. Pope John Paul had been personally impacted by the martyrs, and would have been attracted to a Christian community which had a martyr tradition at its center.

*Lay discipleship.* John Paul's success in overthrowing Communism in Poland came from mobilizing the Polish laity, and he believed lay Christians had a special calling to transform society. He repeatedly proclaimed the vision of a "civilization of love"—a world in which everyone belonged to a single global family—and he believed it would be created by Christian families. The Mennonite tradition in which ordinary people matter, the laity matters, and the family matters would have been attractive to John Paul.

John Paul left behind an immense legacy, a legacy whose eventual impact we can only imagine now. But surely that legacy includes a new relationship between the Mennonite and Catholic communities, one that will continue into the future.

By his actions John Paul said he believed Mennonites are part of the universal Church—that they belong, that their gifts should be recognized, that their traditions should be honored, that their voices should be listened to. When he came to Rome Mennonites were on the periphery. They no longer are.

Pope John Paul indicated that he hoped for a time when Mennonites and Catholics could join in an effective Christian witness to peace. That is one reason the report of the International Mennonite Catholic Dialogue is entitled *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*.

That hope, which only a few years ago would have seemed utterly unrealistic, no longer seems so.

— Ivan J. Kauffman



## *The new pope*

# **Benedict and the Bruderhof**

The new pope, Benedict XVI, has had a ten-year friendship with leaders of the Bruderhof, a lay intentional community that is part of the Anabaptist group of churches to which Mennonites also belong. During a 1995 meeting in Rome the cardinal who recently became pope discussed the persecution of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century with Bruderhof members.

The meeting took place in June 1995, in Rome. Several persons from the Bruderhof community, headquartered in Rifton, NY, had flown to Europe to meet with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was then head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the agency responsible for ensuring doctrinal continuity in the Catholic Church.

Mutual friends from the Integrierte Gemeinde, a similar community of Catholics in Germany where the Cardinal had been bishop before coming to Rome, had arranged the meeting. The Bruderhof delegation included persons whose forbearers were persecuted in the sixteenth century.

The visitors were told the Cardinal was not feeling well and probably would be able to stay for only a few minutes. But, says Johann Christoph Arnold, leader of the Bruderhof, "as our conversation progressed he became more and more attentive." He ended up staying for three hours.

During the meeting a theologian from the German Catholic community read the stories of two of the sixteenth century Anabaptist martyrs. Cardinal Ratzinger listened carefully and then responded in these words:

"What is truly moving in these stories is the depth of faith of these men, their being deeply anchored in our Lord Jesus Christ, and their joy in this fact, a joy that is stronger than death.

"We are distressed of course by the fact that the church was so closely linked with the powers of this world that it could deliver other Christian to the executioner because of their beliefs.

"This should be a deep challenge to us, how much we all need to repent again and again, and how much the church must renounce worldly principles and standards in order to accept the truth as the only standard—to look to Christ, not to torture others but to go the way of witnessing, a way that will always lead to martyrdom in one form or other.

"I believe it is important for us not to adopt worldly standards, but rather to be ready to face the world's opposition, and to learn that Christ's truth is expressed above all in love and forgiveness, which are truth's most trustworthy signs. I believe that this is the point at which we all have to begin learning anew, the only point through which Christ can truly lead us together."

Arnold says, "I will never forget how by the end of the meeting he had tears in his eyes, and how he encouraged us with words of love and reconciliation."

The Cardinal ended the meeting by saying, "It is important for us to realize that we cannot bring about unity by diplomatic maneuvers... Instead we must open ourselves more and more to God. The unity that he brings about is the only true unity. Anything else is a political construction, and it will be as transitory as all such constructions."

"When hatred can be overcome, and forgiveness be given," the future pope said, "that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Then we know that we are in Christ."

Speaking of the new pope Arnold says, "The press has been quick to characterize Ratzinger as an inflexible and mean-spirited theologian, but I know him to be different."

**Members of the Bruderhof community meeting with Cardinal Ratzinger in Rome in 1995. At the Cardinal's right is Johann Christoph Arnold, leader of the community.**

**More information available at [www.Bruderhof.com](http://www.Bruderhof.com).**



*In India*

# Get Well Card from Mother Teresa

When Dr. Glen E. Miller, a Mennonite physician from Ohio, was director of Mennonite Central Committee in India he learned to know Mother Teresa by working with her, and when he suffered a heart attack she sent him a get well card. Dr. Miller will be one of the speakers at this summer's Bridgefolk conference.

Mother Teresa's get well card arrived at the hospital along with many others. I was in a Calcutta hospital recovering from a heart attack. The postcard-sized card had a hole in the top as if it had been thumb-tacked to the wall.

On the front side was a picture of Jesus carrying a lamb and followed by other sheep. Written over the lamb Jesus was carrying was the word "you". On the reverse side Mother Teresa wrote, "Be the little lamb in the arms of Jesus who loves you. I will pray for you to get well. God bless you."

In the many times I met Mother Teresa I was always aware that her daily activities were world news. Despite her responsibilities as the leader of a worldwide organization she had time to wish me well. When I received the card, I recalled that when asked how she had managed to help so many people she replied, "One at a time."

I had become one of those touched by Mother Teresa. As Director of Mennonite Central Committee in India from 1990 to 1996 our paths crossed on a fairly regular basis. I particularly recall visiting her after the religious riots in December 1992. During the week long riots the Army was on the streets with orders to shoot on sight. Mother Teresa and her driver were among the very few who had ventured out.

After the curfew was lifted I went to see Mother to offer MCC relief help. She told me with some amusement how she was waved through the Army checkpoints when her face was recognized. Her widely circulated prayer for peace was credited with reducing violence and helping to bring an end to the conflict. These actions characterized Mother Teresa for me.

When talking to her one quickly became aware of her single-minded pursuit of causes for the right, and in favor of the poor. She was fearless in this pursuit and willing to take on the high and mighty of the world. Her compassion seemed to have no limits. A phrase she frequently quoted was, "To the Glory of God and the good of man."

She was a friend of MCC and honored us by her presence as chief guest at the 1992 celebration of MCC's 50 years in India.

More than 50 years ago Mother Teresa left the cloistered walls of the convent and a comfortable teaching position to enter the busy and crowded streets of Calcutta.

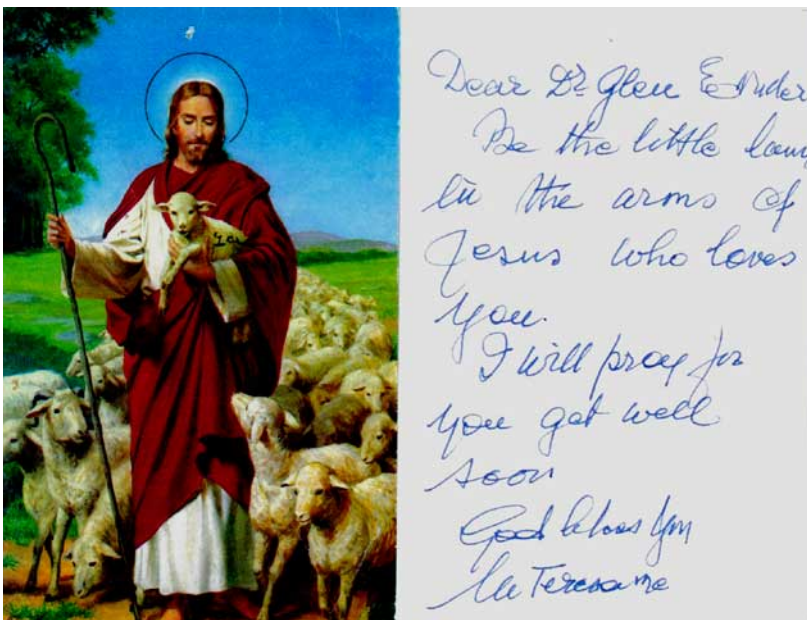
She told us a story of the generosity of the poor. In the early days of her ministry she was teaching a group of students under a shade tree, with the dust

on the ground as her blackboard and a stick as her chalk. She noted that one boy looked sick. When asked why, he said he hadn't had anything to eat for three days. Mother Teresa got some rice and took it to the family. The boy's mother immediately divided the rice into two portions, and gave half to her neighbor whose family hadn't eaten in four days.

The stooped figure of Mother Teresa will remain a symbol for time to come of compassion for the poorest of the poor, and of hope for those in despair and hopelessness. She accepted poverty and deprivation without noticing because her passion and attention was directed to helping the needy about her.

The sisters of the Missionaries of Charity around the world will carry on the work of Mother Teresa. We can best honor her by also taking up the work of making life better for the poor and needy.

— reprinted from *Ohio Evangel*,  
newsletter of the Ohio Conference of Mennonites





## In Kansas

# Conversation on Communion at Bethel

Two Bridgefolk participants, one a pastor and the other a theologian and historian, joined in an exploration of communion from a Mennonite perspective at one of the major Mennonite centers this fall.

Bethel College is one of the oldest of the Mennonite colleges. It is located in North Newton, Kansas. The conversation was held at Bethel College Mennonite Church, shown below.



Two Bridgefolk participants led a “Conversation on Communion” at Bethel College Mennonite Church in September, addressing the growing interest in communion in the Mennonite community.

The speakers were Weldon Nisly, pastor of Seattle Mennonite Church and a Bridgefolk co-founder and board member; and John Rempel, a faculty member at Assoc. Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, IN. About 50 people from the surrounding Mennonite community, one of the largest and oldest in North America, attended the day-long event.

“The primary invitation to be there came from Bethel College Mennonite Church,” Weldon says. “They had asked John Rempel and me to lead a ‘Conversation on Communion’ that linked communion and peacemaking.”

“It was a very stimulating conference to say the least,” he adds. “John spoke to the Anabaptist historical and Mennonite practice perspective. I spoke on the Biblical and pastoral context.”

“I made a case for communion every Sunday, based on seeing the risen Jesus in the blessed and broken bread in Emmaus, and as every Sunday being a little Easter, and that we need eyes of faith to see the risen Christ and be the body of Christ. John made the case for monthly communion.”

“Yet the conversation on communion was much richer than the issue of frequency. Who is invited to the Lord’s Table? And how does that relate to the unity of the church? These were stimulating parts of the conversation.”

In his historical introduction to the discussion John said, “The Lord’s Supper is our most profound and formative symbol. How we practice it reveals more of what we believe about grace, the church, and mission than any other aspect of congregational life. It is our theology incarnate.”

In his meditation of the Emmaus story of Luke 24 Weldon said, “Every Sunday is Easter, and we need the bread and wine of our communion with Christ to see the Risen Jesus to be Christ’s body in and for the broken world.”

In his Sunday morning sermon John quoted a 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptist theologian who wrote, “Just as Christ gave up his body and blood for me, I pledge to give up my body and blood for my sisters and brothers.”

“The act of blessing and sharing bread and wine is a participation in the body and blood of Christ,” John said. “Paul does not argue that bread as a sacred object becomes the body of Christ. But he does say that when we bless and share the bread, we receive more than we were given.”

He added, “What changes in communion is not the bread but the people.”

Both John and Weldon also spoke at the Bethel College convocation. Weldon’s address was “How a Mennonite Pastor got to be a Benedictine Oblate.” John’s was a report on his former work as Mennonite Central Committee representative to the UN.

While there Weldon met with nine Bridgefolk members from the Newton area at the home of Eric Massanari. They were Randy and Myrna Krehbiel, Melanie Zuercher, Robert Rhodes, Corinne and Don Kehrberg, Leslie James, and Miles Reimer. Two new participants were also present.

“I asked each of them to share something about where they are on the Mennonite Catholic bridge, and what joy or sorrow they hold at this time,” Weldon says. “It was a rich time together.”



## New opening

# Dialogue in So. America Begins

Mennonite Catholic relationships in Latin America have been difficult. Thus the opening of dialogue between Catholics and Mennonites in Colombia has significance for relationships throughout the world.

In a significant ecumenical breakthrough, Catholics and Mennonites in Colombia met for a day of formal dialogue in Bogotá on May 20. The dialogue was initiated by the three Mennonite groups in Colombia, and co-sponsored by the ecumenical office of the Colombian Catholic bishops. It took place during the annual week of prayer for Christian unity there.

Latin American Mennonites have been the most opposed to dialogue with Catholics of any regional group. Many have memories of discrimination, such as not being allowed to attend schools, because they were not Catholic.

More than fifty persons attended, including Anabaptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, the president of the Protestant Council of Churches, and Muslims.

Bridgefolk executive director, Gerald Schlabach, who worked in Latin America for Mennonite Central Committee during the 1980s, discussed the event in a recent interview. He said:

“For many years the Protestant missionaries who came to Latin America simply assumed Catholics were not Christians at all, and as a result there has been a formidable stream of thought that would see both the Roman church, as well as the ecumenical movement, as anti-Christian.”

“You see both the best and the worst of Catholicism in Latin America,” he added. “The early Spanish Catholic missionaries simply assumed that the ideal government was one that was officially and loyally Catholic, and that there was no room in society for any other faiths.”

In Colombia there was a decade-long period of violence between 1948 and 1958 in which more than 200,000 people died, and Protestants were among the worst hit. “This persecution has the kind of status among older evangelicals throughout Latin America that the Anabaptist persecution of the 16<sup>th</sup> century has among Mennonites,” Schlabach says.

He added, “Many, many Mennonites in Latin America identify themselves with the Protestant evangelical—and increasingly Pentecostal—movements and their Mennonite identity is often an afterthought or an add on.”

“But,” he says, “those Mennonite leaders who are now self-consciously discovering Anabaptist-Mennonite theology are beginning to find out that they have more in common with Catholics than they thought, as they start to work together on human rights, and peace and justice concerns.”

One of the speakers at the Bogotá dialogue was a Dominican university teacher who discussed the importance of reconsidering history, especially the social situation that led to the Reformation. A Mennonite pastor agreed, but said there is also a need to understand modern political, social and economic conditions, and the search for social change in the radical movements.

The Mennonite peace position can help bring about changes in society, a Jesuit professor said. Such changes are urgent in Colombian society, he added. His Mennonite respondent said that for Anabaptists of the 16th century baptism had much wider than just religious implications. It implied separation of church and state, and had grave consequences for citizens.

Peter Stucky, a Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee member, said, “We in Colombia are deeply wounded and don't know how to heal our own wounds. Are we as Christian churches willing to help reconciliation take place in our country?”



— Mennonite World Conference release  
and interview with Gerald Schlabach