

# Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

Fall 2011 VOL. 31, NO. 4

## Editor's Choice

**How could I have predicted** when I agreed to edit the *Peace and Justice Newsletter* in 1981 that I would still be doing it 30 years later? I was a young mother at home with my children looking for ways to use my writing and editorial skills and be engaged with the peace and justice issues I cared about. This assignment fit both needs. I never expected that the newsletter, which transitioned into *Shalom!* in 1985, would become so much a part of my life.

The year I assumed the editorship, my husband and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary. This year we celebrated 40 years of marriage. In the intervening 30 years, we've raised our two children and launched them out on their own. We've experienced other milestones, including the marriage of our daughter and the engagement of our son, the births of two grandchildren, the deaths of three of our parents, my cancer, and my husband's retirement. I've served on boards, been active in my local congregation, and held several part-time jobs until I finally became full-time in my current position 14 years ago. But I haven't worked in any position for as long as I've edited *Shalom!* This is the 122nd edition—122 times of determining topics and working with writers, compiling and creating coherence out of diverse articles and viewpoints, and writing introductory essays.

Again, as I did a number of years ago for the 15th anniversary, I reviewed my file copies of every edition since 1981. This time, I looked for several articles representing the span of time and the breadth of topics that

*Shalom!* has tackled over the years, as well as ones where I knew or sensed that there was more to tell since the article was written. My goal is to provide a bird's-eye view of where we've been over the past 30 years, and demonstrate how the topics covered in *Shalom!* since the beginning continue to resonate.

For 30 years, I have written an overview of the topic for each edition. Many times, I connected the topic to something in my own life. I introduced issues on health care with my own experience with the health care system (my son's broken wrist, my cancer), the discussion of "what's in a name?" with how my mother's choice of her married name influenced me, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of BIC World Missions with memories from my missionary kid experience, and an exploration of ethics in the workplace with a description of an incident with a difficult colleague at work.

I don't know how long I will continue to edit *Shalom!* I confess there have been times when I have grown weary of the task and wondered if the time had come for me to pass the editorial baton to someone else. But always, I am reinvigorated when I remember that one of my fundamental commitments as a Christian and as a servant in the Brethren in Christ Church is to use the gifts and passion God has given me to communicate the biblical imperatives to be peacemakers and to practice in contemporary ways the "pure religion" described in James 1:27 (NRSV).

**Harriet S. Bicksler, editor**

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# A Compass That Points to Discipleship

By Scott Elkins

**IT WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES** when everything was going well. I was living in Japan and had been on a camping trip in the mountains by myself. Fresh off a solo camping trip, I had a strong sense that something was about to happen, and had written about it in my journal. I attended our “Guys Night Out” Bible study, which usually involved cooking and eating steaks and lots of great discussion about women, steak, and God. I drove home and turned on the TV around 10:30 p.m. Since we were about 14 hours behind the east coast of the U.S., I thought I would watch the morning news on the Armed Forces Station. What I saw was a single, long camera shot, apparently a live feed of some buildings in New York, with smoke rolling out of the side. Just then, another plane crashed into the World Trade Center.



*Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

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At the time, I was working as a youth pastor with Military Community Youth Ministry, contracted to the military chapel at the Marine Corp Air Station, Iwakuni, Japan. I functioned as a chaplain to the teens who lived on base with their families. I lived in a neighborhood about five kilometers away from the base. I received a call from my friend, the chaplain, saying they were in ThreatCon Delta, the highest alert possible, and the base was totally locked down. But the Commander wanted me there, NOW. During the next 48 hours, I functioned as a military chaplain to a bunch of guys glued to a TV set, knowing they were going somewhere to risk their lives. They were scared, angry and heartbroken, and so was I. I helped lead a memorial service that night at the chapel, and I lead the music. I finished the service, and did an interview for the TV station on the base. I looked at my watch; it was about 24 hours since the Towers had fallen.

Several years passed, and I was speaking at a Mennonite camp in the Poconos. My friend worked there, and had asked me to come speak for the week. I was glad to come, if anything, for a personal sense of validation. I had come home from Japan to plant a church. After a couple of years, we finally decided it was time to call it quits. The plant never got off the ground and I was tired. During my free time at the camp, I was bored enough to pick up a brochure about the Mennonites. The paper was about peace, why Mennonites were pacifists, and was full of scripture from the Sermon on the Mount, my favorite few chapters of the Bible. While I had read the Sermon on the Mount a million times, and I thought I understood what it said, this time parts really jumped up at me. It sounded really radical, almost too much to swallow. Don't even resist an evil person? While I had dared to think it before, I wasn't ready to live that way. But now it made perfect sense.

I had watched George Bush's "shock and awe" bombing on TV. But that day, there was a new kind of "shock and awe" campaign happening, and this time it was in me. God used that little pamphlet to change the way I see Kingdom life and my world view. It wasn't until two years later that I found the Brethren In Christ. After a few phone calls to the bishop and a couple of visits, I found myself pastor of Canoe Creek BIC Church.

While Jesus had every opportunity to lead a just revolt against the Romans, he did the opposite. He said, "Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you." I wonder what would have happened if instead of bombing with "shock and awe," we would have showered them with "love and blessing"? If anyone had proposed such an idea on September 12, not many would have listened. In fact, your life would have been in jeopardy. (Don't believe me? Just ask country group The Dixie Chicks, who received death threats for later standing against the war.)

But as radical as that sounds, loving your enemies is exactly what Christ taught. While I know that kind of reaction would probably never take place on a national level, it just shows how far America truly is from being a "Christian nation." As Jesus was prone to do, he took the requirements higher, and demanded that people live from the heart. While loving your enemies is difficult enough, he wants us to trust him enough to bless our enemies. Laying down the right to retaliation is possibly the hardest thing he has asked us to do. It hits at our security and our sense of justice. But yet there is a promise. Jesus says that justice is his business, not ours. So, the issue becomes one of trust. Can we trust God for our security, for our justice?

I know that not everyone in the BIC would agree with my stance on these points. But historically, and currently, the denomination's core value of pursuing peace is one of the most important reasons for the Brethren in Christ to exist. It is one of our distinct gifts to the world at large. I

# Why I am an Anabaptist

by Rod White

am thankful that the BIC is there, to wave the flag of radical obedience to Jesus, even when that obedience is difficult. I am grateful for Shalom! It is so important to all of us, because it is a compass that points toward whole-hearted discipleship. Without that reminder, I am convinced that our peace witness would not be as strong. Thank you, Shalom!, for the encouragement you are to me. I hope the publication goes electronic, so I can forward the thoughtful articles on Facebook, blogs, and emails. Keep up the good work!

*Scott Elkins is pastor of the Canoe Creek Brethren in Christ Church, Hollidaysburg, Pa. And speaking of Facebook, that's where Scott introduced himself to me as a fan of Shalom!*

**From Winter 1992,  
"The Anabaptist Vision"**

**HALF THE REASON** I am glad to be an Anabaptist is reactive. I didn't want to get stuck in some tradition that wasn't focused on being and doing the Bible as best it could. I felt stuck in churches that kept evangelizing the saved. Often the message of the gospel seemed so focused on me as an individual, but the Bible seemed so focused on us and on me as part of a new kingdom.... I read in Colossians that "as members of one body you were called to peace" and connected that to Jesus saying, "Love one another as I have loved you," and "Love your enemies," but my churches were resolutely, even consciously and individualistically, afraid of a commitment to community, and thought peace meant a feeling of rest in oneself, certainly not reconciliation in the church or sacrificial love for enemies....

When I became one of the Brethren in Christ, it was out of conviction. I have received the Lord's call to serve as a pastor in his church.... My question always is, "How can I best do that?" When I looked around (literally in the phone book at one point), I found the Anabaptist way of thinking and living is just what the world needs, especially now. So the other half of the reason I am glad to be Anabaptist is proactive.

New disciples, especially those from dysfunctional families, need a covenant community that nurtures them, holds them accountable, and encourages them to be good stewards of their spiritual gifts and physical resources. Christianity is not a concept to receive in a class, or an emotional experience to be manipulated by a slick speaker in a high-powered setting; it is a life to live with other believers. We believe in that kind of community.

An increasingly violent world needs to know the way of peace. Anabaptists understand the way of peace and we can bring it to bear on the violence in our world. A deceived world needs to see Christians who honestly live out their convictions without compromise. We understand separation. These days people all over the world seem

desperate to survive. People need to see the people of God unified, working together, reaching out with self-sacrificing mercy and a confident, inviting love. We can do that.

**2011: The Anabaptist melody is becoming more prominent**

In 1992 I had a very optimistic view of what Anabaptists can do. Little did I know that I would soon have an opportunity to put my views to the test! By 1995 I had the blessing of parachuting into Philadelphia with the family and opening a laboratory for the Spirit to work with the hypothesis that Anabaptists, BIC style, have something to offer the next generation. I even wrote a book about it.

One might not think that "hipsters" and others who inhabit Philly would be that interested in a covenant community. But many are—close to 400 at this point. The other day a young woman was lamenting about how we were not having a big potluck at our quarterly love feast this time. She said something like, "The Love Feast is what showed me Jesus long before I could get my mind around church." The conviction that we hold our life in common and share our resources is not only what the Occupy Philly people are camping about, it is what the Anabaptists have always talked about, and often practiced. People don't always understand what we are talking about when we use the word "sharing" all the time, but they feel it. We have worked at being an organism that lives like that.

As a new church on the block, I was grateful to introduce the gospel to people as the gospel of peace and not have to worry about how many stakeholders had a relative in the military who would haunt the proceedings and tamp down the convictions. One of my main attempts to foment peacemaking has been the founding of Shalom House in 2006. We have an intentional community of people who serve two-year terms, live in peace, make peace locally, and connect us to God's worldwide peace movement. They have helped shut down gun shops noted for illegal weapon sales, given people immersion experi-

## UPDATING THE PAST

Pages 3-7 feature excerpts from several articles published during the past 30 years and updates from their original authors. The excerpts are identified by the date and theme of the issue in which they were originally published, and the updates by this year's date and a heading. "Voices from the Past" (pages 8-11) feature excerpts reprinted without further comment by their authors.

ences in peacemaking and kept us informed about what Jesus is doing to be the prince of peace. We have worked at walking in the way of peace.

It is hard to hold on to Jesus these days. We honestly get in trouble with some people when we mention his name because they are convinced he is an agent of hatred. We are a people who look anything but uncompromising, but we have managed to hold on to an iron-backbone of basic Christianity. Just today my cell-coordinating group met for breakfast—seven cell leaders who are at work day-by-day to form the church in miniature, face-to-face. Each one had their challenges. One was going to a meeting with the City Council to argue the politics of a new project and wondering how to keep representing Jesus there. With 55 cell groups all over the region, we have held on to our vision to be the face of Jesus where people live, as who we are, warts and all, in Christ. We are separate, but it is an invasive separation.

The world has become even more desperate since I wrote. I never imagined experiencing 9/11, then 10 years of war and a colossal economic comeuppance. In the middle of that we have tried to present the face of Jesus without needing to resort to words all the time—words seem kind of hollow sometimes when things feel desperate. We've had lots to do with at-risk kids. Our compassion teams have visited prisoners, dealt with debt, shale, Haiti, water issues, urban farming and more. We have made major efforts that resulted in a low-cost counseling center and thrift stores that have stored up enough capital to make it possible to seed a business consortium to create enterprise in a job-starved region. We need to show God's love in practical ways.

When I first wrote, I pleaded with people not to harden their "positions" against mine. I also never imagined just how popular having hard positions would become. Rush Limbaugh was just getting popular when I

lived in Waynesboro, Pa. (I still miss corn). I didn't know he would become a virtual deacon in a lot of congregations. The Anabaptist melody, however, is becoming more prominent, as well. Greg Boyd, Stanley Hauerwas and our own Shane Claiborne have become prominent exponents, along with Brian McClaren connecting the emergent movement and Anabaptist thought. It is exciting to see people experiencing the end of the empire and waking up to new possibilities of the life in the Spirit.

In 1992 I had no idea about the doors God might open to me. I am very grateful to the Brethren in Christ, who have supported and encouraged my work in Philadelphia and our version of testing out our mutual views in the difficult territory of 21st century urban life.

*Rod White is founding pastor of the Circle of Hope network of Brethren in Christ Churches in Philadelphia, Pa.*

## ABORTION: A Dilemma Revisited

by Priscilla Simmons

**From Fall 1989,  
"Ethics for All of Life"**

**AT THE OUTSET**, let me say that I am firmly opposed to abortion. However, that doesn't mean that I see it as a clear-cut issue. In fact, as I read the arguments on either side of the issue, I find myself becoming ever more painfully impaled on the horns of the proverbial dilemma...

I conclude that I have two options. One of them is to be lulled into neutrality—a feeling that it is a social problem with seemingly endless ramifications, so I'll not get involved. It's a what's-the-use-of-even-trying complacency. The other option is to do something.

I'm bothered by those on either side of the abortion issue who would make it simple. Somehow, we must ensure life for both unborn babies and for the women who must bear them, whatever their social class. Somehow, we must reduce oppression of unborn babies without condemning them to lives of

miserly. It's all part of a right-to-justice which in turn is part of a right-to-life.

**2011:  
Abortion will never be a non-dilemma**

Not remembering that I had authored this piece, I read it with interest and was somewhat relieved that I had not written anything that I could take exception to from this vantage point in life. I'm rather intrigued by the fact that in the last 20 years, not much has changed in the abortion debate. That revelation does not surprise me. Women of the world have always experienced and will continue to have unplanned pregnancies. Whether or not these pregnancies are the consequence of reckless behavior is immaterial. By and large, they result in turmoil and a need for agonizing choices.

As I ponder what may have changed

since the 1980s, I am struck by the fact the issue of abortion seems even more politicized. Thinking back, I don't remember that a candidate's view on abortion represented such a fundamental ideology on which so many voters determined how they would vote for public officials. Clearly, the major political parties in the United States have positions. "That Democrats are widely perceived as a pro-choice party while Republicans are generally perceived as a pro-life party seems apparent to even the most casual observer of American politics (Carmines, Gerrity, & Wagner, 2010, p. 1135). Of particular political significance, nominations for the Supreme Court are persistently based on the candidate's position on abortion (Koch, p. 67). I clearly remember discussing this phenomenon with a French friend. When I mentioned that many Americans decide their vote for a presidential candidate

based on the abortion stance, she was appalled. Clearly, this appears to be a political oddity unique to the U.S.

In the last 20 years, my worldview has been expanded by my career in a university classroom. In a professional role, I've had the privilege of listening, thinking and facilitating magnificent dialogue. The most pertinent experience came while I was teaching a course in ethics to registered nurses. At the start of the course, I asked students to share what they hoped to gain from the course. A typical response was that they anticipated an opportunity to really learn and think about a dilemma such as abortion and, as a result, solidify their stance on the issue. At the end of the course, however, students often commented that they were even less sure about where they stood than at the beginning. This experience is very telling. Indeed, a decision for or against abortion is a prime example of a perplexing ethical dilemma.

An ethical dilemma can be defined as the need to make a choice between two equally unacceptable options. Regardless of the way it might be rationalized, I don't think there's any satisfactory way to argue that a fetus isn't a human and abortion results in death of that human. There is no doubt, however, that giving birth to the infant could place the child, mother, and others in jeopardy as a result of poverty and its effects. The third option, surrendering the child for adoption, can be equally hard. Clearly, this decision is heart-wrenchingly difficult and requires a great deal of discernment. This has not changed since 1989 – nor do I see it ever becoming a non-dilemma.

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*Priscilla Simmons teaches nursing at the Lancaster (Pa.) campus of Eastern Mennonite University. She and her husband are members of the Lancaster BIC Church.*

# A 20th Century Community Experience

by Julie Weatherford

## From Fall 1993, "Community"

**BACK IN 1980**, while most people in their early- and mid-20s were gearing up for the "me-centered" decade that had just begun, a group of young Christians in Southern California were gearing up for a very different lifestyle. Some of us had been Christians since childhood and others were recent converts, but we were particularly united in our desire to tailor our lives to scripture and to the example and teachings of Jesus. We believed the Holy Spirit could recreate the community experience of Acts 2:42-47 in our 20th century setting.

In answer to God's call to community, our group of 15 pooled resources to share two houses in what was to become known as the Sierra Street Household. Having met together many times previously to study, pray and discuss how to put feet to our faith, we set down in writing a statement of formation that expressed the vision, intentionality and hope that God had place in our hearts regarding community.... We wanted to be a community of God's people who "shined as lights in the darkness" around us as we tried to live out radical discipleship. We hoped to exemplify an alternative lifestyle to fellow brothers and sisters who were experiencing spiritual frustrations similar to our own....

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of our commitment to community was the birth and development of the Riverside Brethren in Christ Church. Officially joining together in 1984, current and former household members formed the backbone and leadership of this body of believers. The three priorities of loving God, loving brothers and sisters in Christ and loving the world formed and continue to form the basis of our church covenant. When our household dispersed in 1989, we all chose to stay in Riverside, and although we no

longer shared our lives the same way, we continued our relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ and members of the same body, the Riverside Brethren. . . .

## 2011: Still answering the call to community

As mentioned in this 1993 article, members of the Sierra Street Household dispersed in 1989 after eight years. A number of former household members remain in the church that grew out of the soil of the household. In the ensuing years, there have been many changes in the life of Madison Street Church (formerly known as Riverside Brethren in Christ Church). But the vision that gave shape to the household – to love God, to love other Christ-followers, and to love the world - continues to flavor the church's vision: "To be a community of believers intent on experiencing and sharing the renewing love and life of Jesus Christ."

From a 2011 vantage point, I know that the experience in the Sierra Street Household provided important stepping-stones along many of its members' journeys with Christ. Much about the household worked well:

- We took our faith seriously enough to band together and try to live it out in ways we believed would please Jesus.
- We encouraged faith via countless rich discussions about timeless faith foundations as well as about the day-to-day practicalities of following Jesus together in 20th century Southern California.
- We incorporated time-tested spiritual disciplines into our lives in order to grow deeper in Christ.
- Our children were well-loved. This was one of the biggest benefits of living in Sierra Street Household. More now

than ever, I am convinced that it takes a lot of caring people to raise a child well.

Other things didn't work so well. It now seems to me that we were all so very young, all of us in our 20s at the start. There was so much we didn't know about faith, about church, about relationships, and about ourselves. Given our immaturity and ignorance, it's amazing to me now that the household lasted as long as it did. God must have held us together in ways we didn't realize at the time. Now over two decades later, here are some changes that I think would have improved this experiment in intentional Christian community:

- We needed some members who had been intently following Jesus for more years and through more of life's seasons than we had. (But none of the older folks in our friendship networks ever expressed interest - no surprise! Anyway, at the time, we thought we knew everything.) I now believe that an ideal intentional Christian community has a broad range of ages, from children to old folks.

- We tended toward legalism in our day-to-day shared life. Structure, commitment, responsibility, and accountability are important ingredients in any household, but I think that Jesus was probably calling us to share more generous amounts of grace.
- It would have been wise to create a discernment period, of flexible duration but perhaps at least a year long, for individuals who expressed interest in joining the household. During this time, the individual could have shared in a variety of household experiences, responsibilities and benefits, while not having made a full commitment to that particular lifestyle. The process could have included encouragement in the practices of spiritual disciplines and self-awareness. The community could have joined with the individual in a discernment process that may have led to an invitation to join by way of a more permanent commitment or may have led to a gracious blessing and release to follow Jesus in other ways.

I am grateful for the years that my husband and children lived in the Sierra Street Household, and I continue to cherish good friendships that grew out of this shared experience and that continue to influence and encourage my faith today. Our world is different from the world of the 1980s, so those of us who remain a part of Madison Street Church respond in new ways to God's call to community. Happily, many other Christ-followers have joined us along the way. Conversations pop up in our midst currently about how we might better live out our calling to intentional Christian community. We want to answer His call with a variety of expressions of Christian community that are appropriate to our place, to our time and to our various callings. We're listening to God and listening to one another, hoping to discern God's call for us in this time and place. God calls his followers to community. We hope to follow His lead.

*Julie Weatherford works for the County of Riverside in California and is a member of the Madison Street Church, Riverside, Ca.*

## Using the Gift of Anger: A Biblical Perspective

by Merle Brubaker

**From Winter 1986,  
"Violence in the Family"**

**THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES** on anger reveal several rules to help us use anger appropriately: Get angry very slowly. Get rid of anger. Don't stay angry. Don't nurture a grudge. Don't incubate those feelings of displeasure. Get rid of anger (Eph. 4:31, Col. 3:8). But how? By expressing it early, truthfully and helpfully....

Express anger helpfully. This sentence seems strange. At first glance it seems to say, "Sin helpfully." But that is because we have identified anger with sin. Anger as we see it exemplified in God, and in Jesus, is obviously not always sinful. It is often helpful.

Sometimes we are not aware that something is wrong until we realize that we are

angry about it. While anger reduces our objectivity, if we acknowledge it immediately we may be able to express our feelings truthfully and helpfully (Eph. 4:29).

If our anger has helped us discover a wrong that needs to be corrected, there is opportunity for it to be expressed lovingly. Matthew 18 offers a three-phase plan. Matthew 7:5 and Galatians 6:1 give guidance for phase one. I believe that I have sinned far more often by not being angry (or by not recognizing and acknowledging my anger) than by being angry. By definition anger is a strong feeling arising from displeasure. There are many things in this world that should displease us.

There are two parts to goodness. One part is to avoid doing wrong. The other

part is to prevent wrong. Some of us find it easier to obey the biblical teachings to avoid involvement in evil. The solution is to learn to confront evil without committing evil. A biblical understanding and use of anger is an important step in God's plan for us.

From Dr. Ronald J. Sider I learned one simple way to express anger early and truthfully and (potentially) helpfully. I was in his office one day at the Messiah College Philadelphia campus when a student came several hours late for an appointment, seemingly without being aware of any inappropriateness in that. Quietly and with no accompanying visible confirmation, Ron said, "I am very angry." I have become willing to allow that statement to be accompanied by visible and/or audible confirmation!

### **2011: Reflections on using anger helpfully after 25 years of painful experience**

I now realize that while I was researching and writing that article, God was preparing me to help represent His anger about a very evil situation. If I remember correctly, I had never read or heard the term sexual abuse, arguably the worst form of abuse of trust by a person in a position of power or authority.

About two years after I wrote that article, our son, Darrel, asked me for advice. He had discovered that a prominent lay church leader in the congregation where he had been youth pastor while attending seminary had sexually abused young men in that congregation over a period of at least six years. By then Darrel had become the pastor of a congregation in a different state thousands of miles away. Some of the young men continued to call him when they needed to talk to someone. After many calls from several young men, he began to suspect that something was terribly wrong. When he recalled having observed a very gross example of sexual harassment by that lay leader during his time as youth pastor, he decided that he had to determine the validity of his suspicions.

He traveled the thousands of miles to interview the young men. He told me later that he felt called to do three things: 1) stop the abuse, 2) get help for the offender and his victims, and 3) help the denomination gain insight and change procedures so they could deal appropriately with such problems in the future. (I remember his telling me, “Dad, don’t get involved unless you’re called to it.”)

He wanted my advice. He said, “I have five young men who are prepared to tell their stories. Who should I take them to?” I told him the name of the official that seemed most appropriate. He contacted one of his former seminary professors who gave him the same advice. It never occurred to me that denominational leaders would be unable to receive the information, much less be unable to deal with it appropriately. I had not yet learned very much about denial; I had never heard of “group think,” “blaming the victims,” or “attacking the messenger.” We were later told that the response to Darrel is what usually happens to people who attempt to confront such evil.

I have had many opportunities to “ex-

press anger helpfully.” Some of those opportunities I have recognized and handled helpfully, and I thank God. For opportunities I have missed, I have learned to trust God for whatever is needed: forgiveness for me and divine intervention beyond anything I could have done or even imagined.

I have reread the 1986 article many times while preparing this reflection. When I wrote it, I was **discovering** Scriptural truth. Now I can see how valuable and how practical those discoveries have been. There was only one sentence that I remembered and consciously used during these years: “I believe that I have sinned far more often by not being angry . . . than by being angry.” Reading that complete sentence now in the context of the whole article fills me with gratitude and amazement for God’s many gifts, including the gift of anger. I pray that I will always express my anger helpfully.

*Merle Brubaker is retired after many years in the pastorate and church administration, as well as teaching part-time at Messiah College. He and his wife Ila now live at Messiah Village and are members of the Grantham (Pa.) Church.*

## **A Modest Proposal for Increasing Diversity in the Brethren in Christ Church in North America**

*By Perry Engle*

### **From Summer 2001, “Multiculturalism, Diversity and Racial Reconciliation”**

A “Top Ten List” of how we might begin to work at increasing diversity in the church:

1. Focus on ministering to the felt needs of those in our realm of influence.
2. Be more strategic and intentional about planting churches in ethnically diverse communities.
3. Express support for the formation of a denominational Commission on Enriched Community to address issues related to racial inclusion.
4. Be aware of the broader implications of implementing quotas in leadership and on boards.
5. Provide opportunities for people of color to tell their stories—in small groups, in worship gatherings, in testimony and song.
6. Diversify the music in your worship experiences.
7. Don’t be afraid to talk about racial reconciliation in the church.
8. Develop a program to address a felt need in your community.
9. Assume that a certain amount of cultural arrogance resides in your own heart.
10. Give diversity time—it doesn’t happen overnight.

### **2011: Ten years later, Perry asks:**

1. How do you think we are doing as a denomination in increasing diversity?
2. Have you experienced pockets of hope around the church?
3. What are we missing in this discussion?

*Perry Engle is bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the Brethren in Christ Church and lives in Ontario, Ca.*

# A Church Home That Cares

by Jennifer Bestwick Rash

## **From Summer 1996, “The Brethren in Christ Experience”**

**GROWING UP IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA,** I knew nothing of the Brethren in Christ denomination. I was raised in a Presbyterian church and was not even aware that there were legitimate denominations beyond Catholic, Methodist or Lutheran. College did not broaden my denominational perspective much either. . . .

[When my then husband and I moved to Philadelphia and Messiah College’s campus there, we were] introduced to a couple who had moved to the city to plant a BIC church. Somehow we managed to get ourselves tangled up in the foundation team for what is now the Circle of Hope church in Center City, Philadelphia. What attracted me to this project was primarily the vision Rod and Gwen White had for the city of Philadelphia and particularly the young and unchurched people of the city. They wanted to build a church that at least attempted to reconcile people of various cultures. And they were committed to developing a Christian community. Admittedly, I am not part of the BIC church specifically because of the denomination. I am part of it because it has given me a place of service in the Kingdom of God. As a result I have developed a stronger commitment to the church. I see more clearly now God’s commitment to this people through the church and our task in being God’s people through that institution. . . .

Perhaps we could have found a home in one of the established churches in the city. But instead we found a home with a body of people who truly care—not just for us but for a lost and searching generation. Our focus should never be solely on ourselves, as I have seen many churches do. Our focus has to be on the resurrected Christ and doing the will of the Father. My sense is that the Brethren in Christ (or least those BICs I’ve met) have hearts in pursuit of Christ and a passion for faith, hope and love; a desire to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

## **2011: Still grateful to be part of the denomination**

Reading through my original article from 1996, “A Church Home that Cares,” I am reminded how much has changed in my life. Fifteen years ago I was pregnant, had a hyphenated last name, worked as a campus minister at the Philly Campus and was part of a team of people starting a church plant. My son is now nearly 15. I have a new last name, and all the students I’ve ever hung around have graduated, most with families of their own. The one thing that remains the same: I’m still Brethren in Christ.

When I arrived in 2000, Harrisburg BIC was in the midst of taking some remarkable first steps into the field of racial reconciliation. Pastor Lou Astuto was the Pastor of Outreach and had encouraged the church to develop a new vision. They had just hired Cedra Washington to work with the youth. As far as I understand, the church had been reaching out to the neighborhood youth for some time, but the commitment to hire someone that could connect to the youth of the church’s demographic was pivotal. Lou moved back to New York; Cedra took his position as Pastor of Outreach and the church has continued to hire youth leaders who can relate to the youth we are trying to reach.

Before he left, Lou had asked me to be a part of the Peace and Social Concerns committee. I had worked for a campus ministry organization that encouraged me to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly. My time in Philly exposed me to poverty and suffering on a whole new level. Every day I was reminded how much I had and how difficult it was to loosen my grip on what I saw was MINE. While both churches are vastly different from one another, both Circle of Hope and Harrisburg BIC have confirmed the church’s need to reach out and share Christ’s love in tangible ways, not just by asking people to

come to church (though they do encourage that as well) but to extend ourselves, to get into people’s lives, to do justice.

One of the ways that kind of love has been manifested in the church has been through intentional conversations and attitude adjustments related to the issue of race. In my early twenties I read a book that made a huge impact on how I understood racism. Several years later, I moved to Philadelphia and the topic became more pervasive. We met Rod and Gwen White and began developing a vision. While we were still meeting in the chapel of the Philly Campus, Rod invited Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, the authors of that life-shaping book I’d read, to attend one of our gatherings. As I look back on that experience, I know how lucky we were to be meeting with these two men. Spencer died less than two years later, yet his legacy has shaped the vision of both Brethren in Christ churches. Since first suggesting we use *More than Equals* as a forum for discussion at Harrisburg BIC, many of us have formed groups to discuss the complex topic of race. Relationships have formed. The church has grown. We moved into a bigger building and we’ve become a welcoming place for our neighborhood.

With fondness, I reflect on my days with Circle of Hope. I miss those old friends, attending cell group and the quarterly Love Feasts. I am grateful to still be a part of a denomination whose core values have significantly shaped my experience of God’s love and grace. Every time someone becomes a member or gets baptized (especially those who have been RE-baptized just like me), I get weepy. I see it not only as a symbol of their commitment to Christ but as a sign that they have felt God’s love tangibly through us. That should make us feel pretty darn good.

*Jennifer Bestwick Rash is a graduate student and attends the Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC Church with her family.*

# Grief, Loss and Rejuvenation

by Megan Scott



**From Fall 2002,  
"Grief and Loss"**

**I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE** to reconcile myself to the lack of a father in my life. His inconsistency has made it impossible to adequately grieve. Without the finale, I live with the fear and the hope that one day he may return.

Our reconciliation would involve a long process of healing and accountability, of proven change. Until then I must try to give shape to my present loss. I talk about him when he enters my thoughts - recalling both good and bad times. And I allow myself to accept the ways in which I take after him - my impatience, my love of books, my hair. I pray for him - attempting to believe in the impossibility of his transformation.

Life is a cycle. We are prepared for loss as we watch summer greens wither into the oranges of fall and the emptiness of winter. Perhaps it is the knowledge that spring will not fail to rejuvenate our world that enables us to press on.

David and I are expecting our first child. This child's heritage includes the love I was

given from Cut Wood [a friend who died], the heartbreak I experienced in loving my father. This is my spring, my contribution to life's cycling, my rejuvenation.

## **2011: Longing for the unknown reality**

My father has come and gone through the years since I wrote this piece, through my daughter Zoe's eight years of life and the birth of my son, Ian, now four. We are currently in a dry spell, with no communication in almost a year. With age, I have been willing to take more responsibility for the maintenance of our relationship. I am moving away from the vulnerability of childhood. I no longer expect him to call or to remember a birthday. I remember his with love and wistfulness, possibly sending him a card or a book I know he will enjoy. It is bittersweet, this longing for the unknown reality of a nurturing father.

C.S. Lewis offers these thoughts on longing, reminding us that our true search is for heaven:

Still, when we preach, we tend to forget the broader aspects of peace. If we do remember to go beyond lack of conflict/war, we stop most often at peace with God. Should we remember to go further, we may mention peace with our brothers and sisters. Only rarely do we emphasize any kind of healing between social groupings.

This lop-sided emphasis is not entirely bad. Since our society emphasizes the individual, since we who live in North America think primarily in terms of the individual, we want to communicate the gospel in individual terms. In order to be relevant, we discover the points at which the gospel of peace speaks most readily to our cultural setting.

At the same time as we want to be relevant, however, we want also to be biblical. The Bible knows little of the individualism

"Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache."

It would be a bit of heaven to have an ongoing and unconditional relationship with my father, to give and receive love without anxiety or fear. Inevitably I will keep seeking such a possibility, and will try to remember when it remains elusive that I am ultimately seeking heaven and that the ache will one day be healed.

*Megan Scott is writing and hoping to find a position in peacebuilding since she and her family recently moved to Alexandria, Va. Megan was the second "Midnight Musings" columnist.*

so clear to the American spirit. The Bible assumes that evil is everywhere, not just in the hearts of men and women (Eph. 6:12). Further, it assumes that God's peace is to reign as widely as—even more widely than—does evil (Rom. 5:12-21)....

When we preach the gospel of peace, for the sake of relevance we may speak first of how God brings you and me peace with him. But we have not preached the gospel until we speak also of the peace God brings to whole people, to whole nations, to the world—indeed to the very atmosphere we breathe. More, we deny our preaching of this whole gospel if we do not work for total peace, if we seek only to heal one set of relationships and do not seek the healing of the world.

*Daryl Climenhaga teaches at Providence Seminary, Steinbach, Manitoba.*

## Voices from the Past

### **The Pervasive Nature of Peace**

by Daryl Climenhaga,

*Peace and Justice Newsletter, Spring 1982*

Periodically someone will remind us that peace is more than the absence of war: it is active rather than passive, the presence of right relationships rather than isolation from relationships. We need these reminders. As the Bible describes it, peace encompasses far more than the absence of conflict. Peace and peacemaking involve relationships healed between individuals and God (2 Cor. 5:20). They include relationships healed between sister and brother (Luke 11:27; Gal. 5:14). They take in relationships between groups of people (Acts 6:1-6; Eph. 2:11-20).

## **Toward a Biblical Perspective on Aging**

by John R. Sider,

*“Do Not Cast Me Away When I Am Old,”  
Winter 1985 (the first Shalom!)*

Two biblical instructions that relate to our responsibility for the aged and aging will be characterized by respect and reassurance....

### **Respect**

Here our focal point is Exodus 20:12: “Honor your father and mother.” The instruction is to respect them for their age. Included in the Levitical listing of various laws is the directive regarding our attitude toward senior citizens: “Rise in the presence of the aged, and show respect for the elderly (Lev. 19:32). This practice should become an automatic response even today.

The aged are to be respected for their accumulated wisdom: “With the ancient is wisdom and in lengths of days understanding (Job 12:12). It takes time to listen to the stories and events that have formed a part of their lives, but as we listen we shall learn and become wiser. Is it not an effective training session and without the trauma that so often accompanied those experiences? From their wealth of knowledge and accumulated wisdom we profit.

The seniors also deserve our understanding and respect for their attachment to the past. The death-bed scene in Genesis 49:29-33 brings into focus Jacob’s strong ties to the past in his beautifully phrased comment, “I am to be gathered unto my people.” To Jacob, even his place of burial was significant. It gathered him finally, physically, permanently with his fathers from whom he had gained so much and by whom his life had been influenced. . . .

### **Reassurance**

Because the elderly may be less active and less involved, they need frequent reassurance. They want desperately to be needed but increasingly they find themselves being omitted from decision-making and planning. Some of us are less effective at 50 than our elders are at 75. Pastors need to remember to ask the counsel of the elders. Families must remember to be sensitive to parents and grandparents as the aging process creates new situations which require frequent reassurances that they are indeed important and appreciated.

Is there not a note of uncertainty and need for reassurance expressed in Psalm 71:9: “Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone”? Have you not encountered a similar insecurity in the seniors who are among your family and circle of friends? Do be sensitive to that cry.

## **Nonconformity: A Contemporary Perspective**

by Luke Keefer, Jr.,

*“Contemporary Nonconformity,” Spring 1988*

Nonconformity is a word victimized by a conspiracy of silence! Two generations ago, it was overused in the Brethren in Christ vocabulary. The generation which immediately preceded the present one took steps to restrict its use. It was a painful process. People were hurt even as the denomination sought to do well. The trauma that generation went through in trying to reassess the meaning and adjust the practices of nonconformity was profound. One indication of the trauma is the unwillingness of that generation—and it is the generation of present leadership at all levels in the church [in 1988]—to use the word in general. [. . . ] It is often cast in a negative light, with furtive references to past excesses. The impression conveyed is that protective silence is the best way to deal with this dangerous word. . . .

But nonconformity is part of the biblical vocabulary! Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Scripture warns against worldliness, making it the opposite of God’s will (1 John 2:15-17). Jesus prayed that his disciples would be kept from the evil in the world, even as they lived their lives and performed their service in that corrupt world (John 17: 13-19). Paul called Christians to separation from the world, especially intimate associations and partnerships that compromised one’s Christian testimony (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Peter calls Christian “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” and urges them to live as “aliens and strangers in the world” which is given to sinful desires (1 Pet. 2:9-12). . . .

To be meaningful, nonconformity must be a group task. Personal conscience is necessary in many areas of life, but, in order for a stand to be taken as the people of God, a large group has to have a common commitment to godliness. One reason why so many Christians are falling into sin today is because they have been left to their own resources, without group accountability and without group caring. And, strange as it might seem, those two do go together. Individualism destroys both, for when we refuse to make group commitments, we also send a message that we do not want the group to exercise care over us....

Nonconformity must be positive in its orientation. Church history teaches us that nonconformity has frequently wrecked on the rocks of negativism and traditionalism. When the “thou shalt not” list gets too long, nonconformity is in trouble. This is especially true when reasons for a practice cannot be tied to a meaningful aspect of Christian life at the present time. Nonconformity is meant to help us be more faithful followers of the Jesus way of life. If we test our group commitments against this goal, we are more apt to settle for guidelines that enhance dynamic spiritual life. Most Christians do desire to be better disciples of Jesus, and they will respond enthusiastically to steps that help them realize this goal. Many will even bear the cross of Christ across the grain of personal preference and societal expectations, if they are convinced that it is necessary in order to walk in fellowship with Christ.

*Luke Keefer, Jr. taught for many years at Messiah College and Ashland Seminary; he also taught core courses for the denomination. He passed away in December 2010.*

## **Peace from a Prison Perspective**

by Carolyn Pertusio,

*“Crime and Justice,” Fall 1992*

The inmate I’ll call John was a legend at the local prison. He was capable of inciting riots via the constant flow of obscenities that he aimed indiscriminately at whoever was within shouting distance. Moving John from one part of the prison to another required four guards—one to distract him, two to grab his arms, and another to slap on

handcuffs and leg irons. Violent and foul-mouthed, he was either intensely hated or intensely feared.

John was also one of the people I wondered about as I began my role as volunteer at the prison. How could my understanding of peace affect John? Would I discover that the Brethren in Christ peace position just wouldn't work for people like John?

What I discovered in the next 1½ years has reinforced my belief in the way of peace. I have discovered that it is a position of strength. . . .

The Lord taught me first of all that the way of peace is the way of love. The inmates had decided that I was a Christian long before I verbalized the fact. In a prison nothing goes unnoticed, especially a loving attitude in harsh surroundings. Consider this incident with John.

One day I had come to deliver John's commissary order at the same moment four officers came to take him to court. John left his cell with arms swinging, hurling obscenities in every direction. Guards, other inmates and John were all shouting and cursing. John made it clear to the guards that he wasn't going anywhere until he checked his commissary order. Shouting his usual obscenities, he threatened me with dire consequences if his order wasn't correct. There, in the midst of near chaos, I was overwhelmed by a sense of peace and love. Ignoring his words and even his attitude, I treated him as I believe Jesus would have. As I helped John check his commissary order, his attitude slowly changed and, when we had finished, he said, "Thanks for helping me, Ma'am."

The Lord showed me that an unconditional offer of respect had great power, especially among inmates. They had already been classed as losers by the judicial system and, in many cases, by friends and family as well. To be treated with respect in this unexpected setting got their attention, and eventually their respect.

The offer of dignity was also a powerful tool, I soon learned. Quiet by nature, I soon found myself listening to one heart-breaking story after another. Although counselors and caseworkers were caring and compassionate in most cases, their workload was just too heavy to spend much time with

individual inmates. My job leant itself nicely to giving inmates the attention they craved. For many of them, all that was needed was a listening ear for them to gain the self-control they needed to deal with their problems....

Sometimes I dream of a prison operated completely by people who believe in the way of peace. To voluntarily give worth and dignity to someone who (humanly speaking) is undeserving of it seems wrong. Yet isn't that what Christ did for us? What he did for us, he asks us to do for others. Who knows what an impact such an approach might have? The way of peace does not ignore or avoid violence. It confronts it—not by nonviolence, although that is certainly part of the confrontation—but by an attitude of respect, the offer of dignity, and the lack of intrusion on another's free will.

The way of peace causes a violent person to look at himself. When he is given respect, dignity and free choice, he is also given power. No longer does he have a need to be defensive, because the person who offers peace gives no offense. The way of peace works. It works because it is the way of love.

*Carolyn Pertusio is a member of the Palmyra (Pa.) BIC Church.*

### **Early Attitudes Have Lifelong Effects** *by Lester Fretz,* *"Attitudes Toward Money," Spring 2004*

From an early age I was always intrigued about money. I soon learned that it was round so it could circulate and flat so it could store. Finding a blank check at age five, I excitedly took it to the bank along with my savings of \$1.43 and opened a bank account. The bank manager graciously allowed me to keep the check!

During my elementary school years, with my bicycle and hand-made cart, I enjoyed spending my noon hours contacting community people for discarded items which could be sold for scrap. It was a pleasure to see the proceeds given to the Red Cross knowing that less fortunate people would be helped.

Being of very slight stature in my first two years at high school and never chosen

at noon hour for the football team, I would bike to the nearby town refuse site, gather bottles, wash them in the adjacent creek and take them to the general store to claim the deposits. Next door to the store was the bank where I would invest my refunds. When government bonds were first introduced, I moved my savings to a bond assuming that likely everyone invested in bonds.

To me, money merely was an objective measure to tell how well or how poorly I had done each day. It was never my aim to become wealthy. Providing a service to others at lunch time was another enjoyable activity which was also profitable. Making people happy while making money was fun and occasionally I treated myself to a 7-Up.

Trudging home one cold winter day from high school and finding a frozen mink entangled in the fence was an exhilarating experience. Knowing the value of pelts, I soon sold it and joyously gave a tithe in the following Sunday's offering. I also gave a portion to my brother who was home working on the farm so I could attend school. Giving was always an integral part of our family life whether it was a coin to take to church or produce for a needy neighbor.

A defining moment in my life came at my graduation from Niagara Christian College. Thinking only about the fun we would have following the graduation ceremony, I had not intended to pay attention to the speaker but his message grabbed me. Using as his text, "You cannot serve God and mammon," that college professor and former missionary's message entitled "No Neutrality" caught my attention and impacted my life from that night onward. Never could I shake off the theme of that message. . . .

*Lester Fretz is retired and lives in Ontario, where he and wife are members of the Wainfleet BIC Church.*

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## Looking Back Over Thirty Years

**THE PEACE AND JUSTICE NEWSLETTER** was originally a project of the Commission on Peace and Social Concerns, an arm of the Board for World Missions. When denominational restructuring in 1984 consolidated peace and social concerns along with benevolent ministries under the new Board for Brotherhood Concerns, the board chose to continue the newsletter and rename it *Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation*, focusing each issue on a single topic. Another denominational restructuring 10 years later eliminated the BBC and assigned responsibility for peace and social concerns along with *Shalom!* to the general secretary where it has remained for the past 17 years.

In the beginning, the publication of first the *Peace and Justice Newsletter* and then *Shalom!* was subsidized completely by the denomination. By the late 1980s and early 90s, we were inviting contributions to help support publication, and then in 2004, *Shalom!* became totally self-supporting. That has gone much better than I thought it would, and, thanks to the generosity of readers, we have always had enough money to continue from one year to the next. However, one downside is that circulation has decreased so that far fewer people receive it now than did in earlier days. On the other hand, *Shalom!* is now available on the denominational website ([www.bic-church.org](http://www.bic-church.org); click on Resources/Publications/Shalom!), and every BIC congregation receives a printed copy each quarter.

When I first became editor, the newsletter was still being typed on a stencil and mimeographed (remember those days be-

fore copy machines and personal computers?!). When the transition to *Shalom!* came in 1985, I enlisted the artistic talents of my good friend Mary Ebersole to develop a logo. That logo from more than 25 years ago is still at the core of the current logo, and helps provide a thread of continuity through all the facelifts and design changes.

A host of mostly Brethren in Christ writers have contributed to *Shalom!* Browsing through my archives, I note with sadness and gratitude those who have passed away (e.g., Darrel Brubaker, John Byers, Henry Ginder, Luke Keefer, Jr., Ross Nigh, Janet Peifer, Martin Schrag, Roy Sider). Others have left the denomination; still others have “disappeared”—that is, I’ve lost track of them and have no idea where they are or what they’re doing. Some have written multiple times; it’s good to know people I can call on and feel confident they will have something significant to say. I also always appreciate finding new voices.

Over the years, there have been several regular features, including “The Alabaster Jar,” “City Talk,” “Brotherhood Connections,” and more recently, news and stories from Mennonite Central Committee, book reviews (most of them written by Lois Saylor), and the column, “Midnight Musings.” Five young people have written regularly for “Midnight Musings” since it started in 2000: Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek, Megan Scott, Patrick Cicero, Rachel Petersen, and now Jeremy Ritch. I’ve appreciated the perspective they’ve brought to *Shalom!* as folks young enough to be my children!

*Shalom!* has tackled many different topics in 30 years: at least 20 issues on something related specifically to peacemaking; 15 on topics related to church life (missions, worship, the arts, leadership, congregationalism vs. denominationalism), several on pro-life themes, several on children and the family, and several on the Christian and political involvement. Other topics include sexuality, the Middle East, Africa, Central America, poverty, the environment, racial reconciliation, the media and technology, health care, immigration and money. Ideas for topics come in various ways, but mostly from suggestions people give me or my observation at work, at church, and by watching what’s happening in the world. Your suggestions are always welcome.

### Proposed Topics for 2012

As I write this, the topics for 2012 are still tentative and could change if circumstances warrant:

- Winter:** Caring for our children
- Spring:** The world coming to North America (immigration, international student ministries, etc.)
- Summer:** Preparing for retirement
- Fall:** Using power to help and not hurt

As always, if you or someone you know would like to write on any of these topics, please contact me.

**Harriet S. Bicksler, editor**