

ShALOM!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

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What's in a Name?

My mother always told me she named me Harriet because she liked the name, plus she had a sister named Harriet. My middle name Alice came from my paternal grandmother who died when my father was eight years old. Growing up, I didn't like my middle name, at least partly because I thought it was old-fashioned. Making the connection with a grandmother I never knew and an extended family that is huge since she was one of 14 children has helped me appreciate and value my original middle name. However, I don't use it anymore....

When my mother was born, her parents named her Gladys Caroline Bohlen. Until 1939, she signed her name Gladys C. Bohlen. When she married my dad, she dropped the C and became Gladys B. Sider, thus retaining her family name as her middle name. When I married in 1971, I followed her example and officially became Harriet S. Bicksler. At the time, it never occurred to me not to take my husband's name, but I also didn't want to give up the name of the family into which I was born. Almost 40 years later, I now sign my name three different ways—Harriet Bicksler, Harriet S. Bicksler, and Harriet Sider Bicksler—depending on the circumstance. Certainly the first is the easiest, but the third is the one I use when I want to be clear about where I came from—for example, as my Facebook name and as a byline for writing.

More naming stories:

- When we had children, my husband and I chose names we liked and that sounded okay with Bicksler; the names have no family or historical significance.

- We've always had trouble coming up with creative names for pets, so we have had Kitty the cat, Sandy the sand-colored dog, Camilla the chameleon, Dutchy the dutch rabbit, and Callie the calico cat.
- For eight years in the 1980s and early 90s, I wrote a column for the former *Evangelical Visitor*. When the column started, I wanted it to be anonymous, to give me more freedom as a writer, but it was difficult to come up with just the right pseudonym. Finally, I decided on "Phoebe" after the woman in Romans 16:1 who was a leader in the early church.

These personal stories of naming, the stories that follow, and indeed this whole edition of *Shalom!* are inspired by the current discussion of whether to consider changing our denominational name (see page 4 and following). After more than 230 years of being "brethren," is it time to change the name to something that retains the emotionally and spiritually significant meaning of "Brethren in Christ" but doesn't sound so gender-exclusive and old-fashioned or quaint? It's not an easy question to answer and opinions abound.

Names are important. We want people to say and spell our names correctly (I wish I had a nickel for every time I've spelled Bicksler since 1971!) and to remember them. As Christians, we believe that God knows each of us by name—evidence of God's care for us individuals. So what's in a name? A lot.

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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Random Syllables or Sacred Symbols: What's the Big Deal about a Name?

By Terry L. Brensinger, Ph.D.

Dr. Robert Lyon—Bob, as we affectionately called him—was among my favorite professors at Asbury Seminary. Bob quite naturally endeared himself to countless numbers of students by the way he greeted them when he met them for the very first time. The seminary annually produced a student directory, and Bob literally memorized every one of the roughly 750 faces and names in it prior to the beginning of the fall semester each year. Then, as he walked around the campus and hung out in the athletic building or cafeteria, he greeted students—students he had never met before!—by name. How surprised and delighted these new students were when this gracious but unfamiliar man called each of them by name.

Why did Bob bother to memorize the students' faces and names? Why, for that

matter, did Ann Landers in a column I once read recommend strategies to help forgetful people remember other peoples' names? In short—because names matter. Names are far more than simple sounds and syllables.

They convey information and create mental pictures. What comes to your mind, for example, when you hear such names as Osama bin Laden, Harvard University, Mother Theresa or Microsoft? In a real sense, a name captures much of what a person or organization is, does and stands for.

In a day and age full of name-choosing, name-calling, and name-changing, it seems crucial that people of faith recognize that the importance of names is deeply rooted, not simply in social norms, but in the biblical story itself. For one thing, names in the Bible are sacred symbols that typically carry significant meaning. They are not randomly selected, nor are they chosen simply on the basis of sensual appeal. Again and again, biblical characters bear names that tell us something about them, their faith and even their calling: Elijah ("the Lord is my God"), David ("Beloved"), Nehemiah ("Comforter"), Isaiah ("Yahweh is Salvation"), Joel ("Yahweh is God") and Elisabeth ("God is Generous") are cases in point. Collectively, the Nazirites ("consecrated ones") observed particularly demanding laws and the Christians followed the one they deemed to be the Messiah (the "Christ").

In the same way, God's various names in the Bible paint a verbal picture of all that God is and does—his personality, purposes and deeds. God is the most high (*El Elyon*), God is mighty (*El Shaddai*), God provides (*Yahweh Jireh*), God sees or watches over (*El Roi*), and God heals (*Yahweh Rophe*), to site just a few examples. Indeed, the name "Jesus" (*Yeshua*) tells us a great deal about God—"Yahweh saves." In these and many other instances, names provide windows through which we readers learn much about God and the people who dot the pages of Scripture.

Second, names in the Bible must be both nurtured and guarded. "A good name," the writer of Ecclesiastes concluded, "is better than fine perfume" (7:1). By implication, people and communities ought to cultivate names that call to mind such biblical virtues as compassion, truthfulness and purity. At the same time, names must be protected because they can easily be smeared and emptied of meaning—years and years of constructive "name-building" can be quickly erased by flings of folly.

It is precisely in this regard that the third of the Ten Commandments comes into play. Because God's name is so meaningful and powerful, the people who bear that name (Deut. 28:10) must be careful not to abuse or belittle it. Unfortunately, the Israelites do precisely that on more than one occasion. In Amos 2:6-8, for example, they profane the name of God by acting like everyone else on earth. They commit heinous sins and behave as though God means nothing to them. In Ezekiel 36:16-22, they belittle God's name by living as though God was weaker than the gods of the surrounding nations. And in Malachi 1:6-10, later Israelites violated God's name by offering inferior sacrifices on their altars. To them, God was unworthy of their best. As a result, the people of Israel drained the glory that had been infused into God's name over the years through both God's inspired words and miraculous deeds.

Finally, names in the Bible are not unalterable—they do at times change. Such changes, however, are not based purely on personal preference or communal appeal. Instead, name changes occur in order to provide a more helpful or accurate depiction of the people or group so named. Here are but a few examples:

- In the light of God's promises to him, Abram's ("high father") name was changed to Abraham ("father of nations").
- In similar fashion, Sarai's ("quarrelsome") name was changed to Sarah ("princess").



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- After wrestling with God, Jacob's ("supplanter") name was changed to Israel ("God contends").
- Following the loss of her husband and children, Naomi ("pleasant") asked that people call her Mara ("bitter").
- When told of his foundational role in the building of the Church, Simon's ("God has heard") name was changed to Peter ("Rock").
- Following his conversion, Saul sought to distance himself from his namesake (King Saul), so he changed his name to Paul ("little").

In each of these instances, the change in name carries with it "updated" information that supersedes the mere preservation of the previous name.

This all-too-brief consideration of an admittedly vast biblical topic—the meaning of names—raises at least three important questions for followers of Jesus to prayerfully consider. These three questions are:

- What meaning, good and bad, has been infused into our own individual and corporate names? When people hear or see our names—personal names, family names, company names, congregational names—what goes through their minds?
- Without worrying in unhealthy or even pathological ways about issues of self-image and reputation, how might we cultivate and preserve God-honoring names?
- When is it appropriate and even important to change a name? Will the "updated" information or "fresh start" provided by the new name offset the potential losses resulting from abandoning the old one?

Names, once again, matter. In fact, they are of such importance that the names we choose and the meaning we infuse into them matter deeply even to God. As a sage in ancient Israel once commented, "A good name is more desirable than great riches (Prov. 22:1)." Surely the same holds true today.

Terry Breninger is pastor/teacher for the International Brethren in Christ Association. This article is condensed and adapted from a sermon he preached when he was senior pastor at the Grantham (Pa.) BIC Church.

The Naming Practices of Christians of Kerala, South India

by Saramma Michael

Christianity has existed in the South Indian state of Kerala for nearly 2000 years. The inhabitants of this state are called Malayalis. According to tradition, St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, arrived at the port city of Cranganore (present day Kodungallur) on the Kerala coast and founded seven churches between 52-72 AD. This combined with migrations of Christians from the Middle East over succeeding centuries resulted in the creation of a unique community of St. Thomas Christians long before the arrival of European mariners in the 15th century. The arrival of the Europeans, in particular the Portuguese, transformed this community of ancient Christians. Some converted to Catholicism, while others retained their old traditions and practices.

Today, Christian communities in Kerala are divided into two broad groups—the Syrian Orthodox (the descendants of the original St. Thomas Christians) and the Roman Catholic.¹ While there is much to understand about their traditions and culture, it is their naming practices that merit special mention.

Christian naming traditions have been created from diverse indigenous and foreign sources (see below). Traditionally, the names of Kerala Christian men and women are usually divided into three parts: Pynumootil Ninan Kurien (my uncle), Vellamkuzhiyil Varughese Thomas (my father), or Arjarakadavil Boniface Nirmala (my mother-in-law's maiden name). The first name is the family name transmitted from one generation to the next through the males. These first names serve as geographical and historical markers locating the family within a particular place in Kerala. So Pynumootil means the house near the pine tree while Vellamkuzhiyil means the house near the deep water hole. However, after marriage women usually give up their family names in favor of their husbands.² The second name is passed on from one's

paternal or maternal grandparents (although there are variations). So, the oldest son born in a family is named after his paternal grandfather, the second after the maternal grandfather, the third after the father or any close relative. Similarly, the oldest daughter is named after her paternal grandmother, the second after the maternal grandmother, the third after the mother or any close relative.³ So my uncle as the oldest son got his paternal grandfather's name Ninan. The third name is passed on from one's father. Therefore my uncle got his father's name Kurien. As the only daughter, I took my paternal grandmother's name, Saramma. This method of naming preserves patrilineal continuity and tradition within these families.

Kerala Christians adopted Christian names from around the world but with a unique flavor. These names could belong to characters from the Bible or saints. One writer has commented that the use of different liturgies was mainly responsible for the popularization of different names.⁴ At times a suffix such as "kutty," "amma," or "chan" could be added to the name. Thus, women would assume names such as Achamma/Shoshamma (Susan), Akamma (Rebecca), Eliamma (Elizabeth), Marykutty (Mary), and so on. Men could assume suffixes like "achan," "kutty," and "mon" (Thangachan, Babykutty, Josemon).

In addition to a Christian name given at baptism, an individual could also have a personal name or nickname used as an endearment. I am called Shanti (meaning peace), but other names could include "kunjumon" (little son) or "kunjumol" (little daughter). Despite the broad trends in naming practices, there are considerable ongoing variations and innovations. To give one brief example, my father-in-law took his family name Parankumam Vila and made it Parankumam Villa by simply adding the letter "l." He did this because of his close connection to Ital-

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To Change or Not to Change: How Do We Decide?

The 2010 General Conference approved a petition brought by the Canadian Conference “to initiate a process that considers a new denominational name to be brought to the 2012 General Conference.” That process is currently under way.

The General Conference Board has created a study group charged with developing a process to determine the thoughts and needs of various constituencies across North America. During the next one and a half years, the study group will collect input from across the church, communicate their progress, and develop reports and recommendations on whether or not to consider a name change. The group will report regularly to the General Conference Board

and eventually bring a recommendation to the 2012 General Conference.

Members of the study group approved by the board are Randy Basinger, Ron Burwell, Rachel Diaz (chair), Perry Engle, Warren Hoffman, Kim Lester, Don McNiven, and Christine Sharp. Some background work has already been done, such as soliciting input from individuals and groups, including the Canadian Conference Leadership Cabinet and the Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership. The study group has met twice by conference call and has agreed that more foundational work is necessary and that whatever process is developed must be as transparent and inclusive as possible. The group also emphasized the importance of connect-

ing this discussion to the vision and mission of the church and making sure that whatever decision is finally made fits with the kind of church we believe God has called us to be.

As evidenced by discussion on the petition at General Conference last year, this is a topic that generates lots of opinions and emotions. Since even the possibility of a name change is a big deal, it's important to note that the petition did not call for an actual name change by 2012, but for a “process that considers” a new name. Watch for your opportunity to be included in the conversation!

Thanks to Don McNiven, BIC General Secretary, for providing the information for this report.

POINT: Is it time to change our name?

by Tim Day

I remember about 20 years ago Dr. Morris Sider asked a class of young church leaders taking his Brethren in Christ History class if we thought that the Brethren in Christ should change its name. The majority of the students said they thought it should but it probably would not happen any time soon because it would be too challenging for our denomination. That day I thought the same thing I do today. As hard as it is, addressing the issues with our name is the right thing to do.

I believe this for five reasons. First, the most obvious reason is that the word “Brethren” communicates the wrong messages to people outside our church, particularly in urban and suburban centers. “Brethren” has fallen out of common usage and communicates “out of date.” Also, it communicates “boys’ club” rather than “inclusive community.” As with all healthy communication, we need to understand both what we are saying (what words mean to us) as well as what others are hearing

(what the same words mean to them). For these reasons, I do not believe it serves many of our churches well in our mission to reach people, particularly in our cities.

Second, Scripture teaches that believers are called to intentionally adjust to their culture in their vision to reach them for Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9: 21-22, “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. ... To those not having the law I became like one not having the law... so as to win those not having the law. ... I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” I believe that believers and local churches not only need to do this but also our denomination needs to model this same Biblical principle as we work together to reach people for Christ.

Third, the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA) has affirmed the practice that national churches adapt the name “Brethren in Christ” into their own language and if need be, to change the

actual meaning to better serve their witness to their own nation. Although the other national church leaders may raise concerns at first, I think their concerns are easily addressed and calmed. Our new name does not require any other national church or the IBICA to change their name. This would simply be a bi-national church making a language adjustment to better reach their culture. Also, I would lovingly challenge our international brothers and sisters with whether we should put their sense of discomfort as a higher priority than doing all we can to remove an unnecessary barrier to reaching people for Christ. This is not a matter of unity since at present, we do not speak the same language or use the exact same name in all national churches. We are unified in our beliefs, relationships and sense of common mission. This is a matter of keeping our focus on reaching people for Christ and doing whatever we can to remove unnecessary barriers. Surely we all agree on this.

Fourth, when looking at a name change,

we have a great deal of flexibility. We do not need to force everyone to adopt a new name. We do not need to change our legal name. We have the option to create a new street name. Other denominations have done this with great success. For example, we could choose to make the acronym “BIC” our rallying point as a denomination and then develop two web sites around two different street names, “Brethren in Christ” and “Believers in Christ” based on Acts 2:42-47. This would allow all of our incorporated documents to remain the same. Churches would have an option

which street name they prefer and would have a website that they could point their people too. I believe in many cases, our primary way of denoting our denominational name is “BIC” and so this approach would minimize the change many would experience. This may not be the best solution but it illustrates the kind of flexibility we have when considering options.

Lastly, I believe we as a church family have been historically driven by mission, not tradition. Previous generations of our church family have made very difficult, potentially divisive sweeping changes for one

purpose alone: to reach people for Christ. Their legacy inspires me to want to leave that same testimony to my own children.

Dr. Sider two decades ago asked a group of young church leaders this question to get us thinking. Now those same leaders are middle aged. How long will we wait? The calling of Christ to do all we can to reach our generation and generations to come compels me.

Tim Day is senior pastor of The Meetinghouse, Oakville, On.

COUNTERPOINT: It's not so easy to change your name

by Pauline Hogan

The request from the Canadian Conference that our denomination be rechristened something other than “Brethren in Christ,” while one of the more interesting issues that may be discussed at General Conference, raises a few questions for me. Here are four problems I find with this idea:

1. I gather from the preamble that the major issue is with the term “Brethren,” since I don’t think our membership has trouble with either “Christ” or “in.” Now, it is true that the word “brethren” is a gendered term. It is also an antiquated one. However, I find that the very antiquated nature of the word ameliorates its gendered-ness. Nowhere in today’s world is this term used to single out only male siblings. It is not used as a synonym for “brothers.” Rather, it is only used in historic names of churches, such as “Plymouth Brethren,” “Mennonite Brethren,” or “United Brethren.” It is, in fact, a signal pointing to a church organization with a certain history going back a century or two. A quick Google will back up my point. No, it’s not a modern term. But we are a church with some history.

2. Let’s think about some other denominations with names that are antiquated. There’s the “Anglican” church. Originally, that meant the “English” as opposed to the “Roman” church. That’s why after the American Revolution the U.S. Anglican church changed its name to “Episcopalian” (a name that meant “led by bishops”). These terms

don’t mean anything in themselves to modern members of these denominations, but they do indicate what kind of organization they belong to, and what the history of that denomination is. If you’re an Anglican, you get to watch your church leader, in really neat robes, crown the king or queen of England. If you’re an Episcopalian, you get to do the same thing, in spite of the name change. In Canada we have a thriving denomination called the “Free Methodist” church. “Are there any unfree Methodists?” you may ask. The name refers to those Methodists who didn’t want to join with the Presbyterians in 1925 to form what is now known as the “United Church of Canada.” The names don’t really matter, but their link to the history of the denomination is significant (at least for those who care about history).

I do care about history, and I know that the Brethren in Christ Church has had a vital impact on the world. I acknowledge that as “River Brethren” our ancestors made their mark, and later as “Tunkers” (shudder) they were officially welcomed to Ontario in the late 18th century. However, it is as Brethren in Christ that our greatest geographical expansion has occurred, and also our greatest advances in cross-cultural efforts, both in North America and abroad. Now the name is recognized by other Christians. A new name would mean starting all over again to establish our bona fides as a “real” church

and develop our identity among fellow believers. At inter-church meetings long explanations would be needed before we could get down to the real issues of whom we are related to or whom we studied with.

3. Our history of missions and expansion means that this is not a question we have any right to consider solely in General Conference. Churches around the world identify with the name “Brethren in Christ,” and it would be confusing, and unfair, to make such a decision without consultation and careful discussion with the international BIC organizations. How would such a change affect their ministries? We need their input.

4. Currently individual congregations are free to call themselves anything they like, and if they wish, they may omit the denominational name from church signs, advertising, web sites, or even bulletins! This allows churches to be culturally relevant, and to appeal to their own local communities with a name that carries good vibes for that locale.

Both our core values and our history are reflected in “Brethren in Christ.” A new term would need to be up-to-date and yet not so trendy that it would date us in the future. Finding one will be a challenging and ultimately unnecessary task, unless, that is, we plan to change our name each generation.

Pauline Hogan is a member of the Falls View BIC Church, Niagara Falls, On.

Changing a Congregational Name

by Lynn Thrush

On January 1, 2000 our congregation changed our name from Chino Brethren in Christ Church to Gateway Community Church. There were a number of reasons why we made the change:

People often could not “hear/understand” when I used the name “Brethren in Christ” on the phone. I would frequently be asked to repeat the name. Because people could not quickly grasp the name and because it included the unfamiliar word “brethren” we surmised that it was thus restrictive to the uninitiated and an unnecessary barrier.

We wanted to newly connect to mission. We were looking to create change, and so name-change was one of a cluster of initiatives we took.

Our name was associated with the theologically liberal Church of the Brethren out of LaVerne, Ca. I once had a conversation with a woman who automatically assumed that I held to a particular position because she thought I was identified with the LaVerne congregation.

A decade after our name change several effects can be noted:

Our new name is easily heard, Gateway Community Church. We do not need to repeat the name.

This culturally comfortable name, Gateway Community Church (sometimes just called Gateway Church), makes it easier for persons in the community to refer to us, or theoretically to come to us. (However, we’ve also been told that our architecture “speaks” of us being dated, so when it comes to communicating to our community we are not consistently “culturally comfortable.”)

The name change was a component of a “culture of change” that we were looking to initiate. Chino Brethren in Christ Church was a long established church; at our January 1999 Leadership Retreat we determined to change our name, plant a church, and use our facility in a more comprehensive, kingdom-enhancing way. Shortly after we changed our name we planted a youth church called The Point. Our culture of change, of which name-

change was part, no doubt contributed to the birth of this creative youth ministry.

The process of change was certainly a critical component of the changing of the name. Our leadership was together; the name change idea emerged from our leadership, not from me, though I affirmed and led the process. We built the case for name change with the congregation. We invited feedback. We dealt with objections, usually ahead of time. We had our bishop affirm our journey. We communicated regularly. I preached on texts that had to do with moving ahead in faith. We did not vote. We spent \$5-\$6000 dollars on a sign. We created a congregational logo. We developed new stationery with the new name and logo. We used a “doing-business-as” (DBA) so we could take checks written out to either name. In our case we also refurbished the sanctuary, took out the pews and purchased beautiful Bertolini chairs (made in Chino!) so that our name change would not be merely external. Three families discontinued as part of our congregation because of our actions.

After ten years we are as connected to the Brethren in Christ Church as before. One of our key leaders served as chair of the General Conference Board in the years following our name change. One of our key leaders has become ministry assistant to our bishop in the years since the name change. One of our key leaders is treasurer of the Pacific Conference. One of our twenty-something leaders has agreed to be an advocate for the BIC Foundation, telling Brethren in Christ stories. She will tell you she loves the Brethren in Christ Church. We have congregational members sprinkled on other Pacific Conference Boards. Congregational respect for our bishop is high.

Truth be told, because the Brethren in Christ have competent, godly leadership across General and Regional Conferences, our people respond as normal, ordinary people respond to such organizations all across the world – with respect. Ten years later, no one here at Gateway thinks at all

that our name should be something else. When the motives are healthy, the results are healthy. Interestingly, on the Sunday prior to writing this article, a twenty-something young man said to me, in response to an earlier conversation he and I had about ministry: “I like history. Is there anything I could do regarding organizing the documents of the history of our church?” What a healthy idea for this talented UCLA graduate to volunteer to organize the history of God’s people formerly under the name Chino Brethren in Christ Church, and now Gateway Community Church. (For the record, as of January 1, 2010 we’ve incorporated in the state of California with the name: Gateway Community Brethren in Christ Church.)

Lynn Thrush is senior pastor of Gateway Community Church, Chino, Ca.

Editor’s Notes

Subscriptions: We are currently gratefully accepting your 2011 subscription renewal contributions. If you are not already a subscriber and would like to receive *Shalom!* on a regular basis, please send your name and address, along with a check for \$15 payable to Brethren in Christ Church, to the editor (address on page 2).

Upcoming Topics for *Shalom!*

Spring 2011: “Relating to People Who Are Not Like Us” (exploring issues of inclusion, religious and political pluralism and tolerance, class, religion, education, culture, race, language, sexual identity, etc.)

Summer 2011: “Pursuing Peace: How Are We Doing?” (taking off on a question posed to the denomination by Mennonite World Conference; exploring “hot button” topics like gun control, criminal justice, national security, personal and corporate violence)

Fall 2011: “Then and Now: Editor’s Choice” (reprising some of the editor’s favorite articles from the past 30 years, updated by their authors in light of changing circumstances and perspectives)

What's in a Congregational Name?

CrossRoads, Salina, Kansas

We chose the name CrossRoads for the new church planting in Salina in 1998 for two reasons.

Salina sits at the crossroads of America where I-70 and I-135 intersect. Interstate 70 basically goes from east to west and 135 runs from south Texas to Canada. One of Salina's Chamber of Commerce mottos is "Salina: City at the Crossroads."

We determined early on that we would be "fishing" for people who were at a crossroads in life. Whether you consider them "un-churched" or "de-churched," we decided to give priority to broken people looking for God rather than Christians looking for a church. (Matt. 10:6; Mark 2:17) The church name, CrossRoads, is just one of the ways we get their attention and it often strikes a chord with people who find themselves at a crossroads in their life. Over half of our people have no meaningful church experience in their past. About three-fourths have some kind of an addiction in their background.

The above priority also provides the reasoning for why we do not include the denominational name in our church name, on our signage, advertising, or logo. Lost people don't care what denomination you belong to. They are looking for Jesus not a distinctive theology. We do publicize our denominational name and give information concerning the BIC on our website, on printed material inside the church, and in our membership classes. We often mention the BIC in the Sunday service and feature as many BIC representatives as are willing to come to Kansas. We also mention often the work of BIC Cooperative Ministries as well as church planting and world missions efforts. Flags from nations where the BIC have missionary work hang from the ceiling of our auditorium.

—Ron Bowell, pastor

Ashland Brethren in Christ, Ashland, Ohio

Here in Ashland, Ashland Brethren in Christ is on our letterheads, signage and communication. But for as long as I can remember, we and everyone else in town refer to us as "ABC." We have a nickname that has stuck and is in our logo.

We are proud of our BIC affiliation but we don't flaunt it. Also ABC helps us stand out in a town that has lots of Brethren churches namely, Brethren (Ashland Brethren), Church of the Brethren, and Grace Brethren.

Our congregation isn't very keen on the idea of a denominational name change. We are pretty good here about women in ministry, equality and inclusivity. But we think the denominational name isn't about that or an affront to women. It's simply who we are historically.

—Keith Tyson, senior pastor

New Trail Fellowship Cowboy Church, Abilene, Kansas

The reason we chose the name New Trail Fellowship Cowboy was that it fit culturally since Abilene is at the end of the Chisholm Trail. However, the name signifies a new start for a trail that leads to Jesus. Also, note that it is singular New Trail (not New Trails) as Jesus said, "No man comes to the Father except through me." Our key verse is Psalms 16:11b, "... you have made known to me a new path (trail) of life." Also, New Trail fits the cowboy culture since the trail is so much a part of their past lives.

As for lack of denominational identification, cowboys as a whole have an independent streak and have an aversion to what appears as formal "religion." I do note in our "Tying the Knot" classes (membership) that we are part of the Brethren in Christ and I state why, noting accountability, doctrinally, morally and ethically. They do not seem to have a problem with that. But we do not stress this issue.

—Stan Norman, Pastor

Refton Brethren in Christ Church, Refton, Pennsylvania

At Refton, we use the denominational name on our sign, website, in our bulletin, literature, and when we publicize things in the newspaper. We use refton-church in our e-mail and web page addresses so they aren't too long. Refton BIC Church has been in this community for 98 years. We believe using Brethren in Christ is a positive thing for our particular setting.

—Mike Anderson, pastor

Choosing Our Firstborn's Name

When Katie and I were told we were having a girl for our firstborn we were thrilled. We wanted a name that had meaning and history. We chose to name our daughter Grace Katharine because:

Grace was the best word we both knew. It summed up both what we held dear in life and what we hoped our daughter would embody. I had an encounter with the Lord in 1998 that was powerful and life-changing. After that moment I have never been truly afraid of anything. I know there is nothing to fear because the Lord is with me and his grace is enough. When Kate was midway through her pregnancy I remember thinking, "What if our child doesn't follow the Lord?!" It was the first time I had been afraid or felt real fear in years. Ever since then I've been moved each time we sing, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!" Katie had also experienced God's grace in a powerful way but that's her story to tell...

Grace was also the name of a kind neighbor lady that Katie grew up next to. She loved Katie and her sister and was quite a character.

"Katharine" carried the history of both her mother's name (my sweet Kate!) as well as her great grandmother – Katharine (Kay) Etherington.

—Tony Bowell,
CrossRoads Church, Salina, Ks.

Choosing Married Names

Naming and Claiming

by Nancy Heisey

Before I married Paul Longacre, a colleague at MCC, where I then worked, pointed out that I had a professional record with the name “Nancy Heisey.” He thought there would be some value in keeping that name. On the other hand, I knew I would have responsibility to represent the interests of my two stepdaughters, and I thought it would be less confusing for their teachers if I had the same last name as they did. So I decided to become “Nancy Heisey Longacre.”

Quickly, I learned that most people had no tolerance for a name that long, and I was usually approached as “Nancy Longacre.” From the first time I heard that name used, I knew clearly within myself that it was not mine. Although I tried to get used to it, another set of questions quickly emerged. My husband’s first wife, Doris Janzen Longacre, had published the wildly popular *More-With-Less Cookbook*. As I traveled to meetings and church events, I was met over and over with introductions or comments assuming I was the cookbook author.

I started to talk with Paul about changing my name back to simply “Nancy Heisey.” He was not convinced this was a good idea. Eventually, however, he was with me one time when someone identified me as Doris. From that moment on, he became my strong supporter in changing my name.

The process was an interesting one. For example, friends and family members wrote to me asking worriedly whether my marriage was falling apart. When I went to the Social Security office to make the change official, I was asked for my divorce papers. During a two-year project of visiting church partners around the world, Paul and I had to repeatedly introduce ourselves as “a married couple.” Yet women in Burma and Ethiopia said to me: “You’re like us. We use our OWN names.”

As my family ties have strengthened and diversified (my daughters have each made a different name choice as they married), my understanding has grown that there are

many ways for women to claim our heritage and our unique identity.

Nancy Heisey teaches at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Simplicity and Flexibility

By Beth and Alan Claassen Thrush

When we decided to marry, we eagerly began the journey to find a meaningful, simple, flexible way to identify ourselves as a new family unit. We knew we wanted to represent our commitment to mutual sacrifice, partnership, and joining one another’s families. At the same time, we wanted to avoid what we perceived as the logistical hassles of hyphens and double last names. We (Alan Thrush and Beth Claassen) eventually decided to both use Claassen as a second middle name and Thrush as a last name. Pleased with our simple, flexible solution, we headed to the California DMV to change our documentation, where a DMV worker insisted that men could not change their names. After pressing for a second opinion, a manager deemed that a man could change or add a last name, but not a middle name, due to computer system restraints. While not our first choice, logistical necessity settled us into our two last names: Claassen Thrush (no hyphen).

Then we entered the professional and academic worlds. In seminary, Alan found that many embraced two last names. Alan Claassen Thrush easily became his identity. At the same time, Beth found two last names cumbersome as a classroom teacher and chose the simpler “Mrs. Thrush.” When graduation day for masters’ degrees came for each of us, Alan Claassen Thrush lined up with the “Cs” while Beth (Claassen) Thrush lined up with the “Ts.” We laughed about the switch, and (somewhat) flexibly continued to embrace our shared identity.

Then we entered a new culture. In Nicaragua, no one changes last names when they marry. Everyone keeps the two last names from birth—the first last name is the paternal line, and the second is the mater-

nal. So while (like us) they all have two last names, they (unlike us) usually drop the second last name (Thrush, in our case), making us the “Familia Claassen.”

Then we entered the world of parenthood. Again striving for maximum simplicity and flexibility, we decided that for our son Simon, Claassen would be the single middle name and Thrush the single last name. However, the Nicaraguan naming formula combined with our non-Nicaraguan system of last names resulted in: Simon Claassen Claassen Claassen. “This cannot be,” said Alan. “Is there no way that both our last names can be recognized?” The agent responded that there is only one exception – single mothers can use both last names of the mother. Simon left the office with a certificate noting his birth to an unwed single mother and the name “Simon Claassen Claassen Thrush.” (The birth certificate from the U.S. State Department reflects our true marital status and name choice.)

Eight years after we—and the California DMV—decided how to identify our family unit, we have learned to laugh and take ourselves less seriously. We have learned that we should strive for simplicity and flexibility in ourselves, even if we can never achieve them in our names.

Alan and Beth Claassen Thrush recently returned from Mennonite Central Committee service in Nicaragua and are planning to resettle in California.

Giving My Daughter Options

By Karen Ulery

I started a new job last year as a substitute teacher where I am required to have people formally address me by my last name. When I am in my daughter’s middle school, I give the students three options of names to call me: Mrs. Ulery (or, “Mrs. U”), Mrs. Yoder (since they know my daughter’s last name is Yoder), or Kyra’s Mom. And then I have to explain why I don’t have the same last name as Kyra’s dad, even though he is my husband!

My mother has always balked at being called Mrs. Keith Ulery: “I took his last name—not his first, too!” Twenty years ago,

when I was about to get married, I polled a number of other married women and asked them what they would do if they had it to do over again. Of course, many were so used to their “new” name that they wouldn’t have changed anything, but one said she wished she hadn’t changed it at all. Something in her own identity from her first two decades of life felt lost. Being the slight trail-blazer that I am, I decided not to change my name.

It certainly was easier. I didn’t have to change any court documents or Social Security information and we simply added the other’s name to existing financial accounts. The trickiest part has been in the church. I was concerned about people thinking we were simply living together, but since we haven’t attended large churches, people usually figure it out pretty easily. However, some friends still aren’t comfortable; for example, one friend insists on hyphenating my name whenever she writes me a check. The Brethren in Christ offices often hyphenate my name in print, but I suspect they make that assumption based on our private e-mail domain name (ulery-yoder.com).

Recently, I’ve felt affirmed that I did the right thing for me. One of the considerations was wanting to have options for my future daughters, if I was blessed to have them. I wanted my daughter(s) to feel they could choose something different, given that the original basis for assuming the husband’s last name was deeply rooted in women being the “property” of their husbands. My 13-year-old has already started to think about what she’ll want to do with her name. I’m glad she feels she has options and doesn’t have to lose the identity that was given to her at birth.

Karen Ulery and her family attend the Elizabeth-town (Pa.) BIC Church

Why We Changed Our Last Names

By Katie and Devin Manzullo-Thomas

Shortly after we first started dating in February 2008, we talked about “married names.” Why, we both asked, does the wife traditionally take her husband’s last name? What does this communicate (implicitly or explicitly) about the nature of the marriage relationship? And why should we unquestioningly continue the practice? It seems

that marriage represents the formation of a new entity—a being composed of two individuals committed to mutual support and affection, drawing on past experiences to create a new life, a new together-ness. How, we asked one another, can such an understanding be reflected in the language we use to identify this marriage?

By the end of the conversation, we still had a lot of questions, but we’d also reached an important conclusion: if we got married, we would combine our last names. And that’s just what we did in June 2010, when we tied the knot.

We believe that all couples grapple with questions about marriage. For the most part, there are no “one-size-fits-all” answers. We know other couples who live out our same philosophy of marriage but who have chosen a different name structure. Some surnames simply sound odd together (ours isn’t exactly mellifluous, but it works). Some couples don’t attach much weight to their names. For us, combining our names turned out to be the most logical and meaningful solution to a number of concerns.

Responses to our decision have been mixed. Many of our friends and family were (and are) incredibly supportive of the choice. Others have not reacted quite as positively and some have been downright antagonistic. Fortunately, we’ve been able to draw encouragement from the experiences—some good, some bad—of friends who have made similar post-marriage decisions.

As one might expect, the question we’ve encountered most often is “why combine?” Looking back, we recognize that our initial conversation was shaped by our understanding of God’s design for marriage relationships. Both of us understand Paul’s words on gender equality (Gal. 3:28) and mutual submission (Eph. 5:21-33) as God’s outline for egalitarian marriage. And both of us find beauty and inspiration in the biblical stories of God-followers—like Abraham and Sarah, Peter and Paul, for example—who changed their names to reflect the new-ness they had found in joining God’s community (Gen. 17:1-5, 15; John 1:41-42; Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 13:9).

Kate and Devin Manzullo-Thomas were married in June 2010 in Grantham, Pa. They currently

live in Philadelphia, where they attend Circle of Hope Broad & Washington, a Brethren in Christ congregation in the city.

Why I Did It

By Wanda Thuma-McDermond

Sometimes retrospective reflection can be an interesting exercise. I have been married for 30+ years. All those years ago, when my husband and I were making wedding plans, I had no intention of taking his name. However, I have had a hyphenated name ever since. So why did I do it? As I reflected, I remembered several reasons why I now have a hyphenated name, or as the British describe it, a double-barrelled name – a term I quite like.

First of all, as a feminist, I saw absolutely no need for me to change names and lose my identity just because I was marrying. I was not going to be any man’s property so why should I take his surname?

Second, I liked my family name; I had lived with it my whole life. After taking a Family Systems course, I realized I had come from a fairly proud and arrogant family. No wonder I had no need to lose that identity.

Third, I knew my mother’s legal signature included her former family name as her middle name. I am not sure if I even knew her birth certificate middle name at that point. So, there was a certain familial precedent.

A short while before the wedding, my soon-to-be husband announced to his family, including paternal uncles, my surname decision. Apparently it was a difficult time for all, partly because my husband was the last of his generation able to produce possible male heirs to continue the family name. Children were the last thing on my mind, but in any nebulous future, I was not planning for them to have my family name; they could have their father’s surname for all I cared. The worry of causing a family rift from the beginning of my marriage led to hyphenation. It fulfilled my need to maintain my identity and was a compromise. So that’s why I did it.

Wanda Thuma-McDermond teaches nursing at Messiah College and attends the Grantham (Pa.) BIC Church.

Changing Names in Miami: A Cuban American Story

by Lois Saylor

Learning to Die in Miami: Confessions of a Refugee Boy recounts the boyhood experiences of author Carlos Eire as a Cuban refugee. Eire seamlessly fuses his early memories to later times and places experienced as a teen, young adult, husband, father, and as an author writing the very sentence his audience is reading. This brings a depth and texture to his writing that illuminates how childhood truths remain with us even while developing with experience.

Names become an important part of Eire's immigration experience reflecting his own struggles with loyalties, identity, history, and future hopes. The young boy goes through a series of re-namings, which he refers to as deaths, before he becomes the author we know as Carlos Eire—the name, we assume, he finally chooses permanently.

Being sent to Miami by his parents to escape communist Cuba, the young Carlos rather quickly changes his name to Charles. He is in America now and wants to adopt it, to fit in, to be American. Carlos is gone, Charles has arrived. He embraces this, but Eire lets the reader know what his young self did not recognize: that Carlos is not really dead. There is a significant denial in the young, new Charles as he braves his way into a new and unsure life. One mechanism he uses to cope with his dislocation from home and parents is to reject Cuba (which he sarcastically renames Castrolandia) and to embrace all things American. And there certainly are new and exciting things for Charles to see and experience in Miami.

Enrolling in Everglades Elementary School forces the young Eire to make another name change, one he was not anticipating:

All my life...I'd had two last names, each equally significant: one from my father, Nieto, and one from my mother, Eire. But everything changed in an instant at the school in Miami. "Only one surname per customer," the assistant principal said. "You can't have two. Pick one."

Sophie's choice, in reverse: Is it better to reject your father or your mother?

We find out that he chose Nieto, his father. We do not learn when or how or why he became Eire.

Life at his first foster home is good, but not permanent. He and his older brother are eventually sent to a foster home with other Cuban refugee boys. But it is a dreadful place where the boys are bounced around between neglect and abuse. The Americanized "Charles" is not tolerated. He is Carlos again in this new home, at his new school, and to his brother who never Americanizes his own name.

Eire's prayers for a miraculous escape from this life are answered as both brothers are suddenly sent to relatives in Bloomington, Illinois. Another name, another death, and realignment in identity and future hopes befall Carlos. Carlos/Charles/Carlos becomes Chuck in a shoe store buying his sneakers for gym class.

"You can't have a name like Carlos around here," says the salesman..."That's not American. Is there an English version of that?"

"Charles," I say.

"Oh...great. But you don't want that either. Nobody's going to call you that. You'll be either Charlie or Chuck."

This guy seems to know a lot. And he's asking about my name because... he's supposed to write my name on [the sneakers] with an indelible marker. ..."Oh," I say, weighing my options. I need to think fast. Whatever he writes on that shoe is going to be my name at school, maybe forever. Chuck certainly sounds tough. I've never heard that name before, but it has a ring to it like Buck or Flash, the two space heroes played by Buster Crabbe. Come to think of it, Chuck is also like Buster. Man, this is a killer name.

I hesitate. This is hard. Can I change my name so completely without having thought about it first? You bet. "Thanks, make it Chuck."

Carlos does make the name decision quickly under the pressure of that indelible marker, but not thoughtlessly. His brief hesitation is sincere. He does know the future is a stake and names are important. Once again Carlos chooses a name that is future oriented. He leaves the past in Cuba which he now calls "Plato's cave," a land of shadows he has left behind for the real world, the world of the north and snow. Even renaming Cuba is a way for Carlos to cope with the loss of his beloved but beleaguered homeland.

Throughout the memoir the young Eire struggles with his own identity, letting go of the past and grasping the future. Eventually, the boy will become the man who can embrace his past openly and lovingly. The first hint we see of this is actually in the poetic preamble, which concludes with these words: "It irks them to know that we escaped/and they so envy our luminous scars/and our ceaseless resurrection."

A major focus of this memoir is losing home, parents, country and identity with the dying this brings, but it also is about reaching out and grabbing the now which leads to the future. Carlos Eire gives us a beautifully written memoir about transitions, resurrections and new life. Like his former memoir, *Waiting for Snow in Havana*, this book is a joy to read.

Lois Saylor chairs the church board at the Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC Church and the Leadership Team of the BIC Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership.

Naming God

by Jeremy Ritch

When Moses went before God in the burning bush, he asked God his name. God simply answered “I Am” (Ex. 3:1-4:17). Before this, God was known as Elohim. It is somewhat unclear what the true translation of Elohim is; however, El is a generic term for God. The Jews often called God El Elyon (the most high God, Gen. 14:18), El Shaddai (traditionally, God Almighty, Gen. 17:1), and El Hai (the living God, Josh. 3:10). These were all terms for God which described him as mighty and the one true God. God’s reference to himself as “I Am” confirmed all the names they used for generations. It also solidified God as the master of everything and the true leader of his people. There is nothing to be added or taken away because God is simply “I Am.” So from this point on the Jews worshipped a God they knew by name. He was more than just El, which could be a number of deities; he was “I Am.”

In Scripture we often see the term LORD, always in capital letters, used to describe God. This appears more than 6000 times in the text and is clearly meant to stand out from the other words. The reason for this goes back to Moses’s encounter with the burning bush. There was no right name for God other than “I Am” so LORD was a way to say the name without really saying it. It allows the reader or listener to know who is being described, worshipped or praised without putting an earthly name on him. LORD in Hebrew is Adonai and it is capitalized to separate it from any other use of the word. This kind of respect shows how personal the relationship was between God and his people during this time and how important God is as leader, king and creator.

When Jesus came as the Messiah, Yahweh (God) became accessible to everyone. While the God of the Old Testament loved and cherished his people, he hadn’t been described as “love” in the same way he is in the New Testament. We see the might and power of Yahweh, and we also see how he forgives his people with mercy and grace. We feel more of the “ABBA father” in the New Testament than the Old. Of course, we know that if God is “I Am” he is the same today as yester-



day and thus, ABBA father is also the same. The term connotes “Daddy” or “Poppa” and is used in scripture (Mark 14:36. Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6) to describe God in softer terms so that God becomes approachable and less intimidating. Whereas Yahweh or “I Am” makes it clear that no God is greater and Adonai or LORD connotes king or ruler, ABBA makes God safe and tender.

We take these names for granted because we have heard them a thousand times. We think of the term Yahweh as nothing more than the Old Testament name for God or a Jewish thing. However, it is so much more—it is the name above all names. Elohim is a name that is rarely used anymore, but it is also important because of the respect for God it commands. We use “Lord” for both God and Jesus—denoting the most high Lord our King, the ruler of heaven and creator of everything. Then of course there is ABBA for the “daddy” who wants to hold us in his arms and care for us as a loving parent. He disciplines us, but he also builds us up, encourages us and wipes away our tears. He saves us from our sin through his son Jesus, he corrects us when we are wrong through his gift of the Holy Spirit, and he loves us more than we will ever know as a good poppa should.

Each of the names for God is important, and each has significance and should be honored. For me personally, the most important name is ABBA, the father of the fatherless and the daddy to those in need of refuge. I take comfort in that because sometimes I don’t need the mighty God Elohim or Yahweh. Some days I am not looking for LORD or Adonai. When the bad days come all I really want is to fall into the arms of ABBA and spend the day with my daddy.

Jeremy Ritch directs Holdfast Ministries in Harrisburg, Pa, and attends the Harrisburg BIC Church.

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ian culture through years of study in Italy, proficiency in Italian, and his close affinity to Italian culture.

Since the 1950s with the growth of modern western education, changes in family structure, travel and migration, the naming traditions of the Christians of Kerala have witnessed dramatic changes. Many families have discontinued the use of the family names (the first name) while retaining the third name as a surname as found around the world. My diasporic relatives living in the United States have chosen simple, personally meaningful, and easy to pronounce names for their children. In some cases, the women have either not taken their husband’s surnames or have hyphenated them with their maiden names. While this has led to some simplification in naming practices, it has also resulted in the loss of family identity, memory, and a sense of historical continuity.

In 2008 when I returned to Kerala and did some family research, I realized very quickly the wisdom of the older generation in devising the unique naming customs of the Malayalis of Kerala. I was able to locate and interact with relatives and extended kin simply by asking for their family names in the places I visited. Once I was identified as a descendant of one of these families, relatives usually extended a warm welcome to me and gave me access to an incredible variety of resources that were invaluable for the reconstruction of the history of any family.

Saramma Michael was raised in a Kerala Christian family and has lived and worked in India, Nepal, and the United States. She now lives in Camp Hill, Pa with her husband and three children. She is fluent in Hindi, Malayalam and Nepali. Her interests include reading, creative writing, poetry, painting, and serving her church (Harrisburg BIC) and community.

Notes:

1. See Leonard Fernando & G. Gispert-Sauch, *Christianity In India: Two Thousand Years of Faith* (Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2004).
2. In Kerala, an exception to this general rule is the largely Hindu and matriarchal Nair community.
3. See A.M. Marykutty, *Personal Names of Kerala Christians* (Edamattom, Kerala: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1997) p. 37.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

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Becoming Ling in America

by Ling Dinse

“Hi! My name is Veronica, nice to meet you!” This was the first phrase I uttered mechanically to my host parents 23 years ago when I first arrived at Houghton College as an international student. My Caucasian host parents took one look at me and said: “What is your real name?”

Veronica was the name assigned to me by my 7th grade English teacher. It was fashionable to have an English name since Hong Kong was a British colony at that time and it showed that you had some English knowledge. My shorter friends got names like Anna, Cindy, David, Elizabeth....etc. and I being the tall girl for a Chinese 7th grader (an amazing height of 4 feet 8 inches) was sitting in the back of the classroom and got a name that started with the letter “V”. This is how “Veronica” came to be my name from 7th grade until I arrived in the United States as a college freshman.

I am so grateful to my host parents for reminding me of my Chinese roots by insisting on calling me by my Chinese given name “Ling.” When I was in Hong Kong, I never thought about my racial roots. My friends looked Chinese, behaved like Chinese and sounded Chinese. I never imagined how isolated I would feel as an immigrant in America, especially in the first few years. I couldn’t understand what my American friends were saying, what they were eating

and why they were standing in line for everything. Assimilation was the answer to my chaotic world. I started to use words like “awesome” and “cool, man!” I ate the unappetizing looking egg salad. I stood in the lunch line with a patient smile on my face even when I was starving. Little by little, I was becoming Americanized. As Eugene Peterson said, “Our personal name is at one and the same time the most common element in our identity and the most distinctive” (Peterson, *Leaping Over A Wall*, p. 24). Having a Chinese name in America allows me to maintain the most common and most distinctive part of me. My Chinese name allows me to behave in my Chinese ways without needing to constantly explain myself when I don’t act like an “American.” I do still forget at times and walk in front of someone, jump into conversations without taking turns, sit too close to others with my Chinese concept of personal space, etc. I have found that having a name like Ling allows me to be true to myself as a Chinese person in America.

I came to America with the goals of acquiring a good education and learning more about my new found faith and this Christian God. “Becoming Ling in America” marked the beginning of a very meaningful spiritual journey. In America, I learned to worship God through prayer

and songs, understand his will through reading of the Bible and cultivate Christ-centered love through fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ. God showed me who I am in Him. At the end, I don’t really care if someone calls me “Veronica” or “Ling.” As the worship song “I Will Change Your Name” by D. J. Butler expresses, God is the one that changed my name and I really like it this time. It has nothing to do with my height or my race. It is about who God is in my life. “Hi! My name is Confidence/Joyfulness/ Faithfulness/One who seeks His face. Nice to meet you!”

Ling Dinse is a congregational counsellor at Elizabethtown (Pa.) BIC Church. She and her husband have two daughters. She loves to cook and counsel (and sometimes does both at the same time).