



# Church Relations Update

## From the Director of Church Relations



By Dale Schrag

Is "Revival" Too Strong a Word?

I just returned from the sixth chapel service of the 2009-10 school year. It was a hymn sing, chosen

in no small part because of the intense pressure of Fall Festival the previous weekend. Hymn sings are easy to plan, easy to execute. And they are very positive worship experiences – for those who like to sing. Non-singers tend to stay away in droves. And since there weren't a lot of students with publicized roles in this chapel, one couldn't count on folks coming as a gesture of support to their friends.

So I went into this chapel service convinced that our string of chapels with at least 100 people in attendance was doomed. But I was wrong. There were, again, for the sixth time in a row, more than 100 in chapel. Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, chapel attendance probably averaged more than 100 – but in those years we had almost 600 students. Today we have 435. Looking at percentages, this year's chapels have been the most heavily attended in my 26 years at Bethel.

And it's more than just attendance. It's who is attending (more athletes than usual, many students who are not Mennonite, etc.) and it's how they are worshiping. The singing this semester has been absolutely incredible – the kind of singing that gives one chills. At the conclusion of our hymn-sing chapel, Bill Eash commented that some

would claim you can measure the quality of a community by how it sings. If that is true, community at Bethel College this year is as healthy as it's been for years.

So that's chapel. Any other signs of revival? Informal worship, weekly hymn sing, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, early morning structured prayer time, Bible study – all are happening and all are healthy, with some experiencing record attendance, at least initially. And then there are the new things: Project 88, a contemporary worship service weekly in Bubbert's; a Women's Spiritual Formation Group meeting weekly in Agape House (the new Campus Ministries House); a group of prayer warriors who meet each Wednesday morning in Agape House to pray fervently for Bethel College and its people.

So is "revival" too strong a word? Perhaps. But there is a dynamism and vitality in spiritual life at Bethel that is markedly different and much more profound than I have seen heretofore.

And, you are wondering, why? I'm wondering that as well. I have some ideas, but no firm answers.

**Idea 1: new leaders.** I highlight Chad Childs, new vice president for student life, who is taking a very active role in campus spiritual life. Chad and his wife Jody are conducting a Bible study in Agape House for more than two dozen students each Monday night. Next, I mention the four student chaplains: Naomi Graber, Maya Kehr, Daniel Klaassen and Will Peterson. Each is profiled later in this *Update* with an autobiographical sketch, so I won't say more here, except to emphasize that they are extraordinarily mature and effective individuals. I note also the contribution of Sharayah Williams, campus ministries assistant. A senior from

Kalona, Iowa, Sharayah is all anyone could ask for in a student assistant. Finally, I make reference to the impact of new faculty (two of whom have scarcely missed a single chapel service this year) and new students. We didn't have enough of the latter this year, but the ones who came are spectacular.

**Idea 2: a campus ministries house.** Now officially named Agape House, this former residence of "Uncle Davy" Richert has been refurbished and refurnished largely through the efforts of the Bethel College Mennonite Church. Our hope was that Agape House would raise the profile of – and the ministry possibilities for – campus ministries. I think it has done both.

**Idea 3: prayer.** One of the results of the sudden presidential transition at the beginning of the year is that many people, both on and off campus, are praying about and for Bethel College with renewed fervor. I think we are seeing the results of those prayers.

**Idea 4: new openness to theological diversity.** I think we (and I use the personal pronoun advisedly here) have sometimes been too prone to insist that everyone see the theological world exactly the same way we see it. It's an attitude that is neither hospitable nor apt to generate significant change in theological orientation – but rather almost guaranteed to ensure theological rigidity on the part of everyone concerned. I think that's changing at Bethel College, and I think it helps explain why there is a new openness to student expressions of spirituality that are at some variance with the Bethel norm.

So, again, is "revival" too strong a word? Perhaps. But something very important is happening. And thanks be to God!

# Church Relations Update

## Some Events to Note

### November 1-3:

*Menno Simons Lectures with Scott Holland*, associate professor of theology and culture at Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, Ind. The title for the series is "Prophets, Poets & Pragmatists: The Historic Peace Churches and Public Theology."

Individual lectures (all in Krehbiel Auditorium of the Fine Arts Center) are as follows:

- Sunday, Nov. 1, 7:30 p.m.:  
*Public Theology as Seeking Cultures of Peace*
- Monday, Nov. 2, 11 a.m.:  
*Entering Whitman's America: A Theopoetics of Public Life*
- Monday, Nov. 2, 7:30 p.m.:  
*The Poetics of Peace*
- Tuesday, Nov. 3, 7:30 p.m.:  
*Prophetic Vision, Poetic Voice and Pragmatic Solidarity*

### November 2-4:

*Pastor-in-Residence, Cyneatha Millsaps*, pastor of Community Mennonite Church in Markham, Ill. Cyneatha will be primarily meeting with students and faculty on a more informal basis, but she will speak in chapel at 11 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4. Chapel services are held on the second floor of the Administration Building.

### November 8-9:

*Staley Lectures with Al Staggs*, D.M., a performing artist with theology degrees from Harvard Divinity School and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. We've invited him to be our Staley Lecturer in part because we are reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* and the Gospel of Matthew this year in Basic Issues of Faith and Life (BIFL). He will give two presentations at Bethel (both in Krehbiel Auditorium):

- Sunday, Nov. 8, 7 p.m.:  
*The Sermon on the Mount* (The greatest sermon ever delivered is presented in a conversational, understated manner as though the

words are being spoken for the first time.)

- Monday, Nov. 9, 11 a.m.:  
*A View from the Underside: The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (A one-person play, adapted and performed by Al Staggs, brings the life of one of the great heroes of the 20th century to the stage. The audience is brought into the prison cell where Bonhoeffer awaits execution and listens to his struggles with evil, injustice and God.)

### November 16:

Patty Shelly, professor of Bible and religion, will give a convocation address (11 a.m., Krehbiel Auditorium) on "*What Christians Should Know about Judaism.*"

### December 7:

Patty Shelly, professor of Bible and religion, will give a convocation address on "*What Christians Should Know about Islam.*" (If you were at the Mennonite Church USA Assembly at Columbus, Ohio, this past summer, you had an opportunity to hear Patty try to do both of these presentations in one hour's time. I was so impressed with the content that I decided the Bethel community needed to hear them, split into two presentations so there would be time for questions and conversation.)

### December 11:

*The annual Messiah sing* will be held in Bethel College Mennonite Church at 11 a.m., featuring a small orchestra and student soloists. The congregation sings the Christmas choruses from Handel's Messiah. The public is welcome to attend; music scores are provided.

### December 12:

Mark your calendars now for a special musical evening, *Hymn Sing for Christmas* at 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at Bethel College Mennonite Church led by Dr. William Eash. This is a fundraiser with proceeds divided 50% for Western District Conference Vision 2012 and 50% for Bethel College. Let's sing together!

## A sample of weekly spiritual life meetings:

### Women's Spiritual Formation

**Group:** Mondays at 8:00 p.m., Agape House. Maya Kehr is primary contact.

**Bible study:** Mondays at 9:30 p.m., Agape House. Led by Chad and Jody Childs.

### Fellowship of Christian Athletes:

Tuesdays at noon. Seminars C and D in the Student Center (bring your lunch). Led by Mark Yoder.

**Hymn sing:** Wednesdays at 9:00 p.m. Administration Building Chapel. Genevieve Rucker is primary contact.

### Project 88 (A Worship Experience):

Thursdays at 9:00 p.m., Bubbert's. Led by Will Peterson and Brian Siriwardena, who is Student Ministries Pastor at Grace Community Church.

**Informal worship:** Thursdays at 10:00 p.m., Memorial Grove (weather permitting, otherwise in the Chapel). Led by Daniel Klaassen.

**Prayer and song gathering:** Fridays at 7:30 a.m., Agape House. Led by Ruth Harder and Nathan Koontz, associate pastors at Bethel College Mennonite Church and Faith Mennonite Church, respectively.

## Profiles of Student Chaplains

### Naomi Graber



Jeremiah 29:11:  
"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

I am a sophomore psychology and Bible and religion major. Coming from Elkhart, Ind., I'm the first in my family to attend Bethel. I first considered Bethel because I had a few very cool and influential counselors at Camp Friedenswald, a very important place to me. Attending family camps, youth camps, winter retreats and just visiting on weekends made Friedenswald a second home. The worship and cabin devotions throughout my life created an environment of awesome spiritual growth. My home church, Sunnyside Mennonite, has also been a nurturing community full of men-

tors, friends and spiritual security. After graduating high school, I served a year in the program Service Adventure in Anchorage, Alaska. I worked 40 hours a week at the McKinnell House, a homeless shelter for single fathers and two-parent families. That experience helped me commit to a life serving Christ and others.

When I first came to Bethel, I knew one person, and she was a junior I had met at Camp Friedenswald. Some of the most life-giving relationships I found here came from campus ministry groups and gatherings. My experiences, as well as my desire to create true community at Bethel, give me great excitement to work as a student chaplain.

## Mayeken Kehr



Psalm 119:64a:  
"The earth, O Lord,  
is full of your steadfast love."

Senior; English education and Spanish majors  
Home church: Berkey Avenue

Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, Ind.

Extra information: I play soccer and tennis for Bethel, I'm president of the Student Alumni Association, a member of the Spanish Club and a volunteer for the Bigs in Schools program. I strongly dislike being asked to list everything in which I'm involved. My favorite fruit is frozen grapes and I enjoy knitting (as long as I don't have to start or finish the project).

A little bit of background . . .

At age 21, my journey in life still seems quite young. Nevertheless, as I reflect on my life's experiences, I realize how I have been continually brought back to the steadfast love of God. I was blessed to grow up in a loving and stable home – something that is increasingly rare in our hurting world. I was surrounded by strong Christian faith in the Mennonite tradition and still identify strongly with this heritage.

It's hard to describe my faith journey in a few lines – how could I possibly articulate all the ways in which God has moved and continues to move in my life? All I know is that God's love is faithful and persistent.

Through experiences of intense sorrow and intense joy, through the opportunity to live abroad in Quito, Ecuador, for five months, through the Ministry Inquiry Program and through daily interactions with people, I have become increasingly aware of the face of God and the reality of love amidst pain in the world.

I am continually amazed by the fullness and steadfastness of God's love in my life. I suppose that's why I chose to be a student chaplain. I hope that in some small way I can share the joy of the Light that darkness cannot overcome.

## Daniel Klaassen



James 2:26:  
"For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."

Junior, elementary education major  
Hometown:

Whitewater, Kan.

Religious affiliation: Mennonite

Growing up in the Mennonite church, I wasn't exposed to much diversity. Until the time I entered high school, I didn't really think about my faith, I just accepted it as what my family did. Through my experiences during my high school years, I was exposed to variety of different faith perspectives, trying to make my faith more my own. Throughout this time, I discovered that even though I create my beliefs as a Mennonite, they were mine and I could choose to interpret them how I wished.

I have never felt overly called to read my Bible and study the scriptures or to read "faith-building" books. In fact, I rarely read my Bible when I don't have a specific verse in mind. While this is an important part of faith, it is not my faith. My faith is stated perfectly in the verse above. I live my faith. I have never felt the need to talk about my faith or try to convince others that I am right. Instead I show God's love through my actions without needing to be recognized or congratulated. I just need to do the work.

To completely understand my faith journey, you must understand one thing: I have an extreme dislike for the term

"saved." In my interpretation of God, we are not divided into the groups of saved and not saved. The God I believe in does not separate people. I know that I cannot back this up scripturally, I know that most people disagree with me, but it is how I choose to interpret the Bible, which is what faith is all about, being ourselves, regardless of what others think.

## Will Peterson



My name is Will Peterson. I am a senior from Basehor, Kan. I am a Bible and religion major and I am also working for Youth Ministry and Coaching certificates. I am part of numerous

groups on campus: football, residence life, choir, Champions of Character Leadership Team and Service Corps (spring break service trips), and I am going to join the basketball team this year.

I have been a Christian for four years. I got saved before my senior year of high school at the Missouri State Fair. Once a believer, I became a part of a church body in Kansas City called Liberty Baptist. During the time there, I was filled with solid doctrine and attended youth group, where I was turned on to Christian rap. When I came to Bethel, I began attending Grace Community Church and continue to strengthen in my faith.

My passion and calling is to work with inner-city youth. I have had a chance to do this the past three summers at Morningstar Ranch as a camp counselor. The ranch is a part of an organization called World Impact, a church planting organization that works primarily with inner-city poor. Hopefully, I will continue from the three years at the ranch as a counselor to working as an assistant camp director or in one of the World Impact cities as a church planter with focus on youth.

The reason I became a student chaplain is because of my desire to see brothers and sisters in the faith being disciplined. I have had a great opportunity to have a pastor from GCC, Steve Friesen, come alongside me in my four years at Bethel. I hope to pour what has been poured into me into my peers.

# Church Relations **Update**



## Home-away-from home

The small green structure, near the Fine Arts Center, is now officially named Agape House. This former residence of “Uncle Davy” Richert has been refurbished to be Bethel’s first campus ministries house.

Dale Schrag, director of church relations and newly appointed campus pastor, got the idea from *The Chaplain’s Handbook*, whose author suggested, “If you can have a house for campus ministries, it is incredibly helpful,” Schrag says.

When he took the campus pastor appointment at the end of the last school year, Schrag began thinking of ways to embody this new call, he says. One thing that occurred to him: “Wouldn’t it be nice if we have something new to show – something that wasn’t there before.” Another driving factor in the project was student requests for a place to hold Bible studies and discussion groups.

So Schrag approached Ruth Harder, associate pastor of Bethel College Mennonite Church (just across the street from Richert House), with his idea, hoping

BCMC would be interested in helping with the endeavor. The church had been looking for ways to strengthen its connection with the college and serve students more effectively, and Harder quickly jumped on board.

The goal is to have a “home-away-from-home feel,” says Chad Childs, vice president for student life. There will be a functional kitchen as well as a living room and dining room. In addition, there will be office space for any pastors from churches in the community who would like to hold office hours there.

“The purpose of the campus ministry house is to establish a higher profile for Christian fellowship and worship on the - Bethel College campus by creating a designated location for campus ministry efforts and collaboration with community churches,” explains Childs.

He adds that this space is different from a church because it “hasn’t been used [before] for any specified religious activity. It’s open, and it provides room for student-led, worshipful experiences.”

Schrag agrees. “It’s a very different space from any other [on campus].”

Bethel’s campus ministry department has only begun to develop ideas for activities and future uses of the house and much of the continued planning will involve students.

Not many regional colleges have this type of campus ministry building that offers students a separate space. To have it has meant sacrifice on the part of some departments, Schrag says, but the college wanted to take “a bold step to see if something like this fit the need of students and the mission of Bethel.”

“During these challenging times, it’s encouraging to see Bethel boldly take risks that enhance the mission by responding to student needs and connecting with the community of Bethel and beyond,” says Childs. “This decision is a true embodiment of Bethel’s central values, its foundation in Christ and its hope for the future.

“I’m really excited about it, philosophically,” he adds. “The campus ministry house is a dramatic link to Bethel’s foundational principles and its current progressiveness and creativity.”