

IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Winter 2012

ANABAPTISM

**We
believe**
JESUS IS
AMONG US



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Despite my status as a relative newcomer to the Brethren in Christ, I sense that our denomination is in a unique time of transition. We’ve experienced radical demographic changes. We’ve undergone organizational shifts. And it seems like conversations about our history and trajectory have been cropping up across the Church.

In pivotal times like this, we have the opportunity to rediscover and reaffirm what unites us—our beliefs, our faith, our identity in Christ.

And so, this issue of *In Part* kicks off “We believe,” a four-part series examining the theological streams that have informed our convictions and values. We’ll work our way chronologically, beginning with Anabaptism (the original movement

I’ve thoroughly enjoyed guest editing this first issue about what “We believe” as Brethren in Christ. It’s been an exciting journey, filled with unexpected twists and revelations.

During Advent, we celebrate an epic journey of discovery. In a back alley of Bethlehem, we find surprising word of God’s identity: straw-flecked baby, God with us, present in each moment of life. The majesty of God compressed into soft infant body.

This edition of *In Part* also invites us to embark on a journey of discovery, focusing on the convictions and commitments that birthed the Brethren in Christ over 200 years ago: our Anabaptist heritage. Along the way, I’ve gained a new appreciation for how Anabaptist theology has influenced my home church, Harrisburg (Pa.) Brethren in Christ. In this issue, my church’s senior pastor, Glenn “Woody” Dalton, describes how our Anabaptist-inspired Core Values of Pursuing Peace, Living Simply, and Belonging to the Community of Faith have shaped Harrisburg BIC’s understanding of what it means to authentically follow Jesus as an urban, multicultural community. I’m deeply grateful for this church

that shaped the Brethren in Christ) and then moving to Pietism, Wesleyanism, and Evangelicalism (the most recent and controversial addition).

With that note of background, I joyfully introduce Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek, the launch editor of this magazine and the guest editor of this issue.

Kristine
Kristine N. Frey, editor (pictured left)



family. In their midst, I can relax into who I am. And yet, I’m continually challenged to learn and grow.

My hope is that as you read this series of issues, you’ll have moments when you find yourself relaxing into our denomination’s heritage. Whether you’re a longtime or new member, I hope you’ll feel a sense of home. But I also pray that you’ll experience moments of discovery, that you’ll be inspired to learn and grow. As the chorus of voices in this issue attests, Anabaptism is not only the original, defining theological stream of our denomination, but it also offers revelations for today and for the future.

As Brethren in Christ, we recognize the true source of what “We believe.” Our identity begins and ends with following Jesus Christ, who had the humility and courage to arrive in the spotlight of a single star. In our journey through Advent and beyond, may we continue to recognize *Jesus among us*, to seek Christ’s light in all aspects of our identity and our lives.

Rebecca
Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek,
guest editor (pictured right)

Creative contributors



Cover art
by Andy Rash

ARTIST’S STATEMENT

To create this visual representation of our Anabaptist heritage, I drew in a variety of elements, each with symbolic meaning:

- The **linen background** illustrates the weave of community—how we are all part of it and carry it within ourselves.
- The **olive branch** is a symbol of our pursuit of peace.
- The **stream**, with its two forks coming together as it nears Christ (represented by the crown of thorns), stands for reconciliation and the nonviolent resolution of conflict—a mending of what was once torn. It also points to the Anabaptist emphasis on believers’ baptism.
- The **fragment in the center of the figure** is from the first page of the 1536 Froschauer Bible, which was owned by three generations of early BIC bishops and is in the BIC Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).
- The **words of Scripture** surrounding the figure are from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), which greatly influences Anabaptist thought.
- The **light source** captures how our Anabaptist ancestors responded to the call to visibly model the kingdom of God, shining their light as a city on a hill.



Andy Rash attends the Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC Church. While sharing a life with his wife, Jennifer, stepson Noah, and dog Jake, he fixes houses, fixes meals, and fixes to jump into the next artistic endeavor feet first.



Muriel Kratz studied art education at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.) and is eminently eager to start her teaching career in January. Some of Muriel’s interests include travel, graphic design, and photography, samples of which appear on pages 4–7.



Nate Bridi, formerly the designer for *In Part*, relishes the opportunity to contribute to the magazine from time to time. He and his wife, Melissa, live in Pittsburgh, where they root for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Nate’s illustration appears on page 13.

IN PART™

Winter 2012

VOLUME 126 NUMBER 1

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST
COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

*Now I know **in part**; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. I Corinthians 13:12*

BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH IN THE U.S.

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INPART.ORG (ISSN 1940-2945)

IN PART (ISSN 1940-2937) is published four times a year by the Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S. *In Part* invites readers into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ within the context of the shared life and ministry of the BIC Church.

Printed by Evangel Press (Nappanee, Ind.)

Send feedback, address changes, or subscription questions to inpart@bic-church.org.

Postmaster: Send changes of address to:

IN PART

431 Grantham Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055 USA

Periodical Postage paid at Nappanee, IN 46550-0166.

Printed in U.S.A.

Member of the **Evangelical Press Association**.

Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *New International Version*.

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Printed on FSC-certified Domtar Opaque-Plainfield paper. At least 25% of the paper fiber comes from well-managed forests independently certified according to the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council; 10% is recycled from post-consumer waste paper.

Note of appreciation

BIC Communications thanks Perry Engle, bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Regional Conferences, who has so eloquently expressed how the streams of BIC theology all find their source in Jesus Christ (as in “Anabaptism: Jesus is among us”). Perry shared these ideas in his message at General Conference 2012, available to view at bic-church.org/gc2012.

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→ Bold, sweetened, with a little bit of room

BY PERRY ENGLE

IN MOTION

Ever wondered . . . what's Anabaptism?

an·a·bap·tism | æn-ə-'baep-tism |
Origin: Late Greek *anabaptismos*, or “baptize again”

NOUN:
a theological tradition originating with the “Radical Reformers,” 16th-century European believers who didn’t think the Protestant Reformation went far enough in its effort to purify the Church

USED IN A SENTENCE:
In addition to advocating believers’ baptism, Anabaptism emphasizes community, discipleship and obedience, the separation of Church and state, and the practices of nonresistance and footwashing.

Focus A Malawian believer pursues relational reconciliation in the spiritual realm



Earlier this year, Lilly* (right), a BIC believer in Malawi, was awakened in the night and found her daughter, Hope* (left), trembling in the corner of the room. Hope shared that a woman in their village had offered her a spiritual “hammer” to use to kill Lilly, but Hope had refused. Lilly then made the courageous decision to meet with this neighbor. The woman eventually confessed that she had sought to spiritually attack Lilly. Instead of pressing charges, Lilly says that God gave her the strength to forgive her neighbor, to the amazement of many in the village. Children and other relatives of the lady have come to Lilly to thank her for her forgiveness.

*Since security is an issue for many believers in Malawi, the names in this section have been changed.

Tracing our history

Anabaptism

The Protestant reformation begins when Martin Luther nails his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

1517

Swiss Brethren leader Felix Manz is drowned, the first martyr of the Radical Reformation.

1525

Swiss Brethren leader Felix Manz is drowned, the first martyr of the Radical Reformation.

1527

More than a century of persecution leads Mennonites in Europe to seek religious freedom in Pennsylvania.

1536

More than a century of persecution leads Mennonites in Europe to seek religious freedom in Pennsylvania.

1710

The Pietist movement initiates a spiritual awakening across Lancaster County that greatly influences Jacob Engel and other early BIC believers.

1754

Led by Jacob Engel, the first Brethren in Christ (known as “the Brethren” or “River Brethren”) begin to meet in homes and barns in Lancaster County.

1760s

BIC Confession of Faith forbids “bear[ing] the sword.”

c. 1780

BIC Confession of Faith forbids “bear[ing] the sword.”

1780

The Civil War prompts BIC U.S. to register as a nonresistance Church.

1860–1865

Elements of Wesleyanism influence BIC thought.

1880s

During World War II, BIC U.S. is divided on loyalty to nonresistant position.

1939–1945

BIC becomes a full member of Mennonite Central Committee, a relief, development, and peace agency of Anabaptist denominations.

1942

Engagement with Evangelicals influences BIC community.

1950s

General Conference strongly reaffirms the BIC Church’s historic position of nonresistance, peace, and nonviolent resolution of conflict.

1976

Church Member Profile indicates that while the BIC community continues to support Anabaptist-informed values, we struggle with knowing how to practice them. (See bic-church.org/cmp for more information.)

1999

Church Member Profile indicates that while the BIC community continues to support Anabaptist-informed values, we struggle with knowing how to practice them. (See bic-church.org/cmp for more information.)

2006

In *Part* magazine, the *Brethren in Christ History and Life* journal, and the Messiah College Sider Institute call our denomination to refocus on our identity and heritage.

2012

Anabaptist influence

Wesleyan influence

Pietist influence

Evangelical influence

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

A PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE
What the Civil Rights Movement and Anabaptism have in common

by JAY JOHNSON

I have vivid memories from growing up in the '60s in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. I remember our entire Philadelphia neighborhood mourning the death of Medgar Evers, a Civil Rights activist who was assassinated in his driveway. I recall television images of young black people being beaten by police, bitten by dogs, and sprayed with fire hoses. I still recollect the hope that swelled upon hearing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech and the fear that resurged a month later when four innocent girls were killed by a bomb in a Birmingham, Ala., church.

Deep within, many African Americans longed for vengeance, but Dr. King modeled a different response: nonviolent resistance. In his 1957 article “The Power of Nonviolence,” Dr. King wrote that the center of the Civil Rights Movement stood on the philosophy of love:

“*Agape* is understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all. [. . .] It is the love of God working in the minds of men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. And when you come to love on this level, you begin to love men not because they are likeable . . . but because God loves them. . . . It is the type of love that stands at the center of the movement that we are trying to carry on in the Southland—*agape*.”

Dr. King wrote these words years before he traveled to India. There, he learned the techniques of nonviolent

→ FOLLOWING JESUS: We value wholehearted obedience to Christ Jesus through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.



Both Anabaptists—such as the 1569 Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems (left, standing)—and many members of the Civil Rights Movement (right) based their commitment to nonviolence in Christ’s love.

resistance. But, for Dr. King, the source of his philosophy was the life and witness of Jesus Christ, not some social or political ideology. From a young age, his convictions were shaped in the Church and by Scripture.

As Christians in the U.S., we have benefited greatly from the witness of Dr. King and so many others in the Civil Rights Movement who struggled and died for this cause. I live their legacy as the pastor of a predominantly Caucasian church in Abilene, Kans. For Christians, Dr. King’s vision continues to speak to the unifying reality of Christ’s example of *agape* love.

The Brethren in Christ view the Civil Rights Movement from a unique perspective. We also have a rich heritage of following Jesus, as lived out by our Anabaptist ancestors. They valued wholehearted obedience to Christ. As a

result, they refused to fight back when persecuted. They believed the message of our Articles of Faith and Doctrine that: “Christ loved His enemies and He calls us as His disciples to love our enemies. We follow our Lord in being a people of peace and reconciliation, called to suffer and not to fight.” Many died at the hands of Church and state for living out their beliefs.

Following Jesus is at the core of our values as Brethren in Christ. Our Anabaptist ancestors and Civil Rights Movement leaders remind us that following Jesus will often lead us to respond in countercultural ways, to “Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14).



Jay Johnson is pastor of Zion BIC (Abilene, Kans.). He previously served for 30 years in Christian radio. Jay and his wife, A'Lisa, have five adult children and three grandchildren.

What can happen when we take JESUS' WORDS SERIOUSLY

The pastoral team at Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC has challenged its congregation to follow Jesus by pursuing a bold vision of diversity and multiculturalism in an urban setting. Hear from these staff members on page 7.

by Glenn “Woody” Dalton



Woody Dalton first encountered Anabaptism in seminary. He says, “Anabaptists were the first group I’d ever studied that seemed to take Jesus at His word. They weren’t trying to explain away the Sermon on the Mount; they weren’t trying to explain why Jesus didn’t really mean to love your enemies or to honor and help the poor.” More than 30 years later, Dalton and the Harrisburg (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church continue their quest to follow Jesus and take His words seriously—a journey that is transforming the church’s vision and community.

In the late 1990s, our church, Harrisburg BIC, was an almost entirely white congregation set in a largely African-American community. I’d been there

for 18 years. Despite our attempts to build relationships with our neighbors, we were still a predominantly white church. Yet our neighborhood had, if anything, become more diverse. I came to realize that we needed to either “get in or get out” of this community. And to be honest, I thought we were destined to get out. But as a church, we said, first, let’s pray.

One day, after a year of praying, I was really frustrated. I pointed my finger toward heaven, and I said, “We’re trying to discern Your will. How about a little help down here?” And while my finger was still in the air, there was a knock on the door. It was James Roach, an African-American man from the community. “My wife, Mary, sent me,” he said. “She was praying, and the Lord told her that we’re supposed to come to your church. Is that ok with you?” *Is that ok with us?!* I pulled my finger down and thought, Wow, I didn’t think You would be that direct.

To my surprise, the Lord began focusing us inward, back into the city, back toward diversity. We began to pursue a new vision to become a multicultural church transformed by Jesus. Today, that vision continues to unfold, drawing us closer to our Anabaptist roots.

ANSWERED PRAYER, THEN A VISION EMERGES

From that dramatic moment, we began to move forward. We thought, God wants us to stay—what do we do next? A key turning point in reaching the community came when Cedra Washington, our associate pastor of outreach and discipleship, joined our pastoral staff. I simply can’t overstate how important her commitment to the church and its vision has been through the years. No matter how long we’d been there, this all-white church, we just had no credibility in the African-American

community, but Cedra did because of her leadership in another local church.

What was interesting was that African Americans started to come, and they’d shake my hand and say, “We really enjoyed the service,” or “We really love this church, we’ll be coming back.” And then I’d watch them walk straight over to Pastor Cedra to get her perspective on the church. She was like a gatekeeper. Sometimes gatekeepers keep people out, but other times, gatekeepers open the gate and say, “It’s ok to come in here.” Other African Americans trusted Cedra that Harrisburg BIC was really sincere about this vision and that it was all right to join this emerging community.

The church realized immediately that if we invited different races and ethnic groups to join the congregation, then the church needed to change.

Worship needed to reflect all the groups represented among us. When you invite people to be part of your congregation, you have to make adjustments that say, “We’re glad you’re here, and you are a vital member of our community.”

The second thing we realized is that we needed to work intentionally toward racial reconciliation—to live out our Anabaptist commitments to peacemaking and belonging to community. How can you have a truly reconciled church or people really loving each other and caring for one another and not talk about what has happened for the past 400 years and not talk about current conditions? How can you say, “Please come to our church, but we’re going to ignore all of the issues that impact your life, and we’re going to ignore all the issues that have historically divided us, and we’re going to pretend none of that exists?” Our church started racial reconcilia-

tion classes because you have to address these issues in order to have authenticity in your relationships.

WHAT HOLDS US TOGETHER?

After many years of purposeful work, our church today enjoys great diversity. We have so much diversity, in fact, that sometimes the differences are breathtaking. More than 14 racial and ethnic groups comprise our church body. But the differences span beyond race and ethnicity, to socioeconomic status and education as well. When I’m in a good space, I look out and see all of this beautiful diversity, and I say, “The only thing holding us together is Jesus Christ.” And then, when I’m afraid and in a bad space, I look out with fear in my heart and I say, “Oh my Lord, the only thing holding us together is Jesus Christ.”

As a congregation characterized by startling differences, we must find our core identity as a community in Christ. When it comes to following Jesus, we are unashamedly Anabaptist. By that I mean, we value community, service

If we are the people who Jesus calls us to be, we will be countercultural in many ways.

to our neighbors, peacemaking, being people of the book, leading biblical and Spirit-led lives, and living simply (which we need to distinguish from poverty, which is not a choice).

These commitments fit very well in an urban setting. In fact, I think the core values of Anabaptism have aided our church growth. We have to be very creative in our ministries. We have to be focused on holistic outreach, because often in an urban setting, it's not enough to say, "All you need is Jesus." A relationship with Jesus is the most important gift in anyone's life, the most important turning point; but the bottom line is that if a person needs detoxing from drugs—and I don't mean this in a sacrilegious way—Jesus isn't enough. Or, if a person's hungry, Jesus needs to come along with some food. We have to be holistic in the way we approach things here.

We believe that the greatest thing that Jesus offers people is grace. Modeling authenticity, talking about our need for it so that grace can interact with our lives is part of the culture of our congregation. We are human beings—real, live human beings being saved by Jesus Christ. Our emphasis on grace doesn't mean we're not trying to help people grow spiritually, morally, and relationally, that's part of our job. But for that to happen, to really happen, from the inside out, you can't be pretending to be a whole lot better than you are. And so, I

think authenticity is attractive to people. It draws people, but it's also absolutely essential for real spiritual growth.

A COUNTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY

If we are the people who Jesus calls us to be, we will be countercultural in many ways. Younger people seem to especially resonate with Anabaptist values. For some reason, Harrisburg BIC keeps getting younger as I get older. I think a big part of this is our vision. Young people value diversity; they don't see it as a threat. They see our commitment to service and making a difference in our community. People are tired of wars; they're tired of materialism; they're tired of living in a society where community is fractured even along family lines. Anabaptism has a tremendous amount to offer to young people and others who are looking for something better, something beyond the cacophony of our nation's divisive political discourse.

Politics are inherently divisive, while our Anabaptist understanding of the kingdom of God brings people together. The kingdom of God is coming, no matter who is in power in America, no matter what political parties do, no matter how we vote. And nothing can stop the Kingdom that we're part of. Our leader has already been elected before the foundation of the world. I'm not saying don't vote or don't care about politics, but we have to keep it in

perspective. Our unity is in Christ, and we have to live in light of that.

Don't get me wrong: I love many things about this country. But our culture is very seductive. If we take the words of Jesus seriously and keep understanding the values of the Kingdom, we just can never be too comfortable in this environment. Our society values materialism and competition, glorifies violence and power, and celebrates narcissism. Cultural sins are the most dangerous because they take sin and normalize it and popularize it. As a result, when you engage in sinful activities, you feel like you're being a good person in your culture. I have to keep questioning myself and help church members question themselves about what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what Jesus is really calling us to.

Many people are looking for a countercultural community that offers an alternative to our society's values. With a lot of seeker-friendly models, we try to blend into the culture as much as possible, which I think is a huge mistake. People don't want more of the stuff that they're stuck in. They want to catch a glimpse of something transcendent and spiritual and something that says, "Here's a whole different way of life; here's a whole different Kingdom that's working itself into the world."

THE ADVENTURE OF FOLLOWING JESUS

If we follow Christ and His kingdom, we will find ourselves in all kinds of places we never dreamed we'd be. I never dreamed I'd be in Pennsylvania, as a southern boy coming up here with all these Yankees; coming from a racist environment in the South to pastoring a diverse, multiracial church; coming

from the middle class and being deeply concerned about the poor and how we can minister to the hungry and people with addictions. The adventure of following Jesus has many times called me out of anything that has ever been comfortable. Like any adventure, it's the hardest thing I've ever done, and it's the greatest thing I've ever done.

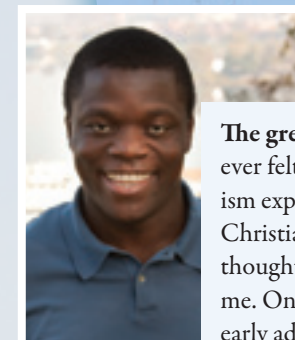
I believe we are called as a congregation and as a denomination to the greatest adventure: to radically follow Christ—His words and example—even when that moves us beyond all that is familiar or comfortable. We have a prophetic and distinct heritage as a denomination. We look squarely into the difficult teachings of Christ. We take seriously the words of the Lord's Prayer—"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"—and believe our Church should reflect the beauty of God's kingdom, where people "from every nation, tribe, people, and language" will stand before the throne in worship. We invite all believers into fellowship with us, but we must not lose the saltiness of our identity in the process. Our Anabaptist heritage calls us to esteem the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, those who mourn, those who are last. In a world skewed toward a different set of values, we are called to follow Jesus and the values of His kingdom, to pursue the challenging and disarming way of life that Jesus defines as truly blessed.



Glenn "Woody" Dalton is senior pastor of Harrisburg (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church. He and his wife, Kim, have three adult sons. Woody enjoys golf, a good steak, chocolate pie, and Mountain Dew.

HARRISBURG BIC'S PASTORS
RESPOND TO THE QUESTION,

What has following Jesus meant for you in your life?



The greatest pain I have ever felt was due to racism expressed by other Christians—from people I thought knew me and loved me. One experience in my early adulthood nearly destroyed my faith not in God, but in His Church.

Through one of Pastor Woody's sermons, the Holy Spirit convicted me that if I really desired to live and love like Christ, I had to forgive. If I wanted to serve my Prince of Peace, like Him, I must not just take His words seriously but also submit to the Holy Spirit daily. For me, that has meant glorifying God by being a reconciler.

—Hank Johnson, pastor of youth ministries



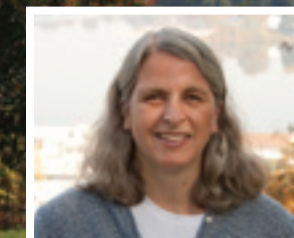
When our teen daughter became ill in the last year, we felt challenged to focus on what God was trying to show us. God has revealed Himself to us in this difficult time, and we now find ourselves able to praise Him in my daughter's healing. When we continue to keep our eyes on Christ, we see His blessings through all things, even the difficult times.

—Patty Patterson, pastor of children's ministries



When I joined this church in 2000 as a part-time youth pastor, I felt Jesus was calling me to quit my full-time job so that I could commit fully to this church and its vision. I knew myself well enough to understand that if the going got tough in my new role, I would be tempted to return to the comfort of my job and my former church. To me, following Jesus means closing the door on any other options and totally committing to the life and to the future that God is calling me to.

—Cedra Washington, pastor of outreach and discipleship



Following Jesus affects every area of my life: relationships, family life, use of money and time, giving, words, values, service to others, character, and my commitment to grace. Scripture reminds us that Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Likewise, as a follower of Jesus, I'm called to serve and to give my life away, too. In doing so, my hope is that others are led to follow Jesus and experience life in Him.

—Lynda Gephart, pastor of administration

Following Jesus in a post-Christian culture

by Kurt Willems

I met David randomly.

I'd been sitting in a coffee shop one evening, working on a seminary paper, when I noticed him at the table next to me. I'm fairly extroverted, so it's no surprise that small talk ensued between us. Yet, as we casually talked, God was in the process of answering a prayer: that I'd connect with some people not involved in the Christian faith.

Our conversation progressed, and I learned that David was an artist pursuing a master's degree in counseling. The common ground we shared as students with goals in the helping professions must have been enough for him to accept my invitation to hang out the following week—even after finding out that I'm a pastor.

When we met for coffee again, the dialogue quickly moved into faith and politics. Early on, I figured out that David was an agnostic with a progressive political worldview. He attempted to get me to show my true "Christian" colors (as Christians are often portrayed by popular culture) by saying something that would offend many church folks: "When you mix religion, nationalism, imperialism, and fear, people do really bad things."

I said, "I couldn't agree more." Based on the contortions of his face, I knew David didn't quite know how to process my response.

"You're a Christian, right?"
"Yep. I'm a follower of Jesus." I then went on to tell him about the way of Anabaptism.

By the end of the conversation, he said, "I think that we were supposed to meet . . . like it was meant to be or something."

A changing culture

American culture is changing. Although we in the U.S. take pride in the separation of Church and state, the civil religion of our country has long "been Christianity." Whether formally legislated or informally understood, Christendom takes shape when a national government and the Church partner to create a society in which a version of the Christian story is at the core of a culture.

To some, this may sound like a positive thing, but unfortunately Christendom has often left the Church's hands dirty with the deeds of nationalistic conquest and greed. The Roman emperor Constantine inaugurated Christendom when he converted to Christianity in the fourth century and began conquering enemies in Christ's name. For the first time in history, the cross and the sword became business partners.

Our society, however, like the rest of the western world, is in a transition toward post-Christendom. Post-Christendom occurs when Christianity no longer occupies the privileged center of public discourse. Stuart Murray, author of *The Naked Anabaptist*, describes post-Christendom as what happens "as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society" because "the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence."

Our Core Values, when dusted clean of the negative aspects of Christendom, shine brightly to many in our culture.

Perhaps this is one way to apply Jesus' invitation to

be the light of the world.

In his book *The Naked Anabaptist*, Murray describes some key characteristics of post-Christian culture, including the following transitions:

- Churches no longer occupy a central place within culture;
- Christians exist as a minority group amidst many ideological communities;
- Christianity seeks not to rule over society but to witness to it

through lived expressions of God's kingdom;

- Churches reimagine their primary role as a movement rather than an institution; and
- Christians move from maintaining the status quo to radically following Jesus from the margins.

Shifts like these discourage many Christians—but should they? As an Anabaptist, I welcome them. In today's post-Christian culture, Christians would do well to see these changes as opportunities to re-embrace our subversive roots and follow Jesus from the margins. The natural outcome could be a witness characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, enemy love, and justice for the poor. Perhaps, for people like David, Christian credibility will be revived afresh.

Brethren in Christ on a mission

Our 21st century context invites us to dream of new ways to join in God's missionary work in the world. About three years ago, God spoke a frightening and exhilarating word to my wife and me in this regard: Plant a church in the mostly post-Christian city of Seattle. Shortly thereafter, I met my mentor, Jeff Wright, pastor of Madison Street Church (Riverside, Calif.). I was at a major crossroads in my life, when Jeff tossed out my name to Bishop Perry Engle and the rest of the Pacific Regional Conference's Board of Evangelism and Church Planting as a potential ministry partner.

Honored that Jeff and the board believed in my wife and me, we accepted their invitation to attend the Pacific Conference's first Emerging Leaders Gathering. There, we learned about BIC Core Values, such as Following Jesus, Pursuing Peace, Living Simply, Serving Compassionately, and Belonging to the Community of Faith. The bold communication of these and all of the other values convinced us that this was a movement we needed to join! Tasty fair-trade coffee and meeting great people at the gathering certainly helped us make the final decision, along with much prayer and counsel.

Embracing our roots

The Anabaptist-influenced values of the BIC appeal to me now, but this was not always the case. Growing up in a sister denomination, I had little interest in the historical connection to Anabaptism; actually, the beliefs in nonviolence and Kingdom-shaped politics embarrassed me. My life with God was influenced mostly by mainstream Evangelicalism until my early mid 20s. This sort of spirituality spurred me on toward loving God and others, but when I finally rediscovered Anabaptism, it was like going through my own

personal revival. The way of Jesus is revolutionary beyond what I had ever imagined!

I'm now thoroughly convinced that our Anabaptist tradition represents the best way forward as we seek to join in God's mission to a post-Christian culture. Our Core Values, when dusted clean of the negative aspects of Christendom, shine brightly to the many "Davids" in our culture. Perhaps this is one way to apply Jesus' invitation to be "the light of the world."

David and I continue to be friends, now nearly three years later. When we visit over coffee and attempt to solve the world's problems, David wants to hear my "different kind of Christian" ideas. In this case, my Anabaptist heritage is not something to shy away from but an entry point into someone's life.

Recently, we were talking about the polarizing climate of this past political season, and he said something more shocking than his comment on the first day we met: "Anabaptism could change the world." You can imagine my surprise. "Now, it's too bad that I don't believe in it," he added.

With a smile on my face, I jokingly said, "You will, bro."

To that he answered, "Well, if I'm ever going to be convinced that the Church is for me, it's going to be because of the Anabaptist movement."

May we become a people who "Follow Jesus" from the margins, offering the unique values of Anabaptism as our gift to the Church and the world. In doing so, we might find ourselves on a Spirit-empowered mission—God's mission—to bring peace, justice, and hope to post-Christendom!



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Chasing after peace

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

How a shy missionary kid ended up becoming a peace and justice advocate in the Anabaptist tradition

by Harriet Sider Bicksler



From my earliest years, I've had a strong sense of justice and fairness. When I was 3 years old, I refused to speak to my father for nine months. As Brethren in Christ missionaries, our family had moved from one mission station in Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) to another, and apparently I was not happy with the move. I told my older brother, "When Daddy takes us back to Matopo, then I'll talk to him." At Matopo Mission, I'd had an African nanny whom I'd dearly loved. When we moved, she didn't go with us. As a child, I had no way to express my grief. I felt a wrong had been done, however unintentionally, and I protested in the only way I knew how.

I tell this story not because I am particularly proud of what I did to my father but because the passion and sense of justice I've described, coupled with the environment in which I came of age, have profoundly shaped the trajectory of my life and faith. My story is about how one person has tried—however inadequately or incompletely—to follow Jesus and His example of passionately pursuing peace and reconciliation.

Foundations for advocacy

My family returned to the United States from mission work in 1961. My adolescent years were lived in the midst of the unrest of the 1960s and the Vietnam War. Although I grew up in the Brethren in Christ Church, I actually don't remember receiving much specific teaching on the issue (a fact I find a bit disconcerting now, as I reflect on it), but I always knew we were part of the historic peace church tradition and didn't go to war.

As the conflict in Vietnam escalated, I gained new understanding as a student at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.). There, I discovered the historical and biblical basis for conscientious objection to war and the peacemaking stance of the Brethren in Christ Church.

My career as a writer and advocate began at Messiah, as well. My senior year was a tumultuous one on campus, fueled in part by the war, but also because a favorite teacher was refused a contract renewal due to his less-than-orthodox views. I remember protesting

to the college president about what felt to us students like an injustice, and I wrote editorials about the issue for the college newspaper.

During my early years of marriage, the Vietnam War finally ended. I watched the return of the POWs on TV while I was at home with our first child. Throughout this time, I didn't participate in peace marches nor was I particularly active in any other way—it just wasn't in my nature.

Called to action

My life as a more active participant in speaking out against war took shape slowly in the 1970s, after I attended a "New Call to Peacemaking" conference. Spurred on by a movement among the historic peace churches to revitalize their commitment to peacemaking, I read several Anabaptist classics, such as Ronald J. Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and *Christ and Violence*, as well as Donald Kraybill's *Upside-Down Kingdom*. As a result of these formative influences, I finally internalized the historic peace position. More than simply learning about my Anabaptist heritage, I knew deep within my heart and soul that God was calling me to be an agent of reconciliation in the world.

I read the New Testament with new conviction. Jesus modeled nonviolence and love for enemies in His own life and taught His disciples to do the same. He came to give more abundant

life. How is abundant life possible if we prevent others from having access to it by killing and oppressing them?

I became convinced that if I could help people more deeply engage the biblical mandate to pursue peace and reconciliation, I needed to. And I embarked on a career of writing, editing, and advocacy. For more than three decades, I've edited *Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation*, a publication of our denomination that has tackled many of the most difficult peace and justice issues confronting Christians.



A classic scene: me hard at work—papers scattered, pens uncapped, and thesaurus out—with the cat calmly looking on.

I also became involved with the board of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)—a relief, development, and peace agency of Anabaptist denominations—and had the opportunity to travel to other parts of the world, such as Vietnam, Cuba, and Palestine. Visiting these nations, which have a history of difficult relationships with the U.S., I met wonderful people who don't fit the "enemy" label our country has put on them. I learned to view the world through different eyes and to think more about the lives of ordinary people in far-off places.

Pursuing holistic peace together

I certainly acknowledge the many ambiguities and hard-to-answer questions related to justice and reconciliation.

I know that many sincere Christians who also take their Bible seriously have come to different conclusions about war and peace, violence and nonviolence. In my personal journey, however, I keep returning to the words of the New Testament: seek peace and pursue it, overcome evil with good, live peaceably with all, love your enemies.

As we consider our contemporary world, we can clearly see that war and violence aren't working very well. What would happen if we engaged our imagination to find redemptive alternatives to these means? What if more Christians followed Jesus' radical example of nonviolence?

Given the desperate need for alternative voices on this matter, one of my great disappointments over the past three decades has been the continuing erosion of a strong commitment in the Brethren in Christ Church to hold firm to its historic peace stance. Sometimes, I have wondered if I should focus my energies on other things besides trying to help the denomination preserve this particular part of its Anabaptist heritage.

The most important reason I don't give in to these thoughts, however, is my belief that the resurrected Jesus calls us to join in His redemptive work of overcoming great evil in the world with great good. Rather than yielding to the temptation to join the majority of the Christian community in accepting war as legitimate, I think we should celebrate our peace heritage and find ways to make it even more relevant today.

I also believe that peacemaking is about more than finding alternatives to war. Conflicts occur at home, at

church, in our community, and at work. As Christians, we need to learn and practice healthy ways to

handle the conflict in all these contexts. I'm glad that the Brethren in Christ Church has worked hard to promote a more holistic view of peacemaking that includes issues like interpersonal conflict, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and racial/ethnic divisions. Sometimes this kind of peacemaking feels as difficult and painful as speaking out against war—and it's just as important.

I deeply believe that God calls Christians to peacemaking along the continuum—from homes to churches to nations. As Brethren in Christ, we've identified Pursuing Peace as one of our 10 Core Values. When we use the word "pursuing" to describe our approach to peace, we acknowledge that it is a continuous activity. Sometimes peace is elusive, sometimes there are complications, sometimes there are obstacles to overcome. Maybe we will never quite capture peace, but we are always pursuing, always chasing, always following after Christ.

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Harriet Sider Bicksler serves as editor of both *Shalom!* and *Brethren in Christ History and Life*. She and her husband, Dale, are part of the Grantham (Pa.) Church. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.



In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003, meeting women who had known my parents.



Graduating from Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.) I'm in the top row, second from the left!

TO THE POINT

What difference does Anabaptism make in our beliefs and church life?

When the early Brethren in Christ read all parts of the Bible, they found Jesus. As Anabaptists, they embraced the call not just to believe in Jesus but to follow Him in a life of Christocentric behavior. One could say, then, that the Anabaptists were the original WWJD people; in every situation they asked, “What would Jesus do?” Then they followed His lead. Their message communicates in this century, when at least some people hate religion but love Jesus.

—John R. Yeatts
Grantham (Pa.) BIC

Without question the new stream of Evangelicalism has muted much of our Anabaptist heritage. We believed we could learn from [Evangelicalism] discretely, adopting only what we felt was of value. But the stream had more force than was anticipated. We have not domesticated it as we did Wesleyanism; instead it has domesticated us.

We must determine that we will not let this source dominate us in a way that the previous three did not. We have been Anabaptists with a difference, Pietists with a difference, and Wesleyans with a difference. We must now be Evangelicals with a difference.

We cannot just return to a previous age of Brethren in Christ identity, for the truth is that we must also be Brethren in Christ with a difference. Part of the canvas of our identity must exhibit fresh paint, where the Spirit of God is brushing us into the portrait He would have us be. Even so, work, Lord Jesus! Let Thy will be done in us.

—Luke Keefer, Jr. (1940–2010)
Ashland (Ohio) BIC

I have observed something surprising over the past few years in the Brethren in Christ pursuit of Evangelicalism. We have been wrestling—on the one hand articulating Core Values that reaffirm our Anabaptist stream, yet on the other hand seeing those Anabaptist distinctives fade. (For example, the 2006 Church Member Profile* showed that while 88 percent of respondents identified peacemaking as a central theme of the Gospel, only 25 percent said that it is wrong for Christians to fight in any war.) As we have been engaged in this identity crisis, suddenly Evangelicalism itself slows down and catches a whiff of something “new” and enticing—and it smells a lot like Anabaptism.

—Elizabeth Claassen Thrush Upland (Calif.) BIC

Competing theologies

are not just seeping into our historic three-stream synthesis, they are burying us under a tidal wave. Without strong leadership and a clear back-to-the basics movement in our theology and practice, we will lose our distinctives much more rapidly than we can imagine. I agree with Dr. Keefer that we need to continually strengthen our ties with other Wesleyan and Anabaptist groups. In my humble opinion, we must also stand on the shoulders of those Brethren in Christ that came before us, in theology and in practice. Together, bound by a shared theology, we can push forward as a people, innovating new forms of ministry, following the movement of the Spirit, and engaging the world for Jesus Christ.

—Scott Elkins
Canoe Creek BIC
(Holidaysburg, Pa.)

*These excerpts were adapted from essays included in the August 2012 volume of the *Brethren in Christ History and Life* journal, with permission from the editor. For information about how to subscribe to the journal, email archives@messiah.edu.

*2006 Church Member Profile—a study of members in three denominations, conducted by the Young Center of Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and coordinated by Donald B. Kraybill. Visit bic-church.org/cmp to view the full CMP 2006 results.

PARTING WORDS

BOLD, SWEETENED, WITH A LITTLE BIT OF ROOM

Sometimes a denomination is like a good cup of coffee

by PERRY ENGLE

I make no apologies for how I like my coffee. I order it the same every time. I know it may not be everybody’s preference, but it’s how I like my brew. You can keep your watered-down instant stuff. For me, I like it bold, sweetened, with a little bit of room.

It’s how I like my denomination as well, and I’m pretty sure that’s why I am Brethren in Christ. This issue of *In Part* is really a focus on our roots as a family of believers. It’s our original blend, if you will, of what it means to us to be serious followers of Jesus Christ.

For me, Anabaptism is like a good Sumatra or a dark French Roast. It produces a bold and uncompromising cup of coffee. In a similar way, when Anabaptists were driven out of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, they were known as earnest followers of Jesus Christ, born of persecution and suffering. Words often used to describe this movement are “radical,” “counter-cultural,” and “self-sacrificing.”

But something happened to a few members of this group after they landed in Philadelphia in the mid-1700s. They encountered a movement called Pietism, which resulted in a spiritual renewal that altered their view of salvation, while retaining their basic conception of the Church. I like to think that these bold and serious-minded believers were “sweetened” by their personal experience of a heartfelt and life-changing relationship with Christ. “Such a

relationship,” writes church historian Carlton Wittlinger, in his book *Quest for Piety and Obedience* “bore outward fruit in Christian love, resulting in a practical, applied Christianity.” It didn’t dilute their understanding of the Church; it simply sweetened their relationship with God and others, and in so doing, inaugurated the BIC Church.

The following century, the Brethren encountered the teachings of John Wesley, which impressed upon them the need for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The BIC made room for this Holiness movement because of its positive focus on the transformed life. Then, in the 1950s, Evangelicalism provided needed motivation to reach our neighbors and our young people for Christ. It poured into us the incentive to stop being so cliquish and legalistic, and, instead, to work towards being God’s people incarnated in the world.

The BIC made some room for the Holiness movement, but found that too much of it tended to make us susceptible to legalism and judgmentalism. In a similar way, the Evangelicalism movement of the past 60 years, while certainly enriching our experience as Christians in North America, has also threatened to water-down the “flavor” of our original Anabaptist-Pietistic blend. For example, its focus on the merging of Church and politics as well as its openness to resolving conflict through violent means have eroded our historic commitment to



Illustration by Nate Bridi

For me, **Anabaptism** is like a good Sumatra or a dark French Roast. It produces a **bold and uncompromising** cup of coffee.

peacemaking and seem to have led to the gradual weakening of our original brew.

I heartily affirm the rediscovery of our roots as Anabaptists, as long as we don’t forget the sweet side of Pietism. As well, we shouldn’t be afraid to leave a little bit of room for other traditions, as long as they aren’t allowed to overpower who we are as committed followers of Jesus. They are the cream in our cup, so to speak, and not the coffee itself.

So I’m ordering up a mug of what it seems God has always intended for us as Brethren in Christ: A blend that is bold, sweetened, with a little bit of room. Just the way I like it.



Perry Engle really needs to lay off the caffeine as bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the BIC Church. He and his wife, Marta, and their family live in Ontario, Calif.

2013

Week of Prayer and Fasting

JANUARY 6–13

Each year, BIC churches across the U.S. embark on a new year by spending time with God and the community of faith in prayer.

Visit bic-church.org to find resources for the 2013 Week of Prayer and Fasting, including:

- Daily devotionals, with Scripture readings, reflections, and prayers
- New ideas for prayer, as individuals, small groups, and congregations
- A list of prayer requests and praises from BIC Churches around the world

Anabaptism



Following Jesus

The Brethren in Christ believe in taking all of Jesus' words seriously. Within our "theological DNA," the Anabaptist strain shows itself most prominently through our conviction that following Christ means:

- Belonging to the community of faith
- Serving compassionately
- Living simply
- Pursuing peace
- Believing the Bible (and the centrality of Jesus' words and witness)

To learn more about how Anabaptism values inform BIC thought and life, check out these and other resources available at bic-church.org.

Inglorious Pastors—A DVD set produced by The Meeting House (Oakville, ON) that explores the 16th-century Anabaptists who waged peace in a world of war (bic-church.org/resources/peace)

Peace & Justice Listserv—Take part in conversations about peace and justice issues (listserv.messiah.edu)

Living Simply—A 12-week DVD- and discussion-based study that explores the attitudes and practices of living simply at the local and global levels (bic-church.org/resources/smallgroup)

INGLORIOUS PASTORS
WAGING PEACE IN A WORLD OF WAR



Living Simply:
A Core Value of the Brethren in Christ
A discipleship resource of the Brethren in Christ Church