



Church Relations Update

A Church Relations Conversation



By Dale Schrag
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Church
Relations

Ben stopped me in the lobby of Schultz Student Center on Wednesday, Sept. 20. "Dale," he said, "I just wanted you to know that I have never felt better about being a Mennonite than I did during convocation on Monday. Thanks."

The previous Monday, Sept. 18, I had delivered a convocation address which I entitled "Reflections on Right Remembering: The Case of Michael Sattler." The convocation had been requested by Amy Barker, campus pastor, who suggested that we need a convocation early in the semester that gives students – especially students who are not Mennonite – a window into the distinctive nature of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology.

I decided to discuss that theology in its 16th-century context, focusing on the case of Michael Sattler, in part because back in August our faculty had spent an entire day discussing what it means to be an "Anabaptist institution" and in part to lay some groundwork for Helmut Harder's Menno Simons Lectures on Mennonite/Catholic dialogue later in the semester (Oct. 29-31).

When Ben said what he did on Wednesday, I immediately took it much more as a testimony to the power of the Anabaptist story than as a compliment for my particular presentation. This Anabaptist story has been energizing and motivating Mennonites for centuries. It did so in 17th-century Holland, when Thieleman Jansz van Braght compiled and edited *The Mirror of the Martyrs*. It did so in 19th-century Russia when the proto-Mennonite Brethren rediscovered the writings of Menno Simons. It did so in 20th-century America when H. S. Bender delivered his masterful presidential address, "The Anabaptist Vision," to the annual meeting of the American Society of Church History.

But my sense is that we Mennonites don't hear as much about the Anabaptists as we used to. Why do you suppose that is? Perhaps it's because they make us too uncomfortable with their uncompromising discipleship and their willingness to suffer. Perhaps we're no longer willing even to affirm their distinctive theology, much less actually follow it. We fear there's too much separation of church and state, rather than not enough; we're too affirming of our government to hold it at arm's length like the Anabaptists did; we really aren't convinced that nonviolence can work in a world filled with terrorist threats. And so on.

There may be at least a grain of truth in all these arguments, but I suspect that there's yet another factor contributing to our reluctance to "play

the Anabaptist card" in Mennonite circles. I think that in North America (although not so much, perhaps, in the rest of the world), Anabaptism has become a concept with as much potential to divide, as to unite, the Mennonite church. How? Why?

I think that in the last quarter of the 20th century, the liberals "captured" Anabaptism. We were so enamored of the Anabaptist focus on peace and social justice that we glossed over their biblicism and evangelical piety. That (over)emphasis had the effect of wrenching apart the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith—a separation that the Anabaptists themselves never would have permitted (and explicitly argued against). Those Mennonites with a passion for biblicism and evangelical piety, as a result, began to look elsewhere for their models of faith and faithfulness. Some began openly eschewing the words "Anabaptist" and even "Mennonite." How unfortunate.

I think there is a crying need for us as a church to recover, to rediscover, the Anabaptist vision. Ben is not unique. That unified Anabaptist understanding of the whole Gospel is as relevant, as exciting, as stimulating, as motivating, as energizing today as it was in 1525, 1660, 1859 and 1943. If you don't believe it, ask Ben.

Church Relations **Update**

Another Case of Bethel/ Hesston Cooperation



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While Bethel
College and Hesston
College have for

many years cooperated to share instruction in academic areas such as history, business and music, that collaboration will take a more visible and public form this coming spring when the two Mennonite colleges join together to prepare and perform a joint Hesston/Bethel musical.

On March 1-3, under the direction of faculty from both colleges, and with a cast of students from both schools, the classic musical *Brigadoon* will be staged in Krehbiel Auditorium, on Bethel's campus. Directing the production will be Megan Tyner, a theater professor at Hesston. Working alongside Megan and serving as musical director will be William Eash of Bethel's music department.

Megan and Bill have already worked together to select *Brigadoon* for the spring musical, and they will continue to coordinate and supervise the many facets of bringing this joint venture to the stage, including auditioning and rehearsing the cast, designing and building the set, publicizing the event, preparing the orchestra and providing technical direction for the performances.

The idea for this joint spring musical emerged from broader discussions between the communication arts faculty and academic deans of both colleges in the spring 2006 semester. Already then the forensics programs at both colleges were cooperating through the efforts of Denise Bruce (Hesston) and John McCabe-Juhnke (Bethel) and their shared experience in forensics prompted conversation about the possibility for additional collaboration between the communication arts departments.

Megan Tyner's familiarity with Bethel—forged in part through her husband Toby

Tyner's status as a Bethel student, and also through her experience last spring teaching a course on Bethel's campus—fostered the possibility of a joint musical production. The efforts of people from both colleges have now turned this possibility into a reality.

Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies Requirement

You may recall that one of the decisions made during the academic program review two years ago was to reduce Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies from a major program to a minor program, with the added stipulation that general education would be altered so that every Bethel College student, regardless of major field of study, would be exposed to the discipline of peace, justice and conflict studies. On October 24, the faculty approved a new General Education (GE) curriculum for Bethel College. Following are excerpts from the proposal pertaining to Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies:

1. All Bethel students will be required to take a course designated "Peace, Justice and Conflict" (PJC) for GE.

A focus on peace and justice perspectives is important to Bethel's understanding of what it means to be a liberally educated person. The name of this requirement is congruent with the Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies minor. This "name recognition" will increase the visibility of the interdisciplinary minor, minimize the confusion of having two different labels for a peace and justice focus on campus and bring continuity to an important emphasis at Bethel.

2. Courses in the curriculum will be approved for meeting PJC by a subcommittee of the Educational Policies Committee, which will provide oversight to this requirement and give further specificity to the guidelines for the PJC requirement.

3. The PJC committee may give further definition to these guidelines, but in general, courses will be approved for

meeting PJC if they incorporate at least two of the following four emphases:

1. exploration of the faith traditions, theological foundations or value orientations that support a PJC perspective
 2. analysis of social or natural systems from PJC perspectives
 3. focus on practical skills of peace-making, communication and/or conflict mediation
 4. study of an issue or problem of PJC from a particular discipline's perspective
- These emphases encompass the range of emphases that are generally part of peace studies programs. This broad definition makes it possible for courses across our curriculum to be approved for the PJC requirement, but also gives some substance to the requirement so that it is not a generic study of "world peace." Also, because the PJC field is widely acknowledged as being interdisciplinary (or "trans-disciplinary"), we ask courses to demonstrate two of these emphases and not just one.

Spring Choir Tour Taking Shape

The Bethel College Concert Choir's tentative itinerary for its spring tour (March 17-25) is:

- Southern Hills Mennonite Church, Topeka
- Topeka Correctional Facility
- Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.)
- Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.
- Bethany Christian High School, Goshen, Ind.
- First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio
- Central Christian High School, Kidron, Ohio
- Oak Grove Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio
- Cincinnati (venue to be determined)
- First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana, Urbana, Ill.
- Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, Kan.
- Home concert, Memorial Hall