

Olive Branches

Relating to Other Christians:

What Do Mennonites Have to Offer?

by Leo Hartshorn

Six peace and justice staff from Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Mission Network, and Every Church a Peace Church recently rode together in a van to attend an Interchurch Relations Consultation held at Fatima Retreat Center, Notre Dame, Ind., July 13–15, 2004. Our conversations on the road centered around politics, peace, and theology. Duh! There was a lot of “preaching to the choir.” Sometimes those who meet opposition to peace and justice on different fronts, even within the church, need those moments when we can give and receive hearty “amens.” This was one of those moments.

Most of the peacemakers, pastors, church and seminary leaders, and theologians could have offered “amens” to the thoughtful presentations made by Stanley Hauerwas, Rodney Clapp, Glen

Stassen, David Burrell, Ron Sider, Lois Barrett, and Richard Kaufman. The presenters addressed what Anabaptist-Mennonites have to offer to other denominations and what our tradition can learn from others. Granted, the presenters were either Mennonites or Mennonite “cheerleaders,” but it was good to hear the “amens,” particularly for the Anabaptist-Mennonite peace tradition. The consultation dealt with many interchurch issues, such as interchurch dialogues (Anabaptist-Lutheran-Catholic) and local interchurch relations. Reports of dialogue by Lutherans and Catholics with Mennonites and efforts to deal with 16th century persecution of Anabaptists perpetrated by their forebears and anti-Anabaptist statements, such as those contained within the Augsburg Confession,

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Many thanks for all forms of your support!

Ecumenical Peace Gathering

Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA, Columbia Mennonite Church, and North Broadway Mennonite Church are co-sponsoring a regional **ecumenical peace gathering on Oct. 28-30, in Columbus, Ohio**. The theme is “Choosing Peace: Practicing Faith in Public.” The Keynote speaker is J. Daryl Byler, director of the Washinton Office of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. He will be speaking on practicing faith in the public square. Rev. Grayson Atha, Senior Pastor of King Avenue United Methodist Church will be leading the Bible study. There will be workshops on restorative justice, youth and the military, how to teach peace, nonviolence across the curriculum, forgiveness and hospitality, peace and the arts, writing for peace, drumming for peace, peacemaking in the Middle East, interfaith peacemaking, racism and legislation, study circles, in addition to a panel discussion on speaking peace to power, youth and children's programs, and worship services.

Further information can found by checking the PJSN website (<http://peace.mennolink.org/>) or by contacting Leo Hartshorn, minister of peace and justice, 717-399-8353, LeoH@MennoniteMission.net. Thanks for your donations in 2003! We begin the year financially stable. We appreciate your continued support and prayers in 2004.



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were an indication of significant steps at historic reconciliation and a “right-remembering” of history. There were conversations on the possibility on focusing some of our interchurch dialogue with Pentecostals, including the new Pentecostal Peace Fellowship. Time was also spent reviewing past interchurch relations and prioritizing initial steps in interchurch relations for the future.

One thing was clear from the conversations at the interchurch relations consultation, and from the fact that so many Mennonite peace staff were invited: was that peace is a significant and positive point of connection Mennonites have with other Christians. Other denominations often connect with us because of our peace tradition. We have a peace theology that does not grow out of political pragmatism or civic responsibility, but is rooted in the centrality of Jesus Christ: his life, teachings, death, and resurrection. Presenters also affirmed that the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition offers to others a way of “living without state power” or “cultural legitimacy.” Our tradition presents an ecclesiology that makes a clear distinction between the church and the world, avoiding the poles of separatism and accommodationism.

These “amens” to Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, especially from thinkers from outside our denomination, are ones that need to be heard across Mennonite Church USA. The Anabaptist-Mennonite peace witness is a collective gift our tradition can offer to others, one that continues to draw many people to us. It has been a key element for many, including myself, in becoming a Mennonite and deepening our understanding of the gospel. Peace is missional. The Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition also offers an alternative to an uncritical, and at times zealous nationalism, within the church, or what Rodney Clapp referred to as “making the cross amenable to the flag.” That element of creative tension between the church and state within our tradition can be a gift to the church in our time.

This interchurch relations consultation reminded me of the gift our tradition of peace can make to not only others, but also to those within Mennonite Church USA. I say that because proclamation of the gospel of peace has not always received an “amen” from within a church with a “historic peace tradition.” I had a brief epiphany during this interchurch consultation that reminded me of the gift of a Jesus-centered peace theology. I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian tradition where denominational conversations that included issues of peace and justice were scarcer than hen’s teeth. Sitting in a room at the interchurch relations consultation not only with a significant number of peace staff, but with theologians, pastors, church and seminary leaders affirming our peace tradition, it suddenly struck me. I was in a different place from where I once had been. I was in a space where “the gospel of peace” was recognized as a gift.

Peace is God’s gift to the world, embodied in Jesus Christ. The whole church, in its diverse traditions, is called to proclaim and live in the way of Christ, who is our peace. And it is not a gift exclusive to the Anabaptist-Mennonites. We have sisters and brothers in many denominations who share in the work and witness of Christ’s peace. Anabaptist-Mennonites have much to offer, but also much to receive by interconnecting with other Christians working for peace.

Every Church a Peace church

Every Church A Peace Church is a movement to enable grassroots people to work for the transformation of churches into peace churches, starting with their own local church. ECAPC believes that the church could turn the world toward peace if every church lived and taught as Jesus lived and taught. The formation of church-based peacemaker groups to experience a new encounter with the living Jesus is the chosen method for this transformation. It works through a four-step process, beginning with the individual finding a partner for the work, then uniting a small peacemaker group, then growing the vision through public meetings, and finally transforming the local church.

- Resources are available online at <http://www.ecapc.org>, in print, and through conferences around the country.
- Inquiries may be sent by email to info@ecapc.org or phone to 717 859-1958
- John K. Stoner, Coordinator (717) 859-1958, ECAPC PO Box 240, Akron PA 17501 <http://www.ecapc.org>
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