

Winter 2004

The BRIDGE

Newsletter of the Bridgefolk Movement

In this issue:

- **New name, new format**
- **New email lectio**
- **10 Pages of Bridgefolk news**
- **Anabaptist Catholic saint**

Bridgefolk • Mennonites and Catholics Bridging Their Traditions

Bridgefolk Newsletter

New Name, New Format

To enable the growing
Bridgefolk process
to continue between
the annual conferences,
and to keep others informed,
we're beginning publication
of a quarterly newsletter
with expanded coverage
and a new format.

Tell us what you think!

Our email is

Newsletter@Bridgefolk.net

Welcome to the first issue of the newly redesigned and renamed Bridgefolk newsletter. The editor is Ivan Kauffman, a former journalist who was one of the founders of Bridgefolk. Expect to see *The Bridge* in your email or in your mailbox every three months.

Inside you will find:

- *News about Bridgefolk and related events*
- *Stories and information about Bridgefolk people*
- *Spirituality that connects doing and being*
- *What you can do suggestions*
- *Letters to the editor*
- *Reflections, commentaries, editorials*
- *References to the information on Bridgefolk.net*

This issue includes reports on last summer's conference, and last December's steering committee meeting—as well as several other news stories—including an exciting MCC report of joint peacemaking by Catholics and Mennonites in Honduras.

Alice Noe introduces a way to pray together between conferences via email. Also included is a story about Katherine Drexel, the newly named Catholic saint who is descended from an Anabaptist family.

There are news items about Bridgefolk people. And on the next to the last page there are two statements, one by a Mennonite and one by a Catholic, that together tell why so many people are working to bridge these two traditions.

What began only five years ago as an informal gathering of a few interested people has now become an international network that involves nearly 200 people in some way, and which is growing rapidly—Mennonites and Catholics who have found that sharing their lives and traditions is a deeply enriching experience.

Tell us what you think of the new newsletter. Use it to share news about yourself and other Bridgefolk. If you see something that would interest other Bridgefolk pass it on. Send us your stories and your thoughts.

A bridge only works when it's used.

*Stories, Singing,
Friendship*

2003 Conference Another Success

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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

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

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

—from the lectio passage used at the 2003 conference



Comments from the evaluation forms

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I look forward to next year.”

“Questions Out of the Hat”

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

Some examples from this popular part of the program:

“Do the Mennonites follow the liturgical year in their worship?”

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

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

“What kinds of spiritual accountability for faith and life are required of members of the Saint John’s monastic community?”

“Are the Mennonites connected to the Anabaptists? If so, how?”

“How do Catholics feel when people from the so-called Free Church speak about the ‘believer’s church’?”

Who Came?

32 Mennonites

26 Catholics

12 Mennonite pastors

7 Benedictines

3 Members of the International Mennonite Catholic Dialogue

4 Europeans

6 Canadians

There’s lots more
on our website . . .

More photos,
conference presentations,
details about
next year’s conference.

Be sure to check it out.



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

*Looking to next year
and beyond*

Steering Committee Annual Meeting

Bridgefolk's Steering Committee agenda was packed this year—not only with planning for next summer's conference, but also thinking about Bridgefolk's organizational structure for the future.

There were also exciting new opportunities for cooperation with Saint John's Abbey, which is looking to a new partnership with lay Christians.

The group met at Saint John's Dec. 11-13, 2003.

Six of the eight members were present, along with Dirk Giseburt who has agreed to provide legal counsel to the steering committee.

These are excerpts and summaries from the minutes taken by Fr. William Skudlarek.

2004 Conference

The theme: **Spirituality and Discipleship: Catholics and Mennonites Bridging the Divide.** Topics will include:

- **Prayer:** How hymn singing and praying the Psalms lead to deeper discipleship.
- **Family Issues:** How living on the bridge affects family relationships, both married and single.
- **Work and Ministry:** Stories from people who have moved from action to contemplation, and from contemplation to action.

Questions: "Should we offer affinity groups? Perhaps some of these groups could meet at meal time, or they could be scheduled in an open space after lunch."

2003 Conference Evaluations

"There were a significant number of comments on how well the schedule worked. Keep the hymn sing, questions out of the hat, daily *lectio*, small groups... What we do best is sing together... We need to encourage Catholics to participate."

What will Bridgefolk look like in 5 years?

"The major consensus that emerged was that we're all headed in the same direction, even though we're not sure where we're heading! We have a greater sense of comfort with who we are and what we're doing: convening, proceeding through friendship, nurturing the connections we have made, being open to whatever lies ahead... Our modest efforts have proven to be powerful, life-giving experiences for many people."

Organization and Incorporation

The steering committee turned to the subject of whether and how to give Bridgefolk an institutional structure. Dirk Giseburt, a lawyer in Seattle and a Bridgefolk participant, attended the meeting to help guide discussion of legal and organizational issues.

For now the steering committee agreed that a simple corporate structure would best fit the current spirit of Bridgefolk. It was agreed that "The key thing that Bridgefolk has done is meet and talk; out of the relationships that have been formed, other projects have come into being. The primary mission of Bridgefolk is to keep the conversation going, and to allow new things to emerge."

The steering committee agreed to study incorporating Bridgefolk as an independent non-profit organization with Dirk's legal guidance. For the time being the board will be self-sustaining, but there could be a "sunset" or "tickler" clause committing Bridgefolk to re-examine its structure every five years or so. "Starting something is one job; keeping it going is another," the committee agreed.

Part of the continuing discussion will involve whether people would like to be part of Bridgefolk as dues-paying members, and how and whether to establish institutional relationships with the Mennonite Church, the Catholic Church, and Saint John's.

Role of the Bridgefolk Coordinator

There was discussion of the Bridgefolk Coordinator's work, which Gerald Schlabach has been doing on volunteer time. This involves "riding herd on the process", planning conferences, working on the website and the newsletter, considerable correspondence and networking, long-term planning, writing, etc. And there is much more that could be done if time were available. For the time being members of the board are taking on some additional responsibilities.

New Guest House at Saint John's

Abbot John reported "We hope to break ground for a Guest House in 2006. It will be "a place for spiritual renewal," he said. "More and more lay people, lay and single, are expressing an interest in becoming more closely associated with us: living in proximity, sharing our ministries. Brother David Rothstein is beginning the work of preparing for a self-governing, ecumenical lay community associated with the abbey. What we are seeing is a convergence of ecumenism, hospitality, and vocation."

Major Conference on Lay Movements in 2006

Bill Cahoy, the Dean of the School of Theology at Saint John's met with the Bridgefolk board to discuss plans for a conference on lay movements to be held at Saint John's to mark its 150th anniversary. It would take place June 24 to July 11, 2006. A similar conference was held in Rome in 1998, involving European movements. The minutes describe this event as part of "the struggle for a new partnership between the laity and the ordained. The new movements are a part of that broader, glacial movement." Saint John's is interested in having Bridgefolk involved in this event in some way.

Sant'Egidio

There was agreement that the developing relationship with the Community of Sant'Egidio should be continued. Sant'Egidio is looking for partners to expand their successful AIDS program in Mozambique, and there was discussion of ways North American Mennonites could participate. Another visit to the Sant'Egidio community in Rome by a larger Bridgefolk delegation was recommended.

International Dialogue Report

"Local dialogues would be more likely to happen if we could provide, or collaborate in providing, a study-guide on the document. We can also be a catalyst in getting conferences set up. Should we think of a theological conference and a pastoral conference back to back?"

Martyrs Conference

There was considerable discussion of the Martyrs Conference, held last summer just prior to the Bridgefolk Conference. Its unexpected popularity raises the question of how to continue this important process. There was consensus that this project may best be housed in an independent institute, possibly connected to an academic institution.

The Bridgefolk Steering Committee

Abbot John Klassen
Saint John's Abbey

Gerald Schlabach
University of St. Thomas

Marlene Kropf
*Office of Congregational Life
Mennonite Church USA*

Fr. William Skudlarek
Saint John's Abbey

Weldon Nisly
Pastor, Seattle Mennonite Church

Regina Wilson
*Pastoral Associate,
St. Joseph's Parish, South Bend, IN*

Sheri Hostetler
*Pastor, First Mennonite Church,
San Francisco, CA*

Ivan J. Kauffman
Author, Washington, DC

'A graced time . . .'

One participant wrote after returning home from this meeting, "The dominant impression that remains is of the remarkable convergence of agendas... It was a graced time of working together and discovering that the Holy Spirit is up to some very interesting things."

Another participant wrote, "It seems increasingly clear each time we meet that this partnership ... greatly enriches everyone and everything it touches."

*Maintaining Our
Spiritual Connection*

Praying Together by Email

The end of all things is near;
therefore be serious and discipline yourselves
for the sake of your prayers.

Above all,
maintain constant love for one another,
for love covers a multitude of sins.

Be hospitable to one another
without complaining.

Like good stewards
of the manifold grace of God,
serve one another with
whatever gift each of you has received.

Whoever speaks,
must do so as one speaking
the very words of God;

whoever serves
must do so with
the strength that God supplies,

so God may be glorified in all things
through Jesus Christ.

To him belong the glory and power
forever and ever. Amen.

— 1 Peter 4:7-11 (NRSV)

As we get further from our conferences at Saint John's it becomes harder to stay in touch with the bonds of friendship developed. We lose the momentum, the urgency, the energy, the focus that we have when we are together.

When I heard of the plans for Bridgefolk 2004 I thought, "What is there to keep us focused and in touch between gatherings? How can we maintain the solidarity we feel when we are in Collegeville?"

Recalling that Sarah Morice had proposed last summer that we do a Lenten reflection together, I realized it was too late to organize such a project this year, but perhaps we could pray together using the internet.

So I'm proposing a *lectio divina*, similar to the method we used the last couple of years in Collegeville, but with adaptations for email. You will all be receiving an email soon describing this whole process in detail.

I was asked to find a scripture that would tie in with the theme of Bridgefolk 2004, which is Spirituality and Discipleship, and for this first round we've selected 1 Peter 4:7-11. So that we're all praying with the same text we have supplied the text from the NRSV (*in box at left*).

In your private prayer time—or with a Bridgefolk group, if you can gather one—pray the passage according to the method we've used at Collegeville.

In case you've forgotten we'll send directions with the email you'll be getting—along with some questions to start your reflections.

Email your thoughts and reflections to the address on the email, and they will be sent to me. When several are available they will be compiled and emailed to the entire group.

We hope to pray with this passage for the next several weeks, with the hope that reading other's reflections will contribute to your next prayer session with the text, and that you will continue to share your reflections with the group after you've had additional contemplative sessions with the text.

You may of course pray and not choose to share your reflections with the group. That's OK. And if you do not want to participate in this exercise and want to opt out of this email list, please let us know by responding to the email you'll be receiving.

Let us accept all reflections submitted in an attitude of prayer and reverence, and not spend time critiquing the reflections of others.

Also, please don't limit yourself to the suggested reflection questions. And if you'd like to suggest a text for our next *lectio*, please do so. Send it to alicenoe@hotmail.com.

Prayer is a great unifier. Let us come together in one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to learn what he will teach us, to go where he will lead us.

— Alice Noe

*International Mennonite
Catholic Dialogue*

Final Report Now Available

The report of the first five-year round of ecumenical dialogue between official Mennonite and Catholic delegations has now been released by the Mennonite World Conference and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

The report is the result of the first formal dialogue between Mennonites and Catholics since the Mennonite churches originated in the Anabaptist movement of the Sixteenth Century. It summarizes the five week-long meetings that were held annually between 1998 and 2003.

The report is entitled "*Called to be Peacemakers*". It is an official document of the Catholic Church, and has been published in the *Information Service* of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. It will be translated into several languages.

The full text is available on the Bridgefolk website,

More details will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

*Outgrowth of
International Dialogue*

John Paul II Greets Mennonite Family

"Jake and I stood in disbelief," Nancy Chapman says. "How could this be?" She was attending the Wednesday audience Pope John Paul holds each week at the Vatican, and when she and her son had arrived they had been ushered to a seat directly in front of the pope's chair.

There were several thousand people present, most of them Catholics, "all clamoring to get closer to the pope," Chapman says. But here she was, an ordinary Mennonite lay woman and her seventeen-year old son, sitting a few feet from the pope.

The pope delivered a meditation on Psalm 98, speaking alternately in French, English, Italian and Spanish, and then greeted a few people from the audience—including the Chapmans.

It was the second time in the year 2002 the pope had shown special attention to Mennonites. The first had been at the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi when the pope had asked the president of the Mennonite World Conference to read the concluding section to the pledge for peace that was the centerpiece of that major international gathering.

Chapman was in Rome with her husband, an archeologist with the National Park Service. She is an administrative assistant at Mennonite Central Committee headquarters in Akron, PA, where the fifth session of the International Mennonite Catholic dialogue had been held, and her congregation had helped host the delegates. A Kenyan priest who works at the Vatican and is a member of the dialogue arranged the audience.

"I was moved because of the sincere love and respect that this man has garnered from his constituents," Chapman said of the pope. "There was a definite spirituality about him."

A year later she adds, "It was an unforgettable experience. My son now wears a chain blessed by the pope." She says she wrote the pope a thank you note and received a reply from one of his secretaries.

— from a Mennonite World Conference release
by Ferne Burkhart



In Honduras

Mennonites, Catholics March Together

Mennonite and Catholic youth from what was once considered the country's most dangerous neighborhood, marched together under banners celebrating

"peace with the risen Christ" calling for an end to gang violence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

*First story about
Bridgefolk
in the secular press*

Kansas Bridgefolk Make the News

Eight people from Newton, Kansas—and one from nearby Wichita—attended last summer's Bridgefolk conference.

When they returned, four of them were interviewed by the *Newton Kansan*—the first time Bridgefolk has appeared in the secular press.

Newton is an historic center of Mennonite life and has more Mennonite churches than Catholic.

The four Bridgefolk interviewed were Don and Corinne Kehrberg, Eric Massanari and Melanie Zuercher.

These are excerpts from the Aug. 29, 2003 story. The entire story is available online at Bridgefolk.net.

Ecumenical dialogues are not new to the Christian faith...but what is new, and fairly unique, is the coming together of laypeople from different denominations to understand one another through relationships.

Shalom Mennonite Church pastor Eric Massanari said many Mennonites are attracted to Catholic traditions of prayer and spirituality, and many Catholics are looking for ways to connect with others concerned with peace-making and social justice.

Corinne Kehrberg, a member of Newton's St. Mary's Catholic Church, said the connection between Mennonites and Catholics reaches back to protests during the Vietnam War. "A respect grew for the peace-making that is the Mennonite hallmark," she said. "This is fairly new to the Catholic Church."

Many of the Bridgefolk participants are interested in embodying a commitment to both traditions, but the Newton group agreed some in both faiths would not approve of this exchange and acceptance of ideas. After all, Anabaptists separated from the Catholic Church over theological differences.

"Maybe too much was thrown out in the 16th century and the following years," Massanari said. "We as Mennonites don't draw on the wealth of tradition of the church. Our history often begins in the 1500s."

Don Kehrberg, a Catholic who recently retired from Bethel College after 30 years as a professor of music, has seen a common theme between Catholics and Mennonites, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was. Bridgefolk helped him recognize the two faiths' desires for peace and social justice as well as prayer and liturgy.

"There is more in common among these two religious traditions than people realize," Don Kehrberg said. "On the Catholic side, we need to do more listening of the liturgy we go through every Sunday. We need to hear the call of peace and justice and working in the world".

Corinne Kehrberg agreed. "I don't think we would have stayed as long at Bethel if it didn't seem like it fit," she said. "There are more similarities. It's affirming to hear other people who've studied the issue experience the same thing I've been feeling."

"Mennonites need to be reminded we're not the only peacemakers," Zuercher said. "Many other people are working in profound ways to make peace and justice."

The Newton group said it hopes to generate local dialogue between the two faith communities, building a bridge to span this community.

"My faith compels me to do this Bridgefolk dialogue," Massanari said. "The diversity of the Christian community is a gift and reflects the many aspects of Christ and our brokenness. We need to honor our differences and see what we have to learn from each other."

"This is how true connection happens. It's the human element," Massanari said. "The interaction of the spirit moves in this grassroots group."

Bridgefolk People

News about people
involved in the
Bridgefolk Movement

Keep us informed !

If you found these news items interesting think about sending along some news about yourself or others, and your activities.

You're giving us a gift when you share your life.

Fr. William Skudlarek, monk at Saint John's and member of the Bridgefolk steering committee, attended a meeting of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue in Assisi, Italy in September. This is the official Vatican-level dialogue between Catholic and non-Christian monks. Fr. William is Catholic chairperson of this dialogue. • In January he was part of a delegation of persons from Catholic religious orders who visited the Holy Land.

Gene Herr, founder with his wife Mary of the Hermitage retreat center in southern Michigan, transferred control to a new board of directors this fall. The Hermitage provides opportunities for traditional spiritual development primarily to Mennonite pastors. Bridgefolk participant **Beverley Schmitt** is a board member. Gene and Mary are now retired in Newton, KS.

Marg Nisly graduated from a medical massage program in Seattle in October and passed the state boards in November. She is now a Licensed Massage Practitioner.

Mary Ann Hoffman is completing her doctoral dissertation at the Dominican House of Studies at Catholic U. in Washington, DC, and working half time as Spanish-language catechist for 200 children in a local parish. She was part of an ecumenical peace mission to Northern Ireland this fall. "The *Night of Light* which we helped coordinate was full of joy with a great mix of Protestant and Catholic families coming together to eat Irish stew, scones and s'mores...and drink tea!" she reports.

Marilyn Stahl, a member of Seattle Mennonite Church, is enrolled in a nine-month "Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life" retreat program at St. Joseph's Parish in Seattle, based on the spiritual exercises developed by St. Ignatius in the 16th century. "The exercises have offered a depth of spiritual formation I have not experienced before," she says, "including writing my spiritual autobiography, a commitment to an hour of prayer every day, and conversation with a Catholic spiritual director every two weeks."

Neal Blough, director of the Paris Mennonite Centre—who was at Collegeville to attend last summer's conference, but had to leave because his father-in-law died suddenly—is helping teach a course in 16th century Reformation history at the Catholic University of Paris, along with a Catholic and a Reformed historian. He is a member of the International Mennonite Catholic Dialogue.

Regina Wilson, Pastoral Associate at St. Joseph Parish in South Bend and a Bridgefolk steering committee member, had to miss the December meeting because her daughter Andree had a role in the local production of *The Nutcracker*. "It was her first time," says Regina, "and it's, oh, such a very big to-do here for the kids (and their parents, of course). After she and I wrangled our way through getting the dang curls right, we all enjoyed it immensely."

Bishop Joseph Martino, Catholic chair of the International Mennonite Catholic Dialogue, was installed as Bishop of Scranton, PA on October 1. He had been an auxiliary bishop in Philadelphia. **Lois and Ivan Kauffman** attended the installation ceremonies. Ivan has been an adviser to Bishop Martino.

Seven people who attended Bridgefolk 2003 also attended the Mennonite World Conference in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe the following month. **Helmut and Irma Harder, Neal Blough, Brenda Bellamy, Weldon Nisly, Mary Oyer, and Arnold Snyder** were all at this major gathering of the international Mennonite community, which takes place every 5-6 years.

Share the news
about
your life.

Other Bridgefolk
want to know.

Send an email
today.

Newsletter@Bridgefolk.net

Andrea Bartoli, who spoke at last summer's Bridgefolk conference as the leader of the Community of Sant'Egidio in the United States, visited Turkey and northern Iraq in December and January as part of the peacebuilding effort there which he is engaged in. Andrea is director of International Conflict Resolution Programs at Columbia University.

Peter Erb, who is a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., and program chair of the Anabaptist Martyrs Conference that met at Saint John's before the 2003 Bridgefolk conference, recently became a grandfather for the first time. The new baby's name is **Leanna Marie Funk**. "All is well, but the new grandfather is near uncontainable with delight," he reports.

Ron Pagnucco, who teaches peace studies at the College of Saint Benedict's and Saint John's, missed last summer's conference because he was in Kenya setting up a study abroad program with the Catholic University of East Africa. He also visited an interfaith active nonviolence program in Nairobi called Well-spring of Truth, which does nonviolence training, peacebuilding and conducts a Muslim-Christian dialogue project, and where one of his students is currently serving as an intern.

Gabriel Schlabach, son of Joetta and Gerald Schlabach, is a freshman at Saint John's University this year.

Jack Sharpe, leader of the Bethlehem Community, a small Catholic intentional community in North Dakota, who attended last summer's Bridgefolk conference, hosted a meeting at the diocesan seminary in Fargo in August, which brought together leaders from several small ecclesial communities in the U.S. and Canada. **Cardinal James Stafford**, former bishop of Denver who then served as head of the Council for Laity in Rome, attended. Bridgefolk was represented by Ivan Kauffman.

Bridgefolk In Print

Items published
by Bridgefolk people
or about Bridgefolk

Marlene Kropf, director of the Mennonite Church USA executive board Office of Congregational Life and a member of the Bridgefolk steering committee, published an article in the December 2, 2003 issue of *The Mennonite* supporting the practice of liturgical confession in Mennonite worship. Her article was paired with another by Mennonite theologian Marlin Jeschke who opposes this trend. Full texts are available online at *Bridgefolk.net*.

Arthur Paul Boers, Professor of Practical Theology at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, IN has an article in the same issue of *The Mennonite* reporting on his study of how two Catholic monasteries provide hospitality to strangers. Saint John's in Collegeville was one of the two. His conclusion was that we do not have to choose between formal worship and being open to visitors. The full text is available online at *Bridgefolk.net*

Gerald Schlabach, Bridgefolk co-chair and coordinator, recently published a chapter on the ethics of peace and war in the *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells. His chapter is entitled "Breaking Bread: Peace and War" and connects the practice of Eucharist to the morality of warfare. • His essay dealing with the problem of sharing the Eucharist, originally written for Bridgefolk, has also been accepted for publication. It will appear in *One In Christ*, the international Catholic ecumenical journal published in England. It is available online at *Bridgefolk.net*.

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

We won't know
otherwise.

Mary Oyer was featured in the Nov. 18, 2003 issue of *The Mennonite* as “a kind of Mennonite icon.” The interview on which the story was based took place shortly before the Bridgefolk conference this summer and mentions her participation as the Bridgefolk hymn leader. The full text is available online at *Bridgefolk.net*.

Arnold Snyder, professor at Conrad Grebel College and a speaker at the 2002 Bridgefolk conference, gave the 2002 Menno Simons Lecture Series at Bethel College, entitled “The Rich Legacy of Anabaptist Spirituality.” His Sunday morning sermon, “The Peace of Christ”, is now online in both print and audio versions via the Bridgefolk website, *Bridgefolk.net*.

The Saint John's football team was in the national news this fall, first because its coach, John Gagliardi, set a record for most career wins, and then because the team won a national championship in its division, defeating a team that was considered unbeatable. *The Washington Post* ran a front-page story Nov. 1, 2003 describing the very different way football is played at Saint John's, and Coach Gagliardi and his staff were later invited to the White House.

What You Can Do

Help fill this large empty space.

The Bridge needs **Letters to the Editor**—lots of them.
They're the most popular part of many publications.

If you've attended a Bridgefolk conference
you know how helpful it is to hear what other people
are thinking and experiencing—
even if they can't say it perfectly.

If you'd like to support Bridgefolk
this is something you can do—today.
And it will only take a few minutes.

Share what's on your mind!

Send *The Bridge* a letter today—short or long.

Newsletter@Bridgefolk.net

Katharine Drexel

Anabaptist Catholic Saint

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

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

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

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

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

Amen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Ivan Kauffman

Bridge Quotes . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EDITORIAL

Why *The Bridge* ?

When Bridgefolk began five years ago the thought that we would soon need a newsletter was far from anyone's mind. But what then seemed like an impossible dream has now become a real movement.

The speed with which all this has happened is more than a little astonishing to those of us who wondered if anyone would come when we announced that first conference at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center.

But perhaps the news in this newsletter explains why it has happened.

The International Mennonite Catholic Dialogue and Pope John Paul's support of it; the commitment of Saint John's Abbey not only to Bridgefolk but to the Martyrs Project, and possibly other things; grassroots cooperation in places as different as Honduras and Kansas; the growing number of personal friendships between Mennonites and Catholics—all these are evidence that something bigger than Bridgefolk is taking place.

Most of what is reported in this first issue of *The Bridge* was not caused by Bridgefolk. Instead it was the larger movement that is drawing Catholics and Mennonites into a new conversation that has created Bridgefolk. It seems clearer each month that Bridgefolk is only one part of a much larger stream, one that is carrying us to places we can scarcely imagine.

We hope this new newsletter will be a part of the process it reports. We want it to provide new opportunities for conversation.

That can only happen if you share your thoughts and reactions. Please pass along what you like and what you don't like, what interests you and what doesn't.

And please share your letters, your stories, your thoughts, and your photos—anything that might interest others.

We make the bridge by using it.

— Ivan Kauffman

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 . . .

visit our website
where you'll find photos of past conferences,
a large selection of articles,
both about Bridgefolk and by Bridgefolk participants,
presentations at past conferences,
and information about the 2004 conference.



And you'll also find links to the online items mentioned in this issue of the newsletter.