

Summer 2004

# The **BRIDGE**

*Newsletter of the Bridgefolk Movement*

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**Bridgefolk • Mennonites and Catholics Bridging Their Traditions**

**Save the Date!**

## **2004 Conference Next Month**

*Thursday evening, July 29 through Sunday noon, August 1  
at Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN*



*The lake at Saint John's*

Group Lectio and Worship  
Small Affinity Groups  
Questions Out of the Hat  
Hymn Singing  
Agape Meal with Footwashing Service  
Outstanding Speakers  
Plenty of time to enjoy Saint John's beauty  
and to connect with other Bridgefolk

**IT'S NOT TOO LATE !**

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

## Conference theme

# Spirituality and Discipleship

## Catholics and Mennonites Bridging the Divide

Vibrant Christian lives and vibrant Christian communities are always marked by the unity of love for God and love for neighbor.

For the Christians who gather each year at Bridgefolk, the 'bridge' for which we work and pray together is above all joining spirituality and discipleship.

The great strength of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is its longstanding practices of committed lay discipleship. The great strength of the Roman Catholic tradition is its ancient spiritual practices. The 2004 Bridgefolk conference will focus on the opportunities and challenges of connecting these two traditions.

How does praying the Psalms, as Catholic communities like Saint John's Abbey have done for centuries, help form lives of discipleship for them? How does praying in song, as Mennonite communities throughout the world have done for the past 500 years, help form lives of discipleship for them?

How does living on the bridge affect family and personal life, both for married persons and for single persons?

What can we learn about following Christ from the experiences of peace and social justice activists, both Mennonite and Catholic, who have discovered the need for contemplation to sustain their action? What can we learn from the experiences of persons committed to contemplation who have been led by their spirituality into action?

What can we learn from talking to one another—in small groups and in informal conversations—exchanging experiences and stories with others who are living on the bridge?

And above all what can we learn by praying and singing together?

These are the issues the speakers at this year's conference will be discussing, sharing their experiences and talking about the issues that have arisen in their lives on the bridge.

**Mark and Louise Zwick**, founders of the Houston Catholic Worker house, Casa Juan Diego, have devoted their lives to serving the poorest of the poor, in the example of Dorothy Day, who combined service and prayer in a unique way. **Biff Wiedman**, a Mennonite and Benedictine Oblate who founded a house of prayer in the inner city of Elkhart, IN will also speak.

**Lois and Ivan Kauffman** will share the experience of having grown up in the Mennonite tradition and then living their adult lives in the Catholic community. **Erica Thiessen**, a Mennonite member of an ecumenical Benedictine monastery, will share her experiences of combining the monastic tradition with membership in the Mennonite community.

**Ken Nafziger**, professor of music at Eastern Mennonite University and a leading Mennonite church musician, will discuss the way Mennonite hymn singing has molded the Mennonite community. Nafziger will also lead the hymn singing at this year's conference. A prominent Catholic theologian-musician, **Michael Joncas** of the University of St. Thomas, will discuss how the Catholic tradition of praying the Psalms has formed the Catholic community. Joncas is the composer of "On Eagle's Wings" and other well-known contemporary hymns.

Also on this year's program is a session on "Called Together to Be Peacemakers," the report of the recently completed international-level Mennonite Catholic ecumenical dialogue. Participants will include **Helmut Harder**, former head of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and Mennonite co-chair of the dialogue; **Drew Christiansen SJ**, associate editor of *America* magazine and a Catholic member of the dialogue; and **Margaret O'Gara**, professor of theology at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, and a prominent Catholic ecumenist.

## First Mennonite Catholic ecumenical dialogue

# International Dialogue Publishes Its Report

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

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

They entitled it “Called Together to Be Peacemakers.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— from a Mennonite World Conference release

## Excerpts from “Called Together to Be Peacemakers”

### History

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

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

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

### The Church

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

### Baptism and Communion

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

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

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

### Peace

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

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

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

### Conclusions

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

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

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



## Personal reflections by dialogue participants

### Helmut Harder

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Drew Christiansen

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

“The three major achievements I would name are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Neal Blough

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## What You Can Do

### Read the Report

It’s available on the Bridgefolk website.

### Discuss it with someone else

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

### Organize or suggest a local dialogue

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

### Send your comments to *The Bridge*

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

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

## Second Martyrs Conference at Saint John’s

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Refuses troops for Iraq*

## **A Mennonite and Catholic First Family**

Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte Frutos and his wife, Maria Gloria Penayo de Duarte Frutos, are a Mennonite-Catholic couple.

President Duarte Frutos has described himself as “a Christian, the most Protestant of Catholics,” and his wife as “the most Catholic of Protestants.”

The First Lady, Maria Gloria Penayo de Duarte Frutos, is a former Catholic who was baptized in 1996 as one of the founding members of a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Ascuncion, the capitol city. She is an active member, especially in evangelism, and her husband attends the congregation at times, although he remains a Catholic.

Their five children also attend the Mennonite congregation regularly, and their eldest son is a baptized member.

President Duarte Frutos’ religious beliefs have always been an issue in this traditionally Catholic country, and they recently became an issue again when he refused to send troops to Iraq, as requested by the United States.

A Paraguayan newspaper reported on Feb. 22 that there was dissension within his administration on this matter, and credited the President’s opposition to “the religious belief which he espouses together with his whole family, characterized by the rejection of all forms of violence and armed service.”

The First Lady sent a letter of greeting to the Mennonite World Conference last summer that said, “We pray for God’s blessing of your world conference and that the unity among Mennonites all over the world may be strengthened.” She also requested prayer “for us as we are facing great challenges as a family and as an authority of this country.”

*Brian Pinter*

## **“A Catholic Among the Amish”**

A Catholic high school student who spent a summer living with an Amish family in Lancaster County several years ago tells his story in the Feb. 9, 2004 issue of *America*, the national Catholic weekly.

The 17-year old Catholic adopted Amish clothing, learned to speak their German dialect, helped milk their cows and harness their horses. He also gained a strong appreciation for their lifestyle.

“By simply watching these people work I could sense their profound faith in God and his goodness,” Brian Pinter writes. “Always dressed simply, the Amish were trying to dedicate every moment of their life to God. Every night I crawled into bed exhausted but happy to be part of the Amish life.”

He also became aware of “the ecumenical chasm that exists between the Amish and the Catholic Church.” One Amish friend asked him “if Catholics could still pay a priest to forgive their sins?” He concluded that the Amish “were living with a 16<sup>th</sup>-century understanding of Catholicism.”

The 17<sup>th</sup>-century martyrology, *Martyrs Mirror*, is found in most Amish homes he discovered. “Many Sunday afternoons I observed Amos, the *paterfamilias*, engrossed in these stories for hours,” he says. Through this book and others “Amish misconceptions about Catholicism are reinforced, generation after generation.”

“It is clear,” he writes, “that the Amish have been overlooked in the ecumenical shuffle of the last 40 years, although I do not think the oversight has been intentional. A highly decentralized, somewhat splintered church, the Amish have no mechanism for reaching out to other denominations.

“But many Amish are genuinely interested in their Christian cousins, the Catholics, nonetheless. Like us, they recognize that at the very heart of the Christian faith lie forgiveness and reconciliation.”



## Spanish Jesuit Moves to Anabaptist

A former Jesuit theologian has joined the Brethren in Christ congregation in Madrid, and was recently rebaptized. The Brethren in Christ are closely affiliated with Mennonites.

Antonio Gonzalez spent eight years working with the poor in El Salvador, where he came to recognize the need for a gospel that spoke of peace rather than power.

When he returned to Spain as a professor and theologian at a Catholic university he began writing a book on the Christian response to globalization and oppression. He came in contact with a Mennonite missionary in Spain, Dennis Byler, who introduced him to Mennonite writing on these topics.

The book that resulted, *Reinado de Dios e Imperio (The Kingdom of God and Empire)* was published last year and has sparked interest and excitement in the Anabaptist community in Spain, where it is seen as having the potential for an immensely positive influence in both evangelical and Catholic churches there.

John Driver, a retired Mennonite missionary and Spanish-language theologian says, "The fact that this Jesuit teacher, assigned to service in Central America during these difficult times, came to his particular reading of the Scriptures and human reality, should alert us to the fact that a holistic vision of the gospel and a commitment to peace and justice are surely not an Anabaptist monopoly but parts of our common legacy in Jesus."

Gonzalez is now teaching at the United Protestant Theological Seminary in Spain, and continuing his research and writing.

—from a Mennonite Mission Network release

## Catholics on Mennonite College Campuses

At two Mennonite colleges where the student body is predominantly Mennonite there were significant interactions with Catholics this year.

There are about 40 Catholics now attending **Goshen College** in Indiana, one of the oldest Mennonite colleges where the student body has historically been predominantly Mennonite. Goshen is just east of Notre Dame.

Several of the more active Catholic students have formed a Catholic Student Association, whose members meet regularly on campus and attend Mass together at the local parish. For a time Mass was celebrated on campus. A Catholic athletic trainer on the Goshen staff serves as faculty sponsor.

The Goshen CSA hopes to send three students to Germany for World Youth Day in 2005, the papal event that draws several hundred thousand youth from around the world. To help fund the trip the local Knights of Columbus chapter is donating the proceeds from a pancake fundraiser.

**Focolare**, the international Catholic lay movement headquartered in Rome, held its annual Mid-Atlantic U.S. conference at **Eastern Mennonite University** in Harrisonburg, VA over the Memorial Day weekend this year.

The mission of Focolare is unity, and its activities are open to people of all Christian denominations and all religions.

The invitation to this event said that it expected to bring together "people from all ages, backgrounds and walks of life to experience that a new culture is possible when the Gospel message of mutual love is lived."

On a lighter note, the women's field hockey team from **EMU** hosted the team from **Catholic University** in Washington, DC last October 11. The Mennonites defeated the Catholics by a score of 7-1.

Mary Schertz

# Recovering Mennonite Spirituality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### A Bridgefolk Story

## George and Abbey Dupuy

**Two young Christians  
from other traditions  
“pitch their tent” on the  
Mennonite-Catholic Bridge**



George and Abbey Dupuy both grew up in Virginia, she a Baptist, he a Presbyterian. They met in the marching band at James Madison Univ. in Harrisonburg, VA. They both completed their education at Eastern Mennonite Univ. in Harrisonburg. They were married in December 2001. George is now a Mennonite pastor. Abbey is now a Roman Catholic.

George credits Eastern Mennonite Seminary for his change. “Attending classes at EMS was a life-changing experience,” he says. “My experience with the Mennonites I met at Seminary was my first real experience of a faith community. I was in seminary on Sept. 11, 2001, and my experience during that time confirmed my need to be in a believers’ community committed to peace and justice.”

“My professors and my friends in the Spiritual Formation department were especially influential. My studies of St. Teresa, Francis de Sales, Meister Eckhart and others were what brought me onto ‘the bridge’.”

“I was invited to attend Big Spring Mennonite in Luray, and soon after offered a job there as Associate Pastor. I was rebaptized and licensed as pastor on the same day, a cold day in November in the Shenandoah River.”

Abbey traces her change to a serious two-year illness that began in her last year of college. “I began RCIA classes intending just to learn more about the tradition, but the journey through RCIA was life-changing and made me realize that I had finally found my home. George and I were married in December of 2001, and I was received into the Catholic Church the following Easter.”

“I had been interested in other traditions, especially Catholicism, since middle school, when I used to try to convert

my Catholic friends at lunch. My roommate in college was a very committed Catholic, and she made a big impression on me. She managed to live her faith every day without seeming overcome by guilt or the need to proselytize. My sponsor during RCIA, Elizabeth, was also very influential—she has a strong faith that is obvious in everything she does.

“The most important influence, though, was St. Therese of Lisieux. When I read *Story of a Soul*, I felt I had met a new kindred spirit. I loved the way she wrote about Jesus and how intimately she knew him. I had always imagined Jesus and myself as being close friends, and I often experienced God’s communication with me through images. Finding out that there was someone else—a Doctor of the Church!—who had a similar approach made me feel I needed to be a part of the tradition that valued her way of thinking.”

What did people think when George and Abbey announced they were going to embark on life together as a Mennonite pastor and a Catholic? George says, “We have certainly struggled with the Spirit’s leading, but eventually we decided that we had to be true to God’s calling. We were certain that we were called to be together, and we were certain that we were being called to our own paths in Christianity. We trusted that God would help us work out the details.”

Abbey says, “Most people seemed to think it was a bad idea, but we both knew we were on the paths God had intended for us. We both felt we had come home to our respective traditions and that we were being obedient. We knew, also, that we were called to be together, so we had to accept that the ‘mixed marriage’ was just part of the bag. It didn’t hurt that we were drawn to each other’s chosen traditions, as well. We just covenanted to go to Mass on Saturday evenings and to church on Sunday morning.”

They are now both active in ministry. George is a pastor at Big Spring Mennonite Church in Luray, VA, and director of Faith in Action of Page County, an ecumenical volunteer project that provides services for homebound seniors. Abbey is director of a before and after-school care program for children in grades K-7 conducted by their Mennonite church. They are in the process of becoming foster parents for a boy they met through the after-school program.

They learned about Bridgefolk in the winter of 2003 from Brenda Bellamy, while attending the annual Worship Weekend at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, and they attended the Bridgefolk conference last summer. "It's so comforting to know that we're not freaks," says Abbey, "that we aren't the only people dealing with these issues." George says, "It was a tremendous feeling to be surrounded by others that were in similar situations. The confirmation of community was wonderful."

But they are also struggling with the problems of being a family while living on the bridge. "Every weekend when I get up and leave George kneeling in the pew on Saturdays—knowing that one of the strongest and most compassionate Christian people I know is not allowed to receive Eucharist in my church—what do we do?" asks Abbey.

"Or when my faith community in the Mennonite church—which is very small and much more closely connected to my personal life than my large Catholic parish—stands in a circle to receive communion, turning to each other and saying, 'The body of Christ,' and I feel almost nauseated because it somehow doesn't feel right to me?"

"Those are the real issues about Eucharist, and it has very little to do with ecumenical councils and dialogues between people who have the power to make important decisions. It's gritty and messy and much more painful than that."

But despite these problems George and Abbey are committed to continuing. "I can't imagine either of us giving up our chosen traditions," says Abbey. "Since this is the way we have been made, and since we're also made to be together, I guess we'll be dealing with a slightly more complicated church life than many other people we know for a long time to come."

She says this realizing the problems of raising children in a Mennonite Catholic family. Abbey asks, "Is it possible to raise children on the bridge? Has anyone ever successfully done this?"

How do they feel about the future? Abbey says, "I think, for now, we've found a community in Bridgefolk that can sustain us in spite of the current divisions between our traditions, and that gives me hope."

George says, "While the bridge can be a difficult place to pitch a tent, I feel sure that this is where God is calling us to be. I believe that we'll stay there."

### *First Bridgefolk Baby*

## **Nathan Drexel Brubaker**

Sarah and Phil Brubaker are the proud parents of Nathan Drexel, born May 15. He was named at a prayer service three days later, and given the names of the prophet Nathan who called King David to repentance at great risk to himself, and Saint Katherine Marie Drexel who was born to an Anabaptist mother and a Catholic father and who used the fortune she inherited to found a religious community dedicated to providing a fair education for African Americans and Native Americans.

Sarah and Phil attended last year's Bridgefolk conference, shortly after being married. They met while students at Duke Divinity School. Phil says, "My liturgically-minded Anabaptism and her justice-minded Catholicism blend well, and we enjoy attending each of our churches together each week. We hope that our marriage will embody the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 that the Church will be one."

Sarah is a doctoral student in systematic theology at Notre Dame. Her primary interest is theological anthropology, the study of the human person from a theological perspective.

Phil is training coordinator for the Damascus Road Anti-Racism Process, and an administrator for the Center for Peace and Nonviolence, a local coalition of churches in South Bend witnessing together to peace and nonviolence.



**Nathan Drexel arrived at 9:33 pm on May 15, 2004, weighing 7 pounds and 11 ounces, and measuring 20.5 inches.**

**For more pictures of Nathan, and more information about Phil and Sarah, check their website, [www.nd.edu/~smorice/](http://www.nd.edu/~smorice/).**



# Bridgefolk People

News about people  
involved in the  
Bridgefolk Movement

Share the news  
about  
your life.

Other Bridgefolk  
want to know.

Send an email  
today.

[Newsletter@Bridgefolk.net](mailto:Newsletter@Bridgefolk.net)

**Regina Wilson**, Pastoral Associate at St. Joseph Parish in South Bend and a Bridgefolk steering committee member, has received a grant from the Louisville Institute for an eight week sabbatical, which she will spend at the Maryknoll Language Institute in Cochabamba, Bolivia. “My time will be spent learning about Latin America, learning Spanish, becoming acquainted with the people and religious practice of Bolivians and traveling,” she says. “Jeff and our daughters will join me in August and we will explore Bolivia for twelve days then head back to Indiana. As part of the grant we were invited to a two and a half day orientation session, a *very* ecumenical affair where I was a minority as a Catholic. We are expected to bring back some kind of written report on our experience. I'm very grateful to have this opportunity and excited to experience what lies ahead.”

**Darrin Belousek**, philosophy prof at Goshen College and leader of a Mennonite voluntary service project in South Bend, is joining the faculty at Lithuania Christian College this fall. LCC was founded in 1991 by North American Christians, including several Mennonites. There are currently some 600 students from about a dozen countries, most in East Europe. Instruction is in English. Of the 50 faculty members, one-third are Lithuanian and the remainder are from Europe and North America. For more information see the LCC website [www.lcc.lt](http://www.lcc.lt). Darrin says, “My world, and my worldview were transformed by the nonviolent revolution that swept across Eastern Europe in 1989-91. When the Berlin Wall fell before a mass of singing, praying, candle-holding people, while the nuclear missiles on either side stood powerless, I realized that something astonishingly new was happening, that the future had been broken open. Now I have the opportunity to be a part of that continuing transformation, as well as to help strengthen the church in Eastern Europe as it emerges into the public square after decades of communist repression.”

**Myrna Krehbiel**, director of Peace Connections in Newton, KS, recently celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ecumenical organization she leads. It began as a protest of nuclear weapons, but a few years ago, at the request of several area churches, shifted its focus to helping people find peace within themselves. “Building community and peace within is the beginning place for contributing to peace in the nation and the world,” Myrna says. “People felt powerless to make a difference. This is an effort to educate how to make a difference daily.” Peace Connections programs now include nonviolence education and practice, youth development, community connecting and individual development. For more information see the articles on Peace Connections posted on [www.theKansan.com](http://www.theKansan.com).

**Alan Kreider**, mission educator for the Mennonite Mission Network, continues to travel widely with his wife Eleanor, and to teach part-time at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, IN. He has begun a 4-year research and writing project studying the lifestyle, worship and mission of the early Christians. The approach of the early Christians to war will be a part of this project.

**Brad Gregory**, professor of history at Notre Dame and keynote speaker at last year's martyrs conference, gave a series of three speeches at Bethel College in North Newton, KS in March. Bethel is one of the oldest and best known of the Mennonite colleges. His book, *Salvation at Stake*, is footnoted in the report of the international Mennonite Catholic dialogue.

**Weldon Nisly**, pastor of Seattle Mennonite Church and a Bridgefolk steering committee member, participated in a consultation on “Alternative Intentional Communities” held at the Ecumenical Institute at Saint John’s in March. The event was called by Abbot Timothy, the former abbot of Saint John’s, and brought together 12 persons involved in new forms of non-monastic Christian community.

**Betti Erb**, has moved back to her home in southern Ontario, where she is writing a book on the history of Menno Singers, the choir in which she sang for 15 years prior to her move to Seattle. The singers are now celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. She is also associate editor of *Canadian Mennonite*.

## Bridgefolk In Print

Items published  
by Bridgefolk people  
or about Bridgefolk

When you see  
something in print that  
would interest  
other Bridgefolk,  
please  
pass it on!

We won’t know  
otherwise.

**Melanie Zuercher**, is editor of *Peace Signs*, the new online peace ‘ezine’ published by the Mennonite Church. To see the publication, including Melanie’s own contributions, go to <http://peace.mennolink.org/peacesigns/>

**Gerald Schlabach**, professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas and Bridgefolk coordinator, spoke at the Presentation Sister’ Peace Studies Forum in Fargo, ND in January. The text is available on the Bridgefolk website. His paper, “Eucharistic Theology for the Bridge,” appeared in the April 2004 issue of *One in Christ*, the British ecumenical journal. An earlier article in *Sojourners*, “We Pledge Allegiance...” received a third place award in the Evangelical Press Association annual competition. He is now at work on a volume of essays on the concept of Just Policing.

**Neal Blough**, Mennonite mission worker in France and a member of the international Mennonite Catholic dialogue, has an article in the Jan. 2004 issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, entitled “The Church as Sign or Sacrament: Trinitarian Ecclesiology, Pilgrim Marpeck, Vatican II and John Millbank.” The article is an effort to “develop an ecclesiology that is more consciously catholic and missional, while at the same time maintaining and perhaps even strengthening the fundamental convictions” of the Mennonite tradition. The article is available online at [www.goshen.edu/mqr](http://www.goshen.edu/mqr).

**Fr. William Skudlarek**, wrote an article for the Spring 2004 issue of *The Abbey Banner*, the magazine of Saint John’s Abbey on Bridgefolk. “Realizing how much Catholics and Mennonites had to learn from one another, Abbot John invited Bridgefolk to partner with Saint John’s Abbey in carrying out its ecumenical mission,” the article says. Online at [www.saintjohnsabbey.org](http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org).

**Ivan Kauffman**, Bridgefolk steering committee member and Bridge editor, had an article in the Jan.-Feb. 2004 issue of *Houston Catholic Worker* entitled “The Bridgefolk Movement”. It says, “The great dream of the Bridgefolk movement is to create a ‘space’ that is both Mennonite and Catholic.”

**Saint John’s Abbey** is featured in the June 2004 issue of *The Rake* magazine. Entitled “Can the Monks of Saint John’s Redeem the Church—and the World?” it is a description of monastic life at Saint John’s today, and of its problems. It includes interviews with both Abbot John Klassen and Fr. William Skudlarek. Online at [www.rakemag.com](http://www.rakemag.com).

## Bridgefok Mail

I just read Gerald's "What Is a Peace Church" on the Bridgefok website and I say Amen, Amen and Amen.

Although I haven't been involved very concretely with Bridgefok, I need to express how glad I am for it. I am reminded even more now because although I have been received into the Catholic Church, I do not want to be cut off from the Mennonite Church that I still love. It is so heartening to be connected to people who are building the bridge. I hope to be able to be there at the end of July for the next conference—but it might depend on when and where we end up moving.

We visited my family in Ontario at Christmas and I was reminded of Bridgefok when Andrew and I went to mass there and I met my cousin. I wasn't surprised to see her there because her husband is Catholic, and I knew the family had connections in both the Mennonite and Catholic churches. But I was interested to hear her say how she has been a regular at the Catholic church even as she is an active member of the Mennonite church for 20 years. She goes on Saturday evening or early Sunday, before the Mennonite church service, because she values the mass.

It made me realize there might be a lot more bridge people around, quietly and individually going about their own bridging.

*Rachel Reesor  
Bluffton, OH*

I became Catholic at age 17. I applied to join several religious orders and finally applied to the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, Washington. For a time I was an associate (or affiliate) member of this community. About 1995 I started attending a very conservative Mennonite Church as I sought greater community. This affiliation, while providing community was very confusing for a feminist, liberal, nonviolent direct-action Christian peacemaker. I returned to the Roman Catholic church about 2001, only to find our local parish rather pre-Vatican II in its ways. Currently I attend Seattle Mennonite Church.

I have been trying to sort out the baggage I carry, and find it impossible. I *am* Catholic and I *am* Mennonite. To deny either one is to deny my self. I have now begun the process of becoming an associate of the Adrian Dominican community, and will probably also be joining Seattle Mennonite Church.

Just wanted you to know how comforting it is to find other seekers of truth like myself to link arms with on our journey as Christ's ambassadors on earth.

*Donna Potts Walling  
Stanwood, WA*

I read about Bridgefok in the *Houston Catholic Worker*. We are a young(ish) Catholic family, very frustrated with the lack of cohesive community in our local parish, and frankly envious of our many Mennonite and Amish neighbors who seem to have what we crave.

We are looking for a family oriented, wholesome environment shared by our faith community, and a counter-cultural Christianity, moving away from worldliness. We also feel that we are too fundamentally Catholic in our way of being to really seriously consider switching churches, and see no reason why we should.

In reading the articles on your website it seems that most of the writing is coming from the Mennonite side of the gap. Are there any Catholics attracted to the Mennonite lifestyle out there? Is there anyone involved quasi-local to Western Maryland who might sit down and have a cup of coffee with me sometime?

*Carla Tesar  
Oakland, MD  
catnbag@iceweb.net*

Thank you for your prompt posting of the full summary report of the Mennonite-Roman Catholic Dialogues 1998-2003 on the Bridgefok website. There can be no more appropriate reading and reflection, in my life, during this Lenten season of 2004, than the substance of this report.

Thanks be to God for the faithful efforts of the Mennonite World Conference and the Pontifical Institute for Christian Unity, in their pursuit of collegial relations, honest intellectual exchange, and endeavoring to honor the fulfillment of our Lord's prayer of John 17:21.

*Gerald Stover  
Bethlehem, PA*

I attended the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of College Mennonite Church in Goshen with my parents in April. The events began with a pre-service hymn sing, led by Mary Oyer.

Midway through the service she led number 1 from the current Mennonite hymnal, which she introduced with the following remarks: Hymn number 1 in the previous hymnal of 1969 was "Holy God We Praise Thy Name", an old Catholic hymn that was a favorite of General Conference Mennonites but was new to 'Old' Mennonites.

Hymn number 1 in the current hymnal is also written by a Catholic, though contemporary. "Here in This Place", she noted, may be written by a Catholic but feels very Mennonite.

And then as an afterthought she mentioned number 2 in the current hymnal, "In Thy Holy Place". This one, she said, is written by a Mennonite but it feels very Catholic.

*Gerald Schlabach  
St. Paul, MN*

## EDITORIAL

## A Groundbreaking Document

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Gerald Schlabach

### *The Bridgefolk Prayer*

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

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

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

For more information  
about Bridgefolk  
visit our website

