



Church Relations Update

From the Director of Church Relations



By Dale Schrag

Upon returning to my office in January after a few days off over the Christmas holidays, I noticed a message on my

voice mail. It was a message from Col. Peter Garibaldi, chief of staff of the 3rd Medical Command, United States Army. He had simply called to wish me a happy New Year.

I suspect a word of explanation is in order.

In addition to serving as director of church relations at Bethel, I serve as convocation coordinator. Col. Garibaldi spoke at a Bethel College convocation last fall. I invited him to speak for at least two reasons. First, both of his sons have attended Bethel College. Peter Jr. graduated last year; Angelo is a junior this year. Second, Col. Garibaldi's previous assignment was serving as garrison commander of Walter Reed Army Hospital. I initially invited him to speak last spring, but he was unable to keep that commitment due to the controversy that erupted over conditions at Walter Reed. His convocation address was heavily attended and much appreciated by students. Col. Garibaldi is an engaging and winsome person, and, as his phone call to me indicated, a very thoughtful person as well.

His phone call brought to mind another convocation this fall that

featured John Murray, pastor of Hesston Mennonite Church, talking about his friendship with Gen. David Petraeus. I personally thought it one of the best convocations I had ever witnessed at Bethel College.

A few days ago a colleague asked me to speculate on the long-term impact on the Mennonite church of this openness to listening to and establishing relationships with military personnel. I am sure there are those who would argue that this will contribute to the weakening, and perhaps even the eventual demise, of the Mennonite commitment to peace. They would suggest that we will preserve that commitment only by maintaining clear boundaries to separate ourselves from those with whom we disagree. I beg to differ.

I find myself growing increasingly uncomfortable with simple "boundary maintenance" as a mode of operating in the world.

- I fear it may feed a kind of pharisaical self-righteousness.
- I think it inhibits the development of thoughtful, carefully considered convictions.
- I think it exacerbates tensions, polarization, and division in an already too-tense, too-polarized, and too-divided world.
- Finally, I even question how biblical it is. Remember Jesus' interaction with the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5-13, or Peter's with the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10. Indeed, Jesus was repeatedly criticized by the Pharisees for spending time with the marginalized.

And who is more marginalized than a military officer at a Mennonite college?

But don't my warm feelings toward Col. Garibaldi, or John Murray's friendly relationship with Gen. Petraeus indicate a softening of our commitments to the way of peace? Absolutely not. They do serve to make us think harder and more carefully about those commitments, just as they inspire us to work more diligently to understand those with whom we disagree. And that, I think, is a giant step *toward* being a peacemaker.

Staley Lectures, February 25, 2008

This year's Staley Lectures will feature Shane Hipps, pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church, Glendale, Arizona, and author of *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*. Many of you will have heard Shane preach at the Mennonite Church USA assembly in San Jose last summer. Shane's lectures will focus on *Digital Christianity: How Technology and Media Are Shaping Faith*. The first presentation will be a convocation at 11 a.m. in Krehbiel Auditorium entitled *The Electronic Gospel: Why Changing the Methods Always Changes the Message*. The second presentation will be at 7:30 p.m. in Krehbiel Auditorium, with the title *Electronic Nomads: How Technology Alters the Nature of Community*. Both lectures are free and open to the public, though seating will be at a premium for the 11 a.m. lecture since some 400 students will be in attendance.

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Spring Break Concert Choir Tour

From 28 March to 6 April the Bethel College Concert Choir will be touring in the states of Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa. You will notice that most of the venues listed below are Central Plains Area Mennonite Conference congregations, but there are some notable exceptions. For the first time in years, they will venture up to Canada, singing at Laudamus Auditorium on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University. The choir's time in Freeman, South Dakota, will include at least limited exposure to the annual Schmeckfest celebration and a tour of a Hutterite colony. You'll note that the concert in St. Paul, Minnesota, will be an event affiliated with the Minnesota MCC sale. A free-will offering will be taken with all proceeds going to Mennonite Central Committee.

- Manhattan Mennonite Church, Manhattan, Kan., 7:30 p.m., Friday, March 28
- St. Joseph Cathedral, Sioux Falls, S.D., 7:30 p.m., Saturday, March 29
- Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, S.D., 9:30 a.m., Sunday, March 30
- Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, S.D., 10:30 a.m., Sunday, March 30
- Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, S.D., 7 p.m., Sunday, March 30
- Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 7 p.m., Monday, March 31
- Emmanuel Mennonite Church (Luther Seminary), St. Paul, Minn., 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 2 (This will be a benefit concert for the Minnesota MCC Sale.)
- First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, Minn., 7:30 p.m., Thursday, April 3
- Iowa Mennonite School, Kalona, Iowa, 1:45 p.m., Friday, April 4
- West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa, 7:30 p.m., Friday, April 4
- First Mennonite Church, Beatrice, Neb., 7 p.m., Saturday, April 5

- Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, Neb., 9:30 a.m., Sunday, April 6
- Memorial Hall, Bethel College, 7 p.m., Sunday, April 6

***Out of the Pew*, March 29-30, 2008**

Out of the Pew is a mission event for all senior high youth, March 29-30 on the campus of Bethel College. Throughout this weekend, youth will participate in a local service day (Saturday), join together in worship, explore mission possibilities, and be challenged to consider their call to short or long term missions (Sunday). Parents of youth are invited to a special Parents Banquet on Saturday, March 29. More details and registration information will be sent out in the coming weeks!

Out of the Pew has been planned by First Mennonite Church-Newton in partnership with Western District Conference, South Central Conference, Mennonite Mission Network, and Bethel College.

While this event will take place on the Bethel College campus, it has been scheduled during the beginning of Bethel's spring break, so no students will be on campus. Since the event was, of necessity, scheduled to work best with high school calendars, this scheduling conflict is unfortunate, but unavoidable. However, the college is nevertheless very pleased to host the event. For further information, contact Joel Schroeder, pastor of youth and young adults, First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas, 316-283-0273.