

IN PART

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

Spring/Summer 2016



In
PURSUIT
of
PEACE

*Pointing to
Christ through
nonviolence*

THE VIEW FROM HERE

To be sure, I could have begun my role as editor of *In Part* with a safer topic than “peace.” Yet I’ve always been more interested in asking hard questions about important topics. And if we’re honest, the topic of peacemaking is a challenging conversation across the BIC U.S. Our interpretation of what it means to *pursue peace* varies across the denomination—especially in regard to nonviolence.

For me, the conversation about peace signifies something deeper. It challenges my fundamental perceptions of who I believe God is and what He’s doing. For example, do I believe God’s nature is wholly love? Do I believe God is working toward the restoration of all things and that violence has no place in His kingdom? Or do I believe violence is perhaps less than God’s ideal but necessary or even encouraged under certain circumstances? Depending on the way we think about peace, we may think quite differently about God’s character.


And so we continue in the Christian tradition of wrestling through Scripture together, molding and shaping and challenging one another. We talk about peace, not because it’s easy or that we’ll even arrive at the same place, but because I can’t help but ask, *Are we being called to so much more?*


Scott McFadden
Editor

Growing up in the evangelical tradition, I was blessed with many wonderful gifts. A theology of peace, however, was not one of them. Like many others before me, my journey deeper into relationship with Jesus led me to the conviction that peace was a core component of the Christian faith.

Since its founding in the 1700s, the Brethren in Christ have witnessed to peace—specifically a nonviolent understanding of peace—as a central theme in the Gospels. Today, we continue in this theological stream, citing “pursuing peace” as a core value of our faith and collective identity: “*We value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and non-violent resolution of conflict.*”

This issue of *In Part* is intended to stir conversation about peace; about how we understand and practice peacemaking across the U.S. and around other parts of the world. This is not intended to be the final word on the matter, but rather to challenge us in our call to “live at peace with all men.”


Alan Robinson
National Director

IN YOUR WORDS

I will admit that I don’t read *In Part* from cover to cover, but I did this one [Fall/Winter 2015]! My 11-year-old daughter brought up the subject of same sex-marriages just the other week and we had an open and frank discussion on what the Bible says and choices we make. I am glad my kids are asking questions and seeking answers to what they see in today’s world. This gives me another resource to share with her and her 17-year-old brother on this topic. . . .

Michele Horn (Landisville, Pa.)
Hope Born in Christ

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

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LIFE IN THE BODY

MORE THAN
HOMEWORK*Ministering through an
after-school program*

Since its founding in 1998, Esmirna BIC in Miami, Fla., has been committed to reaching the most vulnerable in society. Located in an area heavily populated by migrant-working families, the congregation sensed a need to offer their community a quality, affordable after-school program for children.

So in 2001, the church established Peace Community Development Center (CDC). Now a fully accredited, incorporated program funded in part by The Children's Trust of Miami Dade County, Peace CDC serves over 150 kids daily at two unique locations, including a seven-week-long summer camp.

José Rodriguez, founder and program director of Peace CDC and pastor of Esmirna BIC, desires to see kids excel. "We keep asking ourselves, 'How can we impact the next generation? How can we help children succeed?'" he asks.

Because many of the program's parents do not natively speak English, it is often difficult for them to assist their children with homework. Furthermore, many after-school programs hosted by local schools are cost-prohibitive for migrant-working families.

Each day, children attending Peace CDC enjoy a snack, receive assistance with homework, work closely with a state-certified reading teacher, and



↑ Children enrolled in Peace Community Development Center's after-school program in Miami, Fla., gather for craft time.



↑ New Life Community Church (Carlisle, Pa.) gathers during the launch service to worship in their new church home.



↑ Steve Airth, senior pastor at GracePoint BIC Church (Ontario, Calif.), spends his Memorial Day weekend building houses for the impoverished in Mexico.

engage in physically and socially stimulating free time. Because the program's teachers and instructors are bilingual, they're able to work with children in English and communicate to parents in Spanish. To engage youth on a spiritual level, Peace CDC holds an optional Bible study course every Friday, which most kids elect to attend.

And all of this costs parents nearly half of a traditional after-school program. Following a structured curriculum, the vast majority of children attending Peace CDC excel both academically and socially. Over 95% of their children pass Florida's state assessments, and about 86% demonstrate improved reading and literacy skills.

As they look to the future, José and Peace CDC's leadership plan to expand their offerings, pouring into a new generation of leaders through youth sports teams, mentoring programs, and community-service projects.

NEW LIFE
FOR NEW LIFE*A congregation opens old doors*

A relational congregation meeting relational needs in their community, New Life Community Church (BIC) in Carlisle, Pa., invites the homeless to join them for Sunday breakfast, provides bicycles for those without transportation, and gives furniture to folks leaving temporary housing. They've even adopted a local BIC congregation and sent out half their leadership team to plant a church across town.

This past January, New Life celebrated 20 years of ministry and the move into a new building. While their previously rented facility provided enough space for their congregants, it placed a ceiling on the level of relational outreach New Life dreamed of achieving.

A few blocks down the road, a large, 1800's-era stone church sat vacant after three United Methodist (UMC) churches merged several years ago. Though little more than a pipe-

dream—the asking price well beyond their means—New Life started imagining what it would look like to call the building home.

Over the coming months, though, God began breaking down barriers. With the support of Carlisle UMC leadership and the BIC Foundation, their dream of calling the place home became a reality.

The atmosphere at launch was electric, with over 400 people from across the community packed into their new sanctuary. "I believe we're in a season where we're going to see incredible things happen in our community," senior pastor Ryan Brown told the congregation that morning.

Closing the service with a special pipe organ-led hymn, Ryan invited all generations to join together in singing "Be Thou My Vision," leaning on God's promises and looking ahead to all this next season has in store.

Adapted from an article originally released in the February 2016 *Connect* Newsletter. Since this article was written, Ryan Brown has been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an aggressive form of bone cancer. We ask the BIC family to join us in praying for Ryan, his family, and New Life during this difficult time.

BUILDING HOMES,
RESTORING DIGNITY*Serving our neighbors
in Mexico*

Picture this: your roof is a left-over scrap of tin. Your walls are discarded garage doors. Without a foundation, your kids sleep on the dirt floor. Chickens roam freely in and out of your home. You have no running water, no sewer system, and very little food.

For tens of thousands living in the impoverished shantytowns on the hills of Tijuana and Tecate, Mexico, living conditions are deplorable. So for the past 13 years, volunteers from Gateway Community Church (Chino, Calif.) and GracePoint BIC Church (Ontario, Calif.) have been helping families build new lives.

Every Memorial Day weekend, these congregations lead a team of volunteers to build houses for brothers and sisters south of the border. Partnering with Baja Christian Ministries, a para-church organization dedicated to

building houses and lives for Jesus, teams construct between two and three homes every year. Whether framing or hanging drywall or painting, there's a job for everyone.

For families receiving new homes, the experience is moving. "We're not just build-

ing houses; we're giving families their dignity back," says Steve Airth, senior pastor at GracePoint, who helps organize the trips. Upon completion of the new home, families tear down their old house and assume a mortgage on their new house—roughly \$7,000. Taking on a mortgage gives parents a tangible means to provide for their families; this is *their* house, *their* mortgage.

The completed houses sit on a sturdy concrete foundation and consist of two bedrooms plus a loft. Able to spread out across multiple rooms, families receive much-needed privacy and personal space.

To date, the congregations have built over 25 houses. And they don't plan on slowing down soon. "These are God's people," says Steve. "And the more we see them as our brothers and sisters, the more we realize what this work is not only doing for them, but in our hearts as well."

ECHOES

EXPLORING OUR HERITAGE OF FAITH



In the wake of the Second World War, Elsie C. Bechtel (left, wearing glasses) was one of many Brethren in Christ who actively expressed the nonviolent peace and love of Christ through compassionate service. From 1945–1947, she lived in France and cared for orphaned children, attending to both their physical and spiritual needs.

Photo: Courtesy of the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives

CURING HATE WITH LOVE

Active peacemaking in a world at war

During World War II, young Brethren in Christ church members launched a movement for active peacemaking. For generations, BIC people declared their commitment to following Christ's nonviolent witness to peace. Yet during times of global conflict, their only public, visible expression to this commitment involved *refusal*—especially the refusal to join the military.

But in the 1940s, many BIC leaders and laypeople pursued a more active peace witness. Joining with fellow

Christians, including Mennonites and Quakers, they confronted the senseless devastation wrought by war through direct relief and recovery efforts: distributing clothing, rebuilding homes and churches, and ministering to those in need.

Among the BIC who journeyed abroad was Elsie C. Bechtel, a member of Valley Chapel BIC (Canton, Ohio). From 1945–1947, Bechtel lived and worked in a tiny village in south-central France, caring for children displaced or

orphaned by the war. Before leaving the U.S., she expressed her desire to combat the world's evil with active love. "Curing hate by love" may seem absurd, she wrote, but Christians can pour out such love "recklessly" because "our God is the God of love and there is no limit to His supply."



Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas is a church historian who works at Messiah College and attends the Grantham Church (Mechanicsburg, Pa.) with his wife, Katie, and son, Lucas. DEVINM2T.COM

PART OF THE WHOLE

FOCUSING ON ONE WOMAN'S FAITH

BROOKE STRAYER

Preparing to complete a one-year term in Zambia with Mennonite Central Committee's S.A.L.T. program, her heart beats for peacemaking. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Brooke Strayer.

What kind of work are you doing in Zambia?

My main responsibility here in Zambia is to work alongside the 12 Brethren in Christ school peace clubs. These peace clubs are extracurricular clubs in each of the 12 Brethren in Christ schools in Zambia where students meet once a week to learn about peace and nonviolence. The material is divided up into five modules: conflict, violence, gender-based violence, journey toward reconciliation, and trauma healing. I help monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the clubs and support less active clubs. A major part of my job involves collecting and sharing stories of those involved in the peace clubs.

What sort of fruit are you seeing from these clubs?

Some of the peace clubs are simply amazing; I am blown away by the maturity of these young adults. Academically speaking, peace club members are among the top-performing students in the school. Many of them are student leaders in other areas as well. Their understanding of conflict and how to resolve it in a constructive manner is beyond their years. They have such a hunger to learn and do more within the community and school.

How did you become interested in pursuing peace work?

Growing up, I was not inclined toward peace, but I also could not say I

was inclined toward war; I was simply indifferent. My thoughts and attitude changed after completing a semester abroad at Uganda Christian University in Mukono, Uganda. As part of the learning, our group travelled to Rwanda to learn about the genocide and how Rwanda recovered (and is still recovering) from the horrors of 1994. Before I left, though, I had decided to change my major to Peace and Conflict Studies. I didn't realize at the time it would quickly become a life passion. Maybe God planted a seed when I changed my major, and it took several months of learning and experience to recognize that passion.

What is one thing Americans could learn about peaceful living from the work being done in these clubs?

I think we can learn that there can be no peace until you yourself are at peace. We've got to learn how to constructively deal with conflict, because conflict will always be present. It's how it's managed that matters as we work toward reconciliation. I think it's incredible that schools here in Zambia are taking an initiative to learn about peace, conflict, and nonviolence. Every time I visit a school, I think, "What if American schools had peace clubs?" Just imagine if such a program existed! Perhaps we'd see more racial reconciliation, reduced gun violence, more unity in politics, and an increased love for those who are "different" from us.



HOME CONGREGATION:
The Meeting House (Carlisle, Pa.)

EDUCATION:
Messiah College (Mechanicsburg, Pa.);
B.A. double major in Peace and
Conflict Studies and History

CURRENT ROLE:
Assistant Coordinator of Peace Clubs,
Choma, Zambia

FAVORITE MOVIE:
Pride and Prejudice (2005 edition)

FAVORITE QUOTE:
"The world is a book and those who do
not travel read only one page."
— St. Augustine of Hippo



ENTERING THE



FLOW

**Reimagining the
conversation on peace
and nonviolence**

by JOSH CRAIN

EVERY MOVEMENT, every artist, every organization changes over time. Michael Jordan stopped dunking from the free throw line and began perfecting his fadeaway jump shot. Bob Dylan spent the 1960s morphing from a folk prodigy to an electric-guitar-wielding-hipster-genius. Apple discontinued the Newton and poured their energy into developing products people actually wanted to buy. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement wound its way from abolitionism to Jim Crow laws to eradicating “separate but equal” to the continued battle against systemic racism today.

While it’s possible to accuse changing movements, artists, and organizations of selling out or straying from their roots, the reality is much more nuanced than that: Change is a necessary component of staying true to one’s core identity.

As a synthesis of Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan traditions, the Brethren in Christ have always enjoyed a diverse, dynamic theological identity informing our lives and convictions. And yet, since the very beginning, we’ve held a commitment to peace and nonviolence central to the way we understand our collective ethos and contribution to the broader Church.

The problem is that most discussions about peace today feel like we’re reading from the same old, dog-eared script. We’ll move from exegetical disagreement over Matthew 5 and Romans 12–13 to discussing Israel’s violent conquests in the Old Testament to disagreeing over why Jesus never asked a Roman soldier to change his vocation. Many of us will move the conversation to the realm of pragmatism: What if someone breaks into your house? What if your children are at risk? What if you have the opportunity to save dozens of innocent lives through violent force? Invariably, Hitler will be mentioned.

What would it look like for the BIC to change the way we think and talk about peace, precisely because we’re committed to it?

Perhaps it’s time we reimagine this discussion as one that’s cosmic in scope, reaching beyond a handful of proof-texts to the entire canon of Scripture. Perhaps it’s time to dig deeper than a defense of pacifism and instead articulate a sincere conviction that the entire Christian story is a pilgrimage leaving no room for bloodshed at its final destination.

It’s important we talk about peace, not because it serves as some helpful ideal, but because, I believe, it reflects our foundational views of the Divine.

So first I’d like to say a bit about Trinity, then a few words about trajectory, then offer some thoughts on where we go from here. We’re headed deep, but hang with me, we’re on this journey together.

REVEALING THE TRIUNE GOD

The understanding of God as Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is foundationally important to our Christian faith, yet so often ignored or unintentionally disregarded. In his book *The Trinity*, Karl Rahner once lamented, “Should the doctrine of the Trinity be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain unchanged.”¹

However, a greater understanding of the Trinity should lead us into greater understanding of God’s heart and character. And a greater understanding of God’s heart and character should ultimately inform the ways we think about peace and nonviolence.

For all eternity, the Trinity has existed as a dynamic community, an endless outpouring of love between three Persons. While salvation in the Christian tradition is many things, perhaps it is most importantly a righting of relationship with God—an invitation to enter into the flow of this Triune love.²

From the beginning, this Triune God has revealed His character through creation. The Scriptures declare, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things have been created through him and for him . . . and in him all things hold together.”³ Every star, every planet, and every molecule in existence is, in some way, evidence of God’s decision to show God’s self. Manifesting Himself in physical time and space, the Christ revelation is God incarnate, taking up residence in human flesh as a man named Jesus who was born in Bethlehem and murdered in Jerusalem.

When we proclaim the name of Jesus Christ—affirming Jesus *as* Christ—we’re actually making two distinct faith statements: 1) Christ has been revealing Himself since the beginning

of the universe, with all creation testifying to God’s presence and every human bearing His image; and, 2) Jesus came and lived among us so we could see Him, touch Him, hear Him, and fall in love with Him.⁴

If this is true, we might expect to find passages in Scripture indicating that what we do to others, we do to Jesus. That how we treat those society calls “least” is how we treat Jesus. That visiting others in prison, clothing the cold, filling hungry bellies, and loving our enemies are, in some mysterious way, actions ultimately directed toward Christ as much as toward people.

And, interestingly, Jesus teaches this exact truth.⁵

When we profess Jesus Christ as Lord, we affirm the Triune God who invites us to treat others with the dignity and value appropriate for a creation made in His image. It would seem, then, that how we regard the creation says a great deal about our perception of the Creator.

THE UNRAVELING MYSTERY

The mystery of the Trinity is revealed to us slowly in the Scriptures. As the Early Church wrestled with this mystery, it was the ultimate revelation of Trinity through Jesus that led our church fathers and mothers to abandon their violent pasts.

Hebrews teaches us that while God had spoken “to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,” in this last epoch of history “he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”⁶

The idea that God exists as a three-in-one Being who loves us enough to enter bodily into our suffering was completely new for

“ . . . we have much to learn about peace from the

TRIUNE
GOD

most fully revealed in Jesus.”

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Israelites and first-century believers. It wasn’t just that Jesus came with new or more information about God, He came as the *exact representation* of God, discarding at long last much of the shadowy mystery that had obscured His character. And as the exact representation of this Triune God, he challenged prior, often inaccurate understandings of His character—ushering them into the Triune relationship they were created to participate in from the very beginning.

Like the first-century church, we have much to learn about peace from the Triune God most fully revealed in Jesus. As Christians living in the United States in the twenty-first century, one of our dominant cultural narratives has been one of redemptive violence—you hurt me, now I have the right to hurt you. Yet, by manifesting Himself in the person of Jesus and giving Himself over to the evil and violence of this world, Christ completely turns this narrative upside down, introducing us instead to the narrative of *redemptive suffering*: that the never-ending seesaw of back-and-forth violence only reaps destruction, but the world changes when we suffer on behalf of one another.

What we find in Scriptures is a Christ continually beckoning us toward Him, which means appealing to the Old Testament to justify violence is literally moving backward in the narrative.

COMING HOME

I spent the first twenty-nine years of my life slowly making my way toward the Brethren in Christ. Though I found Christ as a teenager, I nearly walked away from Christianity in my early twenties because I wasn’t convinced the Jesus I had been handed as a child had anything unique to offer a world in need. It was ultimately a ravishing picture of Christ, pointing me toward the Triune God of love and peace, that brought me back to the fold.

Though I didn’t grow up in the Brethren in Christ, I landed here because this denomination provided a safe place to practice an unsafe faith—exemplifying profound obedience to a subversive Jesus through a life of transformation, simplicity, and peace. I fell in love with this community and continue to fall in love with the Jesus our theology presents.

In an interview about his book *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, author and theologian N. T. Wright explains, “. . . theology is a never-ending exploration—

each generation has to do it afresh in its own context . . .”⁷ For over 200 years, the Brethren in Christ have borne witness to the holistic peace of God’s kingdom. We must ask ourselves now: Will we continue to think afresh about our historic peace witness, or will we allow it to slip away as a distinct contribution to the greater Church body?

Brothers and sisters, may we see our peace witness as a signpost pointing to the Triune God.

May we, in the midst of evil and violence and despair, choose to illuminate a God who has much to offer a broken, hurting world.

And may we enter into the flow, joining with the Christ bringing forth a new creation right here in the midst of this one.



Josh Crain is the senior pastor of The Meeting House, in Carlisle, Pa. When not grappling with peace theology on a cosmic level, Josh practices his peace witness around the house with his newborn son, Will, who, at the moment, enjoys taking advantage of his dad’s convictions.

1 Bloomsbury Academic, 2001, p. 10–11

2 John 17:20–21

3 Colossians 1:15–17

4 *Articles of Faith and Doctrine*, Articles II and IV

5 Matthew 25:40

6 Hebrews 1:1–4

7 fortresspress.com/ntwright

the peacemakers

ESSAYS BY BIC LEADERS IN ACTION

When we talk about peacemaking, it often feels as if there's endless work to be done. Where do we even start? Zoom the lens too far out and we can become paralyzed by lofty ideals, overlooking the ways peace begins in the here-and-now. Zoom the lens too far in, however, and peace can become something designed for us or our neighbors or our country—and not something attainable on a global level.

The following essays by BIC peacemakers remind us that we all have a part to play in bringing Christ's kingdom to earth—whether continually aligning our hearts toward peace, flushing out violence from our communities, or helping rewrite a nation's DNA.

HEART CHECK

by Harriet Sider Bicksler

I grew up in the Brethren in Christ Church, fully internalizing the church's peace teachings during the Vietnam War. In those years, I thought primarily of our peace position as opposition to war. My understanding has since expanded to include a more holistic view of peacemaking. Working to make peace among nations, as absolutely important as that is, has less integrity if we aren't also committed to peacemaking in our homes or communities or even in the way we think about others. Can I think more lovingly about the unkind neighbor, the politician, even the terrorist?

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18). This is one of my favorite verses in Scripture, and I think about it often. Simultaneously comforting and convicting, the verse challenges me to pursue peace when it feels difficult or even impossible. With such extreme division, polarization, violence, and hateful speech these days, the challenge to live at peace with everyone feels greater than ever.

"If it is possible . . ." These words remind me that peacemaking is difficult. In any situation, achieving lasting peace

may take time. Despite my best efforts, reconciliation might not happen. But I constantly ask myself: Do I truly value *all* human life? Am I choosing to value those who seem unlovable, who commit unspeakably cruel and evil acts, who don't value life themselves? What difference might it make if I do?

" . . . as far as it depends on you . . . "

The second clause places responsibility on me to do everything possible to promote reconciliation. Some things are within my control. I can choose to understand where a person is coming from, to put myself in his or her shoes, to see things from another perspective. I can choose forgiveness when someone hurts me or a loved one. I can choose to work toward reconciliation with someone who has wronged me. Reconciliation takes two parties, but it must begin with me.

" . . . live at peace with everyone. "

After the two qualifiers, here's the imperative: "*live at peace.*" It's direct, calling for more than a half-hearted attempt at peacemaking. It's all-encompassing, insisting we live at peace with *everyone*, not just the people we like or agree with. This includes the family member whose political ideologies differ from mine; the Facebook friends who shout at one another from opposing aisles; the church member whose sharp words cut to my core.

I often fail at peacemaking, and I am grateful for the grace the first two parts of this verse give me. But the third clause is not a suggestion; it's an imperative. I *must* pursue peace at all times, both within myself and among other people and nations. If it is possible, as far as it depends on me, I will live at peace with everyone.

.....
Harriet Sider Bicksler has been the editor of *Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* since 1981. She is also the editor for the Brethren in Christ Historical Society and a member of the Grantham Church (Mechanicsburg, Pa.). She and her husband, Dale, have two adult children and four grandchildren.



GUNS AND CITY STREETS

by Glenn Dalton Jr.

There is an epidemic of gun violence in our nation. For us at Harrisburg (Pa.) Brethren in Christ (HBIC), this is bigger than an academic discussion or political agenda. It is about stopping carnage. In the past five years, our congregation has lost eight sons, brothers, a nephew, and a young man just beginning to attend HBIC—all murdered in cold blood. I am tired of burying people and attending funerals. I am weary of watching families' loved ones taken from them suddenly and without warning.

Let me be clear here. Hunters and rifles are not the problem. Skeet shooters are not the problem. Gun collectors are not the problem. And while I do not personally choose to carry, legal handguns are not the problem. The real problem is the proliferation of illegal handguns flooding our communities, as easily accessible as buying a beer to any teenager with money. We have kids in our youth group who could take us directly to the locations these handguns are sold; teens know where these places are.

Often, illegal handguns flood our communities through *straw purchases*, where a non-criminal enters a gun shop alongside a criminal to purchase handguns on their behalf. Once outside, the criminal pays the straw purchaser a sizable fee for their efforts, in addition to the price of the gun. The criminal then sells these handguns to anyone with cash, including teenagers.

The proliferation of guns on the streets—especially with teenagers "packing heat"—makes our cities more dangerous. In recent



years, shootings in Harrisburg have become more random and unpredictable. Gun violence once confined to gangs, certain clubs, and domestic situations now happens anywhere, anytime.

Many of these shootings are known as “dis” shootings. Someone feels disrespected or threatened. Someone flirts with someone else’s girl and there’s a funeral the following week. If I’m a young

none of us, including Eric’s mother, was allowed to approach the crime scene. Finally, police asked the mother to identify her son’s body. As long as I live, I will never forget the anguished scream I heard that night as a mother saw her dead son for the first time. He had flirted with another man’s girlfriend and was murdered for it.

Years ago, as I watched my congregation suffer, I decided I could not be like the priests who walked by the bloody, beaten man on the road to Jericho.¹ Jesus calls us not only to bind wounds but to help prevent them. At HBIC, we teach our kids peace and peacemaking. Even a few skills in this area go a long way.

We have joined *Heeding God’s Call*, a national ministry organization focused on stopping the flow of illegal handguns into cities. In the wake of a handgun murder, our local chapter holds a prayer vigil for the victims and their families at the location the shooting took place.

The victim’s family often joins us as we pray. We also set up a mobile display at schools, parks, and churches, with T-shirts bearing the names of shooting victims and the dates their lives ended. It is profoundly moving to see a row of these shirts hanging on crosses.

We also help people in our congregation with the ongoing process of healing after losing a loved one to gun violence. We bear and bind each other’s wounds. And we pray. We pray for those in pain. We pray for protection. We pray for God’s *shalom*, His peace, to come to Harrisburg and this nation. We pray to stem the flow of illegal handguns into our communities. Prayer is still our greatest weapon.

There are ways the Brethren in Christ can contribute in this area.

For instance, we can support limiting handgun purchases to one handgun per customer per month. This effectively eliminates the profit motive for criminals who would go broke selling only one illegal handgun a month, while still leaving room for the enthusiast or collector. The few states that have enacted stricter gun laws have seen gun-related homicides decrease dramatically—roughly 40%.²

In conjunction, we could pass a law requiring all stolen or lost guns to be reported to police immediately, providing accountability to the straw purchasers. We can also repeal the law barring local communities from obtaining information from the federal government as to where the illegal handguns come from. The overwhelming majority of all illegal handguns come from an incredibly small minority of gun shops and gun shows. By obtaining these records, communities would be empowered to confront these injustices.

I’ve heard the argument that if criminals want to get their hands on guns, we won’t be able to stop them. And I agree. But teenagers and young adults shooting other teenagers and young adults over manageable conflict issues are not shootings committed by professional criminals. The problem goes much deeper than that.

Our Lord still lives and wants to invade this world with His peace. He wants to change hearts and destinies. And He calls us to be His voice. The Anabaptist voice needs to be heard—now more than ever.

.....
Glenn “Woody” Dalton Jr. was born in Virginia, but has made Harrisburg his home since 1980. In his spare time, he can be found on the golf course or in front of a chessboard. Woody and his wife, Kim, have three sons and a daughter-in-law.

¹ Luke 10:30–31

² cnn.com/2013/03/06/us/guns-laws-mortality

MY LIFE IN GOD’S HANDS

by Jacob R. Shenk

I grew up on the younger side of nine children on a farm near Mt. Joy, Pa. With nine children living under one roof, we argued often and occasionally fought. I’ll always remember when one of us would run crying because a sibling had hit us, my father would respond, “And what did you do to them?” The tears usually stopped, and he would require both parties to apologize, kiss, and make up.

As a child, I attended Mt. Pleasant (Pa.) BIC with my family. Messages like, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9); “. . . as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18); and “. . . seek peace and pursue it,” (Psalm 34:14) made a deep impression on my young mind.

At about 10 years old, I felt God calling me to serve as a missionary in Africa. In 1958, shortly after graduating college, my wife, Nancy, and I set sail for Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). And as I stepped into this new context, I began to grasp how valuable it was to have grown up in a peacemaking tradition.

Zimbabwe’s colonization by the British government in the late 1800s began a cycle of violence that has, in many ways, continued to this day. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, animosity escalated between the majority black citizens and minority white rulers, eventually breaking out in war. After Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980, one of the country’s two main tribal groups seized control of the government. Without a common enemy, conflict arose between the two groups. The party in power dispatched soldiers to deal with so-called “dis-

sidents.” They were ruthless: eliminating potential threats, shooting citizens, burying people in mass graves, and throwing bodies down long drop toilets or mine shafts.

I was preaching in Bulawayo one Sunday morning when the police arrived. They removed one man from the congregation. We never saw him again. After the service, the police accused me of preaching politics—a serious allegation. One policeman asked for my address, saying they might want to interrogate me. In that moment, the Lord gave me courage. “Tell them to come, because I want to see them,” I responded.

In the mid 1980s, I attended an interdenominational church meeting in the capital city of Harare. I spoke out about the evil and hatred I saw, and many people feared I would “disappear” one day. Yet I could not remain quiet. I always knew my life was in God’s hands and that I must speak out against violence.

A while later, the heads of denominations met with Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe. They took a stand against evil, speaking out against violence and promoting conversation and reconciliation. And with the atrocities brought into the open, the conflict between the two groups turned around.

There is still work to be done, and I believe Christians should be at the forefront of peacemaking. I will always be grateful to the Lord for the teach-

“I always knew my life was in God’s hands *and that I must speak out against violence.*”

ings I received as a child and for the privilege of being nurtured in a peace church. I praise the Lord for leading me into a ministry where opportunities abound to practice this important biblical teaching and where the fruits of such teachings are abundantly evident.

.....
Jacob R. Shenk and his wife, Nancy, live in Zimbabwe where they have served as missionaries with the BIC U.S. since 1958. Jake currently serves as the Regional Administrator in Southern Africa.



“We bear
and bind each
other’s wounds.
*And we pray.
We pray for
those in pain.*”

man
and I’m
upset, it’s one
thing; if I’m a young
man and I’m upset and I’m holding
a lethal weapon, it’s a whole different
ballgame. What may have ended in a
shouting match or fistfight now easily
and all-too-often ends in homicide.

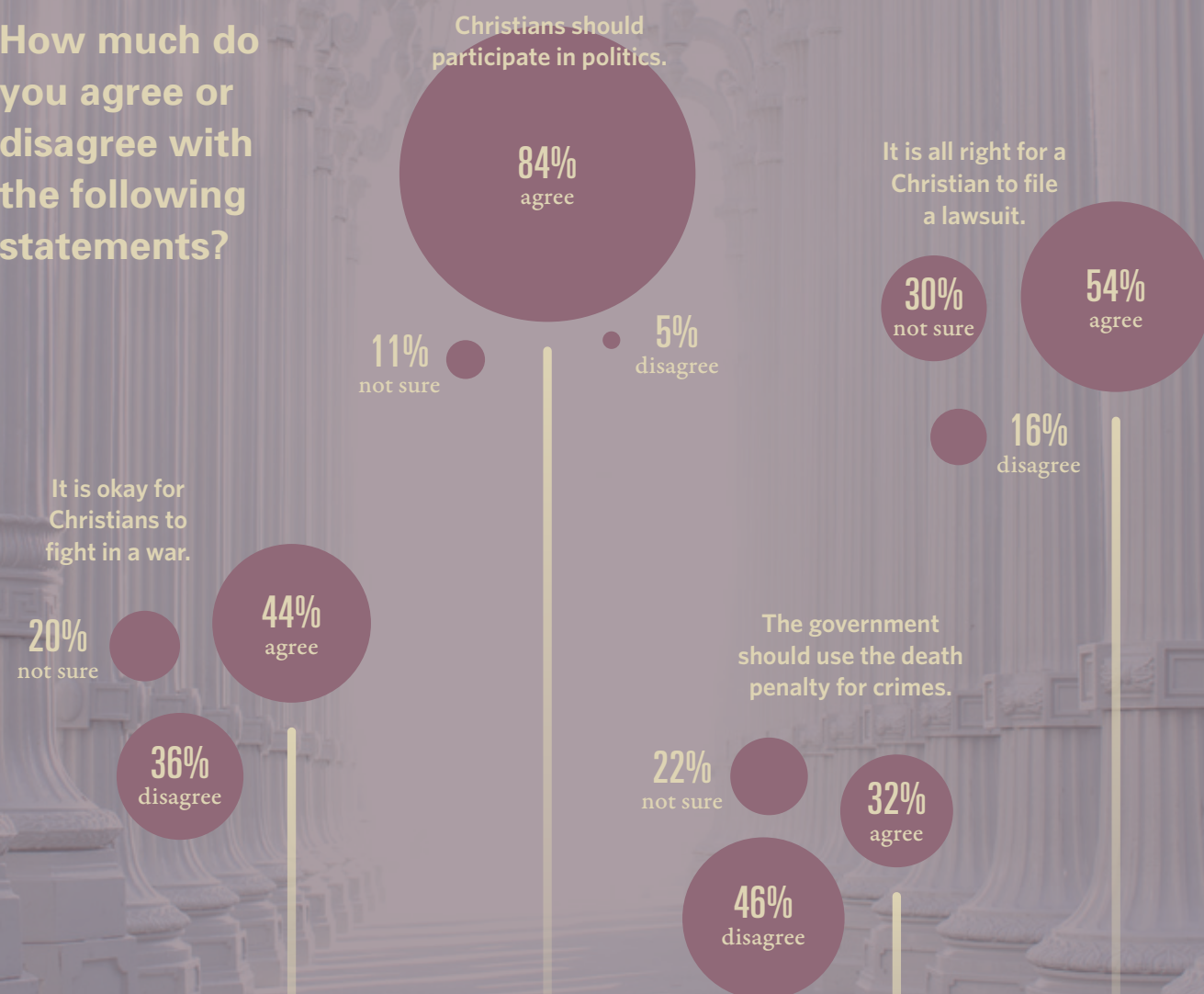
I will never forget the night I
received a call at 3 a.m. from a woman
in our congregation. Her grandson,
Eric, had been shot. When I arrived,

BY THE NUMBERS

DO ALL ANABAPTISTS AGREE?

From the latest political battle to terrorist attack, today's headlines often depict a divided and broken world. But how are Christians, specifically Anabaptists, responding to these issues? In the 2014 Global Anabaptist Profile conducted on behalf of Mennonite World Conference, nearly 1,000 participants across 24 Anabaptist groups, including BIC from Canada, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and the United States, weighed in on important social issues. Here's what the survey revealed about the Brethren in Christ U.S.—*by the numbers*.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



TO THE POINT

CHURCH LEADERS WEIGH IN ON IMPORTANT TOPICS

Is the BIC U.S. peace position still relevant in our current context?

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. While respecting those who hold other interpretations, we believe that preparation for or participation in war is inconsistent with the teachings of Christ. Similarly, we reject all other acts of violence which devalue human life. Rather, we affirm active peacemaking, sacrificial service to others, as well as the pursuit of justice for the poor and the oppressed in the name of Christ.¹

If by “peace position” we Brethren in Christ in the U.S. refer to a kind of political pacifism, then our position became irrelevant a century ago when the United States began flexing its imperial muscles. However, if by “peace position” we refer to a bold and discerning discipleship, then the MDG’s *[Manual of Doctrine and Government]* language is central to our faith. Jesus is our peace, and peace is God’s will. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. It’s not easy, and it challenges the conventional political wisdom of the world. But the road to a holy life is lived following a Jesus who rejected violence in all forms as He embodied God’s mission to restore creation.

— Jeff Wright

Madison Street Church (Riverside, Calif.)

Whose life do we choose to devalue: the perpetrators of atrocities, or their innocent victims? I do not read “turn the other cheek” to mean “turn your back on the helpless.” I just can’t imagine Jesus Himself, if He were here today in human form, sitting idly by as a mass shooter destroys innocent lives. In this world, where God’s holy perfection and Satan’s absolute godlessness are engaged in a timeless battle, we struggle to know if many of our actions, thoughts, and intentions represent one side or the other. So we determine to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance when His way is made known, and trust in God’s grace when we’re unable to discern it.

— Jon Grimshaw

Lakeview Community Church BIC (Goodrich, Mich.)

As people who have confessed that Jesus is Lord, we have a responsibility to embrace peace in all of its forms. The message of peace goes beyond preparation for and participation in war. If an ISIS soldier and an American soldier are both dying on the battlefield, who does Jesus love more? He loves them equally. Our peace position should compel us to seek reconciliation in a broken world. The disputes within the church, the arguments and hatred felt in our homes, the cyber bullying, and the war waged on the battlefield all require grace-motivated reconciliation only Jesus can provide! To limit peacemaking efforts in any form would be to limit the very word of God.

— Mark Sewell

The Vine Church (Smithsburg, Md.)

During an incredibly violent era and system of government, Stephen took the words of Jesus seriously. He did not respond in violence; instead, he blessed his enemies. This led to his death. Ananias was aware of the danger that could come from meeting with Saul, yet he still went and blessed his enemy. As a result, the Church flourished. The success or legitimacy of loving our enemy is not found in whether or not we survive in this world. Instead, it works to remind us of the true purpose of life: to grow in our identity as image-bearers of the Almighty. And Jesus is the fullness of that image. We love our enemies because we desire to look more and more like Jesus.

— Justin Douglas

The Bridge BIC (Hummelstown, Pa.)

POINTS OF VIEW

SHARING PERSPECTIVES ON A CHALLENGING ISSUE

IS WAR EVER JUST?

Our core value of *pursuing peace* states, “We value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and non-violent resolution of conflict.”

But are there exceptions to this position? Are there circumstances in which we, as Christians and specifically BIC, should justify war?

In whose hand is the sword?

To be fair, this question must be qualified. If I am asked, “Is war ever just for a Christ-follower?” then my answer is an unequivocal “no.” Both the life and teachings of Jesus provide an alternate way to live, one in which enemies are loved and prayed for. Furthermore, the first several hundred years of Church history support such a lifestyle, as early Jesus-followers refused to take up arms to defend themselves or any kingdom of this world.

As clear as this evidence is, however, it is also clear the New Testament affirms the use of the sword to restrain evil. In Romans 13:4, even Jesus refers to a function of the kingdoms of this world in fighting for its own. For me, it comes down to this: In whose hand is the sword? In the one whose primary kingdom is the kingdom of God and whose life aim is to conform to the likeness of Christ? Not if we take the life of Jesus and the Early Church’s testimony to its logical conclusion. If the sword is in the hand of the one whose primary kingdom is a kingdom of this world, then the answer is “yes,” as both the Scriptures and history affirm.

We can come up with all kinds of answers to validate pragmatically a just war, but since when does Jesus call us to elevate such pragmatics over following in his footsteps—footsteps that ended at a cross?



Timothy Fisher has served as pastor of the Walkersville (Md.) Community Church for almost 20 years and is the facilitator for the DSP course on biblical interpretation. Tim and his wife, Beth, have been married for over 28 years, and have four children who attend Liberty University.

Is peace always realistic?

“ . . . When the ‘chips are down,’ as in the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the two World Wars, non-resistance stands tend to be either modified or abandoned. Some would deplore this phenomenon as a serious reflection on the viability of a perfect love theology. Perhaps it may imply rather that some idealistic interpretations of perfect love, which seem plausible enough in peace time, are no longer convincing when tested by the real options of troubled times.

It has seemed to me that a basic weakness in unqualified pacifism has been a sanguine view of human nature, with a failure to take with sufficient seriousness the depths of human depravity. Sin makes some things necessary which are extremely painful. Lawless human selfishness is so profound that it will not always respond to the kindness which perfect love yearns to give, and can only be restrained by the compulsion which perfect love demands.

I too desire to merit the blessing pronounced by Jesus on the peacemakers. This fostering of peace should certainly be in the vanguard of all attitudes and policies held by those who advocate peace. But when peace cannot be achieved at all . . . what does perfect love do then? Back off and let non-love take over? Or is there in the very nature of perfect love a demand that at times necessary options to peace be accepted when a just peace is not possible?”

Richard S. Taylor—excerpted from an article in *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace* by Paul Hostettler (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1974).

PARTING WORDS

FEAR AND PEACE

When the sky is falling, to whom do we turn?

by PERRY ENGLE

There’s a lot to be afraid of these days.

A family friend recently trimmed some hedges in our backyard when he lost his footing and fell next to the house. Hearing a loud *bang* from inside, my daughter rushed to the bedroom window to find him sprawled out on the pathway below. Certain that all her childhood fears were coming true, she immediately convinced herself that he was either attempting to invade our home or that he had fallen from the sky in some horrific air accident. Upon closer inspection, she was relieved to find it was someone she knew—a bit bruised, but not broken—and not the fulfillment of her worst nightmares.

But her immediate response was fear. And it doesn’t take much to realize that, in the midst of a world where terrorist shootings take place in San Bernardino less than 30 minutes from where we live, and where politicians promise to build walls across our borders to keep all the “bad” people out, and where we’re encouraged to view people of different religions and ethnicities through suspicious eyes, fear easily overwhelms us.

In a post last year, pastor and blogger John Pavlovitz referred to fear as “the greatest false idol of modern Christianity.”¹ Of course, fear isn’t anything new. But it takes on greater relevance in the midst of presidential elections and 24-hour news cycles. This perva-

sive fear confirms our need to live as a people of peace in a world seemingly bent on worshipping violence, revenge, and *un-forgiveness*.

Peace is the counterpoint to fear. It is the recognition that God is in control and not us or our external circumstances. As Brethren in Christ, our peace position is a direct result of our faith in God. It emanates from our relationship with Christ. We identify as a “peace church” not because we partake in some historic ecclesial stream, but because our Lord Jesus is the Prince of Peace and we are His followers.

I get nervous when we or other denominations elevate peace above all other qualities that should inhabit the lives of Christ-followers. Peace is not a stand-alone doctrine that somehow makes us special in the eyes of Jesus. It is a sign of who we are in Christ. Peace is evidenced in our lives as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and is integrally tied to personal holiness (Hebrews 12:14). Like believing the Bible,

“Peace is the counterpoint to fear.”



Photo: ©iStockphoto.com/OSTILL

belonging to the community of faith, witnessing to the world, and serving compassionately, our value of pursuing peace is a natural outgrowth of discipleship in Jesus Christ. As we grow in Christlikeness, we become more peaceable and, ultimately, less fearful.

There’s a lot to be afraid of these days. And fearful people tend to respond threateningly and violently to the world around them. But as followers of Jesus, we’re invited into an intimate relationship with the One who left us with these words: “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not be troubled and do not be afraid*” (John 14:27).

This is a good reminder for us today, whether faced with acts of terror, home invasions, or strange men falling from the sky.



Perry Engle’s current fears include large, unleashed dogs and the U.S. presidential election. He serves as bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the Midwest U.S. He and his wife, Marta, and their family live in Ontario, Calif.

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