

Shalom!

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Perspectives on Safety and Risk

WHEN I WAS a child growing up in the Rhodesias (now Zambia and Zimbabwe), I did many things that today would likely be considered dangerous. All of us missionary kids loved to climb and play on the rocks at Matopo Mission. I imagine we often climbed barefoot, and I'm sure there were skinned knees and stubbed toes. I rode my bicycle by myself around the mission stations, coming and going from our house pretty much at will. My little brother and I played in the dirt, building roads and towns for his toy cars. When he was still sucking his two middle fingers, he would periodically stop his play and put his fingers in his mouth—no hand-washing first.

We also played in the river, sometimes by ourselves. The river was some distance from our house, so no one watched out the window or from the back porch to make sure we were safe. I loved climbing trees, going up as high as the branches would allow. We had rope swings hung from high horizontal tree branches. I would swing as high as I could or twist the ropes as tightly as possible and then twirl rapidly as the ropes unwound, making me so dizzy I couldn't walk! Again, all this was without adult supervision.

Despite engaging in behavior as a child that would be considered risky today, I don't think of myself as a big risk-taker, and I'm fairly risk-averse. I was reminded of this recently when I read *The Nightingale*, a novel about the risks ordinary French people took during World War II to protect Jews and to work against Nazi occupation (see the book review on page 12). I want to do what is

right, but I don't know whether I would be willing or able to take those kinds of risks.

Risk-taking is a normal part of life. We cannot, and should not, try to avoid every possible risk. At the same time, trying to avoid unnecessary risks is generally considered a responsible thing to do.

This edition of *Shalom!* follows up on a recent "Theology of Risk" policy statement developed by Brethren in Christ World Missions and actions taken by some congregations in response to several church shootings and other acts of community violence. It may stretch your thinking, and you may not agree with every perspective (I don't!). Here are some of the questions you can be thinking about as you read: How should we protect ourselves against the threat of violence? What risks are we willing to take to remain faithful to our pursuing peace core value and commitment to nonviolence? What does discipleship look like and how do we respond in an increasingly violent culture? How do we parent in a world where the risks are great? What is the balance between acknowledging the inevitability of risk and its negative consequences (which are usually not nearly as negative as we fear) and being responsible for protecting ourselves when we can? What kind of risk-taking does Jesus model for us?

We are being forced to have this kind of conversation by what is happening in the culture around us, whether we like it or not. What do you think? I invite your feedback.

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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A Brethren in Christ Theology of Risk

A BRETHREN IN Christ missionary in Southeast Asia is very frugal and looks for the cheapest flights whenever she has to travel. During a time of political unrest in Bangkok, the cheapest flights she could find would have required her to leave one airport and take public transportation to another. She was prepared to risk venturing into a city embroiled in turmoil to get from one airport to the other for the sake of a cheaper flight. Brethren in Christ World Missions (BICWM) here in the U.S. discovered that for less than \$50 more, she could get a flight that did not require a change in airports. The conclusion: when you can significantly minimize risk by spending a little more, it's probably wise to do so.



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While serving in Malawi with BICWM, Jonathan Lloyd and his family experienced a violent home invasion in the middle of the night. They were robbed at knifepoint and threatened with death. Erica was able to call for help, and the police came with guns. In the aftermath of the incident, a police officer told Jonathan he should have a gun, to which Jonathan responded, "I didn't come to Africa to kill people." They did hire a guard company and kept pepper spray on hand as deterrents.

After a period of time back in the U.S., the Lloyd family returned to Malawi for another term. They didn't blame anyone for what had happened, and accepted that they were called to take risks. They were also well aware that they lived much more lavishly than many others nearby—their "stuff" put them at increased risk.

These two stories, ranging from the almost humorous desire to save a mere \$50 to a family experiencing the trauma of a violent home invasion illustrate why BICWM has developed a "Theology of Risk." In addition to addressing situations like these, the policy recognizes that with BICWM's priority for least-reached people groups, there are more security risks than in the past. Some missionaries operate in countries where it is not legal to proselytize and the risk of discovery is always there. Now settled again in the U.S. and leading BICWM, Jonathan's personal encounter with violence and potential death gives him a particularly relevant vantage point from which to help to develop and then implement the new policy.

Previously, BICWM response to risky situations has been on a case-by-case basis. There were usually no substantial conversations about potential risks (beyond the normal health risks) before an individual, couple, or family went to their assignment. For example, Jonathan doesn't recall any real conversation when he and his wife were preparing to go to Malawi the first time. There is a form that missionaries must sign detailing their and their families' wishes "in the eventuality of death," but that doesn't on its own address other potential risky circum-

stances.

The new policy begins by noting that the "New Testament has much to say about danger, courage and risk in the lives of those who follow Jesus Christ and declare the gospel" and lists a number of beliefs based on biblical teaching. It recognizes that "this world can be a most unsettling place, with dangers of many kinds," and names several principles, including (but not limited to):

- We will provide assessments of countries and areas where we have ministry to allow prospective missionaries to consider their area of service wisely and prayerfully.
- We will take action in a crisis incident to support the safety and welfare of our personnel.
- We will not expect our personnel to remain in their location of service during a crisis. We allow them the freedom to leave at any time. The place of relocation will normally be decided in conversation with the team leader and the home office.
- In the event that an evacuation is ordered, we expect our personnel to comply.
- We expect our personnel to consider carefully how their actions may immediately or subsequently put their hosts in danger.

The policy also addresses the specific situation of hostage-taking and what BICWM will and will not do:

- We will make a concerted effort to secure the safe release of hostages. However, we do not pay ransom.
- We value the families of the hostages and recognize their interest in seeing their loved ones released.
- We respect the governments of passport countries and host countries, and we recognize that these governments have an interest in the safe release of the hostages.
- We value the expertise and experience of others who have been involved in hostage situations and will seek their advice and expertise in working through a hostage situation.

BICWM has also contracted with a

faith-based security company to provide training to missions personnel. There are three levels of training: 1) all new workers take an A-level course online; 2) the BICWM crisis management team participated in a multi-day training; and 3) four staff members from BICWM have taken an intensive week-long training that involves role playing real-life situations of violence and hostage-taking. While not all groups that contract with this company would subscribe to the theology, core values, or princi-

ples of the Brethren in Christ (e.g., we won't pay ransom and we believe in nonviolence), the company understands where we stand and prepared a customized manual for BICWM use.

The risk policy was written specifically for BICWM, but it also notes that some of the principles apply to the denomination as a whole and was endorsed by the Leadership Council. As Brethren in Christ individuals and congregations seek to respond to the ongoing risk of violence in our communities

and churches, this policy can be a resource. How should we prepare ourselves to respond to a situation of violence, whether it happens in our home, our children's school, or our church, so that "in all things we seek to honor God, boldly declare the gospel, and act with God-given wisdom in regard to danger and risk"?

This article was based on a conversation between the editor and Jonathan Lloyd, director of Brethren in Christ World Missions.

The Inherent Risk of Following Jesus

by Drew Strayer

"COME FOLLOW ME." These are three of the most terrifying and life-giving words that could be uttered. Well, maybe that's a little dramatic. But really, which of us could ever have imagined our path in life after submitting all that follows that moment to Christ who redeemed us? He calls us to take up our cross daily and follow him. He knows all there is to know about carrying crosses. As our Savior, he carried his own cross and it was used to take his physical life. He rose from the dead, was seen and heard by many, and we read that he ascended to the right hand of the Father, where he intercedes on behalf of those who follow him.

Following Christ involves risk. Any time we submit to someone or something, we allow them control or direction over a certain aspect of our life, whether that's a job, a group we are a part of, or a place we volunteer. In the case of following Christ, he calls us to submit our entire lives. Thankfully, submitting to "God is Love" is a sure thing! We will be loved! The risk is that we don't know much else about what will come as a result of that decision.

Submitting to "God is Love" is a sure thing!

My wife and I are planners. In our first year of marriage, we made and changed three different five-year plans. We allowed our plans to change because we were committed to following God and recognized that his plans were better than ours. . . over and over again. We don't know all that God knows

and he is not hindered by our desires for comfort, security, or by the limits of human creativity. In his mission to love every person on earth and draw them to himself, he uses anything, especially faithfully submitted followers.

An amazing thing about our God is that he is a master at taking broken things and making beauty out of them. An organization I love, RAWtools, takes weapons, submits them to the heat of a forge and the pressure of a hammer and transforms them into gardening tools. I look forward to the day when I use one of these cultivators—redeemed from an existence threatening death and transformed into an implement that cultivates life. But as we know, seeds in a garden do no good unless they die. The seed submits to death and results in a plant that, if cared for and cultivated well, produces fruit.

Submission to God is hard.

We must give God a blank check with our entire life written on it. As Hugh Halter and Matt Smay write in their book, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, that submission is costly:

Living this way means you don't get what your flesh wants. You don't get to keep all the money. You don't get to do whatever you want with your time. You have to share your house, your stuff, your money, your kids. You have to exchange your ambitions for God's, your kingdom for his, and you must be available for God to in-

terrupt your nicely scheduled day with needs that will cause you to pull your hair out (p. 79).

We must offer our hopes, our dreams, and our lives. And yes, sometimes that requires my seeds to die. More frequently, we experience unexpected changes and unanticipated losses, but we get to keep living for God.

Our lives are lived on location, in our communities, with countless submissions and relinquishments. Many times I have taken my life back and selfishly chosen my own path, until God lovingly redirects me, reminding me of the great price he paid to make me free to love on his behalf and to receive his love though I don't deserve it. Another risk of submission to God is to love and to be loved.

Thankfully, we serve a God who calls us to be incarnational, just as he is incarnational as Jesus, the Son, who lived among us as Immanuel, God with us. Jesus knows the losses and pain that come with life on earth. He knows the loss of loved ones and the pain of death. He knows the divine hopes and dreams of individuals' eternities dashed by broken choices and free will. And he knows the name of each person with the breath of God in them—billions of people, with myriad eternities and innumerable divine hopes and dreams.

This "God-is-Love" is the one to whom we must submit, risking all. The "all" we risk includes being relied on, trusted to help,

known for our strengths and Christ-likeness, but also for our humanity and brokenness and the ways we disappoint those we care most about. We risk identification with those we grow to love and serve, and we risk being called somewhere else. The risk of love causes us to miss the ones we know and pray for and love. Thankfully we don't do this alone.

Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Jesus).

Christ goes before us and with us in all that he calls us to. He calls us to join him in incarnation, the greatest risk of all. God took on flesh and lived among the humans who had already begun wrecking his beautiful

earth. He spoke truth to the humans who would condemn him to death. He filled the stomachs and washed the feet of those who would desert him as he was taken to his death. And to do all of this, he left the place of intimate companionship with God the Father. For us. For me. For you.

Would you leave your place of comfort, where people, places, and dynamics are known? Would you leave those things that seem to have been put right, to follow a call and start anew to risk it all over again for others? Or, are there other someones you are called to love right where you are? Are you called to risk it all and stay? Will you pick up your cross daily and follow God is Love into

this life of risk? Will I? He's already there—waiting and calling us to join him in the great incarnation of love! Let's be the church together, risking all to follow him, risking all to love and be loved!

Drew Strayer is pastor of groups and care at Manor Church (BIC), Lancaster, PA. He loves and is loved by his wife, Millyellen, and two children. He is currently working on a Ph.D. in leadership through Capital Seminary, focusing his research on the missional church and how all churches can dive deeper into the mission of God wherever they are.

Congregational Values Clarification

By Margaret Engle

WHEN I SAW the request for *Shalom!* writers on the topic of risk and church safety, I really did not think I had anything to share. But the topic came up in a church board meeting recently, and we are on the journey trying to discern what concerns about safety, fear-motivated actions, and “fighting with the weapons of the world” really mean to us as Christ-followers and members of a Brethren in Christ Church.

A board member introduced our discussion with the question: “Aren't any of you afraid of violence coming to our church? I pack everywhere but church and I'm rethinking that.” Now, first, you need to know that I live in a culture where guns are “packed” everywhere, including church. Several of our national church leaders have commented upon visiting our Kansas churches about how shocked they were to see guns in the building and in the worship. This reality is probably totally foreign to many *Shalom!* readers. However, it isn't uncommon in Kansas. It is part of our culture.

Board members responded in different ways: “No, I'm not afraid.” “You pack?” “I used to feel differently about peace and the sword.” As they responded, I kept thinking, “Surely an understanding of Jesus' teaching on peace should be the basis for how we make these decisions.”

Our discussion continued, and we decided to pursue several next steps: get bids on security systems, continue discussion at our next board meeting, and make recommendations to our local members meeting.

As part of the process, we invited a safety control person to examine our facility and grounds and make recommendations about our present security. We looked at other churches in our area to see what they have in place to deter violence and the measures they have taken to increase safety. Our pastors decided to inform the congregation of this discussion and then to use our adult Sunday School hour as a forum to address our understanding of scripture and God's desire for us. We combined classes so that all adults were included.

We used a values clarification activity to begin. Participants ranked their responses to statements such as “I am increasingly afraid of violence.” The beginning discussion was attempting to focus our thoughts and force us to identify what we felt or believed. We ranked our responses from one to 10 and posted our answers on a chart, and could see at a glance what variety there was just in a class of 16.

We then read an article to further our discussion, “Should Christians Be Encouraged to Arm Themselves?” by John Piper. The

group agreed that our desire is to be faithful followers of scripture, recognizing that we have different interpretations and understandings, as well as faithful followers of Jesus and the Kingdom of heaven rather than our culture and the world.

We discussed spending time trying to evaluate our motives: fear, trust in God versus self-sufficiency, retaliation, anger, and prudence versus naivety or denial. Several shared testimonies of their choices regarding carrying a weapon. Those who were involved in gathering information about security systems and other security improvements on our facilities shared those options with class members. We affirmed that our desire is not to be in denial that gun violence could happen in our little town of Abilene. In fact, several people shared a few examples of near-violent responses in our own church history.

We then spent several weeks sharing in a topical Bible Study on bearing arms. We looked at as many scriptures as possible regarding peace, trust, self-defense, revenge, and violence. As our discussion progressed, no one seemed to have any issues with some facility changes, or even having assigned trained volunteers to greet and monitor people on our premises, but the issue for us involved actually using a gun as part of the

solution. Most would assume that if you carry a gun you intend to use it.

Both at the board level and in our Sunday School discussions, we agreed to pray asking the Holy Spirit to direct our decision-making. We asked all to continue to ask questions and commit to the process of discussion. What will this look like? Will we install security systems? Will people be trained and “on duty” for security purposes? Will we promote guns and offer this as a solution? Will we post signs restricting con-

cealed carrying on our premises or intentionally not post them? As pastors, how will we teach and lead on the issue of fear and trust as well as peace? Does our congregation embrace our core value of peace as we say we do? Are we offering grace to anyone not where we are on this discipleship journey? And, as brothers and sisters in Christ, what consensus needs to be reached before we “take any action”?

This is our process, our journey, our discussion at Abilene Brethren in Christ

Church *right now*. We recognize that it’s a process. We’re asking questions and are not even sure that we are asking all the right questions. I’m excited to hear input from brothers and sisters who are seeking to be faithful to our calling to peace, and to hear how other churches are meeting this current cultural issue.

After 30 years as a middle and high school teacher, Margaret Engle and her husband Dale serve as co-pastors of the Abilene (KS) Brethren in Christ Church.

What Do We Do With Sutherland Springs?

By Gary Mitchell and Brett Bever

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, yes. However, when churches are physically attacked, what should our response be? What if the violence of Sutherland Springs, Texas comes to our door?

Sometimes it feels like this country is determined to find yet another difficult issue that divides us. Can we agree on anything? Do more guns in the hands of good citizens solve the problem? How exactly should we “love our enemies” in a violent situation? Should we use force to protect?

Several years ago, as part of a membership class, we were sitting around the living room with about 12 people who’d been part of a weekly Life Group. We had decided that these people would be wonderful additions to our church. And what better setting to conduct a membership class than in the same living room we’d been in for the past year, devoting ourselves to the Word of God. But then, in week three of the membership teaching, the subject of “peace” came up. Within a month we learned that not only would two couples not become members of our church, but three people would choose to leave the church altogether. One was a military man, with a 30-year career. The other was a firm believer in second amendment rights, and a holder of a “concealed carry” permit. They were gone, and they didn’t really want to talk about it. Sadly, this wasn’t some isolated incident in one membership class.

I (Gary) remember having real difficulty with this issue myself. I too had been in the

military. I would ask, “Who is going to stop the ‘Hitlers’ of the world? And what in the world is wrong with forcefully protecting my wife and family from an intruder?”

And then November 5, 2017 brought us the shootings at Sutherland Springs. Twenty-six dead. Surely there could have been a better result if only. . .

We have at our core a value of “peace.” We say we “value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and nonviolent resolution of conflict.”

What then should be our response? And by the way, please give your answer to the families in Sutherland Springs.

I wasn’t there when Jesus told Peter to put his sword away. And I don’t know why Jesus didn’t have a concealed weapon. He did, after all, know they were coming to take him to the cross. Wouldn’t it have been better for a few soldiers to die for their country that day? What was Jesus thinking?

Well, he responded to the situation by saying, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36).

In Matthew we get more information, when Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces

you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (Matt.5:38-47)

In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

And in Luke 6:27, he says, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

Paul writes:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It

is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom. 12:17-21).

Yes, yes, we say. But who is then going to punish these evil people? And how do we solve the problem of evil regimes, like Hitler’s? What should believers do about that?

The answer to that, I believe, is also in Romans. Right after it says “Do not repay anyone evil for evil,” just a hundred words later, Paul tells us that there are to be governing authorities, established by God, to bring punishment to the wrongdoer:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:1-4).

Does that seem acceptable to you? Peace and reconciliation for us, loving our neighbors and our enemies, and trusting the governing authorities to bring punishment to the wrongdoer? Can I trust in that when my family or my church family are being threatened? Can I confront an armed intruder with just that? The Word of God?

We believe that yes, we can. And we must. People need to be reminded that there is another, better reality at work—God.

When the tragedy happened in Sutherland Springs, we set out to write a new church policy, recognizing that it may seem weak and foolish to some.

What do we do? We know we want to be intelligent about it. We want to be smart. And we want to follow Jesus’ teachings, no matter where that leads us. Even if obedience leads us to death.

So, at our church we will employ nonviolent strategies.

- We will be vigilant, knowing that about 85 percent of the time, the perpetrator tells one person. Sixty-six percent of the time the perpetrator tells two people.
- We will report suspicious behaviors.
- We will use security cameras.
- We will lock doors, close blinds, turn out lights.
- We will call 911.
- We will make ourselves difficult targets.
- We will run.
- We will use any objects as distraction devices—chairs, books, objects thrown from the balcony.
- We will spread out.

- We will cause confusion for the intruder.
- We will evacuate.

We recognize that our state allows its citizens to have, and conceal, weapons. Although we are allowed to post signs on the church property prohibiting the use of firearms, we do not post such signs. We will allow everyone to follow their own consciences with regard to carrying and using weapons. And we will be there to help them deal with the aftermath of those decisions. As followers of Jesus Christ, we will stick to our values. We are a church that pursues peace. We value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and nonviolent resolution of conflict, for the offender and victim alike.

We will follow Jesus. We value wholehearted obedience to Christ Jesus through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

We belong to the community of faith. We value integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance. No matter what. We will let the chips fall where they may.

We will not be defined otherwise by a violent event. And we will embrace the victims and perpetrators alike, recognizing that in the Cross, Jesus did the same thing for us. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Gary Mitchell is board chair and director of administration and Brett Bever is the pastor at New Vision Brethren in Christ Church, Pewaukee, WI.

Keeping Our Children Safe

By Denise Fogelsanger

I FIND MYSELF in an odd position writing about security in my church, specifically in the children’s wing. I was born and raised in the pacifist tradition, first in the Church of the Brethren and currently in the Brethren in Christ Church family. As a pacifist, I don’t believe in war or violence as ways to solve problems. To inflict harm or violence on anyone, especially children, is totally unreasonable and intolerable. When I was asked to be the children’s pastor at my

church, I was honored that my church family had so much confidence in me. I love all the children in our church and want nothing more for them but to know our Savior Jesus as their own. In order for them to learn about him, and trust him, they need to feel comfortable, safe, and loved. By meeting their basic needs, we can begin ministering to them. In this article, I’m focusing on the need for physical safety.

My first concern is to be sure all of our

volunteers have complete background checks (e.g., criminal background and fingerprinting) and mandated reporter training. We do our best to be thorough about knowing the background of people who interact with our children in their classrooms. Our local police department has also provided suggestions regarding the safety of our physical space and gave me a website link where I can further investigate people who will enter our children’s wing. We have two congre-

gants who are on Megan's List (registered sex offenders), and they know they are not allowed in the children's wing. They are not ostracized or shamed, but instead we love and forgive them while at the same time we put appropriate limits on their access to our children.

In addition, our volunteers are aware of any allergies and medical issues among our children. To make sure that the information is well known and yet not readily available to just anyone, we post signs with the information in the kitchenette and on the inside of the closet door in each classroom. Each teacher also has a notebook about his or her children.

When I became children's pastor, our church already had a "check-in" system in place, but it didn't give us much information about each child. One of my first goals was to make sure that a new check-in system would have each child's name and any allergy or medical information directly on the name tag that the child wears while they are in the

children's wing. These tags also have unique codes to match the tags that parents use to pick up their children. We collaborated with our business administrator to incorporate this process through the church management software we already use. So far, all of these procedures have kept our children safe, without any medical issues.

We have also examined the physical layout of our building to determine whether we needed to make some modifications. First, we discontinued unlocking the door at the end of the children's wing so no one could enter the wing from the outside without a key. We do not have bathrooms in the children's wing, so we have signs at the bathrooms closest to the children's wing indicating that those bathrooms are dedicated for use only by children when children's activities are in session. A "guardian" monitors the comings and goings of people within the children's wing. The guardian also assists with the "check-in" system and makes sure classroom volunteers have the supplies

they need.

In the future, we want to install video cameras to record the movements of children and adults in the children's wing and bathrooms. Prevention is our first and main goal, but we are aware of other churches that have used these recordings to review allegations. I pray that we will never need to review the tapes, but I also know that in our ever-changing world, we need to use the resources available to us to prevent and protect our children from harm. After all, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me,"

I take my responsibility to keep our children safe very seriously, and I hope other churches do as well. While we do not need to live in a state of fear, we do need to use our knowledge and resources with which God has blessed us to keep our children safe.

Denise Fogelsanger is children's pastor at the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

The Value of Exposing Children to Some Risk

By Phil Thuma

BEING A PARENT is a scary thing. Most of us never had formal training on how to be parents, and knowing how to handle things can be overwhelming to new parents. Most parents want to minimize any risk that their child might be exposed to, and they assume that being a good and responsible parent involves reducing as many risks as possible for their growing child. As a pediatrician who has worked in different cultures and observed different ways of raising children (and also together with my wife raised three children of our own), I would like to propose that there may be good reasons to not always be so risk-averse when we raise our children.

Let's consider three areas where I think there is evidence that exposing a growing child to some risk is actually good for their health and social development.

1. A little dirt never hurts. Most North American babies are raised in a nearly sterile environment. The assumption for many years was that giving babies sterile formula, sterile juice, sterile baby food, and making sure that

anything their mouths came in contact with (like a pacifier) was as sterile as possible was good for them.

As it turns out, however, when we are born it is important to get some germs into our intestines as soon as possible, not only to help us absorb Vitamin K and other nutrients, but also to help develop our normal "gut flora" to prevent other potential problems later in life. In recent years there has been something of a rediscovery of the value of having bacteria living in our gut, manifested by the huge market for "probiotics" which generally contain several different types of so-called "good" bacteria. (If you haven't read the label on a probiotic bottle, I would encourage you to do so!)

In some countries where babies are allowed to play in and eat the dirt around their homes, they are often healthier than those North American babies fed sterile diets, because the dirt they eat exposes them to the normal bacteria that are good for the gut. While I am not advocating feeding your kids a literal "dirt diet," I do think that every time

a pacifier falls on the floor, it is not imperative to boil it before using it again. Being a good parent means you can relax a bit when your kid is exposed to some dirt, and you do not need to feel that you have failed.

2. Preventing allergies. For nearly a generation or more, parents in North America were told that an allergy to peanuts was one of the most common food allergies. To prevent a peanut allergy, parents were told they should carefully avoid giving their children anything with peanuts in it for the first three years of life.

While the development of allergies is not a straightforward process and is still not completely understood, children are actually more likely to develop a peanut allergy by not being exposed to peanuts at a young age. A study published more than 10 years ago suggested that it actually works the other way around: babies whose lactating mothers ate peanuts and babies who were given peanut butter at an early age were less likely to develop peanut allergy. So while many parents worry about food allergies and thus avoid ex-

posing their young children to foods that adults are known to be allergic to, maybe we should let young children eat a wide variety of foods as early as 4-6 months of age.

Another study demonstrated that avoiding wheat products before six months of age was associated with a higher (not lower) incidence of wheat product allergy later in life. Interestingly, in southern Africa where babies are routinely given some of their parents' food even before they have teeth, I have seen very few food allergies over the years. It makes me wonder if our concern for avoiding any risk of developing food allergies in North America has actually made the situation worse.

3. "Helicopter parenting." Much has been written about the current parenting style where children are protected from difficult situations by parents who actively advocate for the child in every situation, sometimes even after that child has grown up.

While I am sure that the motive of a "helicopter parent" is to ensure that their child succeeds in society, there is actually more and more evidence that successful adults have be-

come so because they have developed a good Emotional Quotient (EQ), which is more predictive of success in life than their IQ (Intelligence Quotient). Parents should ask themselves how best to help their child develop emotional intelligence, because of the connection between the ability to manage emotions and personal and social competence.

Most of us recognize that one way for a child to develop such characteristics is to have self-confidence, and that is certainly not developed when a parent is over-protective and "hovers" over the child and makes every decision for them. When a child makes a decision that turns out badly, they will learn to do better next time, as long as they are in a supportive but not a smothering home situation where the reason for the poor outcome can be discussed in a calm manner. My advice to parents is to relax a bit and let your children learn some life lessons on their own. Even though that means they will face some risks, they will be better for it in the long run.

Living in this world is inherently risky (as we are reminded of many times in the Bible),

but as parents we need to learn that allowing some risk exposure in our children's lives as they grow and develop is a good thing. Being over-protective can often backfire and produce the opposite result that we all desire. So learn to not panic when you see your toddler eating dirt outside, don't get too uptight when your best friend tells you to restrict your babies' diet, and learn to take a deep breath and allow your children to work out some of their own problems.

Phil Thuma is a pediatrician by training and has served as a missionary doctor at Macha Mission Hospital in Zambia. He is also the founding director and senior scientific advisor of the Johns Hopkins Malaria Institute at Macha and the Macha Research Trust.

A Few Things Are Worse Than Risk

By Zach Spidel

I AM, LIKE most people, highly risk-averse. Perhaps that is not a good or a typical trait among church planters. If you know that for the last six years I have been trying to establish a new congregation in a troubled but God-beloved neighborhood on the East Side of Dayton, Ohio, you might be surprised to read that I am not just risk averse—I downright hate taking risks.

I've met people, including some church planters, who get a thrill out of it. God bless those marvelous people! These folks actually thrive in high-risk situations, relish the challenges they bring, and feel most alive when setting out in the direction of some uncharted territory. Sometimes I wish I was more like that, but let me assure you, I am not.

I hate doing things that might not work out. I hate the feeling of trying something new and seeing it fail. I hate planning an event or a service, putting my whole heart into it, hoping that it will be used by God to bless people, bring them into communion with him, and transform their lives, only to have no one show up. I also, maybe somewhat paradoxically, hate the feeling of having a risk pay off, because I can't help wonder if it was a fluke and what will happen next time? I come down hard from each risk I take, no matter the results. I'd prefer to stay in well-charted territory.

On Sundays at Shepherd's Table, I never have any idea if there will be (and I'm not exaggerating) six or 60 people present for worship. Neither number of worshippers is a

surprise when it happens. I would be just fine if I knew that only six people would be at worship. I'd be equally happy (no more nor less, really!) if I knew that it would be 60. It's the uncertainty that gets me, that drains me. It's the risk involved.

So, after six years of taking risks—six years of stress and uncertainty—why am I still here? Why am I doubling down on the idea of a church plant in the kind of place that church planting "professionals" warned me would be very difficult to plant a church? I think the basic answer is that there are a few things even worse than these risks I'm taking—things I'm even more determined to



avoid.

For example, it would be far, far worse to say goodbye to the incredibly beautiful community of messy and messed up saints (I'm among them!) that is clinging to God together on the East Side of Dayton. I might be less stressed out, but I'd also be missing out on a front row seat to the slow-motion victory of God over sin. He's blowing like a righteous wind against the mountains of addiction and injustice and cruelty and indifference here on the East Side. Sometimes (very rarely) he breaks forth like a hurricane and huge chunks of those mountains break off and go clattering down into glorious oblivion. But most of the time, I have to sit quiet and still with my brothers and sisters for a long time and watch very, very carefully to see the fact that God is—all the time—wearing down those awful mountains.

I sometimes get impatient and wish God would hurry up. Sometimes I cry at the cold cruelty of those mountains and how hard life is here in their shadow. Sometimes I feel terrified at how big they are and at how risky it is for me and my little troupe of fellow disciples to go scaling those mountains as often as we do in search of lost souls. But, in the end, I know my life would be far poorer if I were to walk away from this place with all its risks and miss out on hearing the sound of God's breath as it whistles through these dark passes, tearing them down one moat or one landslide at a time.

Another thing worse than risk is apathy. To give love or to receive it—both require risk. If I wanted to avoid risk, then I'd need to settle for apathy, the absence and opposite of love. And as bad as risk is, I know that lovelessness is worse. I know that love is worth the struggle and the uncertainty it entails. I've learned (but how imperfectly, how shallowly, I've learned it!) what the poet Mary Oliver has captured

so well in her poem, "West Wind #2." I leave you with an excerpt from that poem, hoping you'll follow the advice she gives and row with the current of divine love toward the struggle and tumult and risks ahead.

You are young. So you know everything. You leap into the boat and begin rowing. But listen to me. Without fanfare, without embarrassment, without any doubt, I talk directly to your soul. Listen to me. Lift the oars from the water, let your arms rest, and your heart, and heart's little intelligence, and listen to me. There is life without love. It is not worth a bent penny, or a scuffed shoe. It is not worth the body of a dead dog nine days unburied. When you hear, a mile away and still out of sight, the churn of the water as it begins to swirl and roil, fretting around the sharp rocks—when you hear that unmistakable pounding—when you feel the mist on your mouth and sense ahead the embattlement, the long falls plunging and steaming—then row, row for your life toward it.

Zach Spidel is the pastor of The Shepherd's Table congregation in Dayton, OH.

Excerpt from "West Wind #2" from West Wind: Poems and Prose Poems, by Mary Oliver. Copyright © 1997 by Mary Oliver. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Worth the Risk

By Kelly Harnish

THEY CARRIED HER in and roughly laid her rigid, emaciated body in the wheelchair that we had brought for her. Her hollow, sunken eyes revealed pain and terror. She winced as my sister, an occupational therapist, gently positioned her with pillow pets, trying her best to alleviate the pressure points where the child's bones met the chair. Silent tears welled up in the child's eyes, but she didn't make a sound. The child's nannies weren't interested in learning how to position the child or use the chair properly. When they determined that we had spent enough time with her, they announced that it was time for lunch—lunch for the nannies I assume, because the child looked as though she hadn't been fed in weeks. They roughly removed her from the wheelchair and

popped her into a small, wooden chair that rested against the far wall.

My mind raced, as I worried that she would topple off and break in half. Quickly, and in my most cheerful voice, I sang out, "May I hold her?" First, there was a look of shock, and then well-mannered consent. The child was again lifted roughly and without thought, grabbed under her thin arms and carried across the room to where I sat. If I had not seen her placed in my lap, politely tamed my gag reflex as the odor of her rotting teeth entered my nostrils and felt her shaven head, I would not have believed that anything had landed on my legs; she was as light as a feather. Her rigid limbs refused to be massaged into even a minimal flex. But I held onto that child, crooning over her, like

a mother bird and fussing about her beautiful face. She was an image-bearer of my Jesus...but she was like the living dead.

Now, at home with our two newest children, I reflect on this and other scenes that often enter my mind without invitation. Before now, I have not experienced the ever present and unsettling feeling of hovering somewhere in space between two distinctly different spheres of life. I have never experienced the depth of joy, purpose and peace amid-chaos that I feel today while I simultaneously hold onto the level of unmatched grief, heartache, and helplessness that I experience every time I'm left to my own thoughts. The hollow eyes, the boney limbs, the scaly skin, the goopy eyes, the scratches and bite marks, the odor of rotting

teeth—they coexist with my joy and privileged life where I can hear my new daughter belly laughing in the next room and my new son saying he loves me.

I need to hang on to the feeling I have when I think about the living dead in the world of which I've only seen glimpses. Someone must grieve for them. Someone must remember their faces. Someone must allow their very precious lives to make an impact. Someone must tell others that they exist, that they are not rubbish, that they are human. Their eyes are penetrating and beg me to answer questions like: "Who do you serve?" "Do you recognize that I'm an image-bearer?" "Do you see me as refuse or a treasure to be pulled from the garbage heap?"

This article is not about touting the beauty of adoption, although I have been left breathless as I've witnessed unimaginable beauty come from ashes. My message is not about how, as Christians, the Father tells us to care for the orphan and has given us the perfect example of this through his adoption of our wretchedly beautiful selves. No, my message is to encourage you to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, and to alert you to a battle, the magnitude of which you may be unaware. In many ways, it's not unlike the holocaust. The victims have been determined unworthy of life, gathered up, institutionalized, and many are dying because their caretakers don't care or lack resources or some combination of the two.

Ephesians 6 reminds us that "we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." These evil spirits are so caloused and cowardly that they prey on the most innocent and vulnerable, knowing that the number in the opposing army are few, often exhausted themselves and living in the midst of the carnage and chaotic aftermath of their attacks. The enemy has left over 140 million orphans to what he believes will be a garbage-dump burial. He is doing a victory dance because while one quarter of all American adults say that they have seriously considered adoption, only two percent have actually done so (five percent among practicing Christians), according to research done by the Barna group.

From December 2014 to December 2017, we went from three kids to nine through the international adoptions of six, biologically unrelated, older kids. As a licensed clinical social worker, I would never have advised that a family do what we have done. The risks are too great. This sort of recklessness has the potential to capsize a family, break a marriage, ruin any semblance of financial stability, and derail plans for a quiet and comfortable retirement.

There is very little day-to-day back-up as we battle on, but we're so thankful for friends who have dropped notes of encouragement, left gift cards at the grocery store during meat sales, and helped us to ready new rooms for our kids. Likewise, it's disappointing when there is deafening silence from those who have journeyed through life as our Christian friends, or when murmurings of "They're crazy!" make their way back to our ears. To those who have cautioned us, we thank you; you were justified in your concern, but we wouldn't change a thing. We frequently become battle-weary, and we anticipate injuries along the way, but that's part of what we're doing. To those who have pondered our sanity, we fully acknowledge that we are walking a very fine line and will gratefully accept your efforts, through prayer and practical help, to help us maintain our lucidity. We have taken challenge, encouragement, and comfort from this excerpt from 2 Corinthians 5:13-19:

If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. Either way, Christ's love controls us. . . . So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. . . . And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.

I can think of no battle in which I'd rather be so fully engaged. There are so many waiting children and organizations that desperately need your support. If there is one thing I hope to communicate, it is this: please get your hands messy—on a daily basis. Monetary gifts directed towards orphan care organizations and helping to fund adoptions are absolutely vital and appreciated. But, the mere act of writing a check may lull you into believing that you've done all you can do. Please remember, although

the war needs funding—there are very few soldiers on the field. The battle cannot be won without the soldier, who is willing to grab up a little one and head to a foxhole for cover. Will you join us in the battle?

Sources:

<https://www.barna.com/research/5-things-you-need-to-know-about-adoption/>
https://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html

Kelly and Dale Harnish attend the Manheim (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. They have nine children, one of whom came to them through birth, two through infant adoption from South Korea, and six through older-child adoption from China. A former social worker, she is now a full-time mother who tutors her children, advocates for kids, and support other families through the adoption process and beyond.

Editor's Notes

2018 subscription renewals: Due to increased printing and postage costs, we have decided to increase the basic subscription rate for 2018 to \$20, with additional contributions. Please respond as soon as possible to the 2018 renewal letter, using either the enclosed reply envelope or sending your check to the editor (address on page 2). Checks should be payable to Brethren in Christ Church U.S. You can also renew or contribute online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom..

Upcoming topics: Topics under consideration for the remainder of 2018 include gender violence, being a "third way" church, religious freedom, creation care, and economic justice in a world of increasing gaps between rich and poor.. Contact the editor if you have ideas for additional topics or would like to write on any of these topics.

New Trail Fellowship Addresses Security

By Stan Norman

LIVING IN A culture where guns, security, and God are all mixed up together makes for an interesting dynamic in a world that has become increasingly dangerous. I am the pastor of a cowboy church where guns are like apple pie and I live in a state where conceal carry and open carry guns are legal, so I understand the potential conflict between what the culture says and what God might say about security in church.

As followers of Christ, we are always people of hope (1 John 5:13; Heb. 6:19). No matter what happens to us in life, our hope and ability to respond to tragedy should enable us to move forward in confidence and without fear. However, I believe this does not mean that we should not be concerned about what we need to do to protect people who come into our church facilities.

Let me say up front: we have a church security team (which is armed) at New Trail. Only those on the team and I know who is on the team. Almost all security team members have military or law enforcement backgrounds. They accept the responsibility not to shed blood but to act on behalf of others out of love and care for them with the possibility that they might use a gun to do that. We believe peacemaking is about not committing violence but that does not preclude someone from stopping the violence being committed by others.

A security team should include people who are trained (whether in hand-to-hand defense or in using weapons) and who volunteer to absorb potential danger and violence. Any use of a weapon (gun) should be the last deterrent. We do not allow weapons to be openly carried (visibly seen) within our worship facilities because we think that invites conflict and could escalate danger.

We also believe that security should cover more than deterring someone who is in the facilities from doing harm. Church security should also include having well-defined plans for fire and health emergencies. Church security protects not only those who are active members of our church family, but also anyone who comes to our church. Carrying out

Christ's call to reach out to people who are unchurched means that we are responsible for them while they are under our care during corporate worship, special events, Bible studies, etc.

At New Trail, we are within weeks of building a new worship facility. We have spent significant time looking at the construction of the building and how easy it will be to exit the building in case of a dangerous and traumatic event. We have thought about the types of windows and outside doors for children's classrooms, where to locate security personnel, whether we should locking doors after the service starts. We have also sought the expertise of our local sheriff/police departments, asking them to look at our plans and make suggestions about what we should do to make the facilities more secure and safe. I think every church should show their floor plans to law enforcement so that in the event of an incident, they will know how approach the building in a way that maximizes safety for everyone.

I fully understand that we live in a fallen and broken world, but it seems that many people dismiss the danger of that world by simply saying, "God will protect us." Reality has forced us to see that this is naïve. Many in the church say that it is too much of a risk to bring weapons into the church to provide security. But the reality is that when a perpetrator enters our worship facilities for whatever reason, we are already at risk. While one of the core values of the Brethren in Christ is "pursuing peace," I believe it is not prudent to assume that new people who come to our churches are aware of our position. We shouldn't decide not to provide some means of security just because we do not like the thought of harm or violence befalling us.

Jesus said, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36). I believe Jesus was saying that when we go out into the world, we will be attacked for whom we represent. While we should do all we can to keep or make peace, we have the right to protect ourselves.

The book of Esther brings us face-to-face with the issue of protecting ourselves. The Jews were given permission to protect themselves across the kingdom after Haman's desire to kill them was revealed and thwarted by the love of Queen Esther for her people. While some may dismiss this story because it is in the Old Testament, I believe it provides some precedence for today. We should never be looking to create the violence but we should be prepared to address and stop the violence out of love for everyone who comes into our church buildings. We must pray that we never have to face a situation of violence, but using wisdom and practical steps we should do all we can to protect those to whom we minister.

Stan Norman is pastor of New Trail Fellowship Cowboy Church, Abilene, KS.

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guities.

The Nightingale was set against a huge historic canvas, but many people who took risks in the novel—and in the real life stories they reflect—took small steps and fought in one or two ways that aided the bigger effort. When we look back at WWII, we have the privilege of hindsight. But like the characters in the book we have to live life as it comes without knowing the whole story that only time reveals. We live in the here and now, and here and now is the only place we can take our stand. May God guide our hearts and footsteps and light the path before us.

Lois Saylor is a member of the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church and serves on the editorial committee for Shalom!

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BOOK REVIEW: Risking Survival *A Tale of Two Sisters in Occupied France*

By Lois Saylor

KRISTIN HANNAH IN her novel, *The Nightingale*, takes the reader on a tour de force of occupied France during WWII. She follows two sisters navigating their lives in their home country that is suddenly over-run by the Nazi forces of Germany. She shows how occupying forces do not simply take over borders and governance, but rather invade every aspect of life. Even protecting one's own soul becomes an act of resistance and survival.

The younger sister Isabelle is only 18 years old, headstrong, rebellious, and naïve. Her older sister, Vianne, is married with a daughter at home and a husband away fighting the war. The sisters have already suffered from an emotionally distant father who, after the death of their mother, sent them to be raised by a stranger in the family's ancestral home in a small French village. The sisters journey through war and occupation taking very different paths. Isabelle joins the resistance while Vianne tries to protect her daughter and home by not making trouble while suffering the hardships and indignities of a town overrun by occupation forces and French collaborators. Through the double story line the reader sees that both actively

fighting and quietly surviving are risky and costly. Vianne's less rebellious struggle, her fight to survive, is also a valid part of resistance. She tries to navigate the fine line between keeping a low profile and collaboration with the enemy. She faces the question of where and when actions to survive result in complicity in evil. What happens when neutral ground slips away and you only have bad choices?

The author intentionally tells the story of occupation, war, and evil from the perspective of two women because women were the unseen resisters during the German occupation of France and underrepresented in historic remembrances. In the novel, someone pleads for Isabelle to stop her dangerous work and she laments, "Did people say things like this to men? Women were integral to the Resistance. Why couldn't men see that?" Within the story, this invisibility plays out to both Isabelle's advantage and disadvantage.

The crucible of WWII forced people into the extremes of risk, resistance, and survival. In the novel, a friendly Mother Superior tells Vianne, "I think, as this war goes on, we will all have to look more deeply. These questions

are not about them, but about us."

What about us? What motivates us to take risks: anger or a desire to do the right thing, to do justice, or our moral values? Maybe we get pushed into risk-taking by circumstances or we have no choice but to take a risk. Sometimes people take risks when there is little left to lose. We also need to ask, "What keeps us from taking risks?" Fear and a sense of protection are strong motivators against risk-taking. Perhaps lack of reward or low chance of success weighs into not taking a risk. We may simply have low-risk personalities. In all these questions of motivation, we also remember there is a difference between a decided risk and foolishness. Even a risk for some high moral principle can still be foolish.

We also ask, "What are we risking?" We have to count the cost. Is it our reputation or status that is put at risk? Is it finances or wealth, lives and health? Are there legal consequences? Will our actions put our relationships at risk? What is worth losing for what the risk will gain? Like Vianne and Isabelle we may have different answers to the questions facing our lives. We often live in ambi-

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