

Spring 2006

The **BRIDGE**

Newsletter of the Bridgefolk Movement

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Bridgefolk • Mennonites and Catholics Bridging the Divide

2006 Conference

‘Making Peace: At Table, In the World’

The dates for this summer’s conference are
June 29 through July 2.
It will once again be held at
**Saint John’s Abbey
in Collegeville, MN.**

Bridgefolk’s fifth annual conference returns to Saint John’s Abbey in Collegeville, MN—which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this summer. After switching to a Mennonite location last summer, when we met at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA, the conference returns to its Catholic “home” where the first three conferences were held after we began holding annual conferences in the summer of 2002.

The invitation to the conference notes that as “a movement of sacramentally-minded Mennonites and peace-minded Catholics, Bridgefolk has often examined the challenge of peacemaking.” It goes on to add, “We have also encountered the pain of brokenness that prevents us from fully sharing at the table of the Lord.”

This year the conference will explore the relationship between these two themes. “Nowhere is the scandal of Christian disunity greater than when Christians leave the Lord’s Table to kill or exploit one another,” the invitation says. But “nowhere is the promise of God’s kingdom more tangible than when people from estranged nations and communities share a meal together.”

The conference will open Thursday evening at 6:30 with an opening liturgy and an introduction to the conference theme, led by Bridgefolk co-chairs Marlene Kropf and Abbot John Klassen. That will be followed by dinner and evening prayer, and a social hour at 9 p.m..



Register
online
at
www.Bridgefolk.net

Updated
conference
schedule
also
available

Friday's sessions will begin with morning prayer in the Abbey Church at 7 a.m., followed by breakfast.

The Friday morning session will begin at 9 a.m., and is entitled "Making peace at domestic and local tables." It will begin with a panel of peacemaking stories and experiences from families, monastic communities and other intentional communities. After the morning break a second panel will share experiences from local Bridgefolk gatherings.

The Friday afternoon session is entitled "Making peace at world tables." The panel will consist of persons who have served in places of conflict outside of North America.

There will be a two-hour period of free time on Friday afternoon, followed by dinner and evening prayer. Friday evening will be a hymn sing led by Ken Nafziger, the popular church musician who has led hymn sings at previous Bridgefolk gatherings.

The Saturday morning session is entitled "Making peace at the Lord's Table." It will consist of two presentations, one explaining the Catholic communion tradition, and the other introducing the Mennonite tradition.

The Catholic tradition will be presented by Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, a long-time member of the Saint John's Benedictine community, and a member of the Bridgefolk board.

The Mennonite tradition will be presented by Eleanor Kreider, a long-time leader in the Mennonite community and the author of a book on communion from a Mennonite perspective. She is the wife of Alan Kreider who has participated in previous Bridgefolk events.

The Saturday afternoon session will be entitled "Making peace at the Lord's Table in Bridgefolk." It will be led by Abbot John Klassen and Marlene Kropf, and will include small group discussions followed by a large group discussion. It will look at the issues that have surfaced in previous Bridgefolk conferences, and will be an attempt to look forward into new possibilities in the future.

At 5:30 on Saturday evening conference participants will join the local Collegeville parish for Mass in the lower lever of the Abbey Church, followed by dinner in the cafeteria.

Saturday evening will be the opening session of the Monastic Institute, held each summer at Saint John's. This year is the 150th anniversary of the founding of Saint John's Abbey, and that event is being marked by a special session of the Monastic Institute. Fr. Columba Stewart, a leading scholar on early monasticism, will deliver the keynote address. Bridgefolk are invited to attend.

The theme of the Monastic Institute this year is the connection between the monastic tradition and the newer non-monastic communities that are coming into being. Fr. Stewart's address will be entitled "Early Monasticism and Community Movements Today: What Is Old and How Do They Meet?" The Monastic Institute will continue throughout the following week, and is open to Bridgefolk who wish to attend.

The Sunday morning Bridgefolk session is entitled "Clearing the Table," and will be led by Regina Wilson and Weldon Nisly, Bridgefolk board members and long-time participants. It will provide opportunity for reflections on the gathering, Bridgefolk business, and issues that need further consideration.

The session will conclude with a Bridgefolk worship service, led by Ken Nafziger. The theme will be "Sent from the Table with Songs for Service." The conference will conclude with lunch in the cafeteria.

In November

Annual Board Meeting

The Bridgefolk Board held their annual meeting at Saint John's last fall. The major focus was on where we are as an organization, and where we're going—attempting to set some priorities for the future.

Seven of the eight Bridgefolk board members gathered at Saint John's last November for their annual meeting. Co-chair Marlene Kropf was unable to attend at the last moment because of the final illness of her mother in Oregon.

The meeting began with a report by *Bridge* editor Ivan Kauffman, describing how the newsletter has evolved into its present state, which is much more than anyone anticipated. No one at the beginning expected the volume of material that has been submitted, or has become available in other ways. About 50 persons or organizations now receive printed copies. The remaining copies, about 275, are distributed on the internet.

This was followed by a report by Bridgefolk Executive Director Gerald Schlabach, who reported that the growth of Bridgefolk has made it impossible for him to do justice to his professional work as a member of the Univ. of St. Thomas faculty, and also to his work for Bridgefolk, which includes leadership of the Mennonite Catholic Theological Colloquium.

The board agreed that to maintain the present level of activity additional resources and the volunteer efforts of more Bridgefolk participants will be needed.

Board member Regina Wilson then led a discussion of future priorities. She identified four major areas that have emerged thus far:

- Continuing to provide a 'home away from home' for both Mennonites and Catholics who find themselves drawn to the other tradition. This is done through the annual conferences, and through the Bridgefolk website.
- Supporting and encouraging local groups.
- Working to develop a shared work of peacemaking that involved both Catholics and Mennonites.
- Continuing to facilitate conversations, both scholarly and personal, on all the issues that presently divide Mennonites and Catholics, especially the Eucharist, ecclesial unity, and peacemaking.

In a related action the board appointed Lois Kauffman to be a "Bridgefolk Ambassador." Further discussion of the role that the Ambassador will play will be required.

The board also spent considerable time discussing the opportunity for joint Mennonite Catholic peacemaking. This was first proposed by Abbot John Klassen. (*See article on page 6*).

The board also approved the plan for a Christmas season fundraising effort proposed by Krisanne Vailancourt-Murphy.

A major item on the agenda was planning for the 2006 annual summer conference. The theme was selected after much discussion, and a planning committee was appointed. The members are Weldon Nisly, Regina Wilson, Marlene Kropf, and Lois Kauffman.

At the conclusion of the meeting the following "Statement of Priorities" was adopted by the board:

1. Connecting Mennonites and Catholics by creating a space for sharing together through: annual conferences; *The Bridge* newsletter; the Bridgefolk website; local groups; and the Bridgefolk ambassador.
2. Exploring how Christians are called together to be peacemakers, by: convening Catholics, Mennonites and other others to launch new peacemaking initiatives; and, promoting the study of *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*, the report of the international dialogue.
3. Promoting mutual understanding through dialogues and publication, involving the Mennonite Catholic Theological Colloquium, and the Bridgefolk Series of publications.

Mennonites Participate in Sant'Egidio Peace Event

For the first time Sant'Egidio's annual peace conference was held in the U.S., and for the first time several Mennonite leaders participated.

Each year the Community of Sant'Egidio holds an inter-faith peace conference, which draws religious leaders from throughout the world, and from all major religious traditions for a day of common prayer for peace. The events are modeled after the two services of inter-faith prayer for peace that Pope John Paul held in Assisi in 1986 and 2002.

Usually several hundred persons attend, and it is covered widely by the news media in Europe.

This year was the 20th anniversary of the event, and for the first time it was held in the United States—and there was significant Mennonite involvement. Mennonite World Conference Executive Secretary Larry Miller, and Mennonite World Conference President Nancy Heisey were both on the program, as was Judy Zimmerman Herr, head of the Mennonite Central Committee peace committee in the U.S. and Canada.

Also on the program was Ron Sider, head of Evangelicals for Social Action, a Mennonite theologian on the faculty of an evangelical seminary in Philadelphia, and a well known author.

Other Bridgefolk who attended included Fr. William Skudlarek of Saint John's Abbey, Marilyn Stahl and Dirk Giseburt of Seattle, and Lois Kauffman, a member of the Sant'Egidio community in Washington, DC.

The conference in Washington drew about 900 persons from throughout the world. It was co-sponsored by Georgetown University, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Catholic University of America.

Mennonite Catholic Theological Exchange

A new round of the Mennonite Catholic Theological Colloquium began recently, based on papers which discuss the concept of sacramentality from both Mennonite and Catholic perspectives.

The lead paper in this round of theological discussion is by Tom Finger, a Mennonite theologian and long-time Bridgefolk participant. In his paper he acknowledges there is an anti-sacramental tendency in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Finger argues, however, that since sacramentality is based on the belief that God's grace permeates and transforms all creation, "historic Anabaptists were extremely sacramental." After all, they insisted, at least as strongly as any current religious movement, "that grace inform all their concrete, material activities and relationships."

In a response to Finger's paper, Dennis Martin, a Catholic historian and theologian who was formerly a Mennonite, states that for Mennonite theologians to engage in serious ecumenical dialogue with the Catholic tradition they must respond to the settled teaching of the Catholic tradition as enunciated by the bishops acting in unison. If this is not done the result is "cherry picking" the Catholic tradition—selecting those Catholic theologians they agree with and ignoring the portions of the Catholic tradition they disagree with.

In a second response Margaret Pfeil, a Catholic theologian who teaches at Notre Dame and is a member of the Catholic Worker movement, calls fellow Catholics to what she calls "liturgical asceticism"—the process by which God transforms "a frail human community of believers into the Body of Christ" so that they become Christ's presence in service to the world.

This is the fourth session of the MCTC. The results of the first two, on baptism and just policing were published by Pandora Press. The third was held prior to last summer's Bridgefolk conference at EMU, and was a discussion of the International Dialogue report.

Bridgefolk are invited to participate in the dialogue by posting online comments. Details are available on the Bridgefolk website under the tab heading "Theology".

In Iraq

CPT Crisis Unites Mennonites, Catholics

The kidnapping of four members of the Christian Peacemaker Team in Iraq, and the subsequent death of one of them, united Mennonites and Catholics, as well as other religious believers around the world, in an effort to secure their release

Bridgefolk board member Weldon Nisly (below left) was a member of the CPT team in Baghdad when the Iraq war began.



Christian Peacemaker Teams is an organization founded some 20 years ago by Mennonites, and members of other historic peace churches, as an effort to provide a nonviolent alternative to warfare.

From the beginning of the conflict in Iraq small groups of revolving volunteers have been present, including two Bridgefolk, Weldon Nisly and Tom Finger.

Last November four members of the Baghdad CPT team were kidnapped, and suddenly what had been a largely unknown peacebuilding effort became headline news around the world. Of the four, two were Canadian, one British, and one U.S. One was Catholic and one Quaker. None were Mennonite.

Quickly an international, ecumenical effort to secure their release emerged. In the hometown of Tom Fox, the Quaker hostage who was later killed, members of his Quaker meeting joined members of the local mosque in prayer. A *Washington Post* story said, "Out in the corridor it was impossible to distinguish Muslim from Christian among the shoes stacked on the shelves. Inside the main hall, the same was true among the 50 or worshipers who gathered to send what they said was a message of peace and unity around the globe."

In London Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, leader of British Catholics, told a prayer vigil in Trafalger Square. "I want to unite my prayers to yours as you remember in your vigil the four members of Christian Peacemaker Teams being held hostage in Iraq."

The Mennonite World Conference urged the members of its international faith family to "pray for the safety and release of four men being held in Iraq, for their families and those responsible for their detention."

A 78-year-old Catholic sister who served with the CPT in Iraq said there were no plans to withdraw. "We are there because Iraqis have asked us to remain," Sr. Anne Montgomery told the *National Catholic Reporter*. "We are there to give a different face of Americans. We don't carry a gun and we are certainly telling people that there are Americans who oppose the war, because Iraqis don't know that."

When Fox was found dead on March 9 it had a deep impact on Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, where he had been a student. One of his teachers said, "Let us remember Tom for the bravery and hopefulness that came with his determination to be in Iraq to monitor human rights and provide a different kind of American presence there—one that sought to be in solidarity with the suffering."

Ruth Zimmerman, co-director of the Center and a speaker at Bridgefolk's conference last summer at EMU, said, "We all have a responsibility to break the cycle of violence and vengeance that has caused the deaths of tens of thousands in Iraq, including Tom Fox. The answer is not more violence, more vengeance. The answer is more people with the courage and faith of Tom Fox to stand up and say, 'Love, forgiveness, and restorative justice are the answers, not violent retribution.'"

Fox's death, and the subsequent release of the three other hostages two weeks later, once again brought the CPT into national and international attention in the news media.

When the British CPT member was interviewed on his arrival back in London he said, "There is a real sense in which you are interviewing the wrong person. It is the ordinary people of Iraq that you should be talking to—the people who have suffered so much over many years."

Follow-up to the International Dialogue

Joint Mennonite Catholic Peacemaking Proposed

The Mennonite World Conference took official action at the recent meeting of its governing council to propose to the Vatican that Mennonites and Catholics join in some specific action of peacemaking as a way to continue the dialogue that has begun.

Both the Bridgefolk Board and the MCC Peace Committee have voiced support for a project of this kind.

When the Mennonite World Conference held a meeting of its General Council this past March in Pasadena, CA, representatives agreed to continue the international dialogue with the Catholic Church that began in 1998. But they did so by proposing a uniquely Mennonite way of continuing the dialogue—by engaging in a joint peacemaking effort with Catholics.

The action was taken by the highest governing board of the MWC, which meets every three years, and brings together some 200 church leaders from around the world. There are about 50 nations where Mennonite (or the affiliated Brethren in Christ) congregations exist.

In the action taken this year the MWC General Council proposed “joint peacemaking efforts” with the Catholic Church. If the Catholic Church is receptive, the actions states, Anabaptist and Catholics would propose “a concrete plan of action for a specific situation of conflict that would demonstrate the existence of viable and practical alternatives to military action.”

Preferably this would happen in a place where violence affects both Anabaptists and Catholics, such as Congo or Colombia.

In a related action the MWC General Council authorized an international delegation of Mennonites to visit Rome in 2007, at the invitation of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU). Following that event the MWC and the PCPCU would jointly organize two other consultations “in regions of the world where Mennonites and Catholics encounter each other in significant and perhaps problematic ways.” These events would take place in 2008 and 2009.

The Mennonite Central Committee Peace Committee took a similar action just a week later, at its semi-annual meeting in Akron, PA. The theme of the meeting was “Mennonites and Catholics Building Bridges” and focused on the text of the International Dialogue report, *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. Ivan Kauffman of Bridgefolk was also asked to attend the meeting to give a report on the international dialogue from a Catholic perspective.

The MCC Peace Committee consists of theologians and other church leaders from both Canada and the U.S., chosen from among the various Mennonite groups. They meet twice a year to discuss issues related to MCC’s international relief and development efforts. In his capacity as both a former MCC worker and a Christian ethicist, Bridgefolk Executive Director Gerald Schlabach has served on the Peace Committee since 2001.

Part of the discussions at the March meeting involved an “Alternatives to War” project, which Schlabach has been drafting. Both Kauffman and Schlabach emphasized their perception that “from the Catholic side the door is wide open to Mennonites, their peace witness, and the contributions they are uniquely in a position to make to the peacemaking efforts of the larger Christian church.”

Schlabach reported to the MCC committee that the Bridgefolk Board, at its November meeting, had chosen joint Mennonite Catholic peacemaking as a priority for the future.

The minutes of the Bridgefolk board meeting state that, “A joint peacemaking action would be an appropriate way for Mennonites to respond to John Paul’s invitation to the MWC to play a prominent role in the 2002 Interreligious Prayer for Peace in Assisi.

“Bridgefolk has already had a significant power to convene Catholics and Mennonites. Our charism is to bring the right people around the table.” But, the minutes state, we also “have to be clear that the purpose of this group is action—not more talk!”

Abbot John Klassen

'Reflections on Open and Closed Communion'

**Bridgefolk's Catholic co-chair
clarifies the situation of non-Catholics
who wish to take communion at a
Catholic Eucharistic service.**

Ever since the annual meetings of Bridgefolk began in 2002, the planning committee has looked for ways to provide opportunities for Mennonites and Catholics to experience each other's traditions of worship. Last year, for example, participants at the conference that took place in Harrisonburg, Virginia were invited to Mass at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church; on the following day they participated in Sunday worship at Harrisonburg Mennonite church.

Since Sunday worship for Catholics is almost always a Eucharistic celebration (Mass), the issue of common participation in Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion is one that must be addressed.

In his encyclical *That All May Be One (Ut Unum Sint)* Pope John Paul II made a significant change in the requirements for open communion. He wrote, "it is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the Sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance [Reconciliation] and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments" (para. 46). It is noteworthy that the condition of not having access to one's own minister has disappeared. Importantly, John Paul II repeated the above words verbatim in

his encyclical *The Eucharist of the Church (Ecclesia de Eucharistia)* in 2003 (para. 46).

From these important changes, I can summarize the Catholic teaching on the basic conditions for Christians who are not members of the Roman Catholic Church to receive the sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick. The three basic conditions are: 1) they must greatly desire to receive these sacraments, 2) freely request them; and 3) manifest the faith that the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments.

Of these three conditions, the third is surely the one that is critical for receiving Holy Communion at a Eucharistic celebration. Can one say "Amen" to what the Catholic Church believes takes place in the celebration of the Eucharist? As Cardinal Walter Kasper has noted, "One must be able to say this 'Amen' with an honest heart and in union with all the assembled community, both at the end of the Eucharistic prayer and when one receives communion; and one must bear witness with one's life to this 'Amen'" (as cited in Kevin Seasoltz "One House, Many Dwellings," *Worship* Vol. 79, 415-416, September 2005). This is a steep demand but it truly reflects the place of Eucharist in Catholic faith and life. In the same breath, though, it must be said that this is the central requirement for all who receive Eucharist, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

At our conference last summer, the issue of the Eucharist in an ecumenical context came up. It is a sensitive issue. As co-chairs of the Bridgefolk, Marlene Kropf and I (Mennonite and Catholic, respectively) briefly addressed the situation. Marlene spoke to the Catholic position as represented in an earlier articulation. I spoke to Catholics, suggesting that *one* way to show solidarity with Mennonites during this time of the conference would be to receive a blessing rather than the Eucharist. I offered this *not* as a challenge, *nor* as a requirement. I simply suggested that this might be one way to share in the pain of our disunity, a pain that has been experienced by our Mennonite friends in countless ways, even to the giving of their lives.

However, given the Catholic Church's evolving understanding of the conditions for intercommunion, it would be appropriate for Mennonites to participate fully in the sacrament of Eucharist at our future conferences. Pope John Paul II took a deeply spiritual approach to the issue of intercommunion. As the chief lawgiver of the Roman Catholic Church, he had the authority to change the universal law of the Church in accord with the principle set forth in the Church's Code of Canon Law, "The salvation of souls is the highest law" (#1752).

Furthermore, it frequently happens these days that students from other Christian churches study at Catholic schools of theology; Christian ministers or lay people visit a monastery for days of retreat and solitude; or Christians participate in symposia on a variety of topics in a Catholic environment. In all of these instances, if the three criteria mentioned above are met as decided by the individual believer, the person is welcome to receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Eucharistic celebration.

As a friend and I drove up, down, and around within the Ozarks to find what we were told is the most remote of Cistercian Abbeys in the United States and perhaps all of North America, I thought of the Mennonite tradition of being separate from the world.

That first afternoon a bright sun allowed us to explore paths in the surrounding woods and meadows, but the next morning we awoke to a soft blanket of snow that only increased in downy loft as the weekend progressed. I thought of how Mennonites have sometimes been called "the quiet in the land" (*die stille im Lande*). It was so still that the wet snowflakes hitting the ground seemed like "noise"; and, as the white-robed Cistercians follow the "strict," "Trappist" order, there was plenty of silence inside as well.

I was also reminded of the Mennonite ideals of modesty and simplicity. Except for the life-sized white statue of Mary in front of the church (the only place one could sometimes pick up a cell-phone signal, we were told), the cinder-block buildings, built in the fifties when the abbey was founded, might well have been a church and educational wing inhabited by Mennonites, at least the kind that allow colored glass windows absent of images.

Inside, the church was similarly unadorned, just one square room with simple wooden walls and furniture—stalls for about twenty monks, benches for a similar number of guests, a plain table for an altar, and a small electronic organ. Other than the colored glass windows, the room's only ornaments, on the paneled wall behind the altar, were two candle sconces, a door behind which the host resided, and the church's only interior image, a stylized icon of Mary and her child.

The hospitality was "Mennonite" as well. Especially the food. Although the monks are vegetarian, they did not expect their guests to be. The gray, grizzled, smiling octogenarian who cooked and wheeled the food into our dining room offered the best fried chicken I've had in ages.

I passed on the jello salad, so I can't compare it to Mennonite varieties. But the home-baked goods—especially the bread and peanut-butter cookies—would stand up to the best at any Mennonite potluck. These monks are, in fact, professional bakers, supporting themselves by making rum-infused fruitcakes. And judging by their size and shape, the monks do not typically deny themselves good food.

Of course a monastery also displays in an intensified form some communitarian values traditionally held by Mennonites and, probably more so, by the Amish. Entering must be a clearly adult decision because it involves a long-term commitment not easily broken, a commitment to caring for others and a submission to the common good. Anabaptists sometimes called this "*Gelassenheit*."

When it works well, this commitment also allows the development of specific talents or gifts, individual personalities. During just two and a half days, I learned something unique about each of the nine monks in the abbey, thanks to a somewhat voluble "guest master," the occasional appearance in our guest lounge of a lover of corny jokes, and what we could observe of the others as they participated variously in the group services.

Finally, as I browsed in the abbey library and conversed with the guest master, I found some historical parallels between Christian monasticism and Anabaptism.

As I understand it, Anabaptists wanted to return to a kind of pre-Constantinian form of Christianity, before it gained political backing and became in some ways a political state itself. Monasticism similarly has pre-Constantinian roots, as in the groups who fled persecution into more isolated

Phyllis Bixler

A Mennonite Visit to a Trappist Monastery

A retired English teacher who grew up Mennonite, but who has been a religious seeker in recent years, recounts how she connected with her Mennonite and Amish roots—as well as the Quaker and Buddhist meditative traditions she has recently participated in—during a weekend retreat at a Trappist monastery in the Ozarks.

places or, like "the desert fathers and mothers," sought seclusion to practice their faith as they wanted.

I remembered someone long ago telling me that Mennonites are like monastics except that Mennonites expect everyone in the church to hold their rigorous values and life ways, not just a small minority off to the side. Snowed in for a weekend with the Trappists, I saw how this observation held some truth.

Of course, there are differences. Especially in modes of worship.

When I was younger, I would have been totally "turned off" not only by the set prayers but also by the fact that the monks recited them so quietly, almost in monotone, apparently caring not a bit whether or not their guests in the pews understood.

However, coming to these services after several years spent in un-programmed Quaker meetings followed by several more years meditating Buddhist-style, individually and in groups, I was able to take more responsibility for my own prayer and to recognize when my own worship was being buoyed up and deepened by the group—in a "gathered" silence, I believe the Quakers call it.

The set prayers also provided the sense of history that I have come to recognize as an essential part of my religious practice, at least

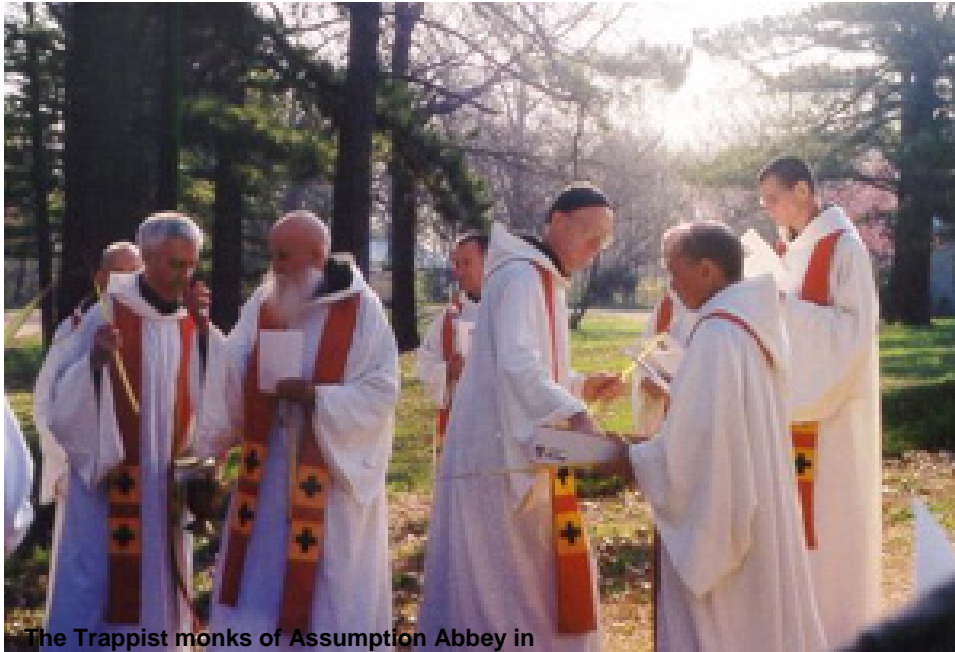
group practice. My experience of worship in a Mennonite church is always qualitatively different from that in other churches because I feel I am with people with whom I share significant history, because that shared past somehow seems also present.

This past weekend, hearing prayers that had been recited in much the same form if not language for many centuries before the Anabaptists were invented helped connect me to that earlier history as well, a history that I was too often led to ignore or deprecate as we Mennonites leapt back to recreate "the New Testament church."

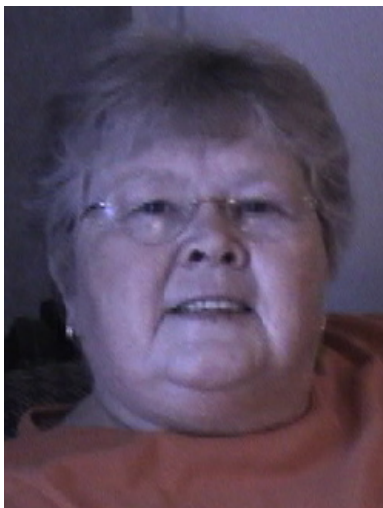
And it is a history I have brought back home with me. In the form of books, such as a survey of Christian mystics, the "showings" or "revelations" of Julian of Norwich, and Brother Lawrence's "Practice of the Presence of God."

In the form of a vow to clear more time and space for such reading, Biblical study, and holy silence. In the form of a vow to attend an occasional mass here in Springfield and to return, perhaps in the spring, to enjoy a week of quiet worship with the Trappists at Assumption Abbey.

Phyllis Bixler grew up in Kidron, Ohio, a rural Mennonite-Amish community. As a young adult she participated in Mennonite Voluntary Service and graduated from Bluffton (Ohio) College, where, in addition to the similarly Mennonite Bethel College (Kansas), Kansas State University, and Missouri State University, she later taught English. Now retired and living in Springfield, Missouri, she relishes time for reading, writing, artwork, and various kinds of spiritual exploration, such as the recent weekend at Assumption Abbey in nearby Ava, described here.



The Trappist monks of Assumption Abbey in Ava, Missouri follow the ancient traditions of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, commonly known as Trappists—the same order as Bridgefolk's Abbot Eoin de Baldrathe.



EDITORIAL

Bridgefolk Matters

This is the seventh issue of *The Bridge* I've had the privilege of editing, and it's given me the opportunity to take a look back, to see where we've been.

The first thing that stands out is how much has happened since we started meeting annually five years ago. Looking over the long list of things reported in these seven issues it's easy to forget how tentative our first meeting was. It was a big leap of faith just to announce it, and we really didn't know if anybody would come.

But people did come, and they have kept coming, in increasing numbers each year since. Probably the biggest surprise has been the steadily growing number of Catholics who have participated. When we began we worried there wouldn't be enough interested Catholics to make our meetings worthwhile. But that hasn't been the case at all.

What has made this happen? Why has something that really has no precedent and that seemed so unlikely at the beginning turned into such a success in such a relatively short time?

I believe it's because people, both Mennonites and Catholics from many different backgrounds, have recognized that something that matters is happening in Bridgefolk. We may not be able to say exactly what it is, but why would we invest this much time and energy in something if we didn't think it mattered—not only us to us personally, but to all the churches, and ultimately to the world?

With this issue of *The Bridge* I'll be turning the editor's job over to others. If this surprising story continues to be told it will be because others think it's important enough to take over. We'll likely need to change the format, but surely the story must continue to be reported in some way.

And when my term on the Bridgefolk board expires this summer I'll also be turning that responsibility over to someone younger. Of course my participation in Bridgefolk will continue, but as I approach my 70th birthday I'm facing the necessity to cut down on my workload, and I'm sure there are others better equipped to ensure Bridgefolk's continuing growth.

It's a great gift to share in this movement of the Spirit.

— Ivan Kauffman

For more information
visit our website
www.Bridgefolk.net

What you can do

Come to
this summer's conference
at Saint John's !

Participating in a
summer conference
does more to build the bridge
than anything else.

You both receive and give
by participating.

The Bridgefolk Board of Directors

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Saint John's Abbey

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