



## From the Pastor's Desk - Letter to the Congregation

The word of God is described as being sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), capable of piercing and transforming hearts, minds, and souls. The Church, the broader makeup of those who choose to actively follow Jesus, also acts to transform hearts, minds, and souls. Historically, Anabaptist and Mennonite Christians have sought to do this through distinctive ways of doing and being in the world. Think of some of the following: peacemaking, adult baptism, priesthood of all believers, simple living, and service.

Because the Anabaptist faith tradition has centered on doing and being, as well as believing, confession has been an important way for followers within Anabaptism to find common ground. The early Anabaptists chose to separate themselves from the Catholic church at the time of the Reformation (c1517). The printing press and early translations of scripture into German allowed laypeople to begin reading the Bible for themselves. Reading scripture for themselves, though, caused and continues to cause schisms throughout bodies of believers. Although we would like for scripture to bind us together, our different ways of reading and understanding scripture can sometimes create divisions.

I think it can be helpful for us to remember that there are positives and negatives to many faith traditions. A positive to what I will describe as the priestly traditions is that there is often a consistent and repeatable message that can bind people together. The priest stated this truth, so we can all trust this truth. We often see this played out in new ways in the more evangelical nondenominational churches of today. Oftentimes a pastor or group of leaders create a church based on a particular mission statement or vision that really thrives as long as the lead pastor and leaders are involved. The difficulty often arises when there is need for transfer of leadership. This is where a familial structure often gets integrated in which the pastor's child or children assume leadership to continue the vision. The shadow side to this way of thinking is when an individual priest or leader begins to have aberrant or abnormal ways of interpreting scripture. In certain structures, there are no avenues for true accountability. Sometimes the structure itself or the individual leaders leading the church can cause a lot of harm and damage the wellbeing of the flock.

In the Anabaptist tradition, there has been a lot of freedom to push back on irregular interpretations of scripture. There is a greater permission to receive what has been stated as truth but to also test it with one's own understanding and with the discernment of the broader church body. A positive of this tradition is that there is more scrutiny by a larger group of believers. The shadow side to this way of thinking is when individuals disagree. How does a group of followers of The Way determine how to move forward together even when there is disagreement? When do disagreements warrant separation?

And so, the Anabaptist Mennonite faith tradition has confessions of faith, statements of belief and ways of being followers of Christ together. These are statements and articles of faith that reflect the center of the church at any given moment. However, confessions are not creeds. They are apt to be changed or renewed. They are more descriptive than prescriptive in nature, meaning they reflect the current understanding and reality of the church, but they are not prerequisites for individual congregations to profess in order to be part of the broader denomination.

Some church traditions and denominations do come from creedal traditions where each individual and church body must strictly adhere to the creeds that have been adopted by the broader denomination and faith tradition. These creeds can act as a salve or balm to counter any possible heretical teaching or preaching. They are binding, too. They are requirements and must be adopted. This is an oversimplification for a system that has developed over centuries, but this may help us to see some of the distinctives of our Anabaptist Mennonite faith tradition as it exists today.

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# Grateful for our Goodly Heritage

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In a confessional church tradition, like the Anabaptist Mennonite church, a confession is more of a reflection for where the Church is at today. These statements of belief and encouragement to action help to address the issues of the day within the church. The reality is that the issues that plagued the church in the mid-1500s are not the same issues that a church like East Union faces today. One reason we do not face the same issues is due to the good work that the Anabaptist Mennonite faith tradition has helped to form who we are today. They have already answered some difficult questions. There are also some disputes from the past that are no longer central issues within our tradition. The Ban has been an important "instrument of church discipline" in the Anabaptist tradition. While exclusion from communion or exclusion from membership may still be implemented in Mennonite churches today, we typically do not see exclusion from association, or excommunication.

In the Anabaptist tradition, each generation must learn and recommit to The Way of being faithful followers of Christ. This commitment, like adult believers' baptism, requires authentic commitment from not only leaders within the church but the general congregation as well. The result is that some spiritual practices and disciplines may no longer reflect the faithful response to the movement the Holy Spirit as they once did. On the other hand, there may be fresh or new ways of worshiping and living out our faith that are lifegiving that congregations will adopt. For example, over the last several years at East Union we have celebrated an Ash Wednesday service. This service has traditionally been celebrated in the Catholic church and other high church traditions, but at East Union we have found it to be a meaningful way to remember our finiteness and vulnerability as we face the Lenten season together. In some ways, our willingness to claim and reclaim our faith can make our decision to follow Jesus as a church community stronger, but this work takes a lot of effort.

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## **70 years ago: 1952**

**April 6** - Brother S. B. Nafziger is worshipping with the group at Sandtown this morning.

**April 13** - Brother and Sister A. Lloyd Swartzendruber and son J. Paul arrived home last Wednesday evening. Five of the group that went to Germany with Lloyd returned with them. We are happy to welcome them home.

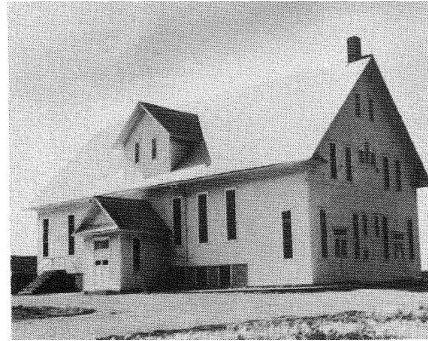
## **60 years ago: 1962**

**April 1** - James Brenneman is serving in Voluntary Service at the Frontier Boys Camp, Box 155, Divide, Colorado. He is serving as counselor for a group of delinquent boys who are sent there from Denver.

**April 15** - MISSING: Noise, as the children pass to their classes. Carpeting has been laid on the steps leading to the primary room. A big thank you to the "Merry Workers" Sunday School Class, taught by Doris Plank, who volunteered to finance this project.

## **50 years ago: 1972**

**April 2** - The IMS Choir is presenting programs in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska this weekend. Choir members from our congregation are Faith A'lee Yoder, Mina Yoder, Debbie Yoder, Geneva Yutzy, Annette Guengerich, Gary Miller, and James A. Miller



## **40 years ago: 1982**

**April 18** - There will be an area meeting for persons interested in peace and social justice issues from a Christian perspective tomorrow evening at 7:30 here at East Union. The meeting will include sharing of current activities and planning for the future. Interested persons are encouraged to attend.

## **30 years ago: 1992**

**April 19** - Congratulations to Chad Stoltzfus, Lance Yoder, and Warren Yoder who graduated yesterday, April 18 from Goshen College. Chad majored in Business, Lance majored in History, and Warren majored in Communications

## **20 years ago: 2002**

**April 28** - Congratulations and best wishes to Brian Miller who graduates today with a BA in Business Administration and a minor in Marketing. Andy Hershberger who graduates with a BA in Business Administration; Devin Yoder who graduates with a BA in Environmental Science; and Kevin Zook who graduates with a BS in Chemistry. They are all graduating from EMU today.

The strength of this confessional tradition is that it continues to bind and rebind us to Jesus. We are constantly being asked to reevaluate how we will respond to the challenges that the world presents us. This represents the hard work of being formed into Christ's likeness. Oftentimes I wish that there were a simple and easy way to become a fully formed disciple, but Jesus demonstrated through the formation of his disciples that to follow him takes time and our whole selves. We are called to be formed and transformed in every aspect of our lives. The hope in this confessional system means that we read and reread scripture seeking how God is forming us in our current contexts. As Jesus followers, we also recognize the gift of his advocate, the Holy Spirit, who also speaks to us through our personal and collective experiences.

Over the last several decades, there have been many issues that have challenged the Anabaptist Mennonite church. Topics like women in leadership, divorce, dress code, and LGBTQ marriage and leadership have all been points of contention within the church. Some of the difficulty relating to each other for congregations and conferences within Mennonite Church USA, stems from the misunderstandings of how our denominational, conference, and congregational structures function. Our current Mennonite Polity grants a lot of autonomy to the congregation. In addition, conferences hold pastor credentials and are the only way for a church to be a part of the denomination. If one's conference would choose to leave the denomination, the congregation would no longer be a part of Mennonite Church USA.

In order for East Union to be a part of Mennonite Church USA, we must also be a part of Central Plains Mennonite Conference. Central Plains Mennonite Conference holds the pastor's credentials and assists congregations with discerning and selecting candidates for the role of pastor. The conference also supports congregations through evaluations of leaders, resourcing leaders, and working through church conflicts. In a non-denominational congregation, this work must all be done internally. There are no outside support systems unless the congregation wishes to hire outside consultants or has developed relationships with likeminded congregations who will help them in times of crisis.

This coming May there is a special delegate session for Mennonite Church USA that will be held in Kansas City from May 27-30. Delegates from churches across Mennonite Church USA, including from East Union, will gather together to discuss several resolutions, including the following:

[Clarification on Mennonite Church USA Polity and the Role of the Membership Guidelines of Mennonite Church USA](#)

[MC USA Accessibility Resolution](#)

[MC USA For Justice Resolution](#)

[A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation](#)

Resolutions are nonbinding statements that express a shared understanding within the denomination regarding a particular topic or issue. These statements rarely are discarded, but sometimes they are updated or altered. These resolutions can speak to internal matters within the denomination. Historically, these resolutions have addressed internal issues such as dress code, recreation, call and care of pastors, etc. Statements and resolutions also speak to broader societal issues such as resolutions about nuclear power, militarism, television violence, energy sources, racial concerns, and more.

In a recent webinar regarding the resolutions process in Mennonite Church USA, Jon Carlson described the resolution process as being, "culturally embedded," stating that, "[Resolutions are] reflective of what's going on in the culture at any given point in time. The church is seeking to speak or to bear witness to the broader culture based on the church's convictions." Through the resolutions process the broader church seeks to find consensus.

The Anabaptist faith tradition is unusual in its high value on seemingly clashing ideals. On the one hand, we hold a very high value on individual conscience. This is expressed in our believer's baptism and a strong individual call to obedience in faith. On the other hand, there is also a strong conformist pressure, in which we place a high value on being a member of a community that is being formed together. Resolutions speak into the center of this tension by attempting to capture the convictions of the broader church while not demanding uniform adoption across the denomination. For example, unless a resolution formally changes actual polity adopted by Mennonite Church USA, local conferences, churches, and even individuals are not required to hold the same conviction as the adopted resolution in order to be a functioning member within the denomination, conference, or church.

The messiness of the resolutions process is also part of the beauty of being and living our Anabaptist faith. We are called to struggle together to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit's work in our context in place and time. We are called at East Union to live faithfully within our Kalona community. We are called to face the current challenges of being the people of faith God has called us to be. We cannot simply rely on the tradition of those who have gone before us. We, too, must do the hard work of wrestling with our faith.

The special delegate session in May tackles some very difficult and sometimes divisive topics. These decisions, though, do not need to cause us to live in fear. Our congregation has lived faithfully together for 138 years. This faithful living does not mean that we have always had the right answers, but that we have always been seeking to live into who God has called us to be. May we have the strength and commitment to continue to live into our shared faith, together. May we hold in prayer our East Union delegates and the delegates coming from across the denomination as they worship together, discern together, and decide together how to speak into our present realities. May we have the courage to face uncertainty with faith. May it be so.

Peace and blessings,  
Joel Beachy

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1. Ban - GAMEO," accessed March 29, 2022, <https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Ban>.

2. Mennonite Church USA, *2022 Special Delegate Assembly: Role of Resolutions*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPPHQmZxhz4>.



# Easter Story

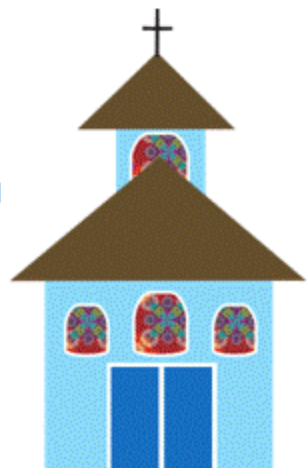
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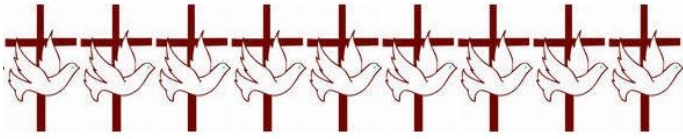
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APOSTLES  
BETRAYAL  
CAVE  
CHURCH  
CROSS  
CROWN  
CRUCIFIXION  
DISCIPLES  
FAITH  
GOOD FRIDAY

JESUS CHRIST  
JUDAS  
LAMB  
LAST SUPPER  
LENT  
MARY  
MIRACLE  
PASSOVER  
PENANCE  
PENTECOST

PRAYER  
REDEMPTION  
REJOICE  
RESURRECTION  
RISEN  
SAVIOR  
SON  
THORNS  
TOMB





# APRIL 2022



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					<b>1</b> Colton Litwiller Chance Litwiller 	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b> Morning Worship	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Mennonite            Women            Meeting</b>  Annie Troyer	<b>6</b> <b>CHOW</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>  Oliver Nixon Steve Dachtler	<b>9</b>
<b>10</b> Morning Worship    Bruce & Karen Harvey '71	<b>11</b>  Bob Yoder & Lola Faye Erb Yoder '09	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>  Lisa Schmidt	<b>15</b>  Greg Schmidt Doug Moberly  	<b>16</b>
<b>17</b> Morning Worship    Chris Charles Jill Moberly	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>  April Schrock	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>  James Boller	<b>23</b>  Eric Yoder Marlin Miller
<b>24</b> Morning Worship  <b>Hillcrest            Touring Choir            6 pm</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>  Kerry Saner-Harvey	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>