

20

Ways to Join God's Mission in the World:

First Steps on a Missional Journey



Mennonite
Church
USA

M
266.97
Os9t

20

**Ways to Join
God's Mission in
the World:**

First Steps on a Missional Journey



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

Mennonite Library & Archives
North Newton, KS 67117

Stories by Laurie L. Oswald, News Service Director, Mennonite Church USA.
Photos by Laurie L. Oswald, Shauna Nefos, Daryl Byler, Jack G. Ludwig
Produced by Executive Board Office of Communications, 2003

Copies available in bulk for \$1/copy plus shipping.
Communications@MennoniteUSA.org, 1-866-866-2872

M
266.97
059t

Foreword

Our new church is undergoing a reformation, whether we realize it or not. It started modestly with those who are already Mennonite. We found it necessary to get acquainted with Mennonites different from ourselves in order to form one, new church body.

Now it becomes clear that Mennonites getting to know each other is only the appetizer to the “main course” of God’s banquet feast. There are many more people waiting and wanting to know Christ and to be Mennonite — even if we have not yet met them, or they, themselves, are not yet awakened to their future in our new church.

We are tempted to believe that our new church was our idea; that it is for our children and us. Rather, God is showing us that our new church is a divine plan, not only a human one.

The purpose of our new church is not to be “its own” but to be “God’s own” for the sake of the world. Starting with us, by first changing our family relationships, God is awakening us to many new life-giving relationships with our neighbors and co-workers on both a local and global scale.

“Are you paying attention?” one Mennonite pastor writes God asked her as she returned to her “regular” tasks after helping and consoling her neighbor. God is asking this question of each person and congregation in Mennonite Church USA. Are we ready for the “main course” of meaning and purpose that God is serving us through a missional calling and identity?

Jim Schrag
Executive Director
Mennonite Church USA

GIFT MC USA 12-3-03

Preface

It's been said that one's first impressions last a lifetime. If so, I've been convinced for life that the missional vision of Mennonite Church USA has given birth to an amazing child. And she's well on the way to finding her place in God's kingdom.

During the first 16 months of the new denomination, I journeyed as news service director into many of the church's 21 area conferences. I captured the first steps of this emerging being, the missional church. The stories and photographs that chronicled my travels were part of Mennonite Church USA news service packets. Some are in this book. They are just a sampling of the missional stories that can be found in every area conference in every part of the country.

At first I disliked describing the word "missional" on paper. It was hard to define this word for readers. But when I saw it being expressed in countless ways in countless congregations,

a light went on in my soul. It will always shine bright in my memories.

What I saw were not people who wanted to do more activities but people who wanted to be more in tune with God. Instead of asking God to bless their plans, they were learning to bless God by joining God's plan — across the world and across the street: in their backyards and barbershops, in their worship and work, in their communities and prayer closets, in their public arenas and private lives.

Just as no two people are alike, no two expressions of being missional were alike. Perhaps that's why I found it so much easier to write stories about people and congregations who embody the concept rather than to define it in clinical terms.

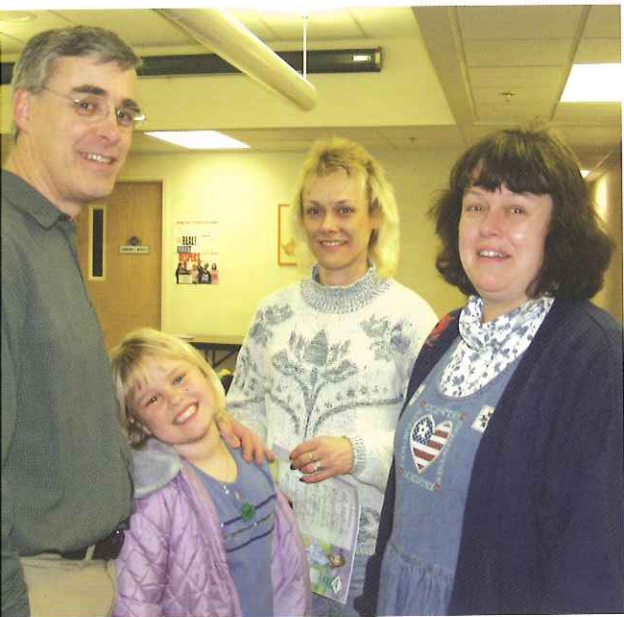
These stories and photos can bring you face-to-face with Mel, who experienced the horrors of 9/11 but found healing

through Project Restoring Hope; with Julie, who came to church expecting to see black buggies in the parking lot but found Jesus in the service; with Nemi, whose outdoor prayer ministry brought the touch of Christ to a girl on drugs.

As you travel from coast to coast in this book, I pray you will see what I saw and feel what I felt: awed and grateful that God invites us to join the mission that Jesus Christ began two mil-

lennia ago. Two years into our journey, we have taken new steps and have more to discover, as we mature into the missional people God desires us to be.

Laurie L. Oswald
News Service Director
Mennonite Church USA Executive Board
Newton, Kansas, June 2003



From left, Duane Beck, pastor at Belmont Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., enjoys a time of fellowship with Kennedy Meyer, her mother, Julie Meyer, and Heidi Crussemeyer. (Photo, Laurie L. Oswald)

Evening service at Belmont Mennonite provides a healing place in a harsh world

Belmont Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., passed the test with Julie Meyer, a low-income single mother, on her first visit to the congregation.

Meyer was searching for a place where she could belong just as she was, without fancy clothes and credentials and without the pain of being labeled a misfit. She found that place at the congregation's evening service, Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship.

"I really didn't know what the Mennonite Church was all about, but when I didn't see any horses and buggies in the parking lot, I decided it was okay to go in," said Meyer, who lives across the street and supports two kids by working part-time at a gas station.

"I was afraid that they'd send me out because I didn't look right, or act right, given the fact that I hadn't gone much to church in the last 30 years. But people were friendly and didn't make me feel that I had to be rich or wear lots of fancy clothes like in another church I attended.

"Jesus was a common person and he treated the poor the same as the rich. He was poor, and I am poor, so I guess we understand each other."

Responding as Jesus would in the neighborhood was Belmont's vision when it began the evening worship service 10 years ago, said Duane

Beck, Belmont's pastor. On Sunday nights, about 45 people attend the service, Sunday school for all ages and a fellowship time, including refreshments.

People such as Meyer, kids from broken homes and Duane Ballge, who lost his wife, Jan, to suicide, find a safe and healing place at Belmont in an often-harsh world. They receive God's love and grace in the midst of emotional and financial struggles, Meyer and other members said.

The place is safe and healing, but it's not fully integrated in terms of cultural differences stemming from economic and education levels, said Beck, who came to Belmont in 1984.

About 60 percent of the evening worshipers are lower-income people from the neighborhood. Only 25 percent are people who also attend the morning service. Belmont's 160 morning worshipers are largely educated, upper-middle-class and ethnic Mennonite.

The morning group is generous, but it doesn't provide a handout to the evening group, Beck said. The evening group's offerings are from \$40,000 to \$50,000 each year.

"One Sunday evening, we even found two lottery tickets and two food stamps in the offering," Beck said with a smile. "I think that's truly a case of the widow and the mite."

*"Jesus was a common person
and he treated the poor the
same as the rich. He was poor,
and I am poor, so I guess we
understand each other."*

— Julie Meyer

Prayer ministry in Upland brings God's healing presence into farmer's market

Nigerian associate pastor Nemi James, married to a woman from Poland, said every day he thinks in three languages — English, Polish and a language from his Nigerian homeland called “Mada.”

When he's doing a prayer ministry at a weekly outdoor market, he pares that down to one — the language of the heart — said the 32-year-old, born in Nigeria to a Baptist preacher's family. He came to the United States with his wife, Agnieszka Lazorczyk, who he met in Poland while serving in Youth With a Mission. Since 1999, he's served at First Mennonite Church in Upland, Calif., where he leads the prayer ministry with church youth.

Market goers each Tuesday scribble their heart cries on prayer request slips, James said. They're seeking freedom from addictions, healing for cancer, peace in the midst of family pain and deliverance from demons — to name only a few. Most of those writing requests don't know who Mennonites are but take a chance God hears their prayers.

“So many of the prayer requests touch and break our hearts,” he said during the market in late June. “I'll never forget the prayer request from a teenage girl who was struggling with drug addiction. She hangs out with the punks with spiked hair and came to ask for prayer that God



Nemi James, associate pastor at First Mennonite Church in Upland, Calif., works with youth in a prayer ministry in an outdoor summer market. They are Christina Ellis and Steve Canche.

(photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

would keep those guys from raping her.

“She came back later to tell us that the night she thought something bad like that would happen, it didn’t. She came to thank us, and then she later came to visit our church.”

Several youth join James in reaching out to people such as this young woman. The teenagers attend the youth ministry the church asked James to develop when he came to First Mennonite. Team members go out in pairs to ask for prayer requests from booth workers selling anything from jewelry to fresh produce to ice cream to New Age literature. One pair was Christina Ellis, an African-American, and Steve Canche, a Mexican youth. James’ mentoring has prepared them to share their faith.

“We see people struggling, people who are confused, people who ask for prayer and people who are scared,” Ellis said. “Nemi’s helped me to grow enough to be able to come out here and share Jesus in all this. ... Nemi’s shown me what a true Christian can be.”

*“We see people struggling,
people who are confused, peo-
ple who ask for prayer and
people who are scared.”*

— Christina Ellis

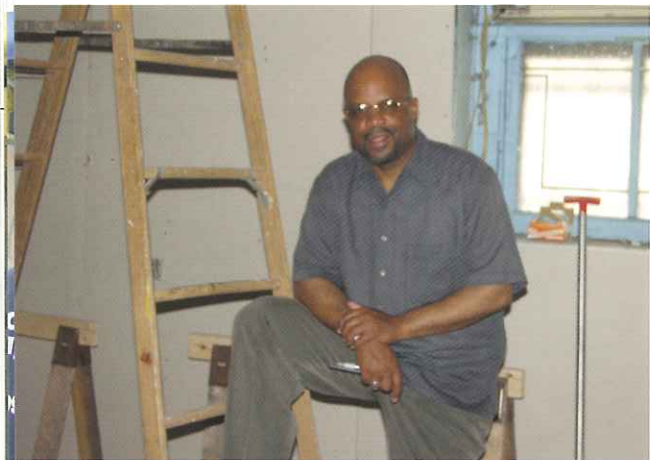
Flooded-out basement transformed into peace center at King of Glory Tabernacle

Because of Project Restoring Hope, a flooded-out basement at King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx is being transformed into a peace center.

Project Restoring Hope is a partnership between Mennonite Disaster Service with New York City churches and other Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches across North America. It's helped to restore wholeness to communities in New York, broken by the events of 9/11, including the faith community at King of Glory. The terrorist attack destroyed the World Trade Towers, killed thousands of people and created emotional and economic turmoil across the multicultural city, where 18 Mennonite congregations are located.

The remodeling at King of Glory organized by the project transformed the basement into the Olive Branch Fellowship Hall. It's a space being remodeled to foster interfaith dialogue and peacemaking activities in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and counter-attacks in Afghanistan, said Michael Banks, pastor of King of Glory, a largely African-American congregation belonging to Lancaster Mennonite Conference.

"For me, as an urban Anabaptist peacemaker, Sept. 11 provided the church with a window of opportunity to show how peacemaking is relevant



Michael Banks, pastor of the King of Glory Tabernacle, Bronx, N.Y., helps transform the congregation's basement into the Olive Branch Fellowship Hall. (Photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

to the 21st century,” said Banks, as he walked through the unfinished basement. “It’s unfortunate that this violence occurred. But it’s shown Mennonites in the city how important it is to provide a peaceful alternative to militarism.

“Project Restoring Hope is about building up all the churches here that weren’t prepared to deal with this situation in a realistic way. I had heard of MDS for years and never quite understood the connection between what it does and the good news of Jesus Christ, and now I know. MDS and its representatives are truly agents of grace and peace.”

Some of those agents of grace and peace were volunteers from the southeastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey MDS unit, including members of such Pennsylvania congregations as Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Souderton Mennonite Church and Doylestown Mennonite Church, all within Franconia Mennonite Conference.

“It’s been good to be more exposed to people in the city and to realize that there are so many Mennonite congregations in New York,” said Titus Hunsberger of Souderton, Pa., MDS unit coordinator, and a member of Blooming Glen Mennonite. “It’s showed us that we don’t need to go to a foreign country to find a partner church. We can do that right in New York, or Philadelphia.”

“We don’t need to go to a foreign country to find a partner church. We can do that right in New York, or Philadelphia.”

—Titus Hunsberger

Anglo, Hispanic pastors use same language of hope in multicultural Miami

Byron Pellecer's native language is Spanish, and Chuck Goertz's native language is English. But when it comes to serving the urban Mennonite church in Miami, they use the same language of hope, the pastors said.

Their hopes are rooted in the belief that Anglos, Hispanics and other ethnic groups can minister together in Southeast Mennonite Conference. And as they do, they will model what it means for Mennonite Church USA to be multicultural amidst the challenges that diversity brings.

Pellecer, pastor of *Iglesia Menonita Encuentro de Renovacion* in Miami, and Goertz, pastor of Homestead Mennonite Church about 20 miles from Miami, said differences can be roadblocks. But the leaders choose to use differences in economics, language and cultural backgrounds as building blocks for big dreams.

An increasingly diverse Miami area is bringing new diversity to the conference that has 30 congregations in Florida and Georgia. A recent census shows that 60 percent of the people in the Dade County-Miami area are foreign-born and 74 percent speak another language other than English at home.

Many Anglos worship in traditional Mennonite centers such as



Byron Pellecer (left), pastor of Iglesia Menonita Encuentro de Renovacion in Miami, and Chuck Goertz, pastor of Homestead (Fla.) Mennonite Church, work together to build God's multicultural kingdom in the South Florida District of Southeast Mennonite Conference. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

Sarasota. But in other areas, congregations also represent Hispanics, African-Americans, Africans, Garifuna — an ethnic group from the coasts of Belize and Honduras — and Native Americans.

“We come at God’s field from different angles, different perspectives, different worship styles, but learning to work together is what God’s grace is all about,” said Pellecer, pastor of the 70-member congregation that has people from about 12 countries in Central and South America, including Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

“But bottom line, we’re both working to build God’s kingdom. So I say let’s take new steps to go for it together, to dream big and do it, not just talk about doing it. No matter what our skin color, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.”

“We’re both working to build God’s kingdom. So I say let’s take new steps to go for it together, to dream big and do it, not just talk about doing it. No matter what our skin color, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.”

— Byron Pellecer

Mennonite Library & Archives
North Newton, KS 67117

Pennsylvania youth head for unknown destination on mission road trip


Imagine asking your parents if you can go on a missions trip with your youth group and then saying, “By the way, Mom and Dad, we don’t know where we’re going until we get there.” And then see puzzlement cloud their faces.

That’s what Alex Pabellon saw when he told his dad that his youth group from Zion Mennonite Church in Birdsboro, Pa., were traveling west to an unknown destination in three recreational vehicles in late July 2002.

Pabellon tried to explain. On their trip, “Live2Worship,” they would interview hundreds of people on videotape by asking the question, “What do you live for?” At the end of the trip, they would compile the interviews and produce a video to give away free.

To do this, 13 teenagers and six youth leaders would pray and worship their way across several states, asking God each day where they should go next. They would stop at state park campgrounds to sleep at night, worship and pray with strangers in cities, do drama on the streets, minister to the lonely and hand out tracts.

Despite the concern of Pabellon’s father and other parents, some members of the youth group convinced adults of their vision — a vision they felt the Holy Spirit inspired. It led them on a 10-day trip that began



The Zion Mennonite Church youth group in Birdsboro, Pa., prepares to leave for their mission road trip, Live2Worship, on July 25, 2002.

(photo by Shauna Nefos)

July 25 and took them as far as Chicago. By the time they got back home Aug. 5, they had also been to Cincinnati and many smaller communities and campgrounds. They logged about 1,600 miles across Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois and back again.

Kristi Walls, a teen youth group member, said, “Jeff Stoltzfus, our youth minister at Zion, encouraged us to think outside the box, and we came up with this road trip idea. We definitely felt it was from the Lord and that it was really cool.”

They broke out of the box of traditional mission ideas — painting at camps, working with kids, going to a convention. And the world outside the box was eye-opening, they said. People find many reasons to live that aren’t tied to religion or God.

“Many people seemed to be searching deeply and looking for something to satisfy their hearts,” Walls said. “They

often said, ‘I don’t know what I’m looking for, but I will find it someday.’”

Daniel Minotto, a teen youth group member, said, “I edited a lot of the interviews, and many people said women, boyfriends and money are what made them happiest. I saw that the world tries so hard to find joy in sex and money and pleasure.

“But I realize that one can’t really find true joy outside of God. And the people who seemed most content were those who were living for God.”

Pabellon said many answers were tinged with the seriousness of 9/11’s aftermath, while others showed that America is shallow and materialistic.

“At best, this country seems to have some well-meaning humanitarianism, especially after 9/11,” he said. “At its worst, this nation seemed spiritually poor and empty. . . . In either case, God is the great equalizer. What struck me most was the contrast between people who have hope and those who don’t.”

Mennonite Church USA brings congregational chorus for peace to Washington

When Jim Schrag, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, spoke on behalf of the church to provide peaceful alternatives to a proposed war with Iraq during a press conference Sept. 12, 2002, on Capitol Hill, he brought with him a chorus of more than 17,000 voices.

As he read his statements during the press conference — planned to coincide with President Bush's U.N. address that morning — he held a stack of 300 pages six inches high that contained that chorus. Those thousands of names accompany a letter he wrote to President Bush on behalf of MC USA calling for sowing seeds of peace.

In what church leaders see as a God-inspired movement, 246 congregations and other people in 33 states and District of Columbia gathered the names in two weeks after the letter-writing campaign began with a goal of 5,000 names. By midnight Sept. 14, the campaign had gleaned 13,477 names.

"This letter-writing and signature campaign tapped into a hunger across the church to somehow have a voice and make a difference," Schrag said. "While names represented many people, it was evidence of a church that wants to speak with one congregational voice on peacemaking. ...



Holding a stack of paper with names, Jim Schrag, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, speaks at a press conference called by Churches for Middle East Peace. Among those in the background, at Schrag's right, is Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill.

(photo by Daryl Byler)

“We have spent a lot of time and energy in the last few years on looking at ourselves and building relationships within to shape the identity of the new church. But now we’re hungry to reach beyond ourselves and do things on behalf of others.”

The press conference was one stop that Schrag made on his visit Sept. 10-12 to Washington. Daryl Byler, director of Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington office, planned the trip and helped make it possible for Schrag to speak at the press conference.

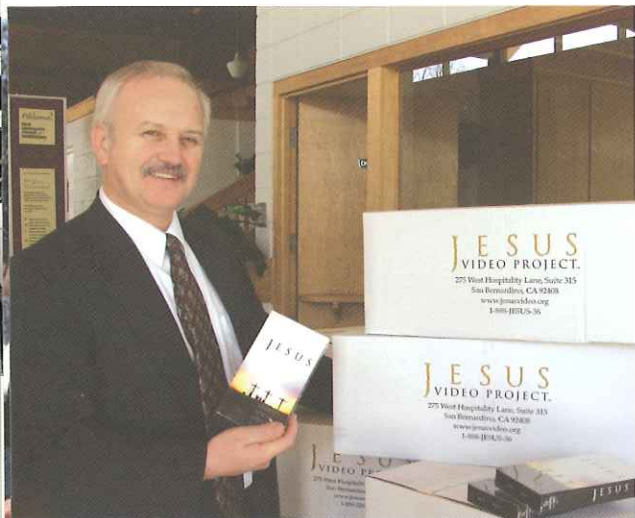
Sixteen denominational groups including Baptists, Catholics and others — called Churches for Middle East Peace — sponsored the press conference, attended by such national media as FOX, CNN and NPR.

Part of Schrag’s letter reads: “As leaders and members of Mennonite Church USA, we express our opposition to the

proposed military invasion of Iraq by the U.S. military. We believe that war will not sow seeds of peace and security.”

Byler — who with MCC and its presence in Iraq since 1998 has paved the way for Mennonites to have a voice in Washington on Iraq issues — said these congregational efforts created a powerful song for peace that’s being heard in Washington.

“While other speakers spoke from the heart, Jim had the very visible expression in those six inches of signatures that all of Mennonite Church USA cares about finding alternatives,” Byler said. “But more than the impact those names may have on officials, I think they will have a greater impact on our church family. There is something powerful that happens when a people collectively say that war is not right. It has a strong impact on our identity.”



Zip code and Jesus, not church affiliation, unites Indiana community

Your zip code — not your religion or lifestyle — was the common denominator in Middlebury, Ind., one Easter.

It didn't matter whether you were Mennonite, Lutheran, Amish, Catholic, had never been to church or had been and aren't now. Simply, all those who lived in the 46540 zip-code area received a *Jesus* video in the mail several days before Easter Sunday. The video depicts the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, as found in the gospel of Luke.

The Middlebury Ministerium — including First Mennonite Church and about 14 other local churches — mailed the video to 4,069 homes and businesses in town and surrounding rural areas. The group wanted to convey that God's love in Jesus Christ crosses denominational lines and reaches into human hearts — regardless of one's background or affiliation, said Linford Martin, pastor of First Mennonite.

Martin and some First Mennonite members — with members from such denominations as Lutheran, Brethren in Christ, Church of God, Conservative Mennonite, Assembly of God and non-denominational congregations — raised \$10,000 for the ecumenical outreach, called the Jesus Video Project, he said.

Linford Martin, pastor of First Mennonite Church in Middlebury, Ind., helps prepare a mailing of Jesus videos to all residents of the zip-code area of 46540. He, along with other members of First Mennonite, joined 14 other local congregations to send out the videos several weeks before a recent Easter. (photo, Laurie L. Oswald)

“We wanted to make the presence of the churches in this community felt, but felt in such a way that people could sense our unity in the basics of our faith,” Martin said. “We wanted to get the gospel into each home, so that lives could be touched and people could seek a meaningful relationship with Jesus, no matter what their background.”

The video is often seen as a project for overseas missionaries, or irrelevant in a quiet community with churches on many street corners, Martin said. But surveys show that many people in the area are unchurched or have left churches because of hurts.

“You don’t think of our area as unchurched, but statistics show that about 11 percent of the 22,000 people in the area aren’t interested in attending church at all, and another 4 percent are interested in going somewhere, but don’t know where,” Martin said.

“We wanted to get the gospel into each home, so that lives could be touched and people could seek a meaningful relationship with Jesus, no matter what their background.”

— Linford Martin

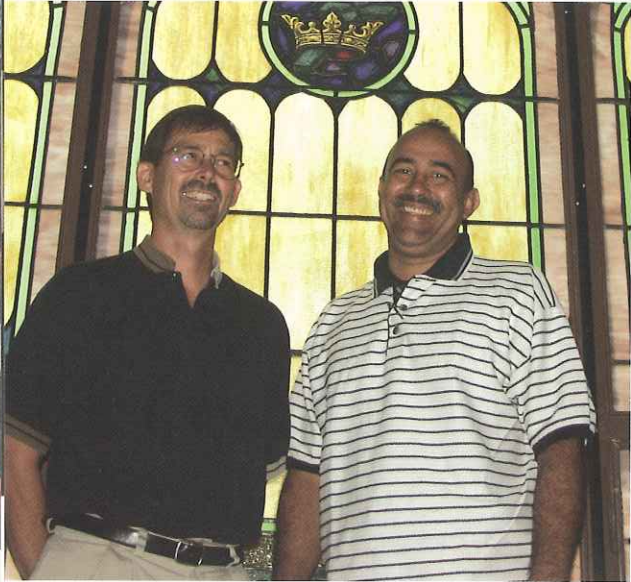
First Mennonite Church in Reedley, Calif., part of God's multicultural vineyard

The traditional Anglo congregation of First Mennonite Church has become part of God's multicultural vineyard in Reedley, a town set in California's fruit fields where two-thirds of the community is now Hispanic.

To respond to the influx of Hispanics into the Reedley area in recent years, the congregation, begun in 1906, has developed a ministry for those who have come to work in the fields and in other jobs, First Mennonite pastoral staff said. In a modern twist of demographics, longstanding Mennonites who came from such places as Mountain Lake, Minn., and Corn, Okla., from the early 1900s through the mid-60s, and new Mennonites who came from Mexico in the 1990s share one church.

As in tending fields, growing a multicultural community is hard work, but the fruits of the labor are worth it, as the congregation seeks to build one church with many expressions, said full-time lead pastor Ken Seitz and half-time associate pastors Juan Montes and Stephen Penner.

"In 1996, we formed a task force to study how to continue to minister to Hispanics coming to our church," Penner said. We assumed that eventually we'd spin off the 'Hispanic ministry' as a church plant. We would then have a mother-daughter relationship with this new church.



From left, Stephen Penner and Juan Montes are part-time associate pastors at First Mennonite Church in Reedley, Calif., where they serve the multicultural congregation with Ken Seitz, full-time lead pastor. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

“But instead, the task force, after looking at what we had and thinking about the changes in our community, recommended to the congregation that we do just the opposite. The congregation agreed, deciding that we should be one, just as Jesus longs for his people to be one.”

First Mennonite is slowly moving toward integration in one of the most racially diverse regions in the United States, while still respecting distinct groups, the pastor said. There’s an English service on Sunday morning and a Spanish service on Sunday afternoon. Several joint services have included a Maundy Thursday event, baptisms and church picnics. Since 1999, the church has provided contemporary worship service on Sunday evenings for young adults and seekers of many backgrounds.

Through these joint efforts, Anglos and Hispanics are discovering that neither English nor Spanish, neither money nor poverty, neither four-part harmonies nor charismatic praise can separate them from sharing God’s love in Christ, Montes said. Low-income undocumented field workers and middle-class Mennonites worship side-by-side. Language and worship styles differ, but their Lord is the same.

“As we’ve developed our relationship with each other, we can learn to see the beauty and the moving of God’s Spirit in the other people who are different from us,” Montes said.

“As we’ve developed our relationship with each other, we can learn to see the beauty and the moving of God’s Spirit in the other people who are different from us.”

— Juan Montes



Don Kingsley (left), a member of First Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan., helps Damien Floyd, 8, of Liberty, Miss., to scale the carnival mountain during First Mennonite's first-ever Fun Fest in summer 2002.

(photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

First Mennonite in Newton, Kan., part of missional video project

When Burton Buller and Wayne Gehman came to videotape First Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan., for Mennonite Church USA's missional video project, they got much more than people talking in front of a still backdrop.

The Mennonite Media team got video of the action of a church reaching out to its community with a free monthly Saturday morning car wash in fall 2002 and a first-ever Fun Fest. About 1,000 people flooded onto the church grounds for the Fun Fest late Saturday afternoon and evening to enjoy free food, music and a carnival.

The team videotaped Rusty Bonham, First's pastor of youth, wearing a Superman T-shirt when helping his youth group wash cars. They got videotape of children rope-climbing a simulated mountain. They got videotape of church volunteers welcoming neighbors and strangers who'd never been to First Mennonite — people too shy to come to a service Sunday morning but able to try a carnival Saturday night.

The team gathered videotape of how another MC USA congregation is being missional — people in the pews reaching out to people across the street with God's love in Christ in all areas of life.

When Buller and Gehman finished videotaping for the project sponsored by Mennonite Church USA's Executive Board and Mission Network, they produced a 15-minute video. It highlighted five congregations, including First Mennonite. The video was sent as a gift to all MC USA congregations as a vision-casting tool.

Buller and Gehman interviewed some members of the vision community, including Pastor Clarence Rempel. He and 11 other congregational team members are part of a three-year process of study, prayer, congregational input, risk-taking and change. The process is helping the 125-year-old congregation to be missional.

“God wants to call First Mennonite to reach its neighbors for Christ and that requires a heart change,” Rempel said. “That includes becoming passionate about the lost as God is passionate about the lost.

“In Luke 15 . . . God is like a father who is waiting for his lost son and runs to meet him, while also pleading with the self-righteous son to come into the celebration. . . . That's heart work, and is fundamental to ground-level change.”

“God is like a father who is waiting for his lost son and runs to meet him, while also pleading with the self-righteous son to come into the celebration. . . . That's heart work and is fundamental to ground-level change.”

— Clarence Rempel



Children worship during a Sunday service at Berea Mennonite Church, one of two congregations that belong to Mennonite Church USA in Atlanta.

(photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

Former VSers shine light of faith, peacemaking into all corners of Atlanta

If you visit Atlanta, Brenda Shelby is one person you may want as a tour guide.

Shelby not only can talk about the history of the city. She also helped to shape its history. She was one of many Mennonite young people who participated in Voluntary Service in Atlanta in the late 1950s through 1970s. They served in schools, hospitals, social service agencies and community development groups through units sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee and Eastern Mission Board of Lancaster Mennonite Conference.

Some came to do alternative service during the Vietnam War. Some marched for peace in the city, the former home of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. Many, like Shelby — a retired math teacher who was part of the first integration of city schools and who married an African-American — never returned home but made Atlanta home.

“After my summer of tutoring through VS with MCC in 1967, I stayed in Atlanta to teach math in the public schools,” said Shelby, who came to the city from a small town in Indiana where she taught her first year after graduation at Goshen (Ind.) College. She is a longtime member of Berea Mennonite Church, a Mennonite Church USA congregation in Atlanta.

“When I first started teaching, there were only a few blacks in the school,” she said. “When integration was mandated, the schools in the East Point area where I taught turned to about 60 percent white and 40 percent black. . . . And right before I left teaching, I saw schools in that area change from a majority of white to about 100 percent black.

“The schools and the city are still not integrated in many places. . . . But as I taught over a period of many years, I saw how my upbringing really helped me. My parents taught me to accept people for who they are and not base my views of them on skin color.”

Shelby took her upbringing to heart in a deeper way when she married Albert Shelby and decided not to return home to Archbold, Ohio, where she grew up at Zion Mennonite Church. In Atlanta, she attended other churches until 1977, when she joined Berea — one of the first racially integrated churches of any kind in the city.

The Mennonite mosaic in Atlanta is broader than congregations, said Jonathan Larson, district minister in Atlanta for Southeast Mennonite Conference. VSers such as Shelby and Ray Leatherman, who came to VS in 1970, remained Mennonite. Others such as Don Bender joined other churches and ecumenical ministries.

“Because the VS programs seconded people to all the organizations in the city, the participants became salt and yeast in many organizations and in many other churches,” Larson said.

A vision for seeking peace and social justice still operates in their lives. Bender, who lives in Atlanta, is a community developer and attends Atlanta Friends (Quaker) Meeting.

“These ideals we held in common have spread throughout different communities, in Presbyterian churches, in Quaker meetings, in Unitarian groups,” Bender said. “And people have a great respect for the work of MCC. The MCC legacy lives on with us.”

Easter-Sunday death of New York City pastor brings resurrection hope

Pastor Arlene Pipkin's death on Easter Sunday — seven months after the World Trade Center tragedy — taught Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship in New York City what it means to find hope in the resurrection and community life.

The death of their 59-year-old pastor to cancer in late March followed the deaths of several thousand people in the terrorist attack Sept. 11 in the neighborhood near their meetinghouse. Of the 18 Mennonite congregations in the city, their church — which belongs to Atlantic Coast Conference — lies closest to Ground Zero, an area in lower Manhattan where many members live, work and take their kids to school.

In the receding tidal wave of this trauma, Pipkin's worsening condition sent another shock wave throughout the congregation. Nevertheless, Sept. 11 and Pipkin's death created a stronger community in the midst of weakness and hope in the midst of loss.

"Arlene left us with one great sermon, and that was, 'Don't be afraid,'" said Manhattan Mennonite member Mel Lehman, a part-time administrative assistant at the church and a freelance writer and video producer with projects in the Middle East.



Mel Lehman, a member of Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, takes a tour of Ground Zero in New York City in April 2002. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

“She was in touch with the power of God and helped us to be. She was not just bearing her death, but she and the Lord had triumphed. She had a gratefulness that struck us all in the final weeks.”

Pipkin had served at Manhattan Mennonite for about two years, he said. Her cancer was in remission when she first came to the fellowship of about 30 members.

“Her death has been a paradox, for it has been life-giving to the congregation,” said Manhattan Mennonite member Clarke Bell, who works with the homeless near Ground Zero. “Amidst all this tragedy, we saw how life is a gift and how it keeps going on and continues to be a gift within our community as we choose to love each other.”

No members died in the tragedy, but they lost friends and associates. One member who is a firefighter lost many buddies in the tragedy and worked with rescue crews at Ground Zero. Another member saw one of the planes hit a

tower as she walked her children to school. Many began to heal through individual and congregational counseling and a retreat supported by Restoring Hope, a partnership between Mennonite Disaster Service and New York City churches.

Lehman’s connection to the Anabaptist peace community helped him process the tragedy and continue his work in the Middle East. He was in Iraq in 1998 during U.S. bombing.

“I know from huddling in the middle of a hallway for four days during U.S. bombing over there, that it’s as scary for them to be bombed there as it is for us to be bombed here,” he said. “We all share human blood, whether we live in the East or the West.

“It seems unpatriotic these days if you question your country’s foreign policy. But I think the reverse is true. As Mennonites, we love America, but we also love the world. Mennonites need to stand up for who we are and say, ‘Enough killing.’ ”



Judy Bontrager, member at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz., helps a child do crafts during the "Christmas in the Park" festival sponsored by Trinity in December 2002. (photo by Jack G. Ludwig)

Children inspire Trinity Mennonite to reach out to their neighbors

Fourth- and fifth-graders at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz., didn't know their idea for having a Christmas festival in a park was "missional."

They simply knew that a good way to share God's love is to throw a party to celebrate Jesus' birth and invite their neighbors to come. As it turns out, the kids were right.

Based on the kids' idea, Trinity held its first "Christmas in the Park" on Dec. 14, 2002, in the park on Trinity's campus in Glendale, a suburb of Phoenix. During the free festival, neighbors joined the carnival-like fun. It included hot dogs, a giant inflatable slide, a petting zoo and a live nativity scene acted out by some of the children who'd dreamt up the festival the summer before.

"During my Vacation Bible School class last summer, kids in my class were talking about what it means to be a missionary right here in our neighborhood," said Jennifer Funke, festival chair at the 350-member church. "At first they gave the usual answers, such as going door-to-door to share the message about Jesus, and evangelizing.

"But I asked them what if someone wasn't good at that, or what if people slammed the door in their face? That's when a couple of boys said,

'Yeah, church can be a really scary place for people who haven't been there before. But what if we had a party in the park on our property? Everybody loves a party. They'd come.'

"I sat on the idea for a couple of months. But then I felt really convicted. I realized it was wrong of me to ask children to dream and visualize about ministry and then not demonstrate how to follow through."

Adults at Trinity had been praying about caring more about their neighbors. But it was the children who gave feet to the prayers, said Stan Shantz, Trinity's pastor. As a member of Mennonite Church USA's churchwide missional church team convened by the Executive Board, he was excited to see how children intuitively responded to the idea of joining in God's mission close to home and moved Trinity beyond its walls into its backyard.

About 450 people came to the festival, which included 90 English-speaking families and Spanish-speaking families, some of which said they didn't have a church home.

As successful as the festival was, it was not the event but the change in attitude it evoked which most excites Shantz and associate pastor Stephen (Tig) Intagliata, they said.

"This festival gave us a taste of what it means to think of the needs of others as we're planning events," Intagliata said. "We've done festivals before just for us. But it's no longer just about us."

"Yeah, church can be a really scary place for people who haven't been there before. But what if we had a party in the park on our property? Everybody loves a party. They'd come.'

— a grade school boy



Charity Ezeamama (right), a member of Los Angeles Faith Chapel, is part of the congregation's food pantry and clothing ministry that serves the homeless and needy in their neighborhood and downtown Los Angeles. Nigerian immigrants began the congregation, one of 45 congregations and 20-plus emerging churches that represent all the continents on Earth and 11 languages in Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference brings Anabaptism to the "Ellis Island" of the 21st century

The world has come to Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, and the mission-focused conference is opening its arms wide.

Mennonites in California are part of a multicultural, urban mosaic that spans the globe and a gamut of cultures. As conference leaders describe, the region is the Ellis Island of the 21st century. Its 45 congregations and 20-plus emerging churches represent all the continents on Earth and 11 languages and bring many textures and shapes to the design.

In the 400 miles stretching from Los Angeles in southern California north to San Francisco, there are first-generation Mennonites who are first-generation Christians in their families, and Mennonites by birth whose ancestors came from the first Anabaptist families in Europe; immigrants who work in fruit fields and professionals who work for computer companies; people from Nigeria, El Salvador and Indonesia, and people who have moved here from Pennsylvania, Kansas and Ohio.

But within this dizzying palate of differences, Pacific Southwest finds its center in Jesus Christ, its passion in mission and its treasures in emerging new leaders, conference leaders said. It seeks to embrace new ways of being community while ensuring its Anabaptist roots shape that community.

“Our biggest challenge is identifying what it is that holds us all together,” said Ruth Suter, former conference moderator, who lives in Brisbane, just outside of San Francisco. “It needs to be a community that transcends all our differences. . . .

“We have the opportunity to understand how the Anabaptist sense of community and accountability plays itself out in a church where many members didn’t grow up Mennonite. . . . We have to be a lot more upfront about our non-negotiables — a commitment to community, peacemaking and mission.

“We have to be explicit because the Mennonite code words mean nothing to new Mennonites. And while new Mennonites take this Anabaptist journey very willingly and enthusiastically, we aren’t going to get there in five or 10 years. But we will get there.”

“Our biggest challenge is identifying what it is that holds us all together. It needs to be a community that transcends all our differences.” —Ruth Suter



As Illinois congregation abides in the vine of Christ, it bears new fruit

As associate pastor Jane Roeschley walked out of her office at Mennonite Church of Normal, Ill., she heard an inner whisper and felt a touch on her shoulder.

“Are you paying attention?” Roeschley felt the voice of the Holy Spirit asking her about Cindi (not her real name). Cindi lived in a duplex built for welfare families in the church’s mostly middle-class neighborhood. Cindi had called the church earlier that day, upset by an incident that had occurred in the area. Roeschley, the only one of three pastors working that day, took the call and met with Cindi to resolve the issue.

“After two hours of dealing with the problem, I walked back into the church, so glad to get on with what I thought was my real work for the day,” Roeschley said. “But at 4 p.m., as I stood in the hallway outside my office, it was my perception that this heavenly hand rested on my shoulder and God asked me, ‘Are you paying attention?’”

“I realized that I’d just had my own personal crash course on what my congregation had been studying about being missional, about taking the gospel across the street and around the world. This woman was literally in my neighborhood, and I hadn’t ever reached out to her or made a contact.”

Jane Roeschley, associate pastor of Mennonite Church of Normal, Ill., worships during a church-wide missional church team meeting in fall 2000 along with Peter Graber. He is senior executive for Missional Church Advancement for Mennonite Mission Network. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

Roeschley, who has since developed a friendship with Cindi, shared this story at a churchwide missional church team meeting. Roeschley, a member of the 15-person team convened by Mennonite Church USA's Executive Board, shared the challenges her church faces in becoming a missional congregation.

One of the greatest challenges for the 170-member congregation is refocusing attitudes about mission, Roeschley said. It's meant focusing more on relationships with God, each other and their neighbors than on programs. It's meant gaining a deeper sense of identity and call as a missional people — such as God calling Roeschley to befriend Cindi in the midst of daily life — rather than simply adding more mission activities.

Being salt and light in one's own backyard begins with one Cindi at a time, Roeschley said. It's one thing to create 300 health kits or raise \$300,000 at a Mennonite relief sale. It's quite another to pay attention to the Cindis of this world.

“My dream for Cindi is that she not only believes that I am paying attention but that God is paying attention,” Roeschley said. “That means I walk with Cindi long enough and deeply enough for her to believe she can turn the corner out of poverty into a fuller life.”

“My dream for Cindi is that she not only believes that I am paying attention but that God is paying attention. That means I walk with Cindi long enough and deeply enough for her to believe she can turn the corner out of poverty into a fuller life.” — Jane Roeschley

Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship adopts refugees, provides home, family


“Nomad” is how Doreen Lwanga, a Ugandan refugee who’s seeking asylum in the United States, described herself before coming to live at Mennonite Hospitality House, a refugee resettlement ministry of Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship.

But after she came to live at the house, Lwanga — a political prisoner rights activist who fled Uganda because its government sought to put her in jail — found a new home and a surrogate family, she said. Her family, who also fled Uganda because of involvement in opposition politics, is scattered across the globe.

As Lwanga waits to hear whether the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) will grant her asylum status, her three housemates — including Susan Gascho, AMF pastor — are like sisters. And the church family has helped her to feel adopted by God.

“My parents also had to flee the country and now are in Tanzania, and all but one of my two brothers and four sisters are living in Portugal, England and Vietnam,” Lwanga said. “I’ve been a nomad for so long. It’s been so stressful with none of us being together.

“When I first came here, I cried every day. I felt like such a stray...



Doreen Lwanga (center) and Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship members Joyce Short (left) and Susan Gascho, pastor; enjoy being housemates at Mennonite Hospitality House, a refugee resettlement ministry of AMF. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

But being here has completely changed my life. I don't know why all these people care. But they've been here for me at a time when I felt so scared.

"I'm thankful that they've welcomed me, even though I am a stranger. But I don't feel like a foreigner in this house. . . . Back in Uganda, I hadn't gone to church for a very, very long time. But I want to go to church here, because I can feel God's presence in a new way when people care like this."

This spirit of hospitality and close-knit family is a hallmark of AMF, said 27-year-old Gascho. She's AMF's first pastor since the congregation began in 1992. The 25-member AMF has developed a shared lay-leadership team to create a sense of community.

Gascho and other AMF members help refugees remain in the United States, as they enter into the process of applying for a green card — a permanent working visa and resident card. Since Sept. 11, 2001, refugees — especially those from the Middle East — find it more difficult to get into the United States, Gascho said. Someone must live in the United States for five years before applying for permanent citizenship.

"It's amazing that I've survived, with no job, no ticket to go home, wherever home is," Lwanga said. "These Christians have given me back the dignity of being a person, not just a number on an INS file."

"It's amazing that I've survived, with no job, no ticket to go home, wherever home is. These Christians have given me back the dignity of being a person, not just a number on an INS file." —Doreen Lwanga



Carol Rose, pastor of Mennonite Church of the Servant in Wichita, Kan., holds a clipping of a newspaper article that ran in the Wichita Eagle, a large daily newspaper, describing the public peace witness that she and other members of the congregation joined every Tuesday during rush hour in Wichita. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

Congregations can be yeast of peace in violence-saturated world

Becoming involved in peacemaking isn't a novel idea for Carol Rose, pastor of Mennonite Church of the Servant in Wichita, Kan.

Ever since 9/11, many people in the 25-member congregation have joined others of the Peace and Social Justice Center of South Central Kansas for public peace witness. In rain, snow or sun, they've stood at two major intersections in Wichita on Tuesdays during evening rush hour and held up signs for motorists, including "Don't Attack Iraq."

"We got all kinds of responses, ranging from honks in response to our 'honk for peace' signs to people flipping us obscene gestures, or even people yelling, 'kill'em all!' said Rose, also a volunteer with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Colombia. "But no matter the response, I take hope in the fact that Mennonites and others involved in peacemaking can be like yeast throughout this city."

This congregation is one of many that the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board invited to witness and pray for peace during the winter of 2003, as the United States made decisions about war with Iraq. The Executive Board asked area conference leaders to send congregations a pastoral letter with a copy of a letter drafted to President Bush.

Many other congregations joined Mennonite Church of the Servant in offering peaceful alternatives to violence. One example is Shalom Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va. The congregation celebrated Peace Sunday by inviting Muslims from the local mosque and students in the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg to help the congregation learn more about Islam.

“I think we’re at a hinge point in what God is doing in the world regarding the myth of redemptive violence, and I believe Anabaptist peace-makers are right in the center of that hinge,” Rose said. “Not so very long ago it was considered normal for a human being to own another human being. God moved through the church to stop slavery. And God can move through the church to show how violence is wrong.”

“Not so very long ago it was considered normal for a human being to own another human being. God moved through the church to stop slavery. And God can move through the church to show how violence is wrong.”

—Carol Rose


A new family at Bally (Pa.) Mennonite congregation is fruit of missional outreach

When Bally (Pa.) Mennonite Church describes how it's being missional, it only has to tell the story of families like the Repperts.

In 1997, Sallie Reppert, a high school senior, came to Bally's youth group for the first time and later became the congregation's children and youth ministry coordinator. She brought her mother, Bonnie Reppert, to visit the church, and her mother became a member. Her father, Dave Reppert, became a Christian at Bally in 1999, and is a men's Bible study leader and chair of Bally's mission and evangelism commission.

They came and stayed because they found a caring church family that not only talks about Jesus but also strives to be his disciples who love and serve others, they said. And now the Repperts are helping to welcome an influx of newcomers at Bally — a predominantly ethnic Mennonite congregation since it began in the 1720s. As one of the oldest congregations in Franconia Mennonite Conference, it's reaching beyond its historical boundaries to widen its circle within the community.

"I found so much caring and warmth with the people at Bally, so much integrity and honesty," said Bonnie Reppert, who helps with Bally's hospitality ministry. "It was so much different here than at my former



From left, Sallie Reppert and her parents, Dave and Bonnie Reppert, enjoy fellowship with Ken and Anne Ebst, all members of Bally (Pa.) Mennonite Church. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

church. It had a lot of Sunday churchgoers, but then people didn't connect during the week.

"But at Bally where people are connected because of an emphasis on building community, I have grown so much spiritually and have changed a lot of my thinking. I'm much happier where I can have good friends, a good support group." After attending Bally for some time, Bonnie Reppert took her husband, Dave Reppert, who had not been in church — except for Christmas and Easter — since he was 17 years old.

"The first time I went to a Bally prayer retreat with my wife, these Mennonite people were so friendly that it was almost scary," Dave Reppert said. "I had been trying to avoid God and church, but these people made it really hard to do that. But then I gave my heart to the Lord during the retreat, and so many things have changed."

Dave and Bonnie Reppert are not the only ones going through changes. Bally is changing, too. Expanding its small fellowship hall into a larger and more functional space, engaging in new outreach ministries and altering its Sunday school hour to be more welcoming to newcomers has brought new growth, said Ken and Anne Ehst, longtime members at Bally. They are also good friends with the Repperts. Ken Ehst is an elder and was Dave Reppert's mentor in those early days.

"As Dave and Bonnie say how much Bally has helped them grow, I know that they have caused us to grow just as much," Anne Ehst said. "We have all been so safe among our own kind, that we often didn't outright express much about our faith, and having new people here brings a fresh perspective."

Sewing classes stitch hope into women's lives in Brooklyn-based congregation


Commuting three hours from Long Island into Brooklyn for sewing classes is the price Carmen Bermúdez pays to make her dreams come true.

The classes will help her open a fabric store some day, Bermúdez said. She is one of 13 Hispanic women enrolled in sewing and English classes sponsored by International Christian Community in Brooklyn. The congregation ministers to Hispanic people, many of whom have immigrated to the United States from about 10 countries, including Argentina, El Salvador and Puerto Rico.

Bermúdez came to the United States from Argentina about a year ago and makes a living by cleaning houses and sewing. She said the classes helped her to become more employable in a community suffering economically because of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"I have a dream of putting up my own fabric factory and selling clothes at low cost, but good quality," Bermúdez said. "And I will need to be able to provide service to the customers who are from all over, so I will need to know both Spanish and English."

Participants learned to design patterns and to sew skirts, blouses and nightgowns and to speak better English. They meet in their church



Sewing instructor Teresa Mejía, Honduras (left), shows student Sandra Alejandro, El Salvador, how to create a pattern during the sewing classes at the International Christian Community in Brooklyn, N.Y. (photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

building — a former Knights of Columbus hall — in the room that once was a bar.

Though they live miles and cultures apart from this urban setting, members of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Reinholds, Pa., were also partners in bringing hope to these women, said Steve Musselman, Emmanuel's pastor. He visited the congregation with his wife, April, and their three children, soon after his congregation — part of Eastern District Conference — had sent \$1,500 to help fund the classes.

“For me and my family, the visit to the Brooklyn congregation was a wonderful time of developing relationships with Christians from other cultures,” Musselman said. “We were welcomed with open arms. My wife and I had interpreters, and they invited us to a meal at the end of their service. It was like sitting down with family. . . .

“Even though there was the element of financial support there, it wasn't about the money. We were simply brother pastors sharing God's mission.”

“Even though there was the element of financial support there, it wasn't about the money. We were simply brother pastors sharing God's mission.” —Steve Musselman

San Francisco Mennonite finds unity in diversity and welcomes gifts of all

What Morgen Jahnke remembered about First Mennonite Church of San Francisco is a large part of what drew her back to the city last year.

Jahnke remembered how the congregation invited her to use her gifts in worship in 1996 through 1998 when she was part of the Mennonite Voluntary Service unit, sponsored by the congregation. Only 21 years old at the time, Jahnke remembers being given a large portion of responsibility as a member of the church's worship committee.

In returning to San Francisco in 2001, Jahnke, now 28, found the same welcome. It's a welcome that invites all people to grow in their giftedness within the spiritual family, no matter what their age, background or perspective, said the poet from Saskatoon, Sask. She uses her creative writing degree as a worship committee member and leader and lives in the city with her husband, Joe Kissell.

"San Francisco Mennonite is one of the main reasons I came back," Jahnke said. "During those earlier years I was accepted right away as an equal player. . . . The congregation is a place where I am accepted and can be myself; it provides a sense of rootedness in a city that can be chaotic and overwhelming at times."

From left, some members of San Francisco Mennonite Church who are involved in planning worship services are Joanne DeFebr, Marten Duboux, Morgen Jahnke and Sheri Hostetler, pastor.

(photo by Laurie L. Oswald)

At a time when Mennonites are concerned about a shortage of new leaders and how to make church relevant for young adults, First Mennonite is doing what it's always done — welcoming people like Jahnke and grooming them as leaders, said Sheri Hostetler, pastor.

As a result, First Mennonite benefits from a cross-section of people becoming involved in the church, where many of its 45 members are in their later 20s to mid-40s, she said. As the only Anglo Mennonite church in the city, the congregation provides a welcoming Anabaptist community in a transient and diverse area.

“To me, First Mennonite’s vision is what Paul was saying in Galatians 2, which is that in Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free,” Hostetler said. “We are all one in Christ Jesus. It’s not that we don’t have differences or gloss over them. But we transcend them for new and higher identity.”

*“We are all one in Christ Jesus.
It’s not that we don’t have dif-
ferences or gloss over them.
But we transcend them for
new and higher identity.”*
—Sheri Hostetler

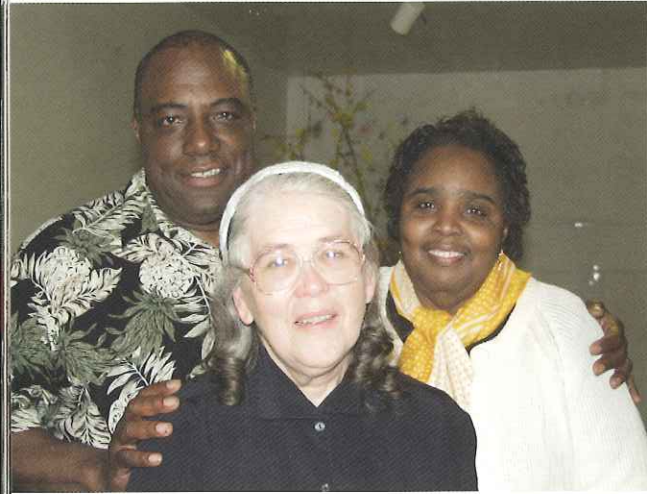
Philadelphia woman shares story of early days at Diamond Street church

When two women in dark cape dresses and white head coverings came to Mattie Cooper Nikiema's door to invite her African-American family to Diamond Street Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, she had no idea she'd one day wear the same.

That invitation came in 1951, several years after Nikiema came from rural Georgia to Philadelphia to join her mother and younger brothers who were living in the city. When Nikiema was 12 years old, they began attending Diamond Street. That's where she donned the conservative dress, got involved in youth group and taught Sunday school.

Diamond Street provided many happy memories, she said. Memories of when men in the church mentored her brothers, who had no father at home. Memories of when she absorbed biblical values that shaped her life choices, such as serving with Mennonite Central Committee in West Africa. Memories of how she became a Diamond Street member at 14 years old. She is still a member there today at 65.

It also provided memories of how God heals wounds. Her mother was asked to leave the church because some people at the church thought she was having illicit relations with the boys' father. He often came to the



Mattie Cooper Nikiema (right) a member of Diamond Street Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, spoke at "Philadelphia Stories: Kingdom Building in the City," a conference held April 3-5, 2003. She enjoys fellowship with her brother, Raymond Jackson, and Miriam Stoltzfus, a longtime Mennonite leader in the city with her late husband, Luke Stoltzfus. (photo by Laurie I. Oswald)

house to visit them.

“They asked her to have him meet the boys outside the home, but my mother felt the boys were too small for that,” Nikiema said. “So rather than do that, and because she didn’t want to cause trouble, she quietly left the Mennonite church to go to the Methodist church, while my brothers and I stayed on at Diamond Street.

“About 10 years ago, I reopened this issue with the former church leaders and said that I knew what was going on in my house, and that what people thought had happened is untrue. They apologized on behalf of the church to my mother, who wasn’t a bitter or vindictive woman. She told them that she had forgiven them long ago. . . .

“While struggles existed in Mennonites adapting to the city, I know in my heart that by and large, the goal of the church was for our welfare and our good. Love was the motivating factor.”

“While struggles existed in Mennonites adapting to the city, I know in my heart that by and large, the goal of the church was for our welfare and our good. Love was the motivating factor.”

—Mattie Cooper Nikiema



About the Author

Laurie L. Oswald has been news service director for Mennonite Church USA since January 2002. Prior to that, she was assistant editor at *Mennonite Weekly Review* for four years. She moved to Kansas after spending 12 years in New York City. There she worked in journalism, public relations and other fields. She is a graduate of Goshen College, where she majored in communications (photojournalism emphasis) and minored in English. She earned creative writing credits from the University of Iowa in poetry and fiction.

The people in these stories embody the word “missional” by the way they live and love and pray. Mel experienced the horrors of 9/11 but found healing through Project Restoring Hope. Julie came to church expecting to see black buggies in the parking lot but found Jesus in the service. Nemi’s prayer ministry brought the touch of Christ to a girl on drugs. Their journeys and 17 others will inspire you to take new steps with God.

—**Laurie Oswald, News Service Director, Mennonite Church USA**

In July 2001, delegates at the Mennonite Church USA Assembly in Nashville affirmed the church’s calling to become a missional church. Several years later, as these stories demonstrate, our congregations, conferences and agencies are well on the way toward becoming the missional church we yearn to become. The word, “missional,” may not be a word you can define with a succinct synonym, but these stories will *show* you what “missional” means in a far deeper way. These stories can help you and your congregation foster a desire to be a part of God’s mission in the world. May their examples inspire you on your own journey to become a missional church.”

—**Ron Byler, Associate Executive Director,
Mennonite Church USA Executive Board**

Copies of this booklet are available in bulk for \$1/copy plus shipping by calling the Executive Board Office of Communications at 1-866-866-2872. Or e-mail Communications@MennoniteUSA.org



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

**Executive
Board**

Great Lakes Office
500 South Main Street
P.O. Box 1245
Elkhart, IN 46515-1245
T: 574-294-7523 F: 574-293-1892

Great Plains Office
722 Main Street
P.O. Box 347
Newton, KS 67114-0347
T: 316-283-5100 F: 316-283-0454

Churchwide toll-free:
1-866-866-2872
www.MennoniteUSA.org