

Fall 2005

The BRIDGE

Newsletter of the Bridgefolk Movement

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Conference at EMU Opens New Chapter

Bridgefolk met this summer in one of the larger Mennonite communities. A local reporter who is neither Mennonite nor Catholic, and who was new to Bridgefolk, wrote this story.

Ken Nafziger led the singing at this summer's conference.



Andrea Bartoli, U.S. leader of the Catholic Sant'Egidio lay fellowship, shared the story of Dirk Willems, the Dutch Mennonite known for saving a drowning pursuer who then killed him. Through his compassionate act, Bartoli said, that martyr gave "a gift of the spirit that I can experience 500 years later."

Glen Miller, in turn, shared warm memories of a friend from his years directing the Mennonite Central Committee in India: Mother Teresa. In lovingly serving people of all world faiths, Miller said, "She was a holy person."

These testimonials were part of the 2005 Bridgefolk Conference, an annual dialogue between Mennonites and Catholics held this year for the first time at Eastern Mennonite University. Bridgefolk began in 1999 at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Mt. Pleasant, Pa. and continued at Saint John's Benedictine Abbey in Collegetown, Minn., in 2002-2004. About 100 people from both traditions, the majority lay members, attended at least one session of this year's events. With their children, they worshiped at local Catholic and Mennonite churches together.

"We have more in common than we suspected," said moderator Ivan Kauffman. Abbot John Klassen of Saint John's, Catholic co-chair of Bridgefolk, spoke admiringly of the Mennonites' nonviolent tradition. Citing John 15:12-17—a text employed as a *lectio divina* for small group reflection—Klassen recalled, "Jesus told the disciples, I call you my friends."

"The bridge is not a path to either tradition, but going where no one else has," said Marlene Kropf, Bridgefolk's Mennonite co-chair. Many Mennonites, she said, are drawn to the Catholic Eucharist tradition. She noted that Bridgefolk does not aim at institutional change, only at building friendship. In 1999 her denominational employer prohibited her attending Bridgefolk in her official role. Since then however Mennonite Church USA has made her participation in Bridgefolk part of her work as Minister of Worship.

The informal grass-roots Bridgefolk parallels a series of high-level ecumenical discussions. As part of a dialogue process between many Christian faiths, representatives of the Vatican and Mennonite World Conference conferred between 1998 and 2003. An abridged edition of their conclusions, entitled "Called Together to be Peacemakers," was published in July 2005 by Pandora Press.

The international dialogue sought "a healing of memories" according to that report, which addresses the two traditions' histories, theologies and practices. It asks, "How can relation-

ships between Catholics and Mennonites become Christian?” John A. Lapp, former executive secretary of Mennonite Central Committee, spoke on the report in a colloquium at EMU preceding Bridgefolk.

Kauffman said Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have both supported the dialogues, though they have yet to become well-known among either church’s laity. Kropf and Mennonite World Conference President Nancy Heisey hope that will change through distribution of the abridged report, which Mennonites and Catholics may study together through local church groups.

Bridgefolk attracts Catholic/Mennonite couples and believers who have moved between denominations—such as Kauffman, a Mennonite convert to Catholicism. Many, however—such as Dorothy Harnish, of Lancaster, Pa.—are simply attracted to both.

Harnish, a lifelong Mennonite, sees no conflict between participation in her church and being a Benedictine oblate at the Immanuel Monastery in Baltimore. She finds a spiritual richness in Catholic devotionals that she misses in more “intellectual” Mennonite services.

In turn, Catholics such as Pete Mahoney—a brother in the Xavierian order, which works among marginalized people—are drawn to Mennonite peace and justice work. “What the Mennonites have given to me is the connectedness with the world,” said Mahoney, a 20-year Shenandoah Valley resident.

Raised “nominally Christian,” Pat Shaver tried but outgrew fundamentalism, then became drawn to both Catholic and Mennonite worship. Having attended all five Bridgefolk conferences, she was one of five Seattle Mennonite Church members visiting EMU.

Though Sant’Egidio has played a key peacebuilding role in Mozambique, Rwanda, Kosovo and the Sudan, Bartoli noted that mission was not the community’s goal. “It happened to us,” said Bartoli, explaining that Sant’Egidio’s mission near Rome extends hospitality to pilgrims from all over the world and learns about needs from them. “Friendship comes first.”

Ron Kraybill, co-director of EMU’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, feels the traditions contribute different, complementary peacebuilding skills. Mennonites, a relatively small denomination, work “from the margins,” representing the marginalized. The Catholic Church, being “huge and complex,” works more “from the center,” representing both “the Pope and the radical priest”—established power and reform.

This year Bridgefolk culminated in a footwashing service. Though church rules prevent interdenominational communion, Kauffman said “What we can do is we can wash each other’s feet.”

Tom Crotty, a Catholic whose wife, Pat, is Mennonite, wrote and shared the following haiku:

*Wide water to cross,
Yet we walk a dry path through
Word walls on both sides.*

— Chris Edwards for *Mennonite Weekly Review*



The footwashing service concluded this year’s conference. Catholics and Mennonites paired off to wash each other’s feet.

Fr. William Skudlarek and Abbot John Klassen brought the Saint John’s Abbey morning prayers with them to EMU, where they opened each day’s activities.





Who Came?

90 people registered for the two conferences at EMU this summer (MCTC and Bridgefolk)—83 adults and 7 children. Another 15-20 local people attended one or more sessions, **making the total attendance over 100.**

Of the adults who registered 46% were Mennonites and 54% Catholics. Most of the unregistered local participants were Mennonite, making total attendance **roughly even between Mennonites and Catholics.**

55% of the registrants were new participants. 43% of them were Mennonite and 57% were Catholic.

34% of the registrants were from Virginia—13 Mennonites and 15 Catholics. All but 4 were new participants.

People from the region were another 29%. 9 were from Pennsylvania—all but 1 new. 9 came from metropolitan Washington, 6 new. 6 came from the nearby states of Kentucky, North Carolina, West Virginia and Maryland.

People from the Virginia region thus made up 63% of the registrants. They included 89% of the new registrants, and 61% of the Mennonite registrants.

The next largest regional group came from the Midwest—14 from Indiana, Michigan and Illinois. Another 4 came from **Canada**, 7 from the **West Coast**, 3 from **Minnesota**, 2 from **New York** and 1 from **Arkansas.**

Children were officially included in Bridgefolk for the first time this year. 10 participated, about 10% of the overall total.

The Saturday evening ice cream social was popular again this year. (Above)

A Mennonite Tour of historic areas in the surrounding countryside was a high point of this year's conference. (Left)

MCTC Session at EMU

Exploring 'Called Together' Together

The Mennonite Catholic Theological Colloquium held its first in-person session, prior to the Bridgefolk conference at EMU this summer. They discussed the international dialogue report.

Nancy Heisey, president of Mennonite World Conference, and a faculty member at EMU, addressed the MCTC this summer prior to Bridgefolk.



Roman Catholics and Mennonites gathered at Eastern Mennonite University on July 20-21 to reflect on “*Called Together to Be Peacemakers*,” the report of the first international dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Mennonite World Conference. More than 30 theologians, historians and ecumenists attended.

The gathering was the first in-person meeting of the Mennonite/Catholic Theological Colloquium (MCTC) and was held immediately before the annual Bridgefolk conference.

The colloquium opened with an address by John A. Lapp, Executive Secretary Emeritus of Mennonite Central Committee, entitled, “Ecumenical Dialogue as a Ministry of Reconciliation.” He noted many signposts of reconciliation between Mennonites and Catholics around the world and stressed that reconciliation is integral to the ministry of the church.

In response, Abbot John Klassen said that ecumenism is never an “add-on,” but is at the very heart of the gospel. Abbot John also addressed the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation and the importance of hospitality.

The next day Earl Zimmerman and Nancy Heisey, both of Eastern Mennonite University’s Bible and Religion Department responded to the report.

Zimmerman said that re-reading history together is one of the really significant developments in the report. He also noted that in America both Mennonites and Roman Catholics have been shaped by our experiences as immigrant churches and religious minorities in a predominately Protestant society.

Nancy Heisey, president of Mennonite World Conference, noted that more than half of the world’s Mennonites live in the global South and framed her remarks on the basis of what she hears from Mennonites in that region. While acknowledging the enthusiasm for dialogue with Catholics among Mennonites in North America and parts of Europe, Heisey noted a more hesitant response among Mennonite communities in Latin America and parts of Africa and Asia, due in part to different historical situations.

The Catholic respondents were Margaret R. Pfeil of Notre Dame and Drew Christensen, S.J., editor of *America*. Christensen was a participant in the five-year dialogue and contributed to drafting the report.

Pfeil asserted that the report didn’t go far enough in calling Catholics to deep mourning and real repentance for the persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century. Remembering the martyrs, and recognizing that Christianity is an incarnational, flesh-and-blood religion, she posed the question of what might be worthy of our blood as a sign of our baptismal commitment today.

Drew Christiansen noted that Mennonites and Catholics share a commitment to live out the call to holiness of life in the postmodern world. This call is not limited to nonviolence, but includes love of the poor, and requires personal and communal discernment. In a challenge to Mennonites, he asked “Does God speak to the Church through the world?” He pointed out that Vatican II had “expressed gratitude for what the Church had been taught even by those who had persecuted her.”

Following the presentations, the participants met in affinity groups to consider next steps in the colloquium’s work.

— Marilyn Stahl

Bridgefolk Series

Called Together Study Edition Published

The report of the international Mennonite Catholic dialogue was an historic event in Mennonite Catholic relations. Now this landmark document is available in an easy-to-read version suited for discussion by local groups.

The series of ecumenical dialogues between Mennonite and Catholic theologians and church leaders, which took place between 1998 and 2003, marks a turning point in Mennonite Catholic relations. For the first time since the Reformation Catholics and Mennonites entered into respectful conversation.

Helmut Harder, the Mennonite co-chair of these dialogues calls it “a historic event of great significance for Mennonite churches around the world and for the global Catholic Church.”

The process began in October 1998 when a group of 14 persons—7 Mennonites appointed by the Mennonite World Conference and 7 Catholics appointed by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity—met for a week-long session at MWC headquarters in Strasbourg, France. It continued with annual meetings for the next 5 years.

It concluded 6 years later when the group published a final report of their long and often intense discussions. The report, entitled *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*, was jointly published by the Vatican and Mennonite World Conference in English, French, German and Spanish.

It offers a common narrative of watershed events in church history especially during the 16th and 17th centuries. It explores theological perspectives that the two traditions both share and dispute concerning the nature of the Church, sacraments/ordinances, and peacemaking. It closes with mutual confessions of repentance for past violence and recrimination, thus inviting a “healing of memories.”

Harder says, “Very early in the dialogue the Mennonite and Catholic participants established a wholesome relationship with each other. They acknowledged each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and spoke respectfully of each other’s churches. They read Scripture, sang hymns and prayed together. The Catholics expressed their expectation that the Mennonites would explain their doctrine of peace. Mennonites wanted to be challenged by Catholic views on spirituality and on unity.”

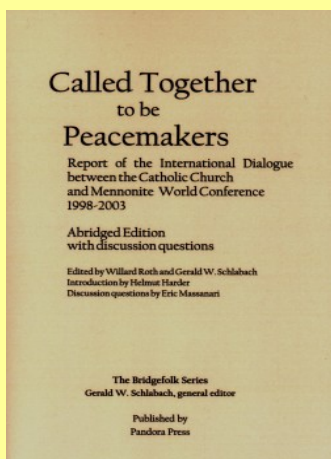
A group of Bridgefolk volunteers led by Gerald Schlabach has now collaborated with Pandora Press to publish a condensed version of this watershed document designed to make the report accessible to both individuals and study groups.

The text has been condensed by Willard Roth, a retired Mennonite editor from Elkhart, IN. The condensed text is about one-third the length of the original. Helmut Harder has written an introduction, and Gerald Schlabach a preface. Eric Massanari, pastor of Shalom Mennonite Church in Newton, KS has written a series of questions designed to stimulate discussion in small groups in local congregations and parishes, as well as elsewhere.

The book includes an appendix that provides study plans of various length and focus. Discussion questions appear throughout the document. Paragraph numbers from the original document are retained for those who wish to study the topics covered in the report more thoroughly.

Bridgefolk participants are encouraged to use the condensed version of *Called Together to Be Peacemakers* in their local areas. Congregations, parishes and classrooms are natural opportunities.

The dialogue report is an ideal opportunity to carry on a Mennonite Catholic dialogue in your local setting. Bulk rates are available.



Called Together to Be Peacemakers is published by Pandora Press

To order a copy, visit www.bridgefolk.net/theology/bfseries.php

For bulk orders write greg@pandorapress.com

Local dialogue

Indiana Bridgefolk Pray Together

Learning to pray in a new way brought Mennonites and Catholics from the South Bend and Elkhart areas together in a new way this summer.

Jay Landry distributes cookies for the cookie-breaking ritual that was part of the social hour which concluded each of the centering prayer sessions.



“We started with what unites us, not with what divides us,” says Jay Freel Landry, Bridgefolk participant and co-organizer of a centering prayer group that met this summer in northern Indiana each Thursday evening in six different churches—three Catholic and three Mennonite.

The program, called “Healing through the Journey of Centering Prayer,” brought South Bend and Elkhart area Catholics and Mennonites together for fellowship and prayer. More than a hundred persons participated.

The event grew out of a meeting of local Bridgefolk last April (reported in the last issue of *The Bridge*) says Landry, who is a lay pastoral associate at the South Bend parish. “I was aware of the tapes by Fr. Keating and Fr. Richard Rohr, and at this Catholic-Mennonite gathering at Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend I suggested we do this together, along with as many Catholic and Mennonite churches who might be interested.”

He in turn contacted Marlene Kropf, Bridgefolk co-chair who lives in Elkhart, and she made contact with local Mennonite churches. “I was thrilled to join in this experiment,” Kropf says. “In my mind there could be no better way to come together than to begin praying together.”

She added, “One of the good things that came out of this experience was Jay and I becoming friends, and realizing how many interests and visions we have in common. Though we come from very different traditions, our vision for the church and for spiritual growth and renewal is remarkably similar.”

“Certainly the best thing that happened is that more than 100 Catholics and Mennonites who knew very little about each other before this summer came together to learn and practice centering prayer, and to join together to heal some of the violence in the world,” she said. “We discovered we are fellow pilgrims on the same journey of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ and to Christ’s way of peace in the world.”

Centering prayer has gained much popularity in recent years. Landry says, “It allows for God’s presence to envelop the person praying. We can just sit there and do nothing and focus on God.” He added, “It can become a discipline for our lives. It can shape us and how we live.”

Kropf agreed. “I was moved by the number of people who told of the ways their lives are being changed by the practice of centering prayer—an increased ability to forgive, a growing desire to be merciful, more boldness to challenge violent words and actions, a deeper sense of being loved by God.”

Each of the sessions concluded with the Bridgefolk prayer, and then with a social time, at which Mennonites and Catholics were asked to introduce themselves to members of the other group who they did not know.

“I saw increasing joy each time we met, in the connections that were made,” Kropf said. “This was a wonderful success, getting to know Christians from another tradition,” Landry said.

Many Catholics said they had never met a Mennonite before—although northern Indiana is home to one of the largest Mennonite communities in the world—and how great it was to do just that amidst prayer and fellowship, cookies and ice cream.

— from a story by Michelle Donaghey in *Today’s Catholic*, newspaper of the Diocese of Ft. Wayne-South Bend, IN

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 16th 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 16th 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?”



Bridgefolk Session at Mennonite Assembly

At this summer's Mennonite assembly over a hundred people turned out for a break-out session on Bridgefolk.

Every two years the Mennonite Church USA, the largest of the North American Mennonite denominations, holds a national assembly, usually attended by several thousand people. It is the highest level gathering of the denomination, and includes official delegates from each of the Mennonite congregations and district conferences.

This year the assembly was held in Charlotte, NC and included a session on Bridgefolk. Marlene Kropf, Bridgefolk co-chair and an officer of MCUSA, led the session, and Bridgefolk participants Weldon Nisly and Eric Massanari participated. Both are Mennonite pastors.

"I was amazed that over 100 people showed up for a seminar at 4:30 on Friday afternoon at the end of a long and full week," said Nisly. "I expected 12-15 people. This could not have happened even a few years ago."

"What was most interesting to me were the comments and questions raised in the 20 minutes of discussion time," said Kropf. She recalls one person asking how we were dealing with the history and martyr issues, and another asking about Eucharistic issues. A local Catholic who attended expressed his appreciation for Mennonite peace and justice resources.

"Overall I simply marveled at the strong interest and support shown by this group of interested seminar participants," Marlene reported. "Who would have thought, even five years ago, that such a seminar might happen at our national conference?"

She added, "I'm grateful for the information available on the website. We hope we may have inspired a few new Bridgefolk participants."

International Lutheran Mennonite Dialogue

A new international-level dialogue has begun, this time involving the Lutheran Churches. Once again the persecution of Anabaptists in the Sixteenth Century is at the center of the dialogue.

"The memories of the persecution and the killings of Anabaptists in large numbers so many hundreds of years back, are still very fresh and painful among Anabaptists and Mennonites today," said Rev. Sven Oppegaard, the Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs of the Lutheran World Federation.

He is a member of the Lutheran Mennonite International Study Commission which held its first meeting 27 June - 1 July 2005, in Strasbourg, France. The commission's mission is to consider the condemnations of Anabaptists in the sixteenth-century Lutheran confessions.

The communiqué issued after the initial meeting stated that the commission became more deeply sensitive to the suffering of Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation from persecution by civil authorities in Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed areas.

It also pointed out that Christians of all confessions were victims of persecution during the sixteenth-century reformation period. "Reflection on this matter raises serious questions concerning the theological rationale for pursuing religious and social goals by violent means, including torture and killing," it stated.

The study commission's work is expected to take at least three years. It is sponsored jointly by the LWF and the Mennonite World Conference. The next meeting will take in Strasbourg in June 2006.

Previous Lutheran-Mennonite dialogues have been conducted in France (1981-1984), Germany (1989-1992), and the United States (2001-2004), but this is the first dialogue at the international level.

The LWF is a global communion of Lutheran churches. It currently has 138 member churches in 77 countries all over the world, with a total membership of nearly 66 million.

— from a Lutheran World Information release

IRS Approval

Bridgefolk Granted Non-profit Status

Dirk Giseburt of Seattle is an attorney and Bridgefolk participant. He volunteered many hours of expert legal time to get recognition of Bridgefolk as a non-profit organization. In an email interview he explained the process.

Why was it necessary for Bridgefolk to incorporate?

It was not absolutely necessary, but there are some definite institutional and legal advantages. Foundations usually make grants only to established 501(c)(3) organizations, so this makes Bridgefolk eligible for grants. Also, banks and insurance companies are sometimes reluctant to deal with unincorporated associations.

Participants in Bridgefolk activities shouldn't see any differences in the established programs—conferences, the newsletter, and the like.

What is involved in incorporating?

On one level, incorporation is easy—you take a standard form with basic legal requirements, have one person (the incorporator) sign it, send it in to the Secretary of State (Minnesota in this case) with your check for \$70, and you have a corporation.

But behind this is a lot more work on the organizers' part, especially in thinking through how governance will work over time. The old Bridgefolk steering committee spent more than a year reflecting on how to provide for both stability and fresh energy in the organization.

What does 501(c)(3) mean? How is that connected to incorporation?

501(c)(3) is the section of the Internal Revenue Code that provides an exemption for charitable organizations. So Bridgefolk has now been recognized by the IRS as exempt from income tax. This also means that others can make donations to Bridgefolk and obtain charitable-contribution deductions from their own income.

Who's in charge of the corporation now that it exists? How will it be managed?

Bridgefolk is managed by its board of directors, as are all corporations, both nonprofit and for-profit. There are currently 8 members on the board (7 from the old steering committee). The board can be as large as 10.

There are two co-chairs and the bylaws state that one should always be a representative of a recognized Mennonite body—Marlene Kropf currently fills this role—and that one should always be a representative of Saint John's Abbey, and this is Abbot John Klassen.

The bylaws also set a goal of balance on the board between Catholics and Mennonites, and that it always include Canadians. There are term limits of 9 consecutive years on the board.

State law also requires a corporation to have executive officers as well. In Bridgefolk's case, the Executive Director, Gerald Schlabach, has the legal function of president. Fr. William Skudlarek serves as secretary and Greg Pofert (not a member of the board) serves as treasurer.

The question of membership in the corporation has been left open. With Bridgefolk in its infancy as a corporation, the organizers felt it was premature to try to address the legal concept of Bridgefolk membership at this time. But the bylaws have set a goal of examining every 5 years or so whether and how to set up membership—that is, bringing the Bridgefolk constituency into a governance role.

What are by-laws and what is their purpose?

Bylaws are a legal document that establishes the procedures for corporate action and the rights and duties of the board and officers. Often nonprofit corporations also include their mission statements in their bylaws as a kind of statement to their constituents and the world of what they hope to be and accomplish—Bridgefolk has done this in its bylaws.

Any personal comments you'd like to add?

In the course of advising the old steering committee on the options for setting up a corporation, I had the opportunity to attend two of their meetings at Saint John's. As you would expect, they treat each other with honesty and openness and care. It's no surprise that these people, who are committed to the unity of the Church, would also be good friends to each other. Working with them has been a warm and beautiful experience for me, for which I am very thankful.

Susan Harrison Joins Bridgefolk Board

Bridgefolk's newest board member lives in Canada, and has been active in recent conferences. Here she tells how she became involved on the bridge.

I live in Toronto with my husband and two children, where we moved from Chicago in 1997. I am in my third year of studies at the Toronto School of Theology, doing a ThD in theology with a focus on theologies of relationship, both those dealing with Christian ecumenism and Muslim/Christian relationships.

While attending a course on barriers and breakthroughs in ecumenical dialogue, one of my professors, Margaret O'Gara, introduced me to Bridgefolk. Having known Gerald and Marlene from my days at AMBS, I was eager to learn more. I attended my first Bridgefolk conference in 2003.

Our family attends the Hagerman Mennonite church in Markham, Ontario, a Swiss Mennonite congregation. I am Mennonite 'back to the Rhine' ethnically, but grew up in the

'diaspora' in Rochester, MN. We worshipped at a Methodist church because the Rochester Mennonite fellowship had not yet formed. We also kept in regular contact with Faith Mennonite in Minneapolis.

During my childhood I attended Methodist, Lutheran and Mennonite church camps with my friends, and enjoyed the annual Mennonite gatherings at the national level.

Music, IBM, and the Mayo clinic play a large role in the Rochester, MN culture. Both venues bring Christians together at all times of the year, and that was the life I knew before I moved to Eastern Mennonite High School in grade 12, then to Goshen College, and Associated Menn. Biblical Seminary.

We lived in Chicago, and in the country of Jordan, after we married in 1989. While in Chicago I had occasion to study at the Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and UCC seminaries, as well as train as a hospital chaplain under the supervision of a Jesuit priest and Methodist minister.

I suppose my Methodist worship background provided me with openness for vestments, stained glass, and liturgy in worship, for I am ecumenical in practice and outlook. As an adult I learned of Taizé through the Mennonite hymnal, and have made it my own language of worship.

As a child I actively explored my Mennonite beginnings, trying to relate to my extended family roots in Pennsylvania and Illinois, while at the same time being in daily friendship with Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Mormons, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists—and so on. So I suppose I have always been on the bridge.

My closest childhood friend is a Catholic woman, whose parents were active as Franciscans. I remember being mindful that "they" killed my ancestors, prayed with icons and rosary, and were very pious! Nearly every day my friend and her parents and I talked about our faith together, and I recall getting frustrated when they would answer "I don't know, I'll have to ask the priest what we believe about that." I was never attuned to the Eucharist problem between us while we grew up, since as an unbaptized person I didn't expect to partake.

We found our common faith and shared morality sustained a friendship that continues to the present. As her extended family ties have kept her involved in the military life of the U.S.—the place of barrier that we most experience—I have found Bridgefolk helpful to give me a common language we could share on this subject.

At the age of 14 I chose a "believer's baptism", and requested it be done at the Methodist church we attended. I didn't join this church however, because it wasn't pacifist. Later at Goshen College I requested membership at a Mennonite church, who debated the validity of my baptism before accepting me as a member.

Since the 1980's I've been interested in Islam and Muslim/Christian relations, and in 1999 began working with Mennonite Central Comm. as the local coordinator of their student exchange between Iran and Toronto. The students who came



Susan K. Harrison and Gerald Schlabach

here from Iran happened to be doing doctoral work in Philosophy of Religion. They had not known any Christians before and most of their knowledge of Christianity was based on Catholic sources.

I found that I needed to know more about Catholicism in order to understand the Christianity they were conversant with. But in addition, as I learned about Shi'a Islam and philosophy, I began to wonder whether there were similar trajectories of thought within Christianity. That journey also led me to learn more about Catholicism.

I value Bridgefolk because of several things I see there which I value as a person who works in the field of dialogue. I value the way it is infused with lay and clergy leadership and participation. I value the way it attends to its people as spiritual persons, seeking God in worship, finding ways to build unity that account for empirical and emotional barriers.

I like the message that it is something on the move, a way of living together, and not a single moment. The motto “pro-

ceed in friendship” has become a daily way forward for me in many situations. I value the way Bridgefolk presumes that there are ecumenical gifts to be shared. I value that it seeks to be able to build community, while also giving a place to the tourist who just wants to see what it looks like when people live on or under a bridge.

I value the way Bridgefolk cares for its participants and keeps in touch outside of the formal meetings. I value the way Bridgefolk share their conversations and experiences through the newsletter, web site, and publications.

I value meeting other Mennonites who are trying various ways to find a fuller expression of our faith. I like the way I always learn something about spiritual practices, new songs, interesting people, and new ways to approach the issues I'm “stuck” on.

Having lived my life on various bridges, I value a place to meet others who know what that feels like and want to understand such a life as the gift it can be.

At Taizé

Witness to Bro. Roger's Death

Bridgefolk participant Brenda Bellamy has spent the past year in the ecumenical community of Taizé, France, and was present at evening prayer in August when Taizé's 90 year-old founder was killed by a deranged woman. What follows are some of her observations of the days surrounding Brother Roger's death, combined with news reports.

Each evening the Taizé community gathers for prayer in the Church of the Reconciliation, the center of their community in southeastern France. The approximately 100 brothers who belong to this ecumenical monastic community lead the prayers, and visitors and pilgrims present that day join them.

On Tuesday evening, Aug. 16, one of the visitors, a Romanian woman suffering from schizophrenia, came to the choir while the prayers were taking place and slit the throat of the 90 year-old founder of the community, Brother Roger.

Bridgefolk's Brenda Bellamy was there, and wrote an email to several friends the next day. “He died within minutes,” she said. “Two dozen children were sitting with him, and tens of young people nearby. His brothers and the 2,000-plus in the church saw, heard, and have been deeply affected.”

“After the first two minutes of panic and chaos, the prayer continued. We sang even as eight of the brothers bore Brother Roger out of the church on their shoulders. Then, as is the case in each evening prayer, the gospel was read. It was the Beatitudes. They were read in eight different languages. And the text was chosen a month in advance!”

“We continued in song. There was the great silence. All you could hear was the distinct sound of European sirens.

“After the silence, an older brother took the microphone and informed us that Brother Roger had died—that we should continue to pray and sing, to stay in the church supporting those who were affected. And we stayed. Even two hours later there were still some 500 people in the church, singing, praying.”

“Then the bells started to toll. It was about midnight. People returned to the church. We began another common prayer. A song. A Bible text.

“A brother walked up to the makeshift ambo that stood directly in front of the area that had been cordoned off by the police. The forensic police were taking measurements there, comparing notes.”

“The brother read the Beatitudes. In French. In English, In German. A song. A silence. An older brother takes the microphone. And in a strong, clear voice full of conviction says, ‘We don’t understand. We are all experiencing how costly it is. Remember something Brother Roger repeated often: God loves everyone, yes everyone, without exception. Our only response in the face of such violence can be to pass a sign of peace. Please pass a sign of peace with one another.’”

“The brothers leave the church again. The prayer continues. The bells ring for the Morning Prayer at 8:15 as usual. A song. A Psalm: ‘Look to God and your face will shine, all bitterness gone’. A Bible text chosen a month in advance: ‘There shall be violence no more in your land... (Is 60:18-20). A song. Silence. Brother Alois, the new prior takes the microphone. ‘We entrust Brother Roger to you Oh God, that he is seeing the unknown. May we welcome and transmit a ray of your brightness that is your love, even as Brother Roger did.’”

Brother Roger’s death produced an outpouring of comments throughout the Christian community.

Pope Benedict called Br. Roger “a pioneer of unity.” He said, “I had known him personally for a long time and had a cordial friendship with him. He often came to visit me.” The pope added, “He is now visiting us and speaking to us from on high. I think that we must listen to him—we must listen from within to his spiritually lived ecumenism and allow ourselves to be led by his witness.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury said, “Very few people in a generation manage to change the whole climate of a religious culture, but Brother Roger did just this. He changed the terms of reference for ecumenism by the challenge to Christians of diverse loyalties to live the monastic life together.”

The head of the World Council of Churches said, “The witness he bore throughout his life to the gospel and to ecumenical dialogue has been enormously influential over the past century. It was a source of inspiration and spiritual renewal for generations of young people, both in Europe and throughout the world.”

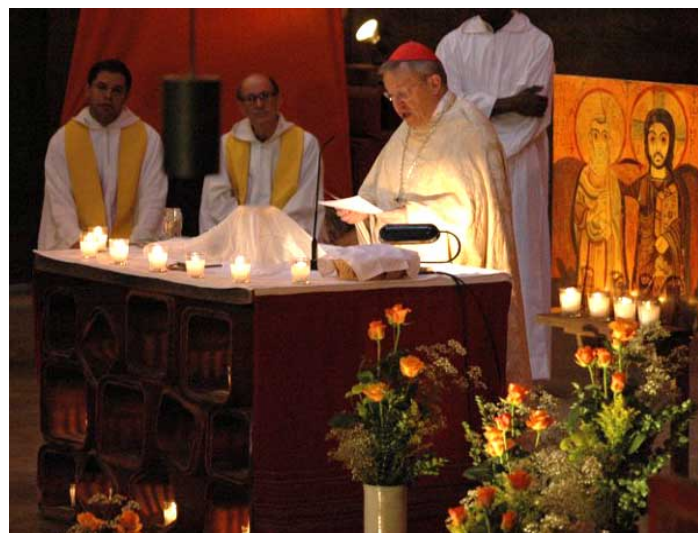
Some 10,000 people from around the world attended Brother Roger’s funeral on August 23. Most of the crowd viewed the service in the parking lot outside the church, via large screen video monitors.

The service was conducted by Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Four Catholic priests who are members of the Taizé Community concelebrated with him. An Anglican bishop read the first reading in English, and the President of the ecumenical Conference of European Churches read the second in French, repeated in German by the head of the Lutheran Church in Germany.

At the end of the service, Romanian and Russian Orthodox priests prayed around and incensed the body of Brother Roger.

In his homily Cardinal Kasper said of Brother Roger, “He wanted to live the faith of the undivided Church, without breaking with anybody, in a great brotherhood. He believed above all in the ecumenism of holiness, that holiness which changes the depths of the soul and which alone leads towards full communion.”

“Yes, the springtime of ecumenism has flowered on the hill of Taizé, in this Church of the Reconciliation,” the Cardinal



Cardinal Kasper officiated at the funeral liturgy for Brother Roger, who was a Protestant.

said, “where members of different Christian traditions meet in respect and dialogue, in prayer and fraternal sharing.” This echoed a comment that the late Pope John Paul II made on visiting the community in 1985.

Newspapers throughout the world covered the funeral, including the *New York Times*. The lead paragraph in the *Times* story said, “At a Eucharistic service celebrated Tuesday by a Roman Catholic cardinal for Brother Roger, a Swiss Protestant, communion wafers were given to the faithful indiscriminately, regardless of denomination.”

In a phone conversation Brenda explained that the Taizé community has its own liturgy, which it celebrates each Sunday. The Taizé liturgy incorporates all the essential features of the Roman Mass, but is also acceptable to Protestants, and Protestants and Catholics routinely share in communion.

Something quite notable, she said, was that Cardinal Kasper officiated at the Taizé liturgy celebrated for Brother Roger’s funeral, and that he distributed communion. Although there was no explicit invitation to open communion, it is widely known that is the custom at Taizé.

At Pope John Paul’s funeral, Cardinal Ratzinger had given communion to Brother Roger, raising speculation that he had converted to Catholicism, but that was denied by Vatican officials.

At AMBS

Bro. Roger's Visit to Mennonite Seminary

Janeen Bertsche Johnson is campus pastor at the Mennonite seminary in Elkhart IN. In 1997 Brother Roger was invited to nearby Notre Dame and she invited him to visit AMBS and he accepted. This is her story of the event.

In June 1991 my parents, husband and I ventured to eastern France to experience for ourselves the ecumenical Taizé community. I was drawn there because I had learned to love Taizé music a few years earlier, and I wanted to sing it in its original setting.

But what I found at Taizé was deeper than a style of music. I discovered a community of brothers that welcomed thousands of Christians from many denominations and nationalities.

And at the heart of that community I encountered its founder, Brother Roger Schutz. I remember him addressing a congregation of thousands, with simultaneous translation into several languages. His quiet words drew me. But even more attractive was the glow on his age-lined face. I bought several of Brother Roger's books and found his theology of forgiveness and peacemaking resonated deeply with my Mennonite faith.

A year later I joined 2,000 North Americans at a Taizé gathering in Dayton, Ohio. This time I served as a cantor for the worship services, and sat close enough to Brother Roger to observe his connection with God and with his fellow worshipers.

When he offered to pray with participants during the closing songs, I went to meet him and was deeply touched by his blessing on my ministry, and on my soon-to-be-born child. I had gone to the Dayton gathering as a pastor desiring spiritual renewal. I received that, but I also received a calling to take to my congregation encouragement for living authentic faith in daily life.

Two weeks later our copies of the new Mennonite hymnal arrived, and I was thrilled to find 14 Taizé songs in it.

Five years later I learned that Brother Roger was coming to Notre Dame to receive an award. I wrote to him, inviting him to visit Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. The reply from Taizé was, "Brother Roger was very happy to learn of your invitation. It had been precisely his wish that, on the occasion of his visit to Notre Dame, there be a contact also with a Protestant institution or group."

On April 25, 1997 I picked up Brother Roger and two other brothers and drove them to AMBS for a worship service that blended elements of both Taizé and traditional Mennonite worship.

As Brother Roger arrived at the AMBS chapel, he was drawn to the young children who had been brought there by their parents. The denominational and seminary leaders waiting to greet him in the chapel foyer had to wait while Brother Roger blessed the children.

Brother Roger's gift to us that day was not his oratorical skill, but the presence and witness of a man of deep faith who had given his life's ministry to encouraging faith and reconciliation.

He gave us, in his own handwriting, a short prayer for our reflection: "Jesus our peace, if it happens that we lose confidence, you, the Risen Christ, cause a tiny flame to flare up in us. This flame can be quite faint, but already faith sheds its light in our night: and God's fire, the Holy Spirit, comes rushing in."

As I grieve the violent death of a gentle brother who preached peace, the flame of faith gives light in this night, and makes me with Brother Roger "more eager than ever to go on toward the One who is Risen."

— from a report in *Mennonite Weekly Review*



Photo by Mary E. Klassen / AMBS

Bridgefolk People

News about people
involved in the
Bridgefolk Movement



Regina Wilson, a member of the Bridgefolk board, has accepted a new position on the Campus Ministry Team of Saint Mary's College in South Bend, IN. She had been a pastoral associate at one of the Catholic parishes in South Bend. Saint Mary's is one of the oldest Catholic women's colleges in the U.S., founded by sisters from France in 1844, at the same time the Univ. of Notre Dame was founded as a men's college. It is located across the street from Notre Dame but is completely independent. It currently has 1500 students, 300 of whom are in study abroad programs this year.

"My job involves working with students on retreat, Bible studies, peer ministry, liturgy preparation and leadership, and presiding and preaching and ministry to those students who are not Catholic," she says. "I have been enjoying this new phase of my journey, and feel that my years of experience in the Church have prepared me well for this work."

Peter Erb, a frequent participant in the Bridgefolk conferences, and one of the leaders of the Anabaptist Martyrs Project that has held scholarly conferences at Saint Johns in 2003 and 2004, is spending the fall term this year at the University of Prince Edward Island, where he has been asked to establish a Catholic studies program. He lives in Waterloo, ON where he is a long-time member of the faculty of Wilfrid Laurier University, and a popular speaker. He will deliver a series of talks at the Assoc. Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, IN early in November. While he is in Elkhart there will be a meeting of the planning committee for the Martyrs Project, to decide on next steps on this effort.

Jason Reimer Greig, and his wife **Elisabeth Brendebach Greig** are the parents of **Benedict Reimer Greig**, born March 4, 2005. Since August 2004 Jason and Elisabeth have been part of the Cape Breton L'Arche Community in Nova Scotia. Prior to that time Jason had been a member of the Daybreak L'Arche Community in Richmond, ON, near Toronto. Elisabeth is from Cologne, Germany and has been a member of L'Arche since 1996. They met at L'Arche in Ontario.

L'Arche is an international network of homes for developmentally disabled adults, founded about 40 years ago by Jean Vanier. It is well known to readers of Henri Nouwen who lived in the Dayspring L'Arche house during the final years of his life. There are now some 100 L'Arche communities in 30 nations.

At Cape Breton Jason is Chair of the Spiritual Life Committee, and house leader of Shalom House, a place of welcome and quiet used by volunteers, guests, and the family members of residents. For more information see the Cape Breton L'Arche website.

Alice Noe has been appointed Coordinator of Catechetical Program Development for the Archdiocese of Washington. She had been Director of Religious Education at St. Peter's Parish on Capitol Hill in Washington, where she worked closely with **Lois and Ivan Kauffman** in the parish RCIA (new members) program. During her time at St. Peter's **Jillian Hershberger** was an RCIA candidate for full communion. In her new job she helps to prepare materials to train catechists in the parishes.

Alice has been an active participant in both the Bridgefolk conferences and the Martyrs Project, and served on the local planning committee for the 2005 conference at EMU, taking the lead in planning the footwashing service that concluded that event. She was also one of the first to suggest that we should move the conference to a Mennonite location this year.

Stanley Kropf of Elkhart, IN spent three weeks in India in August with a group of Mennonite Central Committee board members and staff persons. Stan is Assistant Director of the Great Lakes MCC office in Northern Indiana, and a long-time Bridgefolk

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participant, along with his spouse **Marlene Kropf**. The purpose of the trip was to view first hand the work MCC is doing in India.

“On a scale of 1 to 100 I rate this experience at a 95,” he says. “On one hot and steamy day on the Andaman Islands, we traveled to a village of 42 families, on the sea-side at the end of a very bumpy road. We were greeted by the village band and the whole village. After each of us had been decorated with a rice poultice on our foreheads, and a circle of flowers around our necks, we processed behind the band through an archway constructed to honor our visit.

“The village was hit by the December 2004 tsunami less than an hour after the earthquake. They lost family members, houses, boats and nets. Their economy was ruined and the destruction was great.

“We met with the village women’s self-help groups and heard their stories of recovery and development, in which MCC had assisted. One woman said that the tsunami destroyed nearly everything that had but it was this destruction that has shown them what they as women are capable of doing, and has given them a voice in their community, and the ability to plan and shape their future. Before the tsunami they were merely background in the community, keeping house and tending children.

“MCC and its partner organization have helped these women create self-help groups where they learn livelihood skills of sewing and making crafts for sale, and they have also established a credit union that is administered by and for women. They feel very hopeful about the future with their newly discovered self dignity and livelihood skills.”

Bro. Jeffrey Gros, FSC, formerly Associate Director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, has joined the faculty of the department of Church History at Memphis Theological Seminary. The new appointment took effect in August. Jeff attended the 2003 Bridgefolk conference at Saint John’s, and the meeting of the Anabaptist Martyrs Project that took place at the same time.

During his years on the Catholic bishop’s ecumenical staff he played a key role in bringing the Mennonite peace position to the attention of the wider church, especially in organizing two conferences on the topic and editing the papers from those conferences for publication. He will continue to be a member of the advisory committee for the Mennonite Catholic Theological Colloquium.

Bridgefolk In Print

Items published
by Bridgefolk,
about Bridgefolk, or of
interest to Bridgefolk.

Sing the Journey, the new supplement to the Mennonite hymnal that was introduced at the national assembly in Charlotte this summer, includes a prayer by Pope John Paul II. Marlene Kropf, Bridgefolk co-chair and Mennonite worship leader, says, “Though we’ve often borrowed Catholic songs and hymns and even included some traditional Catholic worship resources in Mennonite hymnals—such as prayers by Augustine, etc.—I don’t believe we’ve ever included a resource by a pope.”

The prayer is: “To you, Creator of nature and humanity, of truth and beauty, I pray: Hear my voice, for it is the voice of the victims of all wars and violence among individuals and nations. Hear my voice, for it is the voice of all children who suffer and who will suffer when people put their faith in weapons and war. Hear my voice when I beg you to instill into the hearts of all human beings the vision of peace, the strength of justice, and the joy of fellowship. Hear my voice, for I speak for the multitudes in every country and in every period of history who do not want war and are ready to walk the road of peace. Hear my voice and grant insight and strength so that we may always respond to hatred with love, to injustice with total dedication to justice, to need with the sharing of self, to war with peace. *O God, hear my voice, and grant to the world your everlasting peace. AMEN.*”

Bridgefolk Mail

Each year the Bridgefolk conferences produce much discussion of Eucharistic sharing, and this year was no exception. These are two of the many comments we received.

I attend two ecumenical conferences each year, generally on two successive weeks. The first is the Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship at Seattle University, where I am a graduate student, and the second is Bridgefolk. Both are wonderful experiences, a rich sharing of perspectives and approaches—not to make ourselves the same, but to more faithfully serve Christ.

With each additional year of attendance at these conferences, as my sense of community gets stronger, the pain I experience at the brokenness which prohibits us from sharing together in the Eucharist grows deeper. This year at each conference I had a Eucharistic experience which I found enlightening. Though they were different, each acknowledged the brokenness of the church in a loving way that I have not previously experienced.

At the Summer Institute in Seattle, Gordon Lathrop, a Lutheran liturgical theologian, presided over the final worship service. As he invited the assembly to communion, he said, “For some here, the doctrines of your faith tradition preclude you from participating in this Eucharist.” Then, in a voice that cracked with emotion, he said, “*Please* don’t stay away. We *invite* you to come forward with crossed arms to receive a blessing.”

Gordon’s heartfelt invitation was quite a contrast from the usual phrase. To hear a passionate “PLEASE don’t stay away” and “We INVITE you” is a very different experience from “You may.” It acknowledges brokenness while expressing the yearning for unity and extends an invitation for as much participation as is currently possible.

The second example is not a prescription or permanent solution, but an example of gracious generosity and love. It took place at Bridgefolk this summer where we attended Mass at the Catholic Church Saturday night, and then a Mennonite service Sunday morning.

The Mennonites were asked not to partake in the Eucharist at the Catholic Mass, but were reminded they could go forward, with arms crossed over their chests, to receive a blessing. Even though we all know the “rules” of each others’ traditions, it is still painful to ask half of the group not to participate in a sacrament in which the other half are free to take part, and the tension is always palpable.

This year it was suggested that Catholics could also choose to go forward with crossed arms for a blessing and forego the Eucharist, as a gesture of solidarity with our Mennonite brothers and sisters.

I don’t think words will ever adequately describe how deeply touched I was to be in a Catholic church and see Abbott

John Klassen (who I have watched preside at the Eucharist) go forward in front of me, with arms crossed, like mine, foregoing the Eucharist to be in solidarity with Mennonites, with me, and the pain we were experiencing. It is an act of love I will never forget, and which will continue to inspire and challenge me.

Christ’s body, the church, is broken. Brokenness is messy and usually not quickly or easily resolved. And yet, the current upsurge of interest in ecumenical dialogue offers the possibility of beginning to heal some of that brokenness, in anticipation of the day when we will eat and drink together at Christ’s table.

For now, may God give us the courage to walk together in the messiness and inspire us to new ways of connecting and healing, as we long for the day when we will lift our voices with the seraphim and sing together “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”

Pat Shaver

When it was suggested at the Bridgefolk conference this summer that we Catholics might consider not receiving Eucharist as a sign of solidarity with those who are not invited to the table, I knew that I would consider it—being a solidarity kind of person. But after prayerful reflection, and several conversations, I concluded that I would not be able to do it.

What I did do was take the wonderful new Mennonite friends that I had made in those days to the table with me. I lifted them up as I raised my hands to receive his body, as I brought the cup to my lips. I held Marlene in my heart, remembering her sadness when she made the announcement about communion at Mass. And all the Mennonites in my small group—yes, they all came to the table with me.

At Blessed Sacrament that evening I observed that other Catholics had not come to the same conclusion I had, and I was surprised at the pain I felt in seeing my fellow Catholics choose not to receive. I can imagine that this was a decision not easily made, but after three days of building on the bridge, and moving ever so slowly to the other side, I experienced a barrier, not only between me and my Mennonite friends, but now between me and my Catholic friends.

So I ask these questions: After exchanging the sign of peace in preparation to receive, is it true peace that we bring to the table? Is the table the forum to which we take this discussion?

What are we modeling to the worshipping community who welcomes us, and who may be struggling to understand the whole concept of Bridgefolk in particular, and ecumenism in general? Isn’t there a way in which we could share a common communion that would truly unite us?

I have been so blessed by my time at the Bridgefolk conference, and this experience in no way detracts from that. I understand that this must be a conversation that is held each year as the conferences are planned. I wanted to add my thoughts for next time.

Barbara Melby

EDITORIAL

The First Ten Years

In June 1994 several of us met at a Believers Church Conference on the Lord's Supper in Ashland, Ohio and realized that Mennonite pastors needed to talk together about the Eucharist. That led to a conference in 1995 at the Mennonite seminary in Elkhart.

Then in August 1999—just 6 short years ago—we invited Mennonites and Catholics who were on the bridge between our two traditions to a retreat at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Pennsylvania. There 25 of us told our stories. There were tears, laughter, much singing, and amazement as we listened and saw the Spirit's hand in bringing us together.

A year and a half later Weldon and Marg Nisly were on sabbatical at the Ecumenical Institute at Saint John's Abbey, and Gerald, Ivan and Lois, and Stanley and I came to visit. Weldon arranged a visit with Abbot John (who was then less than a year into his new role as abbot). He listened to our story, then dumbfounded us all when he asked simply and with true Benedictine hospitality, "What can we do? How can we help?" That conversation led to our summer conferences at Saint John's.

At the same time the international dialogue between Roman Catholics and Mennonites was taking place—an amazing convergence between a worldwide conversation and a tiny, grassroots conversation in North America (though participants in the summer conferences have come from Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands as well).

We have been drawn to Bridgefolk because we see God's Spirit at work, healing wounds in the body of Christ and inviting us to share the rich gifts of our traditions. (I have an image of the Spirit standing just behind both groups, nudging us and saying, "Come on! Get together! You two need each other.")

Now, looking back ten years later, I have to say that God's Spirit was at work in ways we couldn't see then, giving birth to Bridgefolk, because what has happened among Mennonites and Catholics in the past 10 years is more than any human could have dreamed or accomplished.

What God is doing in the world is making friends. Wherever there is alienation, division or brokenness, God is at work to bring peace, communion, and friendship. God has called us here, to this bridge. God is calling us to be friends, on this bridge.

This bridge on which we gather is not a path to either of our traditions. Rather it is a bridge to some place new—a place to which neither of our traditions has yet traveled. Why wouldn't we want to be here, and see where this bridge goes?

— Marlene Kropf
(adapted from her presentation at the 2005 conference)

What you can do

Purchase two copies of the study guide to *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*.

Read one yourself and give the other to someone you know—preferably someone on the other side of the bridge.

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