

# IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN NORTH AMERICA

*Summer 2009*



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[In his last column, “God’s hilarious word”], Perry Engle rightly points out that God has a wonderful sense of humor. I can never read the “devilish ham incident”—when Jesus sent evil spirits into swine—without laughing. The swine raced over a cliff and fell into the sea. Shortly afterwards, the disciples climbed into their boat to cross the water to the other side. Can’t you picture all those Jewish men trying not to defile themselves while pushing aside the floating bloated bodies of dead pigs? Jesus must have smiled!

EMILY CHASE—Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Thank you for *In Part Online*. I reference *In Part* frequently in the adult education forum I lead at my church, Pequea BIC. The online format makes it easier to view from the monitor on the wall versus preparing a handout.

ANNE MARIE SHAW—Lancaster, Pa.

Thanks for a very good article. The “niche Bibles” have expanded readership to an extent. That is good—as long as they are not biased paraphrases. [The] cautions about their use are timely and appear in a good place for the Brethren in Christ.

I wonder how many emails you will get telling you that there is a Brethren in Christ Bible. It is the *NIV Reflecting God Study Bible* (Zondervan 2000). Copies are (or were) available at Evangel Publishing House.

GRAYBILL BRUBAKER—Mechanicsburg, Pa.

> According to Evangel Press, the Reflecting God Study Bible is no longer in print. However, copies of its accompanying reader’s guide and workbook are still available. Contact Evangel Press with inquiries at [evangelpress.com](http://evangelpress.com)

### Correction to spring 2009 issue:

In “City of God, city of change” on page 3, the church’s correct name is La Ciudad de Dios (“the city of God”), rather than La Cuidad de Dios (“the care of God”). Thanks to Lori Thiesen, of Lancaster, Pa., for bringing this to our attention!

# THE VIEW FROM HERE

Almost every family has a story or two that get told and retold at get-togethers. And if you’re anything like me, you have a couple to your name. One that seems to live on in infamy originates from when I was a toddler. I was in my highchair, happily snacking on Cheerios, when my mom told me not to eat any more. After she left the room, I cunningly (or so I thought) crammed a last handful of those delectable O’s into my mouth. But, in my haste, one got stuck to my cheek, so that when my mom returned, proof of my disobedience was all but written on my face.

The story goes that my mom asked me if I had eaten any more Cheerios, and I denied it. All the while, my aunt, who was standing behind my mom, tried frantically to signal to me my mistake. Alas, being only 3 years old, I didn’t get the hint and was duly found out.

Though a couple decades have passed since then, I admit that my tendency toward sin has not lessened all that much (as my family can still attest). I’d like to hope, though, that I’ve gotten better at admitting my wrongdoings when others bring them to light.

Not that this is easy. In fact, I still find that acknowledging my failings to someone else can be an exceedingly painful and humbling practice. But being Brethren in Christ means that we value being part of a family that doesn’t simply turn a blind eye, but that rigorously practices mutual accountability out of genuine care for one another. This means that there’s no pretending not to see the sins that are stuck on the cheek of a brother or sister—or not to hear when others confront us about our own secret snacking. We must be ready and willing to come clean with each other and God. That’s what it means to belong to the community of faith.

Kristine

Kristine Frey, *Editor*

# IN PART™

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### BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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### STAY CONNECTED THROUGH “FAMILY NEWS,”

a quarterly publication that chronicles the births, weddings, anniversaries, and deaths within the BIC family in North America. Visit [BIC-CHURCH.ORG/FAMILY](http://BIC-CHURCH.ORG/FAMILY) or call 717.697.2634 to subscribe or to submit news items.

## IN MOTION

MAKING  
“THE DIFFERENCE”

“After 33 years of ministry in established churches, you tend to become accustomed to doing things a certain way,” observes Calvin Hamblin, pastor of The Difference BIC, a church plant in Massillon, Ohio. But as Cal observes, his work with the fledgling church has changed that: “Church planting requires a high degree of flexibility and spontaneity. I’m learning to go with the flow and not be so dependent upon my own ability to bring things to pass.”

Formerly the pastor at Amherst Community BIC (Massillon, Ohio), Cal led the 17-member core group that founded The Difference—which meets at a local elementary school—in May 2008, and the church held its launch Sunday in October 2008.

From handing out bottled water at local athletic events to scooping free ice cream in nearby neighborhoods, Cal and his team have been actively promoting the new fellowship to everyone they meet.

“The real key to our outreach has been the intentional efforts of the congregation to cultivate relationships with neighbors, co-workers, and friends in order to invite them to ‘join the family,’” he says. “We believe this is the heart of our outreach.”

→ **IN PART Online:**  
Follow the unfolding story of *The Difference*

DEVIN THOMAS  
BIC Communications Intern

## STORIES OF THE BIC IN ACTION

Members of The Difference spread word about the church plant at the Massillon (Ohio) FunFest.



↑ PHOTO: Courtesy of Calvin Hamblin

Eric Villanueva (left) and Kip Vaughn pastor the rejuvenated Desert Light Christian Church (BIC).



↑ PHOTO: Courtesy of Kip Vaughn

## NEW LIFE IN NEW MEXICO

In January 2008, Kip Vaughn began praying for God to provide three to five new families to Sandia Chapel BIC, the church he pastored in Albuquerque, N.M. Sandia first opened its doors in the early 1950s, but half a century later, the church was in decline as it struggled to adapt to a changing neighborhood.

Meanwhile, Desert Light Christian Church was a young, vibrant, non-denominational church plant. As Eric Villanueva, who was serving as the pastor there, explains, the thriving congregation had “all the pieces in place, but needed a place to do the pieces.”

All of this changed when Eric and Kip met through the Albuquerque Rescue Mission and began discussing the potential for a church merger. In July 2008, just two months later, Sandia Chapel BIC became Desert Light Christian Church (BIC), and both churches found their prayers answered.

“We at Desert Light had constantly cried out for a place to meet, but also needed to belong to a denomination

whose values we shared and with which we could grow together,” states Eric, who now shares pastoral responsibilities with Kip. “The BIC became that for us.”

Today, Desert Light Christian Church is a diverse body of people of various ethnicities, ages, and cultures committed to outreach. A focus on family ministry is resulting in couples coming to Christ and saved marriages, while efforts to serve children and men are also flourishing.

Most recently, Desert Light Christian Church leadership initiated “100 × 2”—a vision that after 100 people fill the sanctuary two times, they will begin a new service or church plant. Currently, they are looking to add a service in Spanish. As Kip states in his annual report for 2008, “Who would have dreamed that we would be where we are today? Praise His Mighty name! The best is yet to come!”

KELLY FUNK  
Palmyra (Pa.) BIC



## IN MOTION

## WOMEN AT THE WELL

This past March, 66 women serving in all levels of ministry within the BIC Church gathered at Kenbrook Bible Camp (Lebanon, Pa.) for “Women at the Well: Choosing what is better,” the fifth biennial retreat of the BIC Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership. Over the three-day conference, participants reflected on Luke 10:42, the theme verse, as they attended workshops on a variety of subjects, including biblical foundations for women in ministry, observing the Sabbath, and incorporating the arts in worship.

In addition to those from Regional Conferences across North America, three attendees came from BIC sister churches in the United Kingdom. “This was the second time that we had the opportunity to host women serving in leadership positions in BIC churches outside of North America,” notes Lois Saylor, assistant chair of the Council. “It is always exciting and worthwhile to add this global dimension to the texture and conversation of the retreat.”

Rosett Sibona-Moyo, a ministry leader at Southendon-Sea BIC Church in Essex, U.K., first heard about the retreat from her pastor and, after receiving a scholarship from the Council, was able to attend. “I enjoyed the retreat, especially the discussions about the challenges encountered by women in leadership,” she says.

Many recicladores in Bogotá, Colombia, live in humble conditions and are rejected from mainstream culture, a trend that Trevor Main, a BICWM missionary there, is working to change.



↑ PHOTO: Courtesy of Trevor Main

## REACHING OUT TO THE RECICLADORES

They can be seen in the streets of Bogotá, Colombia, late into the night, scouring dumpsters and public trash cans for discarded items, which they pile onto horse- or human-drawn carts and carry off to sell or re-use. They’re known as *recicladores* (“recyclers”), and they make a living by recycling the plastics, glass, cardboard, and paper that so many others simply throw away. But unfortunately, the weakening global economy has caused the value of the materials they sell to plummet, making their poverty even more pronounced.

“People who do this work are rejected and stay pretty much segregated from the rest of society,” Trevor Main, a BICWM missionary serving in Colombia, explains. But Trevor is working to challenge the social stigma surrounding the recicladores by coordinating efforts to reach out to a nearby community of workers.

Every third Saturday of the month, he and his family join with a few people from Tierra Linda—a BIC

church in the capital city of Bogotá—and from his son’s high school to visit the recicladores’ shantytown. While there, the group shares Bible stories, plays games, does crafts, sings, and has snacks with about 25 children who live there. During the off-weeks, some also return to learn which children come from which homes and get to know their families. In December, Tierra Linda invited the kids to a Christmas party at the church, where each received presents donated by church members. Trevor reports that “generous gifts from BIC individuals in North America,” have also made it possible to provide school kits to children and to distribute bread and milk to the whole community.

“It’s been exciting to see God touching Christians’ hearts at Tierra Linda to reach out with the love of Christ to a community that has largely been overlooked and neglected,” he shares.

→ **IN PART Online:**  
Watch Trevor’s video about the recicladores

## PART OF THE WHOLE

### AT HOME WITH COMMUNITY

*For Mike and Melri Wright, family life and ministry both happen under one roof*

by LISA BROWN

In 1988, as a young adult, Mike Wright joined YouthBuilders, a year-long ministry team that traveled to churches throughout Ontario to work with their youth ministries. “I grew up outside the BIC Church and had never experienced the kind of love, conflict-resolution, accountability, inspiration, and challenge that I found with YouthBuilders,” he says. And it was this experience that helped lead Mike to the Brethren in Christ Church and, eventually, to the Centre for Student Leadership (Clarksburg, ON), where he and his wife, Melri, have lived and served as directors for the last six years.

The main purpose of the Centre for Student Leadership (CSL) is to provide ministry opportunities and training for young adults, especially those taking part in BIC programs like YouthBuilders. Mike, who also serves as associate for the Canadian Conference’s Student Ministry team, facilitates this by mentoring participants and providing special instruction on living in community during the team’s time together.

“Jesus lived in close community with His disciples, and His example is what motivates and inspires Melri and me to engage student teams in a 24/7 communal experience,” he states.

In addition to hosting young adults, Mike, Melri, and their two children welcome other groups to their home at the Centre throughout the year. Although living in constant community can be challenging, Mike says that the tension in the home-work situation has been minimal. “Having groups come to where we live to do retreats feels natural and normal to our family,” he says. His children look forward to meeting people who visit, and he and Melri have discovered unique ways to keep their marriage healthy: “We also hold each other accountable to both our marriage and our ministry, and we place a high value on daily contact and communication about joys and struggles.”

Community and accountability play a part in all of Mike’s roles at the Centre, but he notes that they are “experienced most fully and completely” with his fellow CSL team members.

Composed of three core couples and a few interns from across denominations, the team connects on a regular basis (sometimes daily) and meets for intense times of communal living throughout the year.

### FOCUSING ON ONE COUPLES’ FAITH



↑ Mike and Melri Wright participate in community life in their home at the Centre for Student Leadership, as well as at their church, New Life BIC (Collingwood, ON).

“These periods of communal living force us to open our lives up more and more, extending into areas of our life that most leave shadowed. We are open to challenging each other on areas of family, finances, future life decisions, and spiritual development,” Mike says. “This has encouraged me to open up areas of my life that I’ve always thought were the exclusive domain of my family. I am becoming more open with others about every area of my life so that we can interdependently share burdens, feedback, and support.”

And this, according to Mike, is what community is all about.



.....  
Lisa Brown is a freelance writer who attends The Meeting House and lives in Oakville, ON, with her husband, Kevin, and their daughter. As movie fanatics, Lisa and Kevin see as many as they can in the theatre every year.

## TO OUR CORE

### EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

### WHEN FORM FOLLOWS FAITH

*How the architecture of one BIC meeting house reveals an historic commitment of the Church*

by E. MORRIS SIDER

For the first 100 years of Brethren in Christ history, members met in each other’s homes as testimony to their commitment to simplicity and family-like community. Then, in the 1870s, to accommodate their growing numbers, our BIC ancestors began gathering in meeting houses—buildings constructed specifically for worship. In these new settings, the values of community and accountability that come with family life at its best remained strong, and the meeting houses’ architecture was an extension of those theological commitments.

Looking at the Ringgold Meeting House, which was built in Maryland in 1871 and is one of the oldest still in existence, we can see how these early BIC lived out the call to accountability in various areas of faith.

#### Accountability to living simply:

The simple structure, bare walls and ceiling, and plain, unpadded pews of the Ringgold Meeting House illustrate the unadorned construction and décor of early BIC church buildings. This austerity reminded attendees of the worthlessness of earthly wealth and the call to modest living.

→ We value integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance.



**Accountability to purity:** Typical of all early meeting houses, the Ringgold Meeting House has two separate entrances, one for men and one for women and children. It also had a partition running between the two sides of the room. Both of these measures sought to separate members of the opposite sex and thus eliminate distractions so that full attention could be given to the Word.

#### Accountability to God and each other:

Unlike most churches today, the Ringgold Meeting House features a floor-level pulpit table. This symbolized the idea of the fellowship of believers and suggested that ministers were not elevated above

the congregants, either in terms of their access to God’s truth or their freedom from sin and weaknesses. It was a visual demonstration that congregants were responsible to hold the ministers accountable, just as the ministers were to guide the flock and hold its members accountable.

**Accountability to humility:** The offering box, which was located at the meeting house’s entrance, harkens back to a time when Brethren in Christ did not “lift” offerings by means of offering plates, as they do now. Rather, offerings were deposited in the offering box quietly and in private. This helped congregants remain humble in their giving to God and His kingdom.

BIC church buildings today come in all shapes and sizes, and most look very different from the Ringgold Meeting House. I wonder what our descendants 100 years from now will surmise about our theology by looking at our meeting spaces.

Adapted from “The Ringgold Meeting House as Symbol” by E. Morris Sider in the December 1995 issue of Brethren in Christ History and Life.



.....  
E. Morris Sider is the editor of the BIC Historical Society and has penned a number of books and articles on BIC life. He is professor emeritus of history and English literature at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.). He and his wife, Leone, are longtime members of the Grantham BIC congregation.

Redefining church discipline for the 21st century,

# One Christian to another

BY DAVID WEAVER-ZERCHER



A few years ago, I had a conversation with a friend about church discipline. This friend—a committed Christian and a faithful churchgoer—admitted that he found the idea of church discipline outdated. “There’s only one kind of discipline that’s relevant in the North American Church today, and that’s *self-discipline*,” he said. His point, if I understood him correctly, was that, rather than instituting corporate policies and practices that call people to account, church leaders should devote their energies to helping individuals develop spiritual practices and moral convictions that serve to discipline their *own* lives.

I couldn’t tell if my friend lamented this situation or not. Did he think that disciplinary procedures were themselves a problem? Or were my friend’s observations simply pragmatic, based upon the assumption that corporate discipline was no longer practical, given the way church life functions in contemporary North America?

I suspect it was the latter, and for good reason. Nearly everyone who studies long-term trends in North American church life will tell you that a consumerist orientation has more or less won the day, particularly in Protestant circles. The fact of the matter is this: North American churches compete with one another for adherents, and many adherents choose a particular church based on the goods and services they find there. That’s not to suggest that these adherents don’t contribute anything to their churches; it’s rather to say that, in the process of making those contributions, most churchgoers conduct an informal cost-benefit analysis. If the costs are too high and the benefits too low, they will likely start to shop around.

This market analogy sounds crass, I know, but my own experience bears it out. A year ago my wife and I left one church,

and we now attend another. Although the process of leaving our former church was emotionally wrenching, we were ultimately attracted to our new church because of its perceived benefits: Not only was it nearer to our recently purchased home, but it offered theological emphases we valued, a worship style we enjoyed, and ready-made peer groups for our pre-adolescent sons. Changing churches once in a 10-year span may not make me a pathological church shopper, but compared to my grandfather—who was born, baptized, and buried in the context of one congregation—I’m a ready participant in America’s religious marketplace.

## *Church discipline in a religious marketplace*

Whether we like it or not, this marketplace analogy has real implications for how we think about discipline in the Church today.

Traditional models of discipline as practiced by Brethren in Christ congregations in the past were developed during a time when churches were more akin to families than marketplaces. Think about a family: Not only is a family comprised of relatively few people, but the members are “familiar” with one another. Moreover, unlike our favorite stores and restaurants, families are not something we choose. We may not appreciate everything about our families, but we don’t typically go shopping for another one. In fact, ongoing connections with family members are assumed, and it’s considered tragic if those connections are broken—much more tragic than if we break our ties with our favorite home improvement store.

To be sure, most of you reading these words are more committed to your local churches than you are to Home Depot or Lowe’s. Still, it’s possible that your local church is more akin to your favorite store than it is to your biological family. And that means traditional disciplinary practices don’t work very well, because consumers, when

told they are wrong, are more than happy to take their business elsewhere. As one pastor recently told me, “It’s hard to enact discipline when the church down the street is happy to receive one more member.”

## The Old Order Amish and church discipline

There is, of course, one North American Church that continues to function in opposition to the religious marketplace. The Old Order Amish, who, as Anabaptists, share theological roots with the Brethren in Christ Church, function much more like a family than shoppers in a

*Christians, if they are to flourish spiritually, need people in their lives who ask probing questions and offer honest counsel.*

department store. Their local churches are small, and the people who attend them know each other well. It’s not unusual for persons to be born into, to receive baptism, and to live out their entire lives in a particular Amish congregation. Since Amish congregations are geographically based, Amish people aren’t allowed to transfer their membership. Choice may be the hallmark of consumer capitalism, but it has not yet made its way into the Amish Church.

Whether you hold the Amish in high or low regard, it’s hard to deny the potency of Amish disciplinary practices. This potency flows from four factors:

1. *The Amish have a clear set of shared standards, called the Ordnung.* The *Ordnung* is not typically written down, but church members are keenly aware of its contents and, at baptism, they vow to keep these regulations for life.
2. *The Amish have a willingness to enforce these standards.* Although there may be exceptions, Amish church leaders vigorously embrace the responsibility to enforce their district’s *Ordnung*. If the bishops don’t enforce the *Ordnung*, then the jig is up, and the community will soon cease to be Amish.

3. *The Amish have a deep familiarity with their fellow church members.* One of my friends who converted to the Amish said the hardest part was not giving up his car, but rather his privacy. Minding one’s own business may be a virtue in some circles, but if you’re Amish, you’re supposed to mind other people’s business.
4. *The Amish enact a form of discipline—shunning—that is profoundly painful to the wayward person.* This ritualized practice of social distancing, which the Amish base on I Corinthians 5:9–13, varies from community to community, but the goal is always the same: to restore the wayward person to the church. Shunning sometimes works, though its real power lies in the threat of it, for it deters Amish people from establishing their own set of rules for living the Christian life.

As far as I know, shunning has never been practiced in the Brethren in Christ Church (and I suspect most of us are grateful for that). But even if we leave shunning aside, I’m not convinced that contemporary Brethren in Christ churches demonstrate the other factors that make rigorous discipline possible in Amish communities. We may have a set of shared ethical standards, but that set is relatively minimal; we don’t know our fellow church members very well, especially if our churches are large; we tend not to put our noses into “other people’s business”; and our church leaders are often quite reluctant to enact discipline.

But if traditional forms of church discipline require the sort of community that most North American Christians no longer inhabit, what are we to do? Is self-discipline all we have left?

## Accountability as a complement to discipline

Given the perils inherent in this area, it’s tempting to give our full attention to the more impersonal (and often affirmative) forms of Christian discipleship: preaching and teaching. These are crucial activities, and churches and pastors are wise to devote their best efforts to them. Nonetheless, the New Testament assumes more personal, and at times confrontational, forms of correction. Consider Matthew 18, I Corinthians 5, and Colossians 3. These texts presume that the Church exists, at least in part, to correct those who go astray.

This is where the idea of mutual accountability comes in. Unlike traditional practices of church discipline, which conjure up notions of hierarchy and punishment, mutual accountability suggests the creation of close, egalitarian relationships. *Discipline* is something that parents do to children; *accountability* is something that happens between brothers and sisters. Granted, church discipline may sometimes be necessary—for instance, when a church leader engages in sinful behavior that is widely known but goes unconfessed—yet for the range of practical reasons already outlined, we see that it’s difficult to enact it in our contemporary context. Consequently, our churches would be better served by nurturing accountability, one Christian to another.

In *The Godbearing Life*, authors Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster contend that Christians, if they are to flourish spiritually, need people in their lives who ask probing questions and offer honest counsel. They suggest, therefore, that each of us should have a “mentor,” someone who “possesses more experience, spiritual maturity, accumulated wisdom, or a combination of all three than we do.” This person helps us discern a “faithful life course.” Good mentors (in some traditions they are called “spiritual directors”) do not seek to create a “relationship of superiority,” but they are prepared to offer guidance and gentle correction.

*Unlike traditional practices of church discipline, mutual accountability suggests the creation of close, egalitarian relationships.*

Dean and Foster also say that each Christian would benefit from having at least one “soul friend,” a fellow traveler who we see more frequently than a mentor and with whom we can be open and honest. In addition to asking questions about our bad (or sinful) habits and God’s leading in our lives, a soul friend, write Dean and Foster, is someone with whom we can “share our deepest doubts, joys, longings, fears, dreams, confusion, [and] searching.”

## Creating a culture of accountability

Taken together, mentors and soul friends add up to accountability. On one level, this understanding of accountability is not far removed from my friend’s notion of self-discipline, for it won’t happen unless individual church members commit themselves to it. But churches can—and some churches do—convey this expectation to their new members. And while participation in these types of relationships may be hard to enforce, communicating this expectation creates a culture in which people know that their spiritual health depends on others.

A few years ago, I heard a story about a Brethren in Christ church in the 1940s. The person telling the story remembered that, when he was taken into membership as a relatively young man, he was asked two questions: *Are you willing to forgive your brothers and sisters in this congregation? And are you prepared to ask others to forgive you?* Forgiveness and accountability are different animals, of course. Still, it’s these kinds of questions, asked at the proper time, that create expectations for what it means to live an authentic Christian life.

So perhaps we should try out two new questions in our membership classes: *Are you willing to meet with a spiritual mentor? Are you willing to share you life with, and accept the counsel of, a close Christian friend?* It may be that questions like these, asked at just the right time, are our best hope for fostering discipleship in the 21st century.

## IN PART Online at INPART.ORG:

- SEE WHAT DAVID’S FATHER, JOHN E. ZERCHER, WROTE ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY IN HIS EDITORIALS FOR *THE EVANGELICAL VISITOR*
- LEARN HOW QUIZ TEAM MEMBERS KEEP EACH OTHER SHARP
- ENTER TO WIN A FREE COPY OF DAVID’S BOOK, *AMISH GRACE: HOW FORGIVENESS TRANSCENDED TRAGEDY*



**David Weaver-Zercher** is chair of the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.). A leading expert on the Amish community, David is the co-author of *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (Jossey-Bass, 2007). He lives in Mechanicsburg, Pa., with his wife and three sons.



**Gregory Snader** is a cartoonist, illustrator, and 2007 graduate of Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.). He lives in Lancaster, Pa., where he enjoys drinking tea and drawing with ink.

# Speaking the (straight) truth in (authentic) love

Pacific Lifeline  
changes  
lives through  
accountability  
and grace

**Carmen Hall**, executive director of Pacific Lifeline, is eager to show mercy to the women at the shelter, but she isn't afraid to hold high expectations for them either.

by Susan K. Getty

*"I'm addicted to miracles," says Carmen Hall.*

*And after more than five years as executive director of Pacific Lifeline (PLL) in Upland, Calif., she has witnessed plenty. Yet for Carmen and her staff, watching "with sheer awe as the human spirit chooses to rise" never loses its wonder.*

## Laying the ground rules

Pacific Lifeline is a Brethren in Christ-affiliated shelter celebrating 101 years of ministry. And for the last two decades of that century of service, it has been dedicated to reaching out specifically to women and children facing homelessness or the prospect of becoming homeless. For the women who come to PLL—women who are either victims of domestic violence, going through drug rehab, on probation, or on parole—it is no ordinary shelter. PLL is where the paradigm changes, where they begin, says Carmen, to experience "a shift in how they see their world—a shift in what they want for their world."

Focused on developing self-sufficiency, the one- to two-year residential program (which can serve six families at a time) provides therapeutic support and a curriculum-like process that involves goal-setting and a structure that is alien to many of the residents. Carmen asserts that the rigorous program at PLL makes it "college level" in the world of shelters and is not for everyone. Case managers, doctors, and therapists throughout the state assess when a client is ready for the program. Those seeking refuge at PLL must then complete a 13-page application. When accepted into the program, participants must sign a covenant agreement that sets out the expectations for being a part of the community: They agree to abide by a curfew, complete daily chores, and attend classes where they learn skills including parenting, nutrition,

and self-defense. Within this environment of support and accountability, residents are asked to give up self-destructive habits, trading them in for self-discipline and increased maturity of thought and action.

And if they don't choose to stick to the rules, there are consequences, which are well defined within the written agreement. "My theory," Carmen says, "is by the time you get to our home, you've wasted a lot of your life. This is no time to sit down. I mean business. The carrot is that you have a free place to live, food, and medical care. You will work. You will take care of your children. And if you don't, there's the door."

Carmen likens PLL to a household and her role there to that of a parent who isn't afraid to say "no" to the daughters under her care. A former high school principal who has children of her own, she has experience combining tough expectations with generous grace and love, firmly grounded in her belief that God is all about offering second chances.

## Encountering obstacles, celebrating breakthroughs

Leaving behind their own set of obstacles, Pacific Lifeline "daughters" face a whole new set of challenges when they come to the shelter. Adapting to a structured environment in which they are held accountable is extremely painful and scary for many of them because they have lived in both physical and emotional

chaos. Carmen explains, “Chaos blinds us to options. Or it sends us back to the dance routine [of bad decisions or unhealthy patterns of response].” But as women begin to experience acceptance and respect in this new environment, they are able to risk finding a new path.

That path may involve severing harmful relationships or reconciling damaged ones. Reuniting women with their own families and children—some of whom have been in foster care for years—is a niche specialty of the agency. The needs of the children involved are as paramount as the needs of the mothers, Carmen says. Although it may take months to successfully reunify families, being reconnected with family members who have been hurt by one’s behav-

inspired by his mother—has made his own turnaround and become an honor student.

Unfortunately, not every story has a happy ending. When women have lived under an abusive or skewed authority—or perhaps under no authority at all—adjusting to the community expectations at Pacific Lifeline can be extremely difficult. Carmen says that, for the women, experiencing the boundaries at the home “becomes a point of safety, but there is always a point of rebellion on the way to change. Always. Because [living] in that construct will flush up memories, patterns of behavior, all kinds of things that were usually the genesis for the behaviors and choices that have led to difficulty for the individual.”

team . . . if we care for them as if they are our daughters, then we will get hurt. But there’s the chance that they will raise to that level of wanting to have that mutual sense of gratitude and respect. There’s something about raising the bar. When they can achieve certain goals, people start to see their dignity and their value.”

And so, community life at PLL shows that grace and forgiveness are not the polar opposites of accountability and enforcing consequences. The channel for grace often is accountability. The staff of PLL—Carmen, a case manager, three therapists, an office assistant, two part-time maintenance staff, and two part-time public relations and grant-writing personnel—works together as a team to pro-

around her. When Carmen’s husband received a difficult medical diagnosis this past December, a number of the residents made cards for him, left messages, and made sure that Carmen didn’t stay too late in the office.

PLL alumni have the opportunity to be part of the grad program, which offers ongoing support and fellowship to the daughters of Pacific Lifeline. And the staff delights in seeing that many of these women begin to participate in the community on a deeper level, coming to the point where they themselves can speak truth into the lives of their sisters and provide mutual accountability.

As they walk beside, work with, and watch these women changing the course of their lives, Carmen and



ior and choices “helps create wholeness” in a person’s life.

Against seemingly insurmountable odds, wholeness comes to many of Pacific Lifeline’s daughters. There is Mary\*, a meth addict for nearly 40 years, who earned freedom from her addiction and, in a symbolically significant step, hosted a party for her son’s 11th birthday. It was the first time they had ever celebrated his birthday.

And there’s Tammy\*, a felon recently paroled from prison who had seven children, all in foster homes. While at PLL, she was reunited with her one son—but in the meantime, she was secretly seeing the boy’s father, a runaway felon. “We set the rules down and she broke them all,” Carmen says. So they set what seemed like impossible boundaries, and then they watched yet another miracle occur as Tammy responded to the new boundaries. “She achieved it all,” remarks Carmen. Now in dental hygienist school, Tammy has reason to be proud, of her own accomplishments as well as those of her son who—

### The benefits of mutual risk-taking

Just as the women who enter the program at PLL take a chance by opening themselves up to new relationships of influence, the staff members likewise risk much. “What does it mean to hope in someone when there is no guarantee?” asks Carmen. Every day, the team must put their love on the line because “there’s always the chance for failure.”

The metaphor Carmen uses to describe how she feels about the work at PLL is striking. “I am on the edge of a cliff. Surfing. Naked. We are all exercising vulnerable hope. Naked hope. . . . But people will make it more often if they know there is even one person who has hope in them, who cares enough to be disappointed.”

The territory of community accountability and the ensuing confrontation is not easy to navigate. Carmen says, “It’s uncomfortable. You never get used to it, and there’s nothing about it that’s fun. But we make a choice as a

vide a consistent environment for the residents of the home. Carmen says that “what creates the right to influence is when we care—enough to discipline, enough to confront.”

### Responding to love

The environment of the PLL home shows the women there that they are respected and valued. For the first time in a long time—and sometimes for the first time ever—these women have their basic needs met.

“They learn what it means to be cared for,” Carmen says. And “great love always calls out for a response.”

When a woman begins taking responsibility for her own life, making good decisions, and sticking to the goals she has set for herself and her children, the PLL staff begins to notice that she becomes more outward-focused. There’s a recognition of the needs of others, and an understanding that she has something to offer those

her co-workers are amazed. “It is always about God doing miracles in people’s lives through their hopes and their dreams. He always exemplifies, over and over, second chances. Not everybody will take that chance, but when they do, it is a beautiful thing.”

### IN PART Online at INPART.ORG:

- READ MORE STORIES OF LIVES TRANSFORMED AT PLL
- CATCH A GLIMPSE INSIDE THE PLL HOME
- JOURNEY WITH PHOTOGRAPHER CYNTHIA STAMATIS AS SHE DID THIS SHOOT



**Susan K. Getty** is a writer and artist who lives in Dillsburg, Pa. She’s the editorial assistant for the Office of Marketing and Public Relations at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.) and a member of the Grantham (Pa.) BIC Church, where she is one of the oldest members of the youth group.

**Cynthia Stamatis** lives in southern California, where she was born and raised. Her photographic essays illustrate her passion for storytelling and have earned numerous international awards.

\*Names have been changed.

## VIBES

AN EXPLORATION OF FAITH AND POPULAR CULTURE

## EAT, WEED, AND BE MERRY

*CSAs cultivate fresh foods and community*

by SARAH IMBODEN

**It's an ordinary Tuesday**, and, as usual, you come home too tired to figure out what to cook for supper. But then you see it: a box on your front porch full of... fresh vegetables. Now the challenge isn't just what to fix for supper, but what to do with a pound of snap peas and two gigantic summer squash. Welcome to the life of a CSA member!

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** consists of a group of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation and receive portions of the farm's bounty throughout the growing season. Members also share the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests.

(United States Department of Agriculture)

**A more radical commitment?**

The first time I joined a CSA, I did so with my housemates, a group of young women living together in Harrisburg, Pa. We heard about a CSA opportunity and, being concerned about healthy food and building community, decided to join. As with most CSA farms, ours provided a regular newsletter with updates on the growing season and also scheduled events, like pot-lucks, aimed at encouraging members to visit the farm and to interact with one another. We enjoyed receiving our box of surprises each week, but because

we lived quite a distance from the farm, our household didn't participate in the farm events, so we never became part of the community.

My second CSA experience was more personal. When I met my future husband, he was running a small garden for family and a few friends. Through the season, many of us worked together to produce the food that graced our tables that summer. We celebrated our bounty, but we also shared the frustration of dry spells and plundering ground-hogs. I learned that CSAs can be more than just a trendy way to participate in local economies and food production; as the name implies, they're also about relationships.

The commitment to support the farm (and farmers) through good weather and bad, to voluntarily join our livelihoods, prompts the question: Is membership in a CSA a more radical commitment than that which many Christians are willing to make to their churches?

As members of the body of Christ, we commit to support one another through all kinds of circumstances, but how often do we pull out when "un-

favorable weather or pests" threaten? The BIC Core Value on belonging to the community of faith reads a lot like many CSA mission statements: "We value integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance." Ironically, for many people, organizations like CSAs provide a more tangible context for working out this value than does their neighborhood church.

**A joyful challenge**

The commitment to a CSA goes beyond sweat equity and extends to members' wallets. On average, a share in a CSA costs about \$450 for 20 weeks of produce, a price that some might say is too high. However, studies show that CSA prices are more affordable than either organic or conventional produce prices. The key difference is in the amount and quality of produce CSA farms provide.

The joy and the challenge of a CSA share is the surprise and the quantity. For example, not many of us would go to a grocery store and purchase a few pounds of organic tomatoes or three heads of lettuce in one trip. But this kind of selection is not uncommon in a CSA box. Members of a CSA are challenged to find new and creative ways to incorporate more vegetables into their diets. Sure, if you're not already buying several pounds of produce per week, the share price may not seem like a bargain. But consider this: With each share, you receive not only fresh produce, but also the knowledge that it came from relatively close by and that you helped provide a local family's livelihood. You also likely encouraged sustainable land use, received a few recipe tips, and participated in a community. From this perspective, paying for food becomes less about bargains

and more about what is good for you and those around you.

**More than metaphorical**

Christians today are continually challenged to understand our relationship to the earth as more than metaphorical. Membership in a CSA offers an opportunity to participate in a lively community and invest significantly in an equitable and healthy system of treating the land, consumers, and producers. As Christians—and consumers—membership in such an organization also helps us ask questions about what it means to bear God's image today.

For me, the decision to be a member of a CSA farm flows directly out of my values and my faith. Participating in a community that meets such basic needs (food, fellowship, and sustainable land use) is a way that I can love my neighbors and

## VIBES

## LIVING SIMPLY, EATING WELL



**Simply in Season**, a cookbook published under the Mennonite Central Committee's World Community Cookbook series, shares simple, delicious recipes that celebrate the ecological, nutritional, and spiritual joys of eating local foods in season.

**Simply in Season: Children's Cookbook**, a companion publication of *Simply in Season*, is filled with fun, creative recipes featuring in-season foods for kids of all ages.



**Simply in Season Study Sessions** guides adult or intergenerational Sunday school classes or small groups that are "on the path to connecting food and faith."



honor God with good stewardship of resources. We aren't all called to be farmers, but we are called to support one another in our callings and to live righteous lives while on earth. Whether this plays out within the community of a CSA or a church (hopefully both), it gives us the opportunity to enjoy the bounty of God's creation in fresh, new ways.

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- LOCATE A CSA NEAR YOU
- LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF CSAS
- SEE HOW ONE GARDENER IS BRINGING GREENS INTO HER URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD



**Sarah Imboden** lives in Catskill, N.Y., with her husband, Jonathan. She enjoys working one day a week at their local CSA to clear her mind as she finishes an MA/MA in public policy and history this summer.

## TO THE POINT

*Some research\* indicates that church attendees today are less loyal to specific congregations or denominations than were their parents and/or grandparents. This has coincided with a simultaneous drop in the practice of church membership. What is your church's stance on membership and how does it practice accountability in light of that approach?*

**Tim Day**

THE MEETING HOUSE  
Oakville, ON

In the past, the churches have relied on institutional loyalty as expressed in formal documents, like membership covenants and doctrinal statements. Yet we have not done the hard work of helping people experience what it means to live as a vital member of a family.

Our church [The Meeting House] has a formal membership for our leaders, but we define our core community as those who actually live in community by taking part in a small group, giving faithfully, and actively serving. People “sign” their membership commitment by how they live in community, not how they sign a paper. We believe this better reflects the early Jesus movement as well as our Anabaptist heritage.

**Peter H. von Keyserling**

RIDGE VIEW BIC  
Roanoke, Va.

I am not sure membership is functionally related to community and accountability in today's world. If membership is not valued, then it cannot be used as a wedge to gain compliance.

Today, church discipline will not likely correct most infringements of church rules and moral lapses. It will more likely drive away the transgressor. Love, on the other hand, has a better-than-ever chance of bringing out a correction. If love is active within the church, then accountability is self-imposed.

**Esther Spurrier**

MACHA (Zambia) BIC

Even after many years, I continue to be amazed at how important church membership is here in Zambia. We attend Macha BIC Church—the mother congregation of the Zambia BIC Conference that has about 1,000 in attendance on a good Sunday. People are baptized and members are received once a year. Others who have been on church discipline are restored; this after they have publically confessed, been counseled in their congregations, and been approved for reinstatement. (Many are dis-fellowshipped for sexual sins or having entered into polygamous marriage situations.) It seems a long and painful process and speaks to the importance people place on right standing within the community of believers. Perhaps a strong value on group identity within the Zambian society reinforces this.

**John Arthur Brubaker**

UPLAND (Calif.) BIC

In a positive sense, the local church has adapted to the decline in congregational loyalty by becoming quite ready to quickly accept new attendees. My childhood memory is that newcomers to the congregation were held at arm's length for a long time before being fully accepted by the church family.

In a negative sense, congregations are increasingly reluctant to address behavior that may call for church discipline, knowing that members can easily evade the issue by moving on to another congregation.

Ideally, there should be a mutual understanding between churches, not only within the denomination but also within the larger community, so that when persons move to another congregation, pastors are in communication and agree to require that all unresolved issues in the former congregation be resolved before these persons are fully accepted in the new congregation.

\*Ellison Research (Phoenix, Ariz.) [ellisonresearch.com/PublicStudies.htm](http://ellisonresearch.com/PublicStudies.htm)

## PARTING WORDS

### THE GRAFFITI MAN OF COLLEGE PARK

by PERRY ENGLE

I can't explain how or when the ritual of my daily 20-minute walk turned into a personal campaign committed to keeping my neighborhood graffiti-free.

The original intent of my morning jaunts was simply exercise and prayer, no more. Every day at dawn, my trek took me briskly along the sidewalks and alleyways of Yale, Princeton, Columbia, and Harvard—street names that account for our otherwise unremarkable suburban neighborhood being called College Park.

I have to say I've never been particularly resentful towards the mostly high school students who mark up the landscape along my route. I even appreciate good graffiti as art in particular settings... just not on my garage door. Admittedly, I have on occasion confronted a burgeoning artist or two—Sharpie in hand—in front of my house. At these times, Marta and the girls have gently reminded me of the stories of other southern California residents who, after similar conversations, have had their neighborly concern responded to with unappreciative gunfire.

So, not wanting to lose my life over some 13-year-old writing his initials on my fire hydrant, what I do instead is report the markings via an

online form provided at the city website. It takes a few minutes a couple of times a week, and the city sends out a professional graffiti-removal crew to paint and power-wash the suburban hieroglyphics into oblivion.

One thing that never ceases to amaze me is how long graffiti remains if I don't report it. It's not uncommon for me to return home from one of my trips to find unreported inscriptions exactly where I left them before I went out of town. It's as if there is an unwritten code that has come to rule our culture, and it reasons: “If I didn't put it there, then it's not my responsibility.”

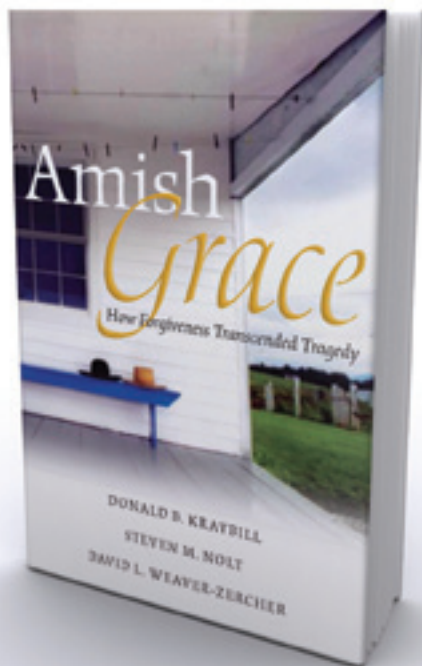
I have a concern that, over time, a similar mindset has crept into the Church. What used to be a normal expectation of brotherly and sisterly accountability for godly behavior and Christ-like ways of interacting has now become an all-too-common attitude of “mind your own business or I'll leave this church.” The graffiti of the Church today is found in conflict that goes on too long, morality that is soft around the edges, and speech that hurts people rather than builds them up. What is sad is our long-suffering in allowing so-called followers of Christ to tag the Christian community with their immature and destructive behavior.

“Am I my brother's keeper?” Cain retorted after killing Abel and being confronted by God (Genesis 4:9). The inferred answer for members of Christ's body has always been a resounding, “Yes!” Christ-followers are responsible for one another's behavior and well-being. God expects us to humbly and privately confront moral failure when it appears and to do everything possible to gently restore those caught in sin (Galatians 6:1; Matthew 18:15–17). In the end, this helps individuals and strengthens the Christian community.

Granted, it would be easier to simply “walk and pray” through life, turning a blind eye to the increasing vandalism around us. But it still begs the question: If followers of Jesus don't accept responsibility to hold one another accountable for graffiti-like behavior, then who will? If not now, then when?



**Perry Engle** is the bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the BIC Church. He does his best to “speak the truth in love” when confronting taggers in his neighborhood. He and his wife, Marta, and their three daughters live at the corner of Yale and Columbia in Ontario, Calif.



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