



# Church Relations Update

## Some Thoughts on Worship



By Dale Schrag

"Hey Dale, I just want to thank you for organizing such a wonderful chapel service today. It was extremely powerful and moving for me."

Lest you think it's a bit self-promoting

to start my essay by quoting this e-mail I received yesterday, you should know that the chapel in reference was our annual Tenebrae service. It's a service that hasn't changed much in the last 25 years at Bethel, so I deserve almost none of the credit for "organizing" it. It's an "extremely powerful and moving" service in spite of me, not because of me.

In this service, we read the passion of Christ from the Gospel of Mark; we blow out candles after each reading (simultaneously either pulling shades or turning out lights), so that by the time Jesus dies, the chapel is almost totally dark with the exception of one Christ candle (and even that one is temporarily placed under the table). In addition, we place a scrim over the organ pipes and project on it the image of Christ's crucifixion from Matthias Grünewald's altarpiece at Isenheim (see <http://www.lib-art.com/imgpainting/1/5/11851-isenheim-altarpiece-first-view-matthias-gr-newald.jpg>). When all the lights are on, one can barely tell that an image is being projected onto the scrim, but as the darkness grows, the image becomes steadily clearer. By the time all the lights are off, one is almost mesmerized by the power of the image.

This service was initially organized by Patty Shelly some 25 years ago; the idea for the Grünewald slide came from emeritus professor of art Robert Regier. It is a powerful service. One of my favorite chapel services of the year. I was especially ready for it this year, having just read James K. A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*.

Smith, associate professor of philosophy at Calvin College, argues that our character is formed as much (or more) by our hearts as by our heads. Smith introduces the concept of "liturgies" of culture, formative practices that shape what kind of kingdom we truly desire. The church, of course, is one of those cultural liturgies—but only one. There is the shopping mall, the sports stadium, the "military-entertainment complex," the university, etc. How can we become more aware of the ways in which these cultural liturgies form us? How can we ensure that the liturgy of the church becomes maximally formative?

In considering the cultural liturgy of Christian worship, Smith discusses a Tenebrae service. He contrasts it with a Good Friday service that included a long sermon "on the fine points of atonement theory." Smith writes:

As you can perhaps imagine, the Tenebrae service has a much greater impact on my children than the long sermon on atonement. And as you also might expect, it tends to have much more impact on the adults too! Why is that? Because the heavy affectivity of the Tenebrae service—its ability to communicate Good Friday almost directly to our body, as it were—touches our gut, our embodied *kardia*.

And that is something shared by all of us, including those who are either uninclined or unable [e.g., children or persons with mental deficiencies] to engage in theological abstractions. Historic Christian worship is fundamentally formative because it educates our hearts through our bodies (which in turn renews our mind), and does so in a way that is more universally accessible (and I would add, more universally effective) than many of the overly cognitive worship habits we have acquired in modernity (p. 137).

I think anyone who was present at our Tenebrae chapel service yesterday would be inclined to add a resounding "amen" to this passage by Smith. And maybe, just maybe, if we want our worship to be "maximally formative," we may have to look to our Catholic and Orthodox friends for help in designing worship experiences that involve more of our bodies. At least that's a thought, I think, that's well worth pondering.

## The Good Year Continues

The last installment of this *Church Relations Update* made much of the good year we were having at Bethel. I talked especially about the quality of and participation in spiritual life. I'm pleased to report that virtually nothing has changed. Chapel attendance has dropped a bit, sometimes falling below 100, but we experienced our normal 8% drop in enrollment from fall to spring, so we have fewer students. And there has been an increase in small groups meeting with a spiritual agenda, as several cluster groups have been formed.

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Spring semester has been special in other ways as well. The Martin Luther King Day celebration in January was simply fabulous in every way. We used MLK's 1960 call for Christians to be "maladjusted" as the theme for our Lenten chapel services. On February 10, we hosted a Numana food packaging event in Memorial Hall. I have never seen greater or more enthusiastic participation in a service event at Bethel College. Though we did not keep statistics, my best estimate is that fully 85% (or more) of resident students and 90% of full-time faculty spent time packaging food for Haiti. Rick McNary, founder of Numana and a Bethel alumnus, spoke in convocation on February 5, and he managed to galvanize the entire campus with his call to serve the poor. I think on February 10 we saw Bethel College at its absolute best!

## Four Students Scheduled for Ministry Inquiry in 2010

The following students are scheduled to do ministry inquiry in the summer of 2010:

- Naomi Graber, sophomore from Elkhart, Ind. (currently serving as a student chaplain), will be at Community Mennonite Church in Markham, Ill., working with Cyneatha



Millsaps. Cyneatha was our pastor-in-residence fall semester, and she had a powerful impact on the community, and an especially powerful impact on Naomi. Naomi's home church is Sunnyside Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

- John Miller, junior from Partridge, Kan., will be going to Christ Community Church in Des Moines, Iowa, to work with Pastor Kent McDougal.



Christ Community was an independent congregation that became "Anabaptist by choice" a few years ago when they joined the Central Plains Mennonite Conference. Kent is a thoughtful, passionate and decidedly Anabaptist pastor with a real heart for training leaders for the church. John, in fact, will be one of two MIP students at Christ Community this

summer, the other being Caleb Detweiler from Goshen College. John is a member of First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, Kansas.

- Sarah Pohl, First Mennonite Church of Christian, Moundridge, Kan., will be heading out West. Sarah will be serving with Steve Penner, pastor of First Mennonite Church of Reedley, Calif. Sarah is a sophomore.



- Caleb Regehr, junior from Grace Hill Mennonite Church, Whitewater, Kan., will be heading south to San Antonio Mennonite Church in Texas, where he will work with Pastor Rachel Epp Miller. Caleb will also be working some with the DOOR program in San Antonio.



## Some Dates to Remember

### Sunday, 25 April, 7 p.m.:

Kansas Mennonite Men's Chorus concert (joined by the Bethel College Men's Ensemble); Memorial Hall (free with freewill offering taken for the work of Mennonite Central Committee)

### Sunday, 9 May, 4 p.m.:

Masterworks Concert featuring the Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra, the Bethel College Oratorio Chorus and the Newton Chorale performing Poulenc's *Gloria* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*; Memorial Hall (tickets required).

### Sunday, 16 May, 7 pm.:

Open Road Concert; Memorial Hall (free).

### June 24-26:

*Marginal or Mainstream? Anabaptists, Mennonites and Modernity in European Society.* Mark Jantzen, associate professor of history, has offered the following description of this major international conference:

"The history departments of Bethel College and Eastern Mennonite University are organizing an international conference to be held at Bethel College June 25-26,

2010, on the history of Mennonites in Europe. Today the history of Anabaptism in the early sixteenth century has made its way out of the narrow confines of denominational history and on to the main stage of European history, at least as measured by its inclusion in general textbooks. Once chronological surveys arrive at the 1540s, however, the lights go dim and Anabaptist/Mennonite historiography retreats back to its corner where both its practitioners and European historians in general often seem to assume it belongs. Does nothing lasting remain from that early radical impulse that might have continued to irritate, shape or fertilize European society from the sixteenth century to today? Mennonites, in fact, because they represented an alternative and cohesive community that was Christian, pacifist and non-state, forced the societies and states where they lived to grapple with recurrent exceptions to the laws and to assumptions about the proper behaviors of subjects and citizens. This conference will examine the extent to which Mennonites, although often marginalized, nonetheless provide models or stimuli for important developments in Western societies. For additional details, see <http://www.bethelks.edu/MennosandModernity/>."