

What others say about *Explore the Core*:

- These sessions have been a blessing in many ways. I believe it will be essential for LMC congregations to be firm in our identity and to understand our core values as Anabaptists in order to respond with love, patience, and respect to other people of other backgrounds we reach out to.
- I really appreciated the whole presentation – an effective job was done of taking concepts and making them clear and understandable. How we do theology is so crucial and I thoroughly enjoyed the whole day. I find Bible Study fascinating and life-changing. The balance brought to the subject is refreshing! The communication was very effective. God bless you in your work.
- I know that there was at least one person here who was not of an Anabaptist background. He said that this presentation made everything make so much more sense to him...especially the part of seeing all Scripture through Jesus first.



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Lancaster Mennonite Conference
**Core Values Reflecting
A Missional Anabaptist Identity**

Student Study Guide

Explore the Core: Core Values Reflecting a Missional Anabaptist Identity

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2160 Lincoln Highway East, #5
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Student Study Guide

2nd Printing September 2008

Also available from Lancaster Mennonite Conference:
Teacher's Manual
Multimedia DVD

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Christian Home: LMC Stock photo.

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WORD FROM THE MODERATOR

1 Corinthians 3:11 says, “For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” This verse has a long history in the Anabaptist movement. The study you are about to embark echoes the sentiment in this passage. This study is all about Jesus.

The credentialed leaders of Lancaster Mennonite Conference provided feedback in 2002 that indicated the need for a shared core of beliefs and practices and their desire to work at discerning and declaring that core.

As a result, the Core Values Council was formed by the direction of the Bishop Board in 2002 with the goal of making shared values clear and explicit in order to unite around them as a community in dynamic ministry.

The work of the Council was reviewed with Bishops in 2003, again at the 2003 Fall Leadership Assembly with all credentialed leaders, and with the broader community at the Celebration of Church Life in 2004.

Since then these values continue to be tested with Conference credentialed leaders, congregations, and agencies in a wide variety of settings and age groups. While core values remain a work in progress through ongoing study and discernment like you are beginning, input to date continues to resoundingly affirm the content and direction of this effort.

As moderator of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, I commend this study to your group and pray God’s blessing upon your effort. I welcome your continued feedback in this process.

L. Keith Weaver, Moderator
Lancaster Mennonite Conference

Explore the Core

What made the early Anabaptists risk life, limb, family and property for a different understanding of what it meant to be Christian and to be church? The same thing that leads people in the 21st century to live lives that go counter to culture: an encounter with Jesus lived out in counter-cultural community. The persecuted church around the world today seeks to hear God and live as the Spirit leads in communities that contrast with the world around them.

In short, it’s all about Jesus.

Question: How can we tell the Gospel with the stories of our culture? Share your own story of “saying yes to Jesus.” Tell a story of God invading your life with his grace.

Two Approaches Compared	
God’s Story	Your Story
Jesus participated in creation	We participate in God’s mission
Jesus sent into time and space	We are sent into the World
Jesus gives his life for his enemies	We expend our lives for others, including our enemies

Question: According to the Church Member Profile 2006, only 2% of the members in Mennonite churches are Christians as a result of the Christian witness of the members of that congregation. Yet Anabaptist forebears lived a life of every-member witness. What must we do to recover that sense of evangelical urgency?

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Luke 10:1-12. Focus attention on our part in God's mission. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? What is God doing? What are people doing? What should our congregation do?

Thinking and Talking Together

This study began with the contemporary story of Livia "saying yes to Jesus." Through the pages of this study, the reader encountered many more lives transformed by the Spirit of God, like Takashi Yamada. Faith in Christ, conversion to Christ, reconciliation between God and humans and between human and human, and transformed lives remains primary to the core of what it means to be Anabaptist in the 21st century in Lancaster Mennonite Conference.

The study now concludes with the story of a 16th century blacksmith named Bachman, introduced by John L. Ruth, in *The Earth Is the Lord's*. Bachman had a reputation for being an unruly troublemaker with the local officials.

"As long as he had caroused all night," he said, "he had been popular; yet he had begun to feel that he was on the wrong path. In his search for salvation, God had finally led him to the Brothers.(48)

Through the witness of these Anabaptists, he encountered Jesus Christ, and he too found peace with God. His life change was immediate and dramatic. "What convinced him" of the truth of this message, he said, "was they not only taught but also lived accordingly." But it did not end his troubles with the local authorities.

When he was arrested with a group of Anabaptists, he was recognized as the former troublemaker of his past. The police chief in the region recognized him and acknowledged, "It's true," ... "you were godless, [and] there is no one in the entire area with whom I had more trouble than you." The officials could not deny that his life had been transformed. But he was arrested and punished anyway, this time for being an Anabaptist.

Because they began reading the Bible in a different way, they concluded that salvation was more than just spiritual and that in God's present reign ethics had present day implications.

NOTE TO STUDENTS

This multimedia curriculum package with a companion Student Study Guide grew out of the work of the Core Values Council. The Council worked toward the goal of the discovery "of a center of values that will commend themselves to the constituency and help the formation of a common core of beliefs and values in the years to come." This goal focused both the assigned work and the outcome upon the desire to become a missional Lancaster Mennonite Conference that envisions new, revitalized, and multiplying congregations. With this focus, the Council worked with two objectives:

1. To move Lancaster Mennonite Conference core values from an implicit to an explicit level.
2. To discover shared values around which Conference congregations can unite in dynamic ministry.

Explore the Core first introduces the term, "missional Anabaptist identity." Next, Jesus Christ, the center of faith and life, is explored. Then the study makes successive revolutions around this center. The way of seeing is first, followed by a way of reading and living. This cycle of the three circles then repeats with the next set of values. The diagram on the next page illustrates this cycle through the values. The headings at the top of each page in the study guide identify the circle under investigation.

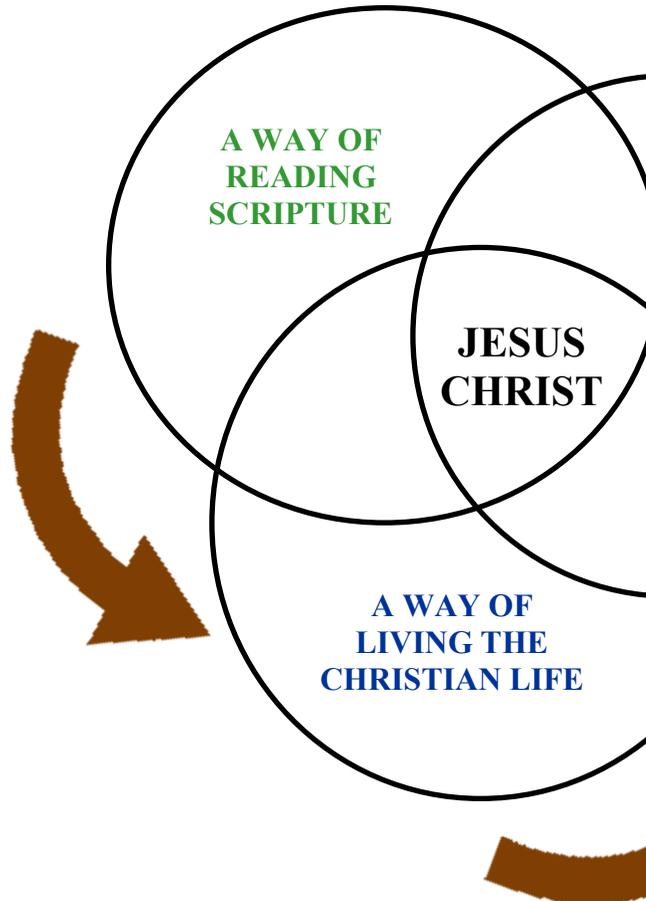
Students can also supplement this study with John Roth's book, *Beliefs* (Herald Press, 2005). Enjoy your adventure with *Explore the Core*.

Core Values Reflecting a Missional Anabaptist Identity (p. 8)

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ (p. 11) ...

...we Value a Way of Reading Scripture through Jesus

- 1 we value the reading of Scripture that leads to authentic obedience to Jesus Christ. We understand Scripture through Christ, discerned in community, and guided by the Holy Spirit. (p. 17)
- 2 we value Anabaptist expressions of this way of reading such as the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. We encourage disciples to engage in theological reflection. (p. 26)



13 WE CAN TELL OUR STORY

Explore the Core has covered a lot of ground. We looked at a way of seeing the world through God’s reign. We illustrated a particular way of reading the Bible through Christ. We explored ways of living as disciples of Jesus.

The study also introduced you to a number of people and groups along the way. You met Living Stones Fellowship, Livia, Dirk Willems, Takashi Yamada and his friends, Alex, Martin Kendig, Samuel Hines, Gary Harder, Susan Biesecker-Mast, John and others. Now we can consider our story.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value...a way of seeing the world through God's reign; we value...a way of reading Scripture through Jesus; we value...a way of living the Christian life as disciples.

Matthew 9:35 *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*

Matthew 10:5-8 *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

Luke 10:1-2 *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

Colossians 4:5-6 *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

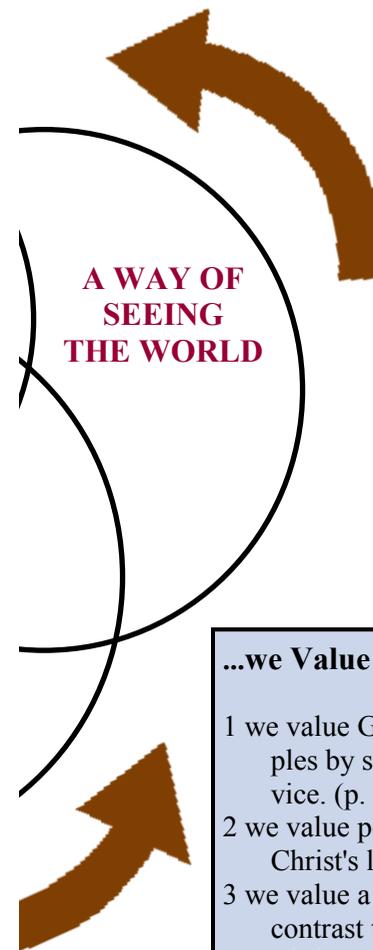
sojourn in the East had enriched them and the newfound friends they left behind in the city. When they entered retirement, they made annual trips to South Florida to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, and they found other ways to be active in volunteer service. John’s alma mater, a Mennonite college, honored his life of service and stewardship in one of their annual alumni awards. John received it in his typical attitude of modesty.

Question: How does one discern between what is “basic simplicity” and what is “unnecessary luxury”? Ponder the African proverb, “What we have, we give,” rather than keep.

Two Approaches Compared	
Materialism	Stewardship
One with the most toys wins	Needs rather than wants
Throwaway culture	Recycle/share
Me/my/individual	We/our/global
Present focus	Future focus

Question: What specific areas of contemporary life do you think require the attention of Christian stewardship?

Read chapter 7 and chapter 9, pages 118-119 of *Beliefs*.

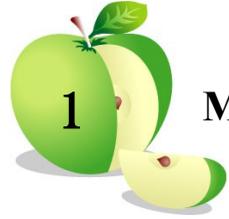


...we Value a Way of Seeing the World through God’s Reign

- 1 we value radical allegiance to the reign of God above all other powers. (p. 14)
- 2 we value believers baptism as a sign of new life in Christ that includes a vital commitment to a local congregation. (p. 23)
- 3 we value the rich and varied expressions of culture, race, language, and worship emerging through the work of the Holy Spirit. (p. 31)

...we Value a Way of Living the Christian Life as Disciples

- 1 we value God’s mission of reconciliation to the world and participate as sent disciples by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ through worship, witness, and service. (p. 19)
- 2 we value peace as a way of living that is deeply rooted in the Gospel and expresses Christ’s love in all human relationships, even with our enemies. (p. 29)
- 3 we value a congregation of disciples who lives intentionally as a culturally-relevant contrast to the world where mutual care, accountability and discernment are Christ-centered and Spirit-led. (p. 34)
- 4 we value the Christian home as a primary setting for nurturing faith and healthy relationships. (p. 37)
- 5 we value simplicity, integrity, justice, and personal and global stewardship that reflect Christ and honor God. (p. 40)



1 MISSIONAL ANABAPTIST IDENTITY

So what is a missional church? A missional church recognizes that it is sent by a missionary God into the world to be a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the Kingdom of God. A missional Anabaptist identity is not a relic of the 16th century Anabaptist movement. Rather it is a call to church renewal around the biblical text with a particular way of reading, seeing, and living. This approach to church renewal remains as relevant today as it was 500 years ago.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ ...

Matthew 9:35 *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*

Matthew 10:5-8 *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

Luke 10:1-12 *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

Colossians 4:5-6 *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Dwelling Together in God’s Word

Consider Luke 10:1-12. Focus attention on God’s mission. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? What is God doing? What are people doing? What should our congregation do?

ployment in a large Eastern seaboard city. He rented an apartment there, his wife still living in the Midwest. Being Mennonite, on a Sunday morning he visited the small Mennonite, urban congregation near his apartment.

The church welcomed him, and when his wife joined him a few months later, both of them became active in the fellowship of the church. The congregation started a renovation project on their building, the contractor performed shoddy work, and church folks were left in the lurch. In his spare time, John joined in and helped with the renovations, swinging a sledge hammer to knock down cement steps that were to be removed. Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers came to the rescue in this “Mennonite disaster,” as the pastor’s teenage son called it.



John was one of several members of the congregation who counseled against taking the contractor to court. He was a professed Christian brother. Mediation was used, but the contractor’s promise to make restitution was minimally fulfilled. It was a brother like John, who was “there for such a time as this,” along with the MDS volunteers, who helped the congregation work through their frustration and aggravation with the contractor and to ponder what it would look like to “wash his feet.” One member of the congregation said that experiencing the good work donated by the MDS folks helped him let go of his animosity towards the contractor.

John’s former employer matched their employees’ giving to non-profits. John made use of that opportunity to multiply his generous giving. He discovered ways to plan his giving in order to minimize the amount of taxes he owed. John became aware of a Mennonite youth in the city where he and his wife Martha now lived, who was headed to college, and could benefit from financial assistance. He set up a scholarship fund at a Mennonite college to benefit students from that city who enrolled at the college.

John and Martha lived simply – in the clothes they wore, the vehicles they drove, and the home in which they lived back in the Midwest. They wanted to use their education and financial resources in ways that blessed others and that extended Christ’s kingdom of peace. Earlier in their life, they had chosen to adopt several children when they were unable to have their own, sharing family with those who were without family.

What would it “look like to wash his feet?”

When John’s former employer called him back, they returned to the Midwest, but their urban



SIMPLICITY, INTEGRITY, JUSTICE & STEWARDSHIP

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value simplicity, integrity, justice, and personal and global stewardship that reflect Christ and honor God.

Matthew 5:37 *Simply let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No” be “No”; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*

Matthew 6:31-33 *So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well.*

Luke 14:11 *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

1 Timothy 6:6, 10, 17-19 *But godliness with contentment is great gain....For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs....*

Micah 6:8 *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Matthew 6:24-34. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (*word, phrase, action, etc.*)? How does the passage relate simplicity, integrity, justice, and stewardship? What practical approaches come to mind?

Thinking and Talking Together

Being laid off by his company was a blow for John. What would he do next in his research career? There were no openings near their Midwestern home. Through a friend, John found em-

Thinking and Talking Together

Lancaster Conference churches face some emerging challenges to the mission and message of the church that are new to modern Christians. American society increasingly ignores the church. In many respects our situation has much in common with the church of the early centuries. As Mennonites begin to realize that the church now lives at the margins of society, there is a growing sense for changing how we understand our mission. For example, Conrad Kanagy, in his study of Mennonites in the United States, informs us that Mennonite church members want pastoral care, but pastors want to equip and send members into ministry.

A missional Anabaptist identity intentionally works with these kind of challenges. A missional church provides Christians with tools to work effectively from the margins of society. We can



West End MC Sending Service

work in partnership with the Holy Spirit in leading people to Christ as we heed the call to “go, make disciples, baptize and teach.” We seek to give the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ priority over our comforts and concerns as we care for others.

If the assumption that there is no longer a prior culturally-conditioned starting point for the church in North American society, then the following question is important to answer: Can the church be a relevant “contrast society” in the world but not of it?

Living Stones Fellowship answers this question with a resounding, “Yes!” But it takes some thinking “outside the box” and some counter-cultural ap-

proaches. Several local campgrounds have opened their doors to *Out of the Box Ministries* at Living Stones. This ministry invites the visitors at the campground to a Sunday Morning worship service held in the campground. Testimonies, worship, teaching, and children’s activities are available for campers to glean from as they enjoy God’s creation outdoors. Afterwards, all enjoy light refreshments and lots of fellowship.

Being church outside the four walls leads the Living Stones congregation to take a day camp/VBS activity into the Little Britain Trailer Park rather than expect the residents to come to their church building.

When sharing the good news with strangers, ministering in mercy, and proclaiming God’s love

for the world through Christ to young and old alike occurs both inside and outside the church walls, then I suggest a missional journey is underway. This is a missional Anabaptist identity.

They talk about God in everyday language.

Tim Keller, author of a helpful, short essay titled, “The Missional Church” offers five things missional churches do to engage their communities. First, they talk about God in *everyday* language. Second, they enter the culture and re-tell the *culture’s* stories with the Gospel. Third, they train themselves for *public* life and vocation in order to invite others to Jesus. Fourth, they *create* Christian community which is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Lastly, they practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level.

Question: How have you observed public society treating the church as irrelevant?

Approaches Compared	
Missional	nonMissional/Traditional
Evangelism is a lifestyle	Evangelism is a program
All Christians equipped and sent	Leaders equipped and sent
Countercultural church on the margins	Mainstream church in society
Mission is across the street and around the world	Mission occurs in foreign lands

Question: Where might Jesus be sending you as a church? What might the Spirit be calling your congregation to do in ministry?

God, the loving Redeemer, received that honest prayer of a creative, but broken, person. Ever creative, too, God set about putting the end of that string in her hand, fragment by fragment... healing pain in ensuing years by means of listeners who prayed, invested time, confronted, called for accountable behavior, and demonstrated unconditional love in a costly relationship.

Question: What does it mean to love unconditionally when an adult child departs from convictions you lived and taught?

Approaches Compared	
Church as primary source for Christian teaching/nurture; home supplements	Home, primary context for Christian teaching/nurture; church supplements
Family relationships structured by hierarchy	Adult family relationships based on mutuality and gifting
Priority on success	Priority on faithfulness to God
Child-centered/permissive parenting	God-centered parenting, freedom balanced with discipline

Question: How might you demonstrate relationships as spiritual family to those not so blessed by a birth family?

Read ch. 8, pages 99-104 and ch. 9, pp. 119-120 of *Beliefs*.

Thinking and Talking Together

“I’d like to claim as my ancestors some of those people buried in the church cemetery!” She spoke passionately, if not angrily, recounting the estrangement of life as an adult distanced emotionally from family who had stolen her childhood innocence by sexual and emotional abuse. So many times she had confided this painful story: valued only for what she could *do*, not for who she *was*; one parent’s waking moments at the bar, the other, dead. Traumatized, emotionally fragile, and longing for love, she soon threatened friendships of others who cared but felt “put upon” as she disregarded reasonable boundaries of time and space in a search to belong.

“I want what you have.”

Another venue, time and people—an extended family reunion. “The heritage we have is wonderful! Our parents and grandparents loved the Lord, took us to church whenever the doors opened and lived what they taught. They weren’t perfect, but we were loved and family life was wholesome. They taught us to work, to be responsible and care for each other. And remember how they sang! Papa would say, ‘Alright, girls, you do the dishes; come, Mama, play the piano and let’s sing.’ Sunday morning we awakened to their singing, too. Oh, we are so blessed!” (*Pitchforks and Pitchpipes*: Hiestand Publishers, 1990, 228). When the matriarchal eldest cousin was about to relocate to a distant coast we sang, “Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love....” Oh, we are blessed indeed! To God be the glory!

The first woman above, broken and alienated, responds after hearing public testimony by the “blessed” one who also suffered losses through death and other stressful experiences but harbored no bitterness. Listen in now as the first woman opens the conversation:

“I want what you have.”

“It’s important that you want Jesus more than you want his gifts.”

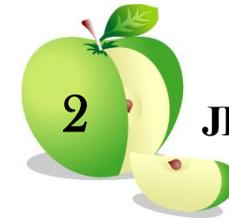
“That’s what I want but I’ve been so dishonest all my life!”

“Are you willing to make things right?”

“I wouldn’t know where to begin.”

“That’s not your problem; that’s *God’s* problem, *if you’re willing.*”

“Lord, my life is like a tangled-up ball of string. Will you find the end and put it in my hand?” she prayed.

**JESUS IS THE CENTER**

As followers of Jesus, our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ. From this center, we gain a greater understanding of God the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit. We are continually being transformed from the power and the effects of sin to a life lived out from this Christ center. Through Jesus Christ, we have a full revelation of God, interpret the Scriptures, view our world, and live a Christian life as a faith community.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value a way of seeing the world, reading the Bible, and living the Christian life.

Matthew 5:21-48 *You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you.*

John 1:1-18 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 14:5-13 *Don't you know me. ...even after I have been among you such a long time.*

John 17:20-23 *As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

1 Corinthians 3:11 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Colossians 1:15 *And He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation.*

Hebrews 1:2 *God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways in these last days has spoken to us in his Son ...*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider John 1:1-14. Focus attention on faith and life centered in Jesus. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? What is God doing? Why should our faith and life be centered in Jesus Christ? Why not center on God, the Spirit, or the Bible?

Thinking and Talking Together

Myron Augsburger tells the story of an opportunity his wife, Esther, had to point another woman to Jesus. Esther had been leading a series of Christian artist conferences and through one of these met Livia. Livia, “the curator of the National Art Gallery in Cluj...” was not a Christian. For the first part of the conference, Livia was on the fringes, critical, and even somewhat obnoxious. However, Esther kept relating to her and recruited her to help prepare the exhibit each conference arranged for the public to see at the end of their assembly.

*Say YES
to Jesus!*

“Late at night, while walking back from this work to their lodging, Livia suddenly said to Esther, ‘I am so wicked, ...I can't come to God. My husband and I are having a terrible time. I'm so wicked, I just can't come to God.’

“Esther simply said, ‘Livia, you don't have to come to God. God has already come to you. All you need to do is to say yes to Jesus.’

“Livia looked at her in some surprise: ‘Do you mean that?’

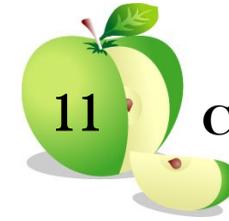
“‘Yes,’ Esther said, ‘all you need to do is just say yes to Jesus.’

“The next day they participated with the group in hosting the exhibit. The following morning as Esther was leading the closing session, she felt led to open the meeting for others to speak: ‘Some of you may like to share what has happened to you in this conference.’

“Before she could finish the statement, Livia was out of her seat and hurrying to the front. ‘I just want to tell you all that I'm saying yes to Jesus.’

By Esther Augsburger

“The crowd was joyful in response and quite supportive. What followed was further evidence of a changed life. She went back to Cluj, began attending the local Baptist church, was baptized, and became involved with such fine spirit that her husband was supportive of her in the change. A year later Esther and I taught for a week at the seminary in Osijek, Croatia, and at the conclusion we made a trip to Romania. On Sunday morning I preached in the



CHRISTIAN HOME

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value the Christian home as a primary setting for nurturing faith and healthy relationships.

Mark 10:2-9 ...from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (cf. Gen 2:18-25)

Matthew 19:9whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.

John 8:11Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go..., from now on do not sin again.”

Ephesians 5:21 ...be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:8 To the unmarried...I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am.

Ephesians 6:1-4 ...do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel...Keep these words that I am commanding you...Recite them to your children and talk about them...at home,...away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Ephesians 5:17-6:10. Focus attention on family relationships. Respond to these questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does the passage relate husband and wife? Parent and child? How does the passage relate Christian home environment to relationships between individuals?

rehab programs had failed to get her off drugs, but that prison and God made it possible for her this time. She encouraged them to attend church when they are released.

As I reflect on what I wrote 12 years ago, I'm still inspired by the courage that Deb has shown in not returning to her old way of life! She has persevered for 15 years, even though life is often not easy. Sadly, most of her friends who were addicts have since died from overdoses.

Today, as a pastor, I keep wondering if churches are doing enough to extend grace to people who struggle with addictions. And in what ways are we maybe "addicted" to staying with what is comfortable or easy...instead of embracing the new ways that God may invite us to extend grace to others? May we have the courage to allow God to guide us one step at a time, in being communities that extend grace! (excerpted and updated by Marilyn Kurtz, from her article "One Step at a Time," originally printed in June 1996 *Missionary Messenger*.)

Question: How do you learn about and then reach out to the needs in the community around you?

Two Approaches Compared	
Individualism	Christian community
Crowd	Collective
Survival of the fittest	Weaker are necessary

Question: How can the congregation help the lone prophetic voice to be heard when the voice expresses things that go against the established norm and community consensus? How does the congregation help individuals to "yield" to the community when tempted to go his or her own individual way?

Read chapter 11 of *Beliefs*.

Baptist church. Sitting in front of the pulpit with radiant attention was Livia, responding to the word and sharing in the worship of Christ. Jesus is building his church!" (*Robe of God*, 47)

The New Testament supplies an abundant list of reasons for placing Jesus at the center of our faith and life. As the large box below shows, other options for a center are possible. At the same time the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition has taken a different approach, one which has a strong biblical connection. We need not apologize for placing Jesus at the center of our faith and life.

Jesus Christ is the savior sent by God
 The church accepted the name Christian
 We believe on the name of Jesus
 The foundation and cornerstone is Jesus
 Jesus is the first-born from the dead.
 Jesus is our elder brother
 Jesus is the coming king.

Jesus is fully God and fully human
 John the Baptist pointed to Jesus
 Jesus reveals the Father;
 Jesus sent the Spirit
 Spirit testifies to Jesus
 We are told to follow Christ
 We are told to become christlike
 Jesus is head of the church

Good reasons exist for placing many of the options in the box below at the center of Christian life. In an effort to practice Christian unity as much as possible at the local level, we need to respect the approach other traditions take. At the same time, we need not agree with them.

Question: Why does it matter where one's center lies as long as the center is Christian, biblical, and spiritual? Is a story like Livia's essential for a Christ-centered faith? Why?

Approaches Compared	
Other Traditions	Anabaptism: Jesus is the Center
God is the center	The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob is Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
Church is the center	Jesus is building his church
Bible is the center	Bible testifies to Jesus Christ
Tradition is the center	I handed on to you what I received: that Christ died for our sins
Spirit is the center	The Spirit testifies to Jesus Christ
Self is the center	To live is Christ, to die is gain

Question: In what ways does Scripture support our Anabaptist understanding of our faith and life being centered in Jesus Christ? Are there ways that you feel that Scripture does not support our Anabaptist understanding?

Read chapter 2 of *Beliefs*.



3 ALLEGIANCE TO GOD'S REIGN

Our way of reading Scripture through Christ and living the Christian life as disciples impacts how we see the world through God's reign as Lord. As a result, we value allegiance to Christ above all other temporal commitments. We value believers baptism as a sign of new life in Christ and commitment to Christ's body through the local congregation. We value the richness of human diversity.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value radical allegiance to the reign of God above all other powers.

Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...*

Luke 10:1-12 *...say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."*

Romans 10:9 (1 Corinthians 12:3) *Jesus is Lord...*

Philippians 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Luke 10:1-12. Focus attention on God's reign. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does the passage relate human allegiance to God's authority?

Thinking and Talking Together

Rwanda was considered "the most Christian nation in Africa" in the early 1990s. Ninety percent of the population claimed some Christian church affiliation. Those who study such things referred to Rwanda as a "case study for Christian missions." If western mission effort had been done right anywhere in Africa, Rwanda was considered the place. The East African Revival had roots here. After conversion of the leaders to Catholicism, Rwanda was called a "Christian Kingdom" by the west.

Deb remembers a happy childhood before her parents divorced, but she then turned to drugs to escape her pain. Eventually addicted to heroin, she lived to get "high" and many years later found herself in the Lancaster County Prison. Deb had violated parole regulations from an earlier conviction for using false drug prescriptions.

She finally became fed up with being sick and tired of her life, and cried out for God's help.

Deb began hearing about God from Faye Stauffer and other chaplains. Another inmate kept sharing Bible verses. And songs she heard in prison church services touched her heart.

Deb requested pastoral visits from Jay Garber whom she met at her boyfriend's funeral after his death from an overdose. After her release from prison, I began meeting with her for weekly times of sharing and Bible study.

It was scary for Deb, getting out of prison and facing so many changes. The old way was comfortable, even though she had witnessed its destruction.

Deb realized she needed to take one day at a time and really learn to trust God's direction. A couple from our church rented her an apartment; another couple helped her buy a car; and many gave gifts at her housewarming.

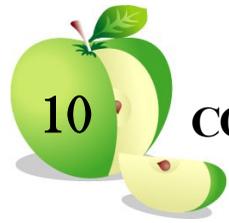
Deb was hired in the kitchen at the Mennonite Home and has made many friends there. Her 17-year-old son lives with her, and her 7-year-old daughter joins them on Deb's days off work.

Following her recent baptism at New Danville Mennonite Church, a beaming Deb said, "I love this church. I wish we could come every day!"

Deb has a heart of compassion for hurting people, especially for some of her friends still struggling with addictions. In the past two years, several friends have died, and Deb asked if she could invite other friends to New Danville for memorial services. As some of our church family got to know her friends, we decided to invite them for informal coffeehouse times instead of just seeing them at memorial services.

After several monthly coffeehouses, we were overjoyed to have several of our new friends attend our Sunday morning services. One couple is now coming regularly and have joined Deb and me in our Bible study during Sunday school.

Deb shared her testimony recently at a prison service for women inmates. That experience helped her compare who she used to be with who she is today. She told the women that seven



10 CONTRAST COMMUNITY

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value a congregation of disciples who lives intentionally as a culturally-relevant contrast to the world where mutual care, accountability and discernment are Christ-centered and Spirit-led.

Matthew 16:18 *I will build my church...*

Matthew 18:20 *...where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*

Acts 15:28 *It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit ...*

Romans 8:29 *Those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.*

1 Corinthians 12:27 *...you are Christ's body and individually members of it.*

Galatians 5:15 *If you keep biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Focus attention on the church as Christ's body. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does the passages relate the members to each other? How does the passage relate Christ's body to Jesus?

Thinking and Talking Together

"Several times I almost died from overdosing," my friend Deb Musser told me, "but I guess even God didn't want me." Then she smiles, her face brightens and a twinkle comes to her eyes. She adds, "God must have a special reason for keeping me alive. It's like I'm on a journey with God, but I'm just not sure where he's taking me!"

Through the years, one step at a time, God has walked with Deb in pain and loss, although she may not have realized it at the time.

The Hutu genocide of the Tutsis and the Tutsi defense against the Hutu began on April 6, 1994 shortly after the president's plane was shot down by a ground to air missile. A *Time* magazine cover will report, "There are no devils left in hell," the missionary said. "They are all in Rwanda." By August, the killing is over. Genocide, a war, 800,000 deaths, and perhaps two million refugees in neighboring countries all in 100 days in the most Christian nation in Africa.

What went wrong in the Christian Kingdom where ninety percent of the population claimed church affiliation as a result of a successful western missionary strategy? Over 100,000 people were arrested for war crimes in a country that was a case study for Christian missions.

"There are no devils left in hell," the missionary said. "They are all in Rwanda."

In his recent book *Mere Discipleship* (Brazos, 2003, p. 15-8), Lee Camp considers this apple in the eye of the western missionary movement and draws some scary conclusions. In Rwanda, "...the genocide demonstrated—in a graphic and horrific way—that the Western Christianity imported into the heart of Africa apparently failed to create communities of *disciples*."

Camp continues, "...with 'Christian Hutus' slaughtering 'Christian Tutsis' (and vice versa), 'Christian' apparently served as a faith brand name—a spirituality, or a religion—but not a commitment to a common Lord." Is Christianity, faith in Jesus Christ, a brand, a logo, an image, that has no connection to a resurrected and living Lord? Does this Living Lord make any claims on the behavior of those who claim the brand name?

But Camp is not done yet. He pushes the point very deep into the soul of the Christian. "Could it be that 'Jesus is Lord' has become one of the most widespread Christian lies?" What allegiance does the Christian truly have to the Kingdom of God and to the Lord Jesus Christ? Does Jesus make any claims upon our way of living as disciples? Or is it all just image? Just capitalist, Madison Avenue branding and fluff.

Camp asks Christians in the west to consider if they are any different than those who live in Rwanda. "We American Christians, are we any different?" Camp asks, "... *could we do the same thing?*" Those who know their American history know that we already have. "How," Camp asks, "could southern Christians slaughter their northern Christian brothers? How could northern disciples make widows out of their southern sisters in Christ?" A haunting question. "Over the course of the war, six hundred thousand men were slaughtered—most of whom claimed Jesus as Lord."

WANTED FOR GENOCIDE

				
ARRESTED		ARRESTED		ARRESTED
FELICIEEN KABUGA AUGUSTIN BIZIMANA JEAN-BAPTISTE GATEETE AUGUSTIN BIZIMANA THARCISSE RENZHO				
				
ARRESTED		ARRESTED		
DELPHONSE HATEGESHAMANA AUGUSTIN NSHABANE DELPHONSE NSHABANE PROTAS MPIRYANYA CALLISTE NZABONIMANA				
YUSUF JOHN MUNYAKAZI, RYANDIKAYO, CHARLES SIKUBWABO, ALOYS NDIMBATI				

600,000 people in the 1860s and 800,000 in the 1990s. Where does the allegiance of Christians lie? To their ethnic tribe? To their economic system? To their nation? Or to God’s reign on the earth and to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Question: How does the horror and tragedy of Rwanda speak to our understanding of what it means to be a Christian and a disciple of Jesus?

Two Approaches Compared	
OT priest/king model	NT and early church model
Allegiance to nation	Allegiance to kingdom of God
Temple allied with nation	Church separate from state

Question: How do you handle events that expect giving honor to the nation (pledge of allegiance, National Anthem, Fourth of July celebrations)?

Read ch. 9, p. 117-118 and ch. 10, pages 140-141 of *Beliefs*.

Question: Ken Nafziger, a Mennonite music professor, says, “The question is not, ‘Is this my music taste or not?’ but ‘What will help people to worship?’” How might you apply that perspective more broadly?

Two Approaches Compared	
Mennonite ethnocentricity	Mennonite supraethnicity
Mennonite Game	Jesus: the name above all names
Swiss-German heritage	Neither Jew nor Greek
Pennsylvania pioneer origins	The earth is the Lord’s
“Menno”nite from Menno Simons	First called Christians at Antioch

Question: Patrick Keifert said, “To become a transformed church we must begin by dwelling in the study of Scripture and doing so with people you don’t normally do it with to gain fresh perspectives.” Share an example of when you gained “fresh perspectives” by doing so.

No reading in *Beliefs* for this session.

Thinking and Talking Together

Toronto, one of Canada's largest and most culturally diverse cities, is the setting for a long history of cross-cultural relationships at Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC). Pastor Gary Harder notes special happenings in 2004, which “pushed them another notch beyond their Russian Mennonite (ethnic) roots.” (Footnote Leader magazine, Winter ‘04-05, pp.18-19)

“We were one in Christ. Period!”

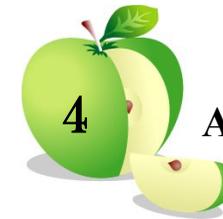
They commissioned Bock Ki Kim for ministry among Korean people and received seven new members from Korean Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, and Mennonite Brethren backgrounds. Four were non-white. That service “tugged deeply on my heart,” Harder said. Further, TUMC, which shares its building with a refugee services ministry and a Spanish church, connects daily across a spectrum of cultures. While “partners influence each other in many significant and positive ways, they also struggle with differing understandings of each other's faith, culture and worship patterns.”

Following an intense discernment process in which they reached consensus on some issues but not on others, Harder's 2003 experience at Mennonite World Conference in Zimbabwe, Africa, wonderfully renewed his spirit. He discovered profound unity in what seemed like one of the most diverse congregations ever assembled. Among those nearly 7,000 people, Gary felt an overwhelming sense of a massive peoplehood from around the world, all committed to Christ, all identified as Anabaptist, yet diverse in culture, language, color, politics, and theology. “And,” he said, “none [of the differences] mattered; we were one in Christ. Period!” He returned home more relaxed and without anxiety about diversity and more passionately committed to a unity in Christ that can embrace enormous diversity.

Harder suggests, “In a small way our congregations, with their difference, can become microcosms of Mennonite World Conference. We need to learn to celebrate the diversity, struggle deeply with our differences, and remember that what matters is our deep unity in Christ.”



By Luis Haro



A WAY OF READING

Our way of seeing the world and living the Christian life impacts how we read Scripture through Jesus. This approach to the Bible is different than some other Christians, and as a result, we reach some different conclusions than other traditions reach.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value the reading of Scripture that leads to authentic obedience to Jesus Christ. We understand Scripture through Christ, discerned in community and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 24:27 *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

John 5:39 *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me...*

Colossians 2:9-10 *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ...*

Hebrews 1:1-2 *In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...*

Hebrews 12:18, 24 *You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm. But you have come to Mount Zion ...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Hebrews 1:1-2, 12:18-24. Focus attention on the contrasts presented. Respond to these questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? What does the passage say about Jesus? How might the passage relate to how we read Scripture?

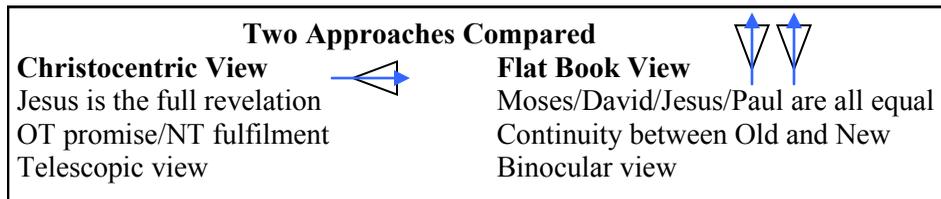
Thinking and Talking Together

In 1569 Dirk Willems was apprehended at Asperen, Holland. He was an Anabaptist. The story of his arrest, recorded in the *Martyrs Mirror*, states that he was pursued by a thief-catcher while the temperature was cold enough to freeze standing water. In his attempt to escape, Willems ran across a frozen pond. While Willems crossed the ice safely, the thief-catcher broke through the ice and fell into the freezing water. When Willems realized that his enemy might drown, he stopped, returned across the ice at great peril, and helped him get out of the freezing water. The *Martyrs Mirror* says that “by doing so, he certainly saved the thief-catcher’s life.” The end result was that Willems was recaptured and then executed by burning.



A Lancaster Mennonite Conference pastor recently made an observation about the capture of Dirk Willems and an Anabaptist approach to Scripture. Dirk Willem’s first thoughts, when his pursuer broke through the ice, could have been the Old Testament story that most closely paralleled his experience. This would surely be God coming to his rescue, just as God rescued the children of Israel by allowing their pursuers to drown in the Red Sea and providing for their narrow escape. Instead, Willems looked to Jesus and his call to “Love your enemies...,” and to “Bless those who persecute you...” Willems demonstrated by his behavior a christocentric approach to reading Scripture that led to an authentic and costly obedience rather than a flat-book approach that gives equal weight to Old and New Testaments that might have saved his life.

Question: When Jesus speaks on numerous Old Testament issues in Matthew 5:21-48 with his “You have heard it said...but I say...,” formula, what position was he taking with respect to his person and the Bible?



Question: Do we really need to “interpret” Scripture in order to know how to live as Christians in, but not of, the world?

Read chapter 3 and 4 of *Beliefs*.



This way of seeing the world turns upside down social, cultural, political, ethnic, gender, economic, tribal, and racial conventions of every age. This way of seeing thus impacts our way of living the Christian life as disciples.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value the rich and varied expressions of culture, race, language, and worship emerging in our midst through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 8:10, 11 *Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

Acts 15:7-9 *Peter...said to them, “My brothers, you know that...God made a choice among you, that...the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God... testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and...has made no distinction between them and us.”*

Revelation 7:9, 10 *...there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...*

Psalms 22:27 *All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Acts 15:6-11. Focus attention on God’s attitude toward Jews and Gentiles. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does the passage relate difference and diversity to God’s dealings with humanity? How does the passage address Christian response to diversity?

change society.” In one meeting, a young man challenged Hines’ relevancy to the South African situation. “The youth stood up in the audience and shouted, ‘Your position is too soft!’”



Hines responded “to the young man in a straightforward manner, meeting him on his own terms rather than being judgmental.

“As a revolutionary you say, ‘There is a problem, and I am going out to solve it, and if you get in my way, I’ll kill you.’ ‘Is my interpretation of your position correct?’

“‘Yes,’ the youth responded.

“‘I too am a revolutionary,’ said Hines, ‘but one who is a reconciler. I say, There is a problem, and I am going out to solve it, and if you get in my way, I’ll lay down my life for you!’ Now which one is soft?’”

Augsburger concludes that Hines was able to respond in love with a peaceful spirit that “met the young man where he was and gave him an alternative to ponder.” (*Robe of God*, 32)

if you get in my way, I’ll kill you

Question: What do the following passages say about peace, justice, and racial harmony? Matthew 5:9, 43-48; Romans 12:19-21; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 2:1-10; 11-22; Colossians 1:20; Matthew 22:23 (Micah 6:8); Matthew 25:31-46; James 2:14-17.

Two Approaches Compared	
Just War	Peace
Love may mean killing another person	Love never means killing
Failure to intercede violently means shared guilt with the aggressor	Aggressor responsible for their own actions

Question: The Old Testament command, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” appears many times in the New Testament, including in the words of Jesus. How do Mennonites seek to practice Christian charity within the global family of faith?

Read ch. 8, pages 105-110 and ch. 9, pages 111-117 of *Beliefs*.



RECONCILIATION

Our way of reading Scripture and seeing the world impacts how we live the Christian life as disciples. Reconciliation speaks not only of peace with God but also to how we relate to one another as disciples of Jesus and citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value God’s mission of reconciliation to the world and participate as sent disciples by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through worship, witness, and service.

Matthew 28:18-20 ...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Isaiah 61:1, 2 The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

Matthew 25:37-40 Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

John 20:21 Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. We are Christ’s ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, “Be reconciled to God!”

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. Focus attention on what God has done in Christ. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? What has God done in Christ? How might this passage relate worship, witness and service?

Thinking and Talking Together

Takashi Yamada, a Japanese Mennonite pastor and leader in the Mennonite World Conference, told a story that wove together his faith story with the story of two other Asian Mennonites (James McClendon et al., "Reconciliation in the Church," in Baptist Roots, Judson Press, 1999, p. 367). "Several years ago I was invited by the Taiwanese Mennonite Church to spend some time with them," Yamada reported. "While I was there," he said, "my dear Taiwanese friend, Pastor Lin, introduced me to one of his church members, a Chinese Christian who had once fought against the Japanese Army as a soldier when he was in mainland China." A Taiwanese Mennonite pastor (Lin) a visiting Japanese Mennonite pastor (Yamada), to a Chinese Mennonite Christian living in Taiwan.

The church is a community of God's people surpassing their racial, national and cultural human ties.

Some history helps grasp the full texture of this story. Japan's 1894 invasion of China was concluded by treaty in 1895. Among other things, China was forced to cede the island of Taiwan to Japan at that time and Japan occupied Taiwan for the next 50 years. Japanese colonization included a rigorous effort at Japanization—the attempt to replace Chinese culture and tradition with that of Japan. Then in 1931, Japan invaded China again. The war escalated, and, by 1938, the Japanese controlled all the major cities and had complete control of the entire coastline. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japan drafted Taiwanese men to fight for them. China continued its fight against the Japanese until Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945 after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. War reparations required Japan to return Taiwan to China, but the Chinese government takeover of the island after 50 years caused widespread resentment. The unrest resulted in an uprising in 1947 that was quickly suppressed with serious loss of life. Two months later, Taiwan was again proclaimed a province of China.

Some church history is also helpful. Christianity arrived in China in 7th century but the First Mennonites to China did not arrive until 1905. The Jesuits brought Christianity to Japan in the



Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value the way of Peace as a way of living that is deeply rooted in the Gospel and expresses Christ's love in all human relationships, even with our enemies.

Matthew 5:3-10 *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.*

Matthew 5:38-42 *But I say, don't resist an evil person! If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too.*

Matthew 5:43-48 *I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.*

Romans 5:6-10 *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at the right time and died for the ungodly. ...while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son....*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Romans 5:1-11. Focus attention on God's attitude and approach to humanity. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does God deal with his enemies in Christ? How does the passage connect Jesus to God's attitude toward his enemies?

Thinking and Talking Together

Myron Augsburger, in his book, *The Robe of God*, tells of a tense conversation between Samuel Hines and a South African revolutionary. Hines, pastor of Third Street Church of God in Washington, D.C., spoke throughout the troubled nation of South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle. Hines went to South Africa with a message of "love and nonviolence as the best way to

“If this humbly titled *Confession* came to the governor’s attention, it may have helped to ease his apprehensions of trouble from foreign-born Mennonists. In any case, on May 28, 1715, not long before Pequea’s Martin Kendig sailed back to Europe, Gookin was persuaded to sign a law enabling ‘Religious Societies’ in Pennsylvania ‘to buy, & Enjoy Lands, Tenements & hereditaments.’ Within two years the Mennonist congregation growing at Skippack, fifty miles east of the younger Pequea settlement, could purchase fifty acres specifically ‘for the use and behoof’ of their poor members as well as for a meetinghouse-schoolhouse and graveyard.” (The *Earth Is the Lord’s*, 180-1)

The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Herald Press, 1995, p. 8) lists a number of ways that Mennonite confessions of faith have served the church over the centuries.

1. They provide guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture with the confession itself is subject to the authority of the Bible.
2. They provide guidance for belief and practice. In this connection, a written statement should support but not replace the lived witness of faith.
3. They build a foundation for unity within and among the churches.
4. They offer an outline for instructing new church members and for sharing information with inquirers. In other words, they are missional.
5. They give an updated interpretation of belief and practice in the midst of changing times.
6. They help in discussing Mennonite belief and practice with other Christians and people of other faiths.

Question: Of the six uses of confessions, which use(s) did those early Mennonists draw on? Which ones does your church use?

Two Approaches Compared	
Creedal View	Confessional View
Universal	Local
Timeless	Occasional
Ancient	Contemporary, current

Question: Which confession of faith does your congregation use? Why?

Read chapter 1 of *Beliefs*.

16th century but the Mennonites arrived in 1949 after the second world war. Christianity arrived in Taiwan with Dutch in 17th century, but the First Mennonites came to Taiwan in 1948.

Pastor Lin, a pastor in the Taiwanese Mennonite Church, suffered military oppression from the Japanese and from the Chinese. Japan forced Taiwanese men to fight in WWII for Japan against China and the United States. The Chinese Christian from the Taiwanese Mennonite Church fought the Japanese during the second Sino-Japan War. China repressed the Taiwanese after WWII.

Takashi Yamada attended the Japanese Naval Academy and fought in WWII against the United States and China. Yamada, with great shame at the time, refused to accept a kamikaze assignment to fly a plane into an advancing US Navy ship. Thus he lived to tell this story. He was baptized in 1952 by Mennonite missionaries from the United States, the country that dropped two atomic bombs on his country.



There existed in the national histories of all three men a time when they were all in violent conflict with each other. There was “bad blood” between them and each had adequate reason to hate the national and ethnic origin of the other. Such tragic backgrounds often lay the groundwork for “holy war” and “ethnic cleansing.”

“When we faced each other,” Yamada explained, “it was this Chinese brother who first stretched out his right hand for shaking hands, saying, ‘We were once enemies of each other, but now we are brothers in Christ.’ I was struck and moved so deeply by what he did that I just could not help being choked up with tears,” Yamada said.

Yamada concluded his story with this observation. “With this tragic historical background, each one of us met together there, and found that we were brothers in Christ. Furthermore at the back of the conversion and Christian life of each one of the three of us, there were the toiling works of our missionary brothers from overseas. There I see the higher spiritual solidarity in Christ beyond our racial and cultural solidarity. The church is a community of God's people surpassing their racial, national and cultural human ties.”

Question: In your local congregation, what issues of reconciliation make it difficult for you to reach out to the lost or for seekers to feel welcome among you?

Three Approaches Compared		
Word and Deed	Deed	Word
reconciliation/evangelism/peace a distinct third way	peace/justice liberalism	evangelism fundamentalism

Question: How has God uniquely gifted your congregation to reach out to the community with the Good News? What particular need or group of people in your community is your church called to meet or to reach?

Read chapter 12 of *Beliefs*.

Thinking and Talking Together

In *The Earth Is the Lord's*, John Ruth relates the following story: “Though Martin Kendig would be a major land dealer for several decades, he himself did not receive Pennsylvania citizenship for thirty-three years—a fact that caused complications for the heirs of some of those who purchased land from him. In that first winter of 1710-11, Kendig must have had an interest in two legislative proposals presented to the Pennsylvania Assembly. These were submitted shortly after the Mennonists had been promised their land grant but before their plantations had been laid out.

“One petition was for a law allowing people ‘who for conscience’ sake cannot take an ‘oath’ the right to ‘affirm’ instead. Another was for an act empowering ‘Religious Societies...to Dispose of Land’ in Pennsylvania. Since the latter bill came before Lieutenant Governor Charles Gookin while the Mennonists were awaiting the location of their own acres ‘in one ...tract,’ we may well suspect that it was they themselves who had asked for such a privilege. In the following years, their agents—Martin Kendig, Hans Funk, and Hans Herr—would certainly ‘dispose’ of thou-

- 1527 Schleithiem Confession
- 1632 Dordrecht Confession
- 1881 Rules and Discipline
- 1921 Christian Fundamentals
- 1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith
- 1995 Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective

sands of acres of Conestoga land to various immigrating members of their own ‘Religious Society.’ Their six-thousand-acre grant—much more land than ten families could clear—seems a clear indication that they were expecting more of their own people. In about five years, Kendig returned to Europe, where leader Benedict Brechbühl was still considering various offers of land for his people.

“In February 1711 Governor Gookin argued that long and bitter experience in England warned against giving religious communities any ‘powers’ to control lands. With this kind of opposition, how could the Mennonists in Gookin’s colony provide proof that they were *not* a danger to government? The nearest thing to such proof would be some kind of confession of faith. When their Swiss grandparents, who had endorsed the Dordrecht Confession in Alsace in 1660, had needed some certification of their benign civil character to show officials in the Palatinate, the Dutch Doopsgezinden had translated that confession into German for them. Now again, in 1711, the Mennonists in Pennsylvania requested and obtained from Amsterdam a new printing of the same German edition. But while helpful to the Mennonists themselves, it was of little use to show their English-speaking officials. So in 1712 Amsterdam helped out again with a new translation in English. The wording of its title page is significant: *The Christian Confession of the Faith of the harmless Christians, in the Netherlands, known by the name of Mennonists*. This was the opening statement of Mennonists in America.



7 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value Anabaptist expressions of this way of reading such as the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. We encourage disciples to engage in theological reflection.

Matthew 15:1-6 ... *He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ..."*

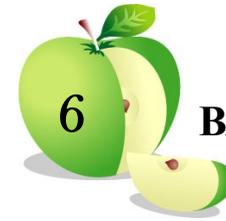
Philippians 2:5-8 ...*being in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Colossians 1:15-18 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*

1 Corinthians 15:1-9 *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:1-9. Focus attention on the historical nature of the account. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does the passages speak to the idea of a confession of faith?



6 BAPTISM

The practice of believers baptism provides a clear example of how a different way of reading the Scripture can lead to different conclusions. Believers baptism draws on a christocentric way of reading. A flat-book approach to the Bible, on the other hand, can provide a rationale to support infant baptism from Scripture.

Because our faith and life are centered in Jesus Christ, we value believers baptism as a sign of new life in Christ that includes a vital commitment to a local congregation.

Matthew 28:19-20 ...*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

Acts 2:38 *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."*

Romans 6:4 *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free -- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

Dwelling Together in God's Word

Consider Acts 2:37-47. Focus attention on baptism. Respond to the following questions. What catches your attention in the verses (a word, a phrase, an action, an idea, a personal connection, etc.)? How does the passage relate belief and baptism? How does the passage relate church and baptism?

Thinking and Talking Together

Alex (not his real name) was a young local political committeeman. His parents' marriage had failed, and his family lived with their mother in a housing project. Alex and his brothers earned a reputation as fighters in any neighborhood dispute. He became involved in substance abuse. He had attended Sunday school as a boy at a nearby Mennonite church. A prayer cluster in that church prayed for him now as a young man. Occasionally his path crossed with that of the pastor of the church.

One day he met the pastor and said he needed to talk. He came to the church and shared with the pastor that he was in trouble with the law. He was ready to commit his life to Jesus. They prayed, and the pastor gave him a Bible with his name and the date written inside the front cover. A short time later, after a church service, Alex told the pastor something spooky was going on inside him. He had different desires than he had before he was a believer. Things he would have wanted to do earlier, evil things, now he chose not to do. He wondered what was going on. The pastor suggested to him that the Holy Spirit was at work in his life.

During this time, Alex was living with his girl friend. They joined with the pastor in pre-marital classes and were soon married. Alex wanted his newfound faith in Christ to be shared by the pastor at the wedding, for family and friends to hear. Some time later, at the baptismal service for Alex and his wife, he invited family and friends to come and hear his testimony in being baptized. He became active in the local Mennonite congregation, continued to invite friends to church whenever there was a Friends Sunday, became a youth leader reaching out to neighborhood young people, and served a term as elder.

... something spooky was going on inside him.

Alex's baptism testified of his life-changing faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. He and his wife desired to start new traditions as a Christian family, different from their families of origin. And they did. They also participated in the local congregational family of God. Alex represented the congregation in district conference gatherings.

Alex's newfound life in Christ was not without trial. Alex and his wife struggled and their marriage came apart. Currently Alex is rebuilding relationships with his growing sons, and he has renewed his commitment to Christ. He continues as a member in a fellowship of believers. He



now mentors men who struggle with patterns of failure similar to his own. The journey of salvation and transformation symbolized by Alex's baptism continues within the community of faith.

Question: What kind of "instruction" should any candidate for baptism and membership in a Mennonite church receive prior to baptism?

Two Approaches Compared	
Believers Baptism	Infant Baptism (Reformed)
Jesus provides the pattern	OT practice of circumcision can amend NT practice
Baptism is a NT practice	Circumcision is an OT type for NT baptism
Only those able to understand and personally confess should be baptized	Household baptism in the NT probably included infants and children

Question: How should a Mennonite congregation respond if a new believer desires baptism but is not ready to make a membership commitment to the local congregation?

Read chapter 5 and 6 of *Beliefs*.