



Calvary MESSENGER

“... God forbid that I should glory, save in
the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”

Galatians 6:14

NOVEMBER 2025

Meditation	
<i>A Thankful Heart</i>	1
Editorial	
<i>Sacrifices of Thanksgiving</i>	2
The Bottom Line	
<i>Philosophy in Schooling</i>	6
In Mourning for Charlie Kirk and for the Anabaptists	11
Marriages.....	14
Cradle Roll.....	14
Ordinations	15
Obituaries	15
Observations	18
Dear Mr. Doubtful.....	21
History Matters	
<i>Beachy Beginnings</i>	23
I Saw A Beautiful Thing	
<i>¡Que Bonita!</i>	27
Mission Awareness	
<i>The Value of a Soul</i>	29
A Woman After God's Heart	
<i>Gratitude Attitude</i>	31
Junior Messages	
<i>Cambodia, Serve God, Rain or Shine</i>	33
Youth Messages	
<i>The Foundation of Discernment</i>	35
Thought Gems	back cover

Calvary Messenger

November 2025

Purpose of Calvary Messenger is:**To propagate sound Biblical doctrine;****To stimulate a deeper study of God's Word;****To anchor and fortify the faith of Christians;****To point lost and dying souls to Christ the Savior;****To welcome prodigals back to the fold and family of God;****And to help defeated Christians find victory in Christ Jesus.**

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A Thankful Heart

Ruth Hershberger, Jesup, GA

We have been blessed so very much
When Jesus is our Friend.
He gives us grace and peace and joy,
His mercies never end.

We have been blessed so very much
When Jesus is our Lord.
He leads and guides us on our way
As we trust His holy Word.

Food we have abundantly,
We never should complain,
When many folks around the world
Can barely life sustain.

We have so many freedoms too,
To live and work and love,
To come and go and find our place,
All gifts from God above.

But most of all, this is our plea,
To have this daily art...
To glorify You with all our life,
And have a thankful heart.

[The author says she has had 90 years of blessings.]

Sacrifices of Thanksgiving

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing (Psalm 107:21-22).

When the train stopped, bright sunshine was flooding the landscape. I jumped out and found myself up to my knees in snow. This was the first time that I saw the long freight train with the one passenger car by daylight. I listened. It was as silent as the snow. I asked the German engineer, "Sir, can you tell us where we are?"

"Helmstedt," he replied.

After a while: "Sir, how far are we from the border?"

"Two meters," he replied. "If I go two more meters, my cowcatcher will be in the British zone."

Encouraged by his friendly explanation, I asked again, "But you can't go, I suppose?"

"The light has to turn green, and that arm has to come down," he explained. "When both happen, then we can go."

But we didn't go.¹

It was January 31, 1947, in Berlin, Germany. After numerous miracles, 1115 Russian Mennonite refugees

were finally on a train, heading for the ship, Volendam, that would take them on to Paraguay and freedom. But they were stopped at the Russian/British border of the divided post-war Berlin. They were so close to freedom, but would Russia allow 1115 of her citizens to leave?

.....

Later this month, we will celebrate Thanksgiving Day. How can we show gratefulness to God, the Provider of all of our blessings? We don't bring "first fruits" offerings to the tabernacle or temple as people did in the Old Testament. Of course, we should faithfully support the work of God by giving back to Him of the material and financial blessings He has given us. While God does not need material things from us, thanking Him is one of the best ways to glorify Him. Recognizing that the material blessings we enjoy are from Him and not because of our own hard work will help us be grateful.

*"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? **Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most***

High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

*“Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! **The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!**”* (Psalm 50:12-15, 22-23)

Hopefully, we never encounter difficulties like the train ride out of Russian territory or the present war in Ukraine. But becoming aware of difficulties that other people are experiencing should not only keep us from complaining about our own circumstances, but help us to have a grateful spirit for all of God’s blessings we enjoy. But unless that gratitude prompts us to generously share with others, we could be guilty of the same self-righteousness as was the Pharisee who prayed, *“God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican”* (Luke 18:11).

Apostle Peter talks about the privileges and responsibilities of being God’s spiritual nation in I Peter 2: 9. *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”* Adam Clark

writes about our greater blessings as Christians.

“They [the children of Israel] were also a peculiar people, a purchased people; a private property, belonging to God Almighty, Deuteronomy 7:6; none other having any right in them, and they being under obligation to God alone. All these things the apostle applies to the Christians, to whom indeed they belong, in their spirit and essence, in such a way as they could not belong to the Hebrews of old. But they were called to this state of salvation out of darkness—idolatry, superstition, and ungodliness—into His marvellous light, the Gospel dispensation, which, in reference to the discoveries it had made of God, His nature, will, and gracious promises towards mankind, **differed as much from the preceding dispensation of the Jews, as the light of the meridian sun from the faint twinkling of a star.** And they had these privileges that they might show forth the praises of Him who had thus called them, the virtues, those perfections of the wisdom, justice, truth, and goodness of God, that shone most illustriously in the Christian dispensation. These they were to exhibit in a holy and useful life, being transformed into the image of God, and walking as Christ Himself walked.”³

Let's continue with Peter Dyck's story of the Russian Mennonite refugees' train ride and their response.

.....

Then I heard a click, a sound that made me whirl around and look up at the traffic signal. That arm had come down, and the light just then turned green. The engineer gave me a friendly nod and reached for the throttle.

I jumped back on. We crept along for half a mile or so, not more. Then it stopped again. The engineer explained that we had left the Russian zone and were now in the British zone.

I jumped off again, ran to the first boxcar, and slid the heavy door open. "We're out!" I shouted to the surprised people who had been cooped up in almost complete darkness for more than twelve hours. I grabbed the next door and did the same. Then the next and the next, "We're out...we're out"... forty times, until everybody knew that we were out and no longer in the Russian zone.

*We had come to the Red Sea, and it had parted. Singing began in one of the cars and spread quickly to the others. **Soon the entire train was singing that great hymn of praise, "Nun danket alle Gott."***

During this Thanksgiving season, let's honor our Provider and spiritual Deliverer with offerings of thanksgiving in contrast to a spirit of entitlement that is a tendency of all of us in this nation. May we stand out as God's purchased people who have experienced "His marvellous light!"

"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 12:15).

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs" (Psalm 69:30-31).

AY

1. *Peter & Elfrieda Dyck, Up From the Rubble (Herald Press, 1991), p. 200*

2. *Ibid, p. 201*

3. Adam Clark's Commentary, *I Peter* 2:9



If you have GOOD EYESIGHT and GOOD HEARING,
THANK GOD Who gave them to you.

Proverbs 20:12

Announcement

Mission Awareness Editor Transition

Brother Floyd Stoltzfus has been responsible for the Mission Awareness column for over 26 years. According to the *Calvary Messenger* archives, he became editor of this column in March 1999. Brother Floyd has faithfully written about a variety of subjects related to missions: preparing for the mission field, ministering and preaching to the lost wherever they are found, supporting missions, making us aware of mission opportunities around the world, and that we can fulfill the Great Commission no matter where we live. He has done some of this even while serving on the foreign field. We are grateful to him for faithfully writing and providing for the Mission Awareness column. God bless you!

For the last several months he has been sharing the responsibility with Tim Petersheim, a brother in the same church, Pequea A. M. Church, in Narvon, PA. Tim will be taking on most of the responsibility in the coming months.

Tim and his wife, Deanne, served under Amish Mennonite Aid (AMA) in Belize, at the Haynes Street Mission from 2017 to 2020. Tim currently works in construction, and Deanne is busy homeschooling three of their five children. They enjoy raising a family together on their small farmette. While they are in the “thick” of family life, and have less spare time than do Floyd and Marilyn, they are concerned about reaching out to the unsaved, regardless of where they are found.

If you would like to reach out to these brothers with appreciation and encouragement, here are their email addresses:

Floyd- floydmarilyn43@gmail.com

Tim- timmypetersheim@gmail.com

Announcement

Annual Calvary Bible School Cleanup

Come join us in our CBS cleaning November 10-12, 2025, in preparation for the next school year. This is open for young and older. Our staff building is included so we could really use 45-50 people. If you, your youth group, or other friends could help us, we would really appreciate it. Good food, lodging in the dorms, cleaning supplies, and evening volleyball will be provided.

If you are interested, contact **Lowell Swartzentruber, (864) 378-3394**, so we know how to plan. Please come help us!

Announcement

THE 2026 SHEPHERDS' INSTITUTE

Cornerstone Mennonite Church
20000 County Road 655, Memphis, MO 63555

February 9-13, 2026

*Equipping church leaders to be compassionate and wise in
pastoral care, church administration, and biblical preaching.*

Daytime classes for ordained and licensed ministers:

8:45 Devotions

9:00 Man and Redemption (Theology) Milo Zehr

10:45 Biblical Hermeneutics (Preaching) Dave Yoder

12:15 Lunch

1:00 Leadership and Brotherhood (Pastoring) Verlon Miller

2:45 Round Table Discussion Milo Zehr, moderator

Evening sessions (open to the public) – 7 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.

Two Kingdom Doctrine History Chester Weaver

Healing Hurting Hearts Dave Yoder

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the bottom line

Philosophy in Schooling

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

Prior to 1950, few people went for higher education. About 1960, the demand for people schooled in medicine, science, and engineering came on strong and grew rapidly. These three branches of the emerging modern life gave rise to an increased

need for more proficiency in math in expanding forms, which brought increased use for computers and its programming. That, in turn, gave upward propulsion to all kinds of technology with ever higher levels of experimenting, discovery, and

development.

All of these spawned vast amounts of publications, followed by text books, and wider yet, more reference studies of all kinds, made available by way of computer programs. Parallel to the computer age was the accelerating space age with its own scientific excitement of exploration and discovery. Knowledge and schooling were everything, the more one could get, the better was the promise of the future. The big push for ever broader applications for computer uses and technical equipment skyrocketed in 2000-2025.

What happened in recent years? The law of supply and demand kicked in—too much supply of the ever higher-educated students and not enough demand. What else? The law of aerodynamics also kicked in, as in, what goes up, comes down. The increasing pot of gold at the end of the rainbow ran out of currency. The upward spiral of increasing higher education went down through the floor of practicality, finally recognized by 2025. High paying jobs were needed to pay off high-priced student loans plus the ever-present interest rates. Lower pay makes for longer debt, more financial disillusionment and discouragement and depression, as graduates under

pressure needed to settle for lower tech levels than that for which their studies had intellectually groomed them.

Now there are colleges and universities with lower enrollments, making a financial crisis for their down-sizing, causing a serious, national dilemma. Besides, national birth rates have gone down, also a matter of grave concern. The newspaper had a headline about the dearth of “Willing Workers” of U.S.-born nationals. Downscaling is seldom by choice. Economic survival itself is a teacher, as in, having a new set of economics that teaches a new round of frugality by current events in the economy to meet the challenges of downscaling.

Continually raising the level of academic expectations for our Christian schools has perhaps already made it more difficult to recruit needed teachers, even for our elementary schools. We wish to upgrade our schools; how could any thinking parent be against it? But can we never reach and perform at the level of a “practical excellence?” Must we always be restless and dissatisfied with an ever higher accomplishing production?

I have seen youth Bible School homework requiring book reports on subjects totally unrelated to the

in-class studies. There is also some required reading from popular authors who are not conservative Anabaptists. The given concept is to “cause our students to think for themselves.” If that meets the goal for our higher education, are we then logically expected to accept their free-thinking conclusions, and give room to express those insights as promotions in our future church programs? Because, you know, thinking always leads to doing.

Liberal arts programs of upscale colleges typically become known for their acclaimed graduates. Cutting-edge learning happens in numerous classes, largely conducted by lectures given by renowned professors. New ways of thinking are developed by wide-ranging philosophies, which lead people to blindly step into new ways of societal structures. It begins by free thinking, “outside the box,” they say. What happens? These free thinkers then criticize the box!

Schools were first developed to teach facts and truth. Attendance was not compulsory, nor were diplomas given which could then command higher paying jobs. Philosophies promoting speculation and theories would have been despised and denied, being a waste of time, and being seen as an unwanted possibility for error and deception.

The study of truth and facts had prepared students to discover more of the same in their life experiences. Philosophy, and its octopus-type tentacles, could be recognized as a non-contributing time and energy robber, and thus should be avoided. Philosophy chosen in the mind, and then held in the heart, can become an “inner voice” that can mislead and deceive the individual thus exercised. Philosophy is the product of the mind, and is manhandled to make people think, so they say. The Bible says, “*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7).

The Bible is the book of God, and given by God for man to be informed of divine thought. It is the Book of books to direct man’s thoughts in line with God’s thoughts. Those thoughts are of utmost importance in regard to truth and facts. Its history is factual, and its directives are conclusive as an entire body of truth. Its prophecies are set, producing confidence in people of faith.

Philosophy is not a body of truth. It can contain some truth, but mixed into its structure of propositions, there can be subtle errors, even lies and deception. Philosophical thought processes are a human way of thinking. Winsome personalities can more easily get away with a truth-error combination, which becomes

the natural cultivation of humanistic exploits. They laugh at people who cannot understand their off-track train of thought! Some listeners will say, “He is too deep for me,” when actually, philosophical speaking is shallow by its very own nature.

The truly deep things of God are given and revealed by Him to hearts and minds that have been made clean from the lusts of the world, including its worldly ways of thinking and expression. The Bible says, *“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit, we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the [supposed] wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory”* (I Corinthians 2:5-7).

This text teaches us:

- The goal of all learning under God shall be to ennoble a faith response to God.
- Two wisdoms are presented. The wisdom of this world variously dead ends and self-destructs. The wisdom of God is a powerful resource for living. But what is it?
- The wisdom of God is timeless, as it thrusts all the way back to the dawn of creation, “ordained before

the world,” put in place by God for those whose hearts yearn for His own brand of higher education, even heaven’s best.

- The timelessness of the wisdom of God is set even broader and higher in the next two verses.

Verse 9. *“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”*

Verse 10. *“But God hath REVEALED them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”* (emphasis mine)

1. The eyes of man are for seeing (reading), the ear for hearing (others’ talk), the heart for man’s input by human choice, or to increase in all practical knowledge that prepares the mind and heart for useful and practical purposes in the Kingdom of Christ. *“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment”* [discernment, foresight and experience] (Philippians 1:9).

2. Truth is by revelation from God, and always from the higher to the lower. All truth is revealed to us by God, given by two or three witnesses, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are “*the deep things of God,*” encompassing and surpassing all breadth, height, and depth of

wisdom (Ephesians 3:16-19).

3. Philosophies seek to go from the lower to the higher, from man's eyes, ears, and heart. The presuppositions and theories come from man and get lamely passed on to other hapless men. They only tend to go lower, not higher, both the man himself, and also his philosophies. When used to presume on rising in the wisdom of this world, it burns out as an earthbound meteor, ending as nothing, even as a fake wisdom. The Bible identifies it as *"profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called"* (I Timothy 6:20).

4. The wisdom pursued by man from his own smarts seeks and charts either a fulfilled life without God, or partly without God, or mostly without. Departing from God happens incrementally, by degrees, as in a car tire, going flat and unusable by a slow leak, not usually a blowout.

Thus Christians, even of ourselves, become subject to "filler stuff," at least as a temptation in our Christian education.

The Bottom Line is that as our Christians of higher learning seek to reach up for our own brand of higher education, our concern is that we do not compromise our own approach to practical education for our time and place. To be sure, we are not against more learning. I continue my own education even now, as I have all my life, having an inquiring mind which will turn to being 88 years old this month. Our God is pro-knowledge, which is ever intended to lead His own to His appreciable wisdom!

The biblical high ground for all teaching and learning is to dispense truth and facts, and leave philosophy to the philosophers down there at Mars Hill.



Constancy

The heights by great men reached and kept

Were not attained by sudden flight,

But they, while their companions slept,

Were toiling upward in the night.

-Henry W. Longfellow

In Mourning for Charlie Kirk... and for the Anabaptists

Ellis Miller, Hutchinson, KS

Today I mourn for a widow who has lost a husband who loved her and who loved Jesus. I mourn for two children who will grow up without their father.

I mourn for our nation divided by the politics of left and right, but united in the pursuit of power and wealth and glory. Able to expend energy in social outrage, but unable to love the “other” neighbor as themselves.

While this is tragic, it isn't surprising and it isn't new. Human nature without redemption will always find an enemy—other nations, other races, other religions, other views.

I mourn for the American churches who have joined the flag with the cross, who embrace the Bible with one hand and the rifle with the other. Who don't live as exiles hoping for a heavenly country, but instead celebrate their leader who promises to make this nation great again.

While this is tragic, it isn't surprising and it isn't new. The church has long been tempted with power and with compromise. Constantine and the crusades show what happens when

the church abandons the ways of its suffering Savior and takes up the sword.

But even more, I mourn for my Anabaptist brothers and sisters and our churches. How has it happened that we have kept an identity that is plain but lost our identity as pilgrims? When did we move from living as exiles and ambassadors to embracing conservative politics and political figures as our own (whether we vote or not)?

To be clear, I count Charlie Kirk as a brother in Christ. He unapologetically preached Christ and the Gospel. For this I am grateful. He was a gifted communicator who challenged many to reconsider both their personal views and their political views. His skill was admirable.

Yet, he also unapologetically pushed an aggressive political agenda and was closely tied to a president whose words and life differ sharply from Christ's commands. He attacked political enemies and called for the death penalty for a former president. He saw the US government as Christian (“This is a Christian state. I'd like to see it stay

that way.”) and believed that Christ’s command to “*Occupy until I come*” was an instruction to dominate in government and all of society.

His funeral witnessed the confusing marriage of the church and state. His widow gave a moving testimony pointing to Christ and speaking of forgiveness. Other speakers clearly preached the Gospel. But the stage was also shared with a political party to preach their agenda. It is clear that this version of Christianity is deeply joined to a particular brand of politics. The two are inseparable in life and in death.

What if instead of hours of politics, the time would have been given to Christ and the cross? What if committed Christians from across the political spectrum had laid down their differences and together preached the risen Christ? This could have been a moment for the church to stand together. Instead, the unity of political views trumped the unity of Christ.

We aren’t here to discuss Charlie Kirk. While I count him as a fellow believer, he was from a different faith tradition. His teachings were the clear outworking of his beliefs.

My question is whether our faith tradition will live out our beliefs. Or are they still our beliefs? This message of joining church and state

is not unfamiliar to us as Anabaptists. However, it was not the message of our spiritual ancestors, it was the message of their persecutors. It is alien to the way of the Kingdom Christian.

We wince when we see a buggy in the lane and a Trump sign in the yard. Yet, these symbols too closely represent the hearts of many in our churches. We have brothers who are listening to Fox News more than the Bible, to Tucker Carlson more than Menno Simons.

A friend recently told me that unless we unapologetically embrace and speak about our identity as citizens of another country, it will disappear in the onslaught of social media and conservative political culture.

For those of you who do not embrace this marriage of Anabaptism and politics, we are at a place where silence is probably not the right option. We must prayerfully, graciously, humbly, and courageously speak up for Christ and His Kingdom.

We are at a turning point.

How will we respond?

Will we embrace Christ’s words that “*my kingdom is not of this world?*”

Will we embrace the instructions of Peter to live as exiles and sojourners?

Will we accept the call to be ambassadors of another kingdom

both in this country and throughout the world?

Will we love our enemies and pray for them?

Will we become passionate followers of Christ, or will we remain the comfortable quiet in the land?

Will our people be steeped in Scripture and prayer or in social media, entertainment, and distraction?

Will the heritage we pass on to our children be one only marked by hard work and the blind pursuit of prosperity? Or will they have seen us sell all in order to gain the greatest Treasure of all?

Will the Master say, "Well done!" when we stand before Him?

A Prayer For Our Time

Our Father Who is in heaven,

May Your name be sacred in our churches and in our lives.

May Your kingdom come in our communities.

May Your will be done

... in our lives,

... in our families,

... in our congregations,

... in our nation,

... in the world

as it is in heaven.

Give us what we need and protect us from what we don't need.

Forgive our sins and teach us to forgive.

Protect us from all the attacks and traps of Satan that would lead us away from You or destroy what You wish to do.

Protect us.

Keep us.

For Yours is the glory and the power.

We give our allegiance to You and not to the nations and political movements of this world.

For You are our King.

Forever and ever.

Amen.

Author email: ellisandlynita@findusfaithful.com

This article can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/MourningKirkAndAnabaptists>.

[For more on this subject, see the Observations column. AY]



When *sorrow* comes, we have no right to ask,
"Why did this happen to me?"
unless we ask the same question
when *joy* comes our way.

marriages

May the homes established by these marriages be little substations of heaven, where God reigns and His blessings flow.

Leis-Horst

Bro. Trevor, son of Kevin and Delores Leis, Harriston, ON, and Sis. Cherie, daughter of Clifford and Carolyn Horst, Stratford, ON, on August 23, 2025, at Faith Mennonite Church for Anchor of Hope by Kevin Leis, father of the groom.

Martin-Yoder

Bro. Ezra, son of Elvin and Rachel Martin, Wellman, IA, and Sis. Emily, daughter of Leighton and Joanna Yoder, Wellman, IA, on September 13, 2025, for Sharon Bethel Mennonite Church, Kalona, IA, by Lavon Bontrager.

Milton-Hostetler

Bro. Luke, son of John and Paula Milton, Vanleer, TN, and Sis. Rachel, daughter of Joseph and Fannie Hostetler, Lobelville, TN, on August 30, 2025, at Lighthouse Mennonite Church by Paul Overholt.

Yoder-Villalobos

Bro. James Yoder, son of Junior and Eunice Yoder, Oskaloosa, KS, and Sis. Dayana, daughter of Victor and Glenda Villalobos, Patate, Costa Rica, on April 12, 2025, at Guatuso, Costa Rica, by Marcus Witmer.



Yoder-Wagler

Bro. Joel, son of David and Dorothy Yoder, Oskaloosa, KS, and Sis. Juanita, daughter of Galen and Mary Ellen Wagler, Oskaloosa, KS, on August 2, 2025, at Western Hills for Ebenezer Amish Mennonite Church by David Yoder.



cradle roll

The children which the Lord hath graciously given . . . Genesis 33:5

Brenneman, Joel and Sharla (Hooley), Falkville, AL, third child, first daughter, Willow Kate, September 17, 2025.

Brenneman, Zachary and Rosalyn (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, first child and daughter, Harmony Grace, August 2, 2025.

Coblentz, Josh and Waneta (Lambright), Cochran, PA, second child, first son, Theodore Hans, June 18, 2025.

Drudge, Travis and Cheyenne (Horst), Wroxeter, ON, first child and daughter, Brynlee Wren, August 4, 2025.

Hostetler, Andy and Rodica (Nisly), Partridge, KS, first child and daughter, Elise Marie, September 4, 2025.

Martin, Barry and Thelma (Stauffer), Greenfield, OH, third child and son, Bentley Tate, July 7, 2025.

Miller, Allen and Kathryn (Hochstetler), Kokomo, IN, third child, second son, Japheth Malachi, September 6, 2025.

Miller, Kristen and Arlene (Miller), Hutchinson, KS, first child and daughter, Sophia Ruth, September 20, 2025.

Raber, Owen and Carol (Miller), Hillsboro, OH, fifth child, third son, Jordan Lane, July 5, 2025.

Schlabach, Ryan and Margaret (Miller), Hadley, PA, third child, second son, Ty Noah, June 27, 2025.

Schmucker, Derek and Anita (King), Partridge, KS, first child and son, Jenson Wayne, July 26, 2025.

Wagler, Robert and Jenna (Graber), Oskaloosa, KS, first child and son, Miles Bennet, June 26, 2025.

Wagler, Steven and Sharon (Eash), Partridge, KS, second child, first daughter, Shiloh Rose, May 13, 2025.

Weaver, Melvin and Laura (Weaver), Sturgis, MI, fifth child, third daughter, Chloe Lanae, September 1, 2025.

Yoder, Larry and Brittany (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, second child and daughter, Nicole Jade, September 23, 2025.



ordinations

May the grace of God be upon our brothers as they minister faithfully. Let us pray for them.

Bro. David Overholt, 44, (wife, Charlotte Yoder), Montezuma, GA, was ordained minister for Clearview Mennonite Church, Montezuma, GA, on August 31, 2025. Preordination messages were given by Raymond Yoder. The charge was given by Dwight Yoder, assisted by Raymond Yoder and Virgil Kanagy. George Plank shared the lot.

Bro. Cody Zimmerman, 36, (wife, Wanita Yoder), Harrison, AR, was ordained deacon at Cornerstone Mennonite Church, Harrison, AR, on September 7, 2025. The charge was given by Darrell Rohrer, assisted by Clarence Yoder, Jr. and Conrad Helmuth. Leonard Mast shared the lot.



obituaries

Bontrager, Esther E., 91, of Middlebury, IN, died on September 11, 2025, at her residence. She was born on January 17, 1934, in LaGrange County, IN, to Eli and Katie (Bontrager) Herschberger. On May 12, 1957, in Goshen, she married Elmer Leroy Bontrager. He died on February 21, 2020.

Surviving are two sons: Richard (Ella), Topeka; Lamar (Joanna), Wolcottville; three daughters: Bertha (James) Hershberger, Summersville, KY; Laura

Bontrager, Middlebury; Gloria (Galen) Nissley, Millersburg; daughter-in-law, Martha (Reuben) Yoder, Crossville, TN; 26 grandchildren, 47 great-grandchildren, six step-grandchildren, eight step-great-grandchildren; brother, Daniel (Orpha) Herschberger, Wakarusa; brother-in-law, Elmer (Sara Viola) Gingerich, Mountain View, AR; and sister-in-law, Susie Hershberger, LaGrange.

She was preceded in death by her husband; son, Galen; and three siblings: Fannie (Chris) Miller, Henry Hershberger, and Lavina Gingerich.

She was a member of Rosewood Fellowship Church. Esther was a homemaker and enjoyed sewing, crocheting, piecing quilts, and making bread. She also loved tending to her flowers and garden and mowing her grass, which she last did on June 30 of this year.

The funeral service was held on September 15, 2025, at Rosewood Fellowship Church. The service was conducted by the Rosewood Fellowship ministry team. Burial followed in the South Haven Cemetery, Millersburg.

Miller, William E., 84, of Blackville, SC, passed away peacefully on September 10, 2025, at home surrounded by his family. He was born on June 15, 1941, in Hartville, OH, to Phineas and Emma Miller. He married Alta Miller on June 1, 1967.

He was a member and deacon of Calvary Fellowship Mennonite Church.

William was well known in the community as a contractor and builder.

Survivors include his wife, Alta, his children: Susan Miller, and Jonathan (Louella), both of Blackville; Rhoda (Brian) Graber, Washington, IN; and Jesse (Lori), Blackville; grandchildren: William (Lynelle) Miller, Natalie (Derice) Hochstetler, Emma, Liesel, Allison, Jonathan Clay, and Millie Miller; Connor, Leah, Reagan, Savannah, and Katie Graber; Meagan, Troy, Audrey, Brandon, and Kaden Miller; and two great-grandchildren: Zara and Louix Miller. He is also survived by his sisters: Alta (Leroy) Hershberger, Sligo, PA; Miriam (Alfred) Raber, Hartville, OH; Rhoda (Paul) Yoder, North Canton, OH; Mary (Larry) Johnson, Ocala, FL; Martha Digovani, Sarasota, FL; and Elsie (Kermit) Zimmerman, Milford, IN; brothers: Glenn (Marie), Sarasota, FL; Nelson (Betty), Shipshewana, IN; and sister-in-law, Sylvia Miller, Hartville, OH.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by two brothers, Mervin and Phineas, Jr.

The funeral was held on September 13, 2025, at Calvary Mennonite School. Burial followed at Calvary Fellowship Mennonite Cemetery.

Yoder, Millard D., 74, of Paint Lick, KY, peacefully went to meet his Lord and Savior on December 29, 2024, at his home. He was born on July 8, 1950, to Denver and Emma (Peachey) Yoder in Norfolk, VA.

Millard will be lovingly remembered by his wife of 53 years, Mary (Kurtz) Yoder. Surviving in addition to his wife, are eight children: Geneva (Paul) Peachey, Paint Lick; Marcus (Dorcas), Soldotna, AK; Faith (Milt) Kinsinger, Lexington, IN; Nathan (MaryJo), Thompson Falls, MT; Emmanuel (Glenda), Sterling, AK; Jonathan (Becky), Thompson Falls, MT; Millard (Carolyn), Wytheville, VA; Violet (Jerald) Rhodes, Auburn, NE; four brothers: Homer, Donald, Denver Jr., Calvin; four sisters: Sharon, Ellen, LaRetta, and Hannah; 42 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Denver and Emma Yoder, a brother, Clifton, and a sister, Judith Kropf.

Millard was baptized upon the confession of his faith in Jesus Christ as a youth. He was a member of the Gospel Light Mennonite Fellowship. He enjoyed brightening people's day with his sense of humor! He also had a deep concern for the spiritual well-being of his children and grandchildren.

He was ordained to the ministry on November 1, 1981, and 11 years later he answered to the call of bishop responsibilities. He was a servant leader, left a legacy of passionate preaching and had a burden for the lost souls of mankind. He conducted many revival meetings and would often have children's class, in which he loved to teach them the "Crayon Box Song."

*When I was just a little girl,
no higher than your knee*

*My mother bought a box of crayons
just for me,
I picked them up, I opened them up,
I looked way down inside,
And the colors all reminded me
of Jesus when He died.*

*Chorus
Red is the color of the blood
that He shed,
Brown is the crown that they
placed upon His head,
Blue is for royalty!
Within Him did dwell,
Yellow's for the Christian who's
afraid to tell.*

*I colored and I colored till my
crayons were all gone,
And though I've grown much older
now the memory lingers on,
And when I see a little girl
with a crayon box in hand,
I tell her what it means to me and
hope she'll understand.*

*Afraid to tell of the Savior's love,
Who died on Calvary,
Who died for the lonely sinner,
just like you and me.
Someday He's coming back,
to be our King again,
Then the colors of the crayon box
you will see.*

We miss him dearly but rejoice that he is no longer suffering and is Home at last!

The funeral service was held January 3, 2025, at Richmond Church of Christ. The burial followed in the Gospel Light Mennonite Church Cemetery.



In this column in the September issue of the current year, I recounted an exchange between two brothers in which one of them marveled at the dearth of books in the house of a mutual acquaintance. Since then I got a delightful letter from one of the readers of this column. She recounted how some years ago, while she was gone a few days, her husband fixed up book shelves in the basement to remedy their book storage dilemma. Some of their book shelves had books two or three books deep before her husband's handiwork addressed that problem. She said that folks who now enter their house might well wonder where their books are. But she knows they are downstairs. To this feedback, I'll repeat what my late uncle, who was also one of my school teachers, would often say after a pertinent explanation like this, "Good observation."

• • • • •

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a Russian novelist and dissident, wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago*, "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts."

The writer of Romans stated it just a bit differently in chapter 3, verse 23, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" This realization should help us cultivate both humility for our need and gratitude for God's goodness in addressing that need through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

• • • • •

A couple of months ago, I had a conversation with a reader of this publication who is almost two decades older than I am. Our conversation touched on this column. When I converse with folks who mention Observations, I often ask what things they believe would be helpful to bring to the attention of the readers. This brother expressed a deep concern about the influence that Christian Nationalism exerts on our people. I share this burden with my brother. Hence, in last month's column I made some observations regarding Christian Nationalism. A week or two after that column was submitted and a week or two before the October Calvary Messenger was received by readers, Charlie Kirk, a 31-year-old politically conservative activist, was assassinated. He was killed in an outdoor gathering on a college campus where he was discussing political issues and current events

in an open mic setting. Charlie was perhaps most famous for exactly this type of gathering. The emotional firestorm that was touched off by this terribly sad development was remarkable. Charlie's widow is left with two young children.

The benefit of hindsight will sometimes help us know how this affected American history and the Christian church and more specifically, the Anabaptist church. That hindsight will be better understood in the months, years, and decades to come, should the Lord tarry. Who was Charlie Kirk?

• • • • •

Charlie Kirk founded a political activist organization called Turning Point USA when he was 18 years old. That organization promoted politically conservative perspectives for the last 13 years or so. Charlie was particularly focused on reaching the young voters whose vote tends to lean to the progressive-left side of the political spectrum. Charlie Kirk was also unapologetic in his profession of Christian faith. He referred to himself as a Nationalist and a Christian.

As is almost always the case, Turning Point USA began in relative obscurity. But the influence of Charlie Kirk and this organization has grown a lot. Many folks believe that Kirk is the single person most

responsible for the voter shift towards Republicans between the 2020 and 2024 national elections, and hence the re-election of President Trump.

I'd like to offer a few more comments to our readers in the wake of Charlie Kirk's death.

- I never asked Charlie Kirk to represent my perspective. He didn't. Hence, I don't need to vilify nor defend him.

- I will cite two things that I respect about Charlie Kirk. The first was that he was very intentional about public dialogue and discourse with those who disagreed with him. In his public events he instructed those who disagreed with him to move to the head of the line. All comments were welcome, but those who disagreed got priority. I respect that.

- Charlie was outspoken in his articulation of Christian faith. There are certainly points of practice and understanding where I differ with how Kirk expressed himself. My impression is that he was willing to, without apology, advocate for Christ and Christianity as he understood it to be. I respect that.

- Those who disagreed with Charlie often described him with a whole dictionary of colorful words like, bigoted, hateful, misogynistic, racist, fascist, etc.

- Those who agreed with him usually cited how he loved those

who saw things differently and how compassionate he was. They saw his efforts as genuinely coming from a desire to help people experience a better future.

- Since Kirk was killed, he's been referred to by folks in our Beachy churches as a "brother in Christ" and "someone I don't believe was a Christian." I believe that both of these perspectives were likely an effort to distance or diffuse the raw emotions surrounding this event. I do not wish to unduly criticize these comments. The one who commented that he doesn't understand Kirk to have been a Christian quickly added that he isn't the judge. I assume that the brother who referred to Kirk as a Christian brother would agree.

However, the Scripture reminds us not to judge but to leave things in the hands of Him Who judges righteously. I think this speaks to our twin tendencies to judge someone as being a Christian or not being a Christian.

Part of the problem with judging is that we tend to swallow what we shouldn't from the persons whom we judge as being Christian, and we tend to reject what we shouldn't from those whom we judge as not being Christian. If we pass judgment, one way or another, we are more inclined to make all the information align with our judgment. So, when

we don't judge, it frees us to evaluate things more objectively. I would prefer to learn what we can from this situation and leave the judging one way or another to the One Who judges rightly.

Lastly, Charlie Kirk's views of involvement in government stand in stark contrast from the understanding that church and the state operate with distinct roles and responsibilities. Because many of the things that Kirk championed were things that many conservative Anabaptists appreciated, I would like to warn us to avoid the temptation to subscribe to Kirk's view of involvement in the affairs of state that would erode our primary loyalties to our heavenly citizenship. The pull to become politically involved for our people pulls to both sides of the political spectrum as well as the points in between. God is glorified when His people come together to build His Kingdom, rather than gravitate toward opposite ends of the political spectrum. I'm prayerful that the result of Kirk's influence in Anabaptist churches wouldn't be one that blurs the lines between church and state for our people. Time will tell.

• • • • •

September 30 is International Translation Day. On this day Wycliffe Bible Translators released some encouraging statistics regarding

the progress that is being made in Bible translation work. In 2021, 1,892 languages had been deemed as suitable for translation but didn't have any Scripture in that language. One year ago, that number had shrunk to 985. This year the figure dropped another 44% to 550. In the last year, 95 New Testament translations were released and 23 full Bible texts were released which is the highest total in any year ever recorded. While much remains undone in this effort, this progress is encouraging indeed.

The marvels of technology come with a dark side that we cannot afford to underestimate. However, phenomenal benefits occur for the benefit of mankind and advancing the Kingdom as these capabilities are harnessed for good. Bible translation is one of the things that have been immensely impacted, in some cases dramatically reducing the time that is required to translate Scripture into a language for the first time.

Now is not a good time to relax these efforts though, as one in five

people worldwide still don't have Scripture in their mother tongue. It's relatively recent that many of the readers of this column would be among the one in five. But those who count Pennsylvania Dutch as their mother tongue now have a translation of the Scripture freely available in that language. We've had English and German translations for centuries, but the New Testament was first released in Pennsylvania Dutch in 1994 and the entire Bible in 2013. I am more comfortable conversing in English than in Pennsylvania Dutch. However, I find the Pennsylvania Dutch translation making connections and stirring me in ways that I have not felt with English and Spanish Scripture translations that I've used far more than Pennsylvania Dutch. This is not unique for folks who have had the opportunity to read and understand Scripture in a second language, but experience Scripture for the first time in their mother tongue.

RJM



Dear Mr. Doubtful

Hannah Eicher, McArthur, OH

Dear Mr. Doubtful,
Thank you for your inquiry. I'm excited to share with you the truth as I understand it from God's Word.

First of all, when God created the world, He made it perfect. All the

things that bother you about it now were not present then. There was no pain, no sickness, no death, no suffering at all. That's the way He intended it to be.

So why then do those things exist now? To understand that, I have to

explain more about my God. He loves relationship. He desires that we come to Him and love Him on our own. So, He gave us something called free will. And that gave us the power to choose evil.

Unfortunately, that's what man chose. This brought sin to the world, and the natural result of sin is death. By its very nature, sin causes suffering. The Bible says that by one man, sin entered the world, and death passed upon all men.

But instead of leaving us alone in our predicament, God promised a Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave His very best to redeem us, to rescue us from the power of sin and the devil. Jesus came to earth and shared in our humanity. He healed the sick, wept with the grieving, and preached about the Kingdom He was here to set up, which would show the world how God had designed life to be lived. In the end, He was killed by wicked men, giving His perfect life as a sacrifice so that our relationship with God could be restored.

But He didn't stay dead. We have four eyewitness accounts of His resurrection, in which He triumphed over man's great enemy—death, which, as I said before, was the result of sin. He returned to Heaven, and Christians await the day when He will return to take them to their home in Heaven where it will be just like the beginning—perfect.

So that's the story. That's why I believe that my God offers the answer to suffering. Governments do not have the answer. So often they cause more suffering than they alleviate. At least one religion brushes suffering off the table as “maya,” or illusions. Another says that suffering is a result of sin committed in a previous life. I challenge you to study other religions and see if they offer a cogent explanation and answer for evil.

Evil is the absence of good. God is overflowing goodness. Wherever He is present in a life, that life becomes good. Where He is allowed to have His way, good comes.

So, if He is all-powerful, why does He not intervene in every case? Why do good people suffer? Why does He not stop evil men from carrying out their devious plans?

God is too big for us to understand. He does sometimes intervene but not always.

Sometimes hard things in our lives turn out to develop us into better, stronger, and more compassionate people. I've heard of an illustration that goes this way. Suppose you decide to make a cake, and you taste every ingredient as you put it in. Eggs—nasty. Cocoa—yuck. Baking powder—horrible. But when you mix them all together, you get a delicious chocolate cake. Hard things in life can turn out for our good.

Does God cause sickness? Is He the

author of suffering? Does He inspire evil men to do awful things, like the Holocaust? No. Absolutely not. He is good. He is loving. He is a God Who weeps with us. He is a Father Whose heart we break, Who holds us tightly and says, “Daddy’s here.”

No, we won’t know all the answers in this life. We’ll never understand God completely. He’s too infinite for our fragile minds to comprehend.

But I believe He not only offers the answer—He is the Answer. Someday, He promises to make all things new, just like He intended all along.

Wouldn’t you like to know this God? Search for answers. Don’t stop looking until you’re satisfied. My God offers hope and redemption, and life beyond the grave.

[This was written for a class at Shelby County Bible School in March 2024.]



history matters

500th Anniversary Celebration (Part 7)

Beachy Beginnings

Tim Miller, McKenney, VA

While we’re celebrating 500 years of Anabaptist history, it seemed appropriate to reflect on the origins of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship as well. How in the world did we come to be identified by the names of three leaders? Does that fact have anything to do with the struggle to understand our own identity today?

Amish immigration to America occurred in two broad stages: the late 1600s to the early 1700s, and the early 1800s. The first group settled in Pennsylvania for the most part, while the second group passed through the earlier settlements and headed west

to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, lands that had been recently opened for settlement with the expulsion of the Native Americans.

The decades between the two movements had allowed changes in both the American Amish and the European Amish, which brought some tension between them. A ministers’ meeting, likely mainly attended by descendants of the early migration, produced the “Pennsylvania Discipline of 1809.” This document reinforced the stricter positions of the Pennsylvania churches, including stricter shunning and greater resistance to changes in clothing and technology. Their position on shunning, that anyone

who left the Amish and joined another church was to be banned and shunned, seems to have become stricter than what had been practiced in Europe. Articles 16 and 17 of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith were written to modify the strict shunning that had split the Dutch Anabaptists more than two centuries earlier. These articles, accepted by all the Amish, seem to limit the ban and shunning to one who “either through his wicked life or perverted doctrine, has so far fallen that he is separated from God.” The first article of the 1809 discipline reads, “That all those who leave us and unite with other churches are to be regarded as apostate persons, and shall, according to the Lord’s Word and ordinance, be excommunicated, and are to be regarded as subject to the ban.” This was primarily in response to the threat posed by Dunkard revivalist preaching of the time.

In 1855, a break in fellowship occurred between the Lagrange and Elkhart, IN, congregations. According to Leroy Beachy, this was only the third division among the Amish in almost 200 years, but it illustrates the growing tension within the group.

From 1862 to 1878, 16 Amish ministers’ meetings were held. These meetings included preaching and worship times, but were primarily intended to discuss some of the

“liberal” trends among them. By the 1870s, the division had become clear and permanent. Those who adhered to the traditional ways, about one-third of the Amish, were called the Old Order, while the two-thirds who chose more liberal ways were known as Amish Mennonites. These went on to form various conferences, particularly the Conservative Mennonite Conference, now known as the Rosedale Network of Churches. The 1809 position on shunning took on a different character as the questions arose among the Old Orders about using the ban on those who still adhered to the same 1632 Confession of Faith.

In the mid-1890s, the two Amish churches near Somerset County, PA, separated along those lines. The Old Order bishop in the Pennsylvania church, Moses D. Yoder, applied the strict shunning to all in the Maryland church. Other bishops had been involved in trying to bring peace, and when asked by Yoder to support the strict shunning, they had advised against it. Bishop Yoder withheld knowledge of that counsel from the congregation, whether by a misunderstanding or by intention is not known, and communicated the understanding that the assisting bishop approved of the strict shunning. The church adopted this unanimously, but when it later became known that the

assisting bishop, J. Witmer of Daviess County, IN, had not approved, contention developed, and more people left for the Maryland church.

In 1916, Moses M. Beachy was ordained bishop of the Old Order church in Somerset County, due to M. D. Yoder's poor health, although he continued to serve in the ministry. Within the next several years, conflict developed over Beachy's hesitancy to implement strict shunning toward those who left the Pennsylvania church for the Maryland church. Other differences in the strictness of church discipline and the discussion of introducing Sunday School added to the conflict. Contrary to a common understanding, Moses Beachy was not in favor of allowing automobiles, but did believe that it was inconsistent to make a distinction between riding in a car and driving one.

Bishops from Lancaster Co., Indiana, and Illinois were asked to assist with resolution and recommended that each case for shunning be decided individually, rather than making a blanket decision covering everyone who left for the Maryland church. The conflict continued because the three Yoder ministers (all related) insisted that the church abide by the 1895 decision.

On October 31, 1926, Moses Beachy made a statement to the congregation where he called attention to changes

that had happened under previous bishops and on the strict shunning and appealed with, "why not leave this matter of changing churches to them and God, instead of expelling and avoiding them...since we have no exact Scripture on it." He asked members to consider their own shortcomings when thinking about how to deal with others. In that statement, he also pleaded with the church to correct practices that had been drifting.

In November, two outside ministers were present to assist in council meeting during which several items were brought up as needing attention, but they encouraged the church to take a milder approach to the shunning issue. The Yoder ministers were not willing to proceed with Communion under those conditions, so no date was set. By the next spring, it seemed that positions were becoming even more firmly entrenched, and on April 17, 1927, Beachy announced that there would be Communion the next Sunday. On April 24, slightly over half of the membership participated in the Communion service.

Changes progressed quickly from there. On May 8, a meeting was held to organize a Sunday School. During the May 15 church service, eight young people declared they wanted to live for Christ and come under instruction for baptism. The first

Sunday School was held on May 22 (the Amish in Somerset County used meetinghouses).

Also, at the end of May, the dissatisfied group called in other ministers to investigate the problems. At the meeting they held on May 26, they interviewed each member present, but only those dissatisfied with Beachy, along with the Yoder ministers, attended. The visiting ministers advised this group not to withdraw from the church. June 2, 12, and 26, 1927, found the church meeting all together, but at the end of the meeting on the 26th, Moses D. Yoder, former bishop, with Moses Beachy's permission, announced a separate church service on the following Sunday for those who agreed with him on strict shunning. This marked the permanent separation.

The Amish church used two meetinghouses due to the scattered nature of its community. Both Amish churches continued with alternate Sunday worship, alternating between the two buildings. They were distinguished by the last name of their leaders: the Yoder church and the Beachy church. This sharing of facilities as "neighboring churches" continued for nearly two decades. The Beachy group also used both buildings for Sunday School on the Sundays between worship services. The Yoder group was assisted by a

bishop from Dover, Delaware, who helped with Communion and the ordination of two more ministers.

Nearly two decades earlier, in 1909, there was a split in the Old Order Amish church in Lancaster Co., PA, also over the issue of strict shunning. There was fellowship and rather frequent pulpit exchange between the ministry of Beachy's church and this Lancaster Co. "John A Stoltzfus" (later Weavertown) group. Both groups considered themselves Amish; in fact, Moses Beachy, in a reply to an opposing bishop in 1932, stated, "I am as Amish as you are."

At the end of 1928, the Beachy church's decision to accept the use of automobiles caused them to be disfellowshipped by all Old Order Amish. The Lancaster Co. group's decision to do the same solidified their fellowship with Beachy's group, even though the relationship wasn't formalized until 1950. As other groups of Amish separated from Old Order groups over Sunday School, mission work, use of technology, and other issues, Moses Beachy was often asked to assist, and so a network of likeminded churches was formed. And—the rest is history that is too long for this article.

But to the name. Since the use of automobiles was the issue that brought separation from all Amish churches, it was the defining issue among the larger church. Because

Moses Beachy was more outgoing and active in assisting other like-minded congregations, his church naturally became the common point of identification for those who followed a similar path. As Elmer S. Yoder noted, “There have been churches, such as Valley View, which may not have deliberately chosen to become Beachy, but by tolerating the automobile, found the Beachy circle the most convenient and logical place for fellowship and interaction.” (BAFMC, p. 129). Since there was another widespread group that was neither Amish nor Mennonite but shared common faith with both, it was convenient to identify a distinctive on that middle ground by calling this new group the Beachy Amish Mennonites. Since they were united by lines of fellowship rather than by structures, the moniker Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship followed, along with a deep commitment to congregational autonomy. As David L. Miller once said, “We have maintained that success or failure is necessarily on

the local level because that is where the church is.”

And the identity. A quick review of writings from both the Beachy and the Stoltzfus groups reveals a desire to consider those who share common doctrine and values—but differ in practice—as brothers and sisters in faith, rather than as spiritually fallen. That perspective remains a bedrock principle of Beachys today.

Resources:

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- Beachy, Leroy. *Unser Leit: The Story of the Amish. Millersburg, OH: Goodly Heritage Books, 2011.*

- Mast, J. B. *Facts Concerning the Beachy A. M. Division of 1927. Meyersdale, PA 1950.*

- Yoder, Elmer S. *The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches. Hartville, OH: Diakonia Ministries. 1987*



I Saw a Beautiful Thing

¡Que Bonita!

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

From my comfortable seat in the corner of the spacious lobby at Penn Valley, I watch her enter. She's come with her parents

and younger sister to an annual gathering of church leaders, as I had hoped she would. Her brown eyes flash and a huge smile breaks across

her face, and she makes her way toward me, assisted by her mother. She is Bonita, the Spanish word for beautiful. We've met a number of times now, and additional threads of friendship wrap around my heart each time I see her...as noted in my journal, October 28, 2024, "I am loved by this little woman!"

I don't remember our first meeting. Welcomed into a loving and stable family, life has offered Bonita challenges. An as-yet-unnamed condition shapes each day for her; mundane, ordinary tasks require significant concentration. She will try again and again and again to be understood, where I would have given up long since, in humiliation. Together, we learn along the way that I can read her finger spelling, and this tool aids our conversation. Her persistence in the face of difficulty is *que bonita*, and calls me to imitate my friend.

One day, we were sharing a meal and seated across the table from each other. Our conversation was hijacked when I glanced at my plate and started in alarm—what's wiggling in my salad? On its back, struggling mightily to right itself, was a brown, marmorated stink bug. Evidently drawn by the lights, it had flown in through the open door, and I had nearly popped him into my open

mouth. Bonita nearly dissolved in giggles! Our merriment lasted quite a while after the bug was delivered from danger, discreetly covered with a neighbor's napkin so as not to embarrass the cook.

The following day, I was busy crocheting as I visited with Bonita's mother. She inquired what I was making and I explained the project, mentioning quietly that it was a surprise, and the friend for whom I was crafting happened to be a member of their church. From across the room, there was an audible gasp! Bonita's eyes glowed and she guffawed most appreciatively at having overheard my secret! My alarm was quickly laid to rest as her mother assured me from personal experience that Bonita is able to keep quiet. And she did!

When it was time for them to start the long road home, Bonita signaled me to come over to her spot on the couch. I leaned in for a hug, having enjoyed our contact the past day. However, I got more than a hug; she kissed me on the cheek. This significant overture told me again that I was loved, and I went on my way rejoicing.

To be loved by a pure spirit such as this one—*que bonita*, how beautiful!



The Value of a Soul

Tim Petersheim, Narvon, PA

During the 3½ years that I lived in Belize City, Belize, on multiple occasions I witnessed young men losing their lives to gun violence. The shocking reality of the moment will always be impressed in my memory. Along with the desperation of watching a young life quickly fade away is the sickening sight of another young man, the perpetrator, nonchalantly leaving the scene. I'll never understand how human life can be treated with such casualness and disregard.

Both secular and Christian culture teach that human life is to be valued and respected. What we seem to forget sometimes is that the life we see on this earth is just the tip of the iceberg. Life here is important. But life hereafter is eternal.

In America, we place a premium on living a long, happy life. It's all a part of the "American Dream." Individuals will spend millions of dollars to extend their lives for a few more years. Americans collectively spend trillions of dollars annually on healthcare expenditures. But while Americans value prolonging life on this earth, many fail to acknowledge

the eternal spirit that God has placed within each one of us. *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36-37).

Ponder for a minute the reality of eternity. Time without end. Forever. It's really sobering to consider time being infinite. Especially when we remember that eternity will include every person we've ever known, and every soul who has ever lived. Now, take a serious moment to remember each one of the people you have crossed paths with today. Consider that each one of these precious souls will live eternally—either in Heaven or hell. Each one will answer to God someday. Knowing the certainty that each of us will live eternally, what kind of value should we be placing on the souls around us?

My dad died in 2019 after a brief battle with cancer. The ache of missing Dad was front and center for a long time, and I remember imagining what I would be willing to give up (if I could) to get my dad back. Obviously, I didn't doubt the finality of death, but the pain of

separation made me consider this hypothetical scenario. I had decided I would be willing to give up all of my hard-earned money and possessions just to get my dad back. If being with Dad for a few more years was worth all my worldly possessions, of how much greater value is his—or anyone's—eternal soul?

I think we all know that attempting to place monetary value on the soul is foolish. But we don't have to look far to understand the immense price that God was willing to pay to redeem us. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). I hope the familiarity of this verse doesn't lessen its powerful reminder to us of the incredible cost that was paid to redeem our souls. We've been bought *"with the precious blood of Christ"* (I Peter 1:19). There is no dollar amount that can equate the worth of one's soul.

If the worth of a soul is immeasurable, then shouldn't our interest in seeing souls saved be of utmost priority? That's not always the priority that I see when I look around though, and if I'm honest, when I look internally. It's imperative for us Christians to individually and collectively contemplate the precarious situation of those we rub shoulders with every day. Does

our burden for lost souls compel us to tell them about Jesus? Are we intentionally shining the light of Jesus, or is the light being *"hid under a bushel?"* As churches, we should more frequently discuss and strategize how we can best utilize the vast resources we've been entrusted with to enlarge the Kingdom of God and bring lost people to Jesus.

I believe that staying in tune with the reality of eternity will not only influence the way we live (as Peter writes it: *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness"*), but our outreach and mission efforts will be enhanced if we can grasp the reality of eternity.

There are over eight billion people living in the world today. Approximately one-third of these people are classified as Christian, and we would expect true disciples of Jesus to be far less in number than one-third of the world's population. There is so much work to do and so many lost souls to win for Jesus! Allow the Holy Spirit to speak through you to someone today.

God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. How much do we love the world? Jesus' love cost Him everything. What does His love cost you?



Gratitude Attitude

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



Jesus bursts forth in a prayer of gratitude in the middle of people, in the middle of a day of ministry, and in the middle of opposition. He dialogues with His Father in spontaneous thanksgiving, then turns with tender care to those around Him (Matthew 11:25, 26).

When we respond to a gentle nudge from the Holy Spirit, with intentional gratitude, in obedience to the Word and Jesus' example, we can grow a habit of spontaneous thanksgiving. Practicing this form of gratitude cultivates joy and contentment and makes us more like Jesus.

Note these words that come alongside the giving of thanks in Scripture (KJV/ESV):

- In all circumstances
- Continually
- Shouts of joy
- Sing
- Joyful noise
- Sacrifice of praise
- Always
- For everything
- In everything

Let's joyfully work on our gratitude debt! Here are a few ideas to get us started. Get creative on some of your own inspirations.

1. Think of a teacher, mentor, or elder who shaped your walk. How are you living out their influence? Text, call, write, or talk to one to express your gratitude. Be specific.

2. Sing a song expressing gratitude, loudly, by yourself, to God.

3. Thank the preacher when he preaches. Thank the song leader for leading worship.

4. Thank someone who rubs you the wrong way. Don't tell them that, though; just thank them for being who they are.

5. Write a thank you note to your mail carrier for their dependable service, slip it into the mailbox with a small thank you gift.

6. Thank the person cleaning the restrooms. A tip could reinforce your words.

7. Thank your oldest son or daughter for absorbing your mistakes while you were learning how to parent.

8. Name a time when someone forgave you. How did it change your heart?

9. Thank your husband for a character quality. Thank him for who he is and not just for what he does. Be specific.

10. Thank God for your latest trial. Tell Him how you have grown because of it.

11. Thank your guests for allowing you to practice hospitality. It would be impossible to be hospitable without guests.

12. Pick out several sisters in your congregation with whom you connect the least. Thank them for specific ways they have blessed you.

13. Thank the clerk at the checkout counter for their friendliness (if applicable). If friendliness is not observed, thank him or her for serving you.

14. Thank a person who gave a testimony in church.

15. Think of a promise of God that sustains you. How can you express thanks for it?

16. Thank an author or editor for writing a book or article or song that has influenced you.

17. Thank God for giving you one-on-one time with Him during the nights you can't sleep.

18. Write a reminder note about gratitude and put it on the mirror. (Dry erase markers work well.)

19. Thank those who clean the church house.

20. Thank your children's teacher(s). Flesh it out with a gift of gratitude.

21. Who in your life consistently shows you kindness? How can you thank them?

22. Thank an older single person for their faithfulness.

23. Thank Jesus for showing us God during His time on earth. Ask Him how you might be more like Him.

24. Recall a prayer God answered differently than you expected. What goodness came from it?

25. Thank a small child for singing in church, or for their smile.

26. Thank a missionary for their willingness to leave what is familiar. Pray a blessing on them.

27. Recall a moment today when you felt seen or understood. How can you thank God for that gift?

28. Acknowledge a young mother's intense responsibilities. Encourage her by thanking her for keeping on.

29. Write down three specific things you're grateful for about your church family.

30. Thank a young VS worker for bucking the norm on earning money at home by serving voluntarily.

31. Think of a Bible verse that has anchored you. Why does it matter so deeply?

In the closing verses of Colossians 3, we're called to put on, to let, to be, and to do. Woven throughout each of these verses is the repeated thread of thankfulness. As our gratitude becomes spontaneous, frequent, faithful, and intentional, our lives begin to shine with a truer reflection of Jesus.



Cambodia, Serve God, Rain or Shine

(and other stories)

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

Do you want to peek into the life of a missionary in Cambodia?

Missionaries should be good sports, curious, and okay with trying new things. They enjoy delicious tropical fruits. But what would you think if you were served roasted hornets and grilled snails? Fresh honeycomb from a tree sounds delicious, but what about bee larva?

And how would you like to live in a land where temperatures over 100 degrees are not unusual?

Could you teach English classes in a building where the roof leaks?

Read and learn about some of Barbie Esh's days:

"The hot season this year was much milder than last year; the hottest day this year reached 104 degrees in April. The heat in 2024 was over 100 degrees nearly every day in April. July was pleasantly cloudy and breezy with billowing clouds and scattered rain showers.

"Summer in Cambodia also brought an unusual bumper crop

of mangoes. We picked, peeled, chopped, dried, and froze buckets full of mangoes. Other fruits include black Khmer cherries, passion fruit, sweet pineapple, coconut milk, various unidentified sour fruits, and juicy yellow limes for \$0.25 a kilo. Then the children found fresh honeycomb in our tree. My high school boys shared honeycomb and bee larvae with me. Our Khmer teacher's aide showed me how to eat it. Two more peculiar foods include roasted hornets and grilled snail at a fellowship meal.

"ESL classes are held in a rented building with a concrete floor lean-to in the back where my co-teacher, Lanita, has her classroom. Inside is a large room with tile floor: my classroom. Efforts have been made to improve the leaking tin roof, but the rain always finds other holes. We have dripping water around the tables with puddles on the floor. The rain makes such a racket on the roof that it's impossible to hear the teacher in a downpour. Some students choose

to wait for the rain to subside to go home, because students riding a bicycle or a moto get drenched. I am surprised sometimes that they show up at class when there is a rainstorm moving in, but we are usually there to teach English to whomever shows up.

“We do our best; we choose to serve God in torrential downpours or in hot sunshine.”

EL SALVADOR

I heard this story when we were at a church service in El Salvador:

There was a man who came to church years ago. He wanted to live for God, so he confessed his sins and did what was right. God changed his life and helped him get a good, well-paying government job.

After working awhile, he was tempted to take bribes. This temptation appeared to be an easy way to make more money.

But one day, because of the bribes he chose to take, some wicked men came and beat him up. They left him in bad shape. This man was so scared he fled to Guatemala.

Later, he returned to El Salvador, but he never came back to church. God had blessed him so much, but he left God.

What will you choose each day? Joshua said, “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

Why Are You Different?

*Rosemary Hoover, Texas, ARC**

I sat down beside her and reached for her baby. She kept right on talking.

“What is it that makes you people different?” she asked.

“I left Haiti in September last year. I’ve met many people on my long journey—in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Mexico, all the places I traveled to get here to the States—the people were the same. They were mean, harsh, and unfriendly. No one cared.

“But you, why are you different? You give me food and water, hold my baby, and say he’s beautiful. You listen to my story. What is it about you and your friends that’s different? Why are you doing this? What’s going on?”

We had a long conversation. She dumped out her life story. How she was raised in a family and community of unbelievers. How her country became worse and worse, and she lived in fear or being killed by the gangs. How she heard nearby shooting every day and every night. How she sent her children to live with her grandma in a safer town. How her husband was killed in a motorcycle accident. And then how she fled in hopes of reaching the States.

She was open and friendly, and when I asked her if she knows Jesus,

she said, “I know about Him. But I don’t serve Him.”

Then she flooded me with questions about salvation and questions about death.

I asked her if she would like a Bible, and her eyes shone as she reached out her hand and hugged the Bible close.

Will this dear Haitian lady meet Christians in the United States? Will she read the Bible she was given? Will she choose to love and serve Jesus?

** Anabaptist Refugee Committee
[from the ARC Newsletter, November 2024]*



youth messages

The Foundation of Discernment

(Discernment Series #1)

Ryan Stoltzfus, Dobson, NC

A few months ago, South African pastor Joshua Mhlakela made a startling announcement: He knew the exact date of Jesus’ second coming. Joshua claimed to have learned this through a vision in which Jesus told him, “On the 23rd and 24th of September 2025, I will come to take my church.”

The YouTube interview in which he made the prophecy went viral, and after other online influencers picked up the message, the claim spread wildly on TikTok. As the predicted time got closer, news of the prophecy spread even faster. According to a Washington Post article, Google searches on the morning of the 23rd for the word “rapture” outpaced Google searches for America’s most popular secular singers.

As the “final” day dawned, Joshua

Mhlakela and several others started a YouTube livestream with a plan to be on the livestream when Jesus returned. Out of curiosity, I joined the livestream a few times throughout the day. Needless to say, it was one of the most fascinating livestreams I’ve watched. By noon that day, nearly 10,000 people were tuned in.

As I watched the livestream, YouTube comments streamed in. Most of the comments were genuine, with people praising the Lord, urging sinners to repent, and offering prayers anticipating Christ’s return later that day. Others were less serious, with one commenter writing, “rapture today, please send me all the money in your bank account. I will try to help the left behind people with it.” Other amusing comments included, “my wife is gone!” and, “I literally

just lifted from my couch for about two seconds!”

Of course, if you’re reading this right now, you know that the prediction was a failure. I’m writing this article on September 24, 2025, and unless Jesus returns in the next few hours, Joshua Mhlakela and his followers are dead wrong.

The Need For Discernment

We live in a time full of conflicting information. Loud, confusing, contradictory claims are being made and projected on social media. AI is making it hard to know what’s real and what’s fake. Hundreds of political commentators and spiritual leaders post incessantly on YouTube, Spotify, and blogging platforms, trying to convince everyone that their ideas are the right ones.

It’s in this kind of world that we desperately need discernment. We might laugh at the ridiculous ideas that Joshua Mhlakela and his followers believed, but the truth is that they were simply believing something that seemed reasonable to them. They lacked the discernment to distinguish between truth and lies. While falling for rapture predictions might be an extreme case, we’re all susceptible to believing half-truths and disinformation.

In the next few articles in the *Calvary Messenger*, I plan to focus

on the topic of discernment. What is discernment? What are the key aspects of discernment? How do we practice discernment? What does it look like to wisely sift through the many opinions about social media, money, artificial intelligence, sexuality, and theological teaching?

Defining Discernment

What is discernment? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines discernment as “the ability to see and understand people, things, or situations clearly and intelligently.” Another definition, given by a Bible dictionary, is “the sound judgment which makes possible the distinguishing of good from evil.” In the Bible, discernment is often synonymous with wisdom.

Discernment is the ability to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, light and darkness. It’s what Solomon asked God for in I Kings 3:9: “*So give your servant a receptive heart to judge your people and to discern between good and evil.*”

Discernment is essential, but how do we get it? How do we even start having the wisdom to discern between the good and the evil? We live in a world where Satan is constantly trying to mix the black of evil and the white of good into a fuzzy gray. He continues mixing truth with lies, just like he did to Adam and Eve

in the garden.

Where then do we start? What foundation do we build on to become more discerning people? The book of Proverbs has the answer.

The Foundation of Discernment

The main goal of the writer of Proverbs was to teach people discernment and wisdom. Toward the beginning of the book, we find the first and most important step in becoming a discerning person: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”* (Proverbs 9:10).

This verse cuts straight to the chase: The beginning of knowing truth, the beginning of being wise, comes by fearing the Lord. If we do not have this piece, all else fails. We can have critical thinking skills, we can have the ability to spot bias in a news article, we can read 80 books a year. But if we do not first and foremost fear the Lord, our knowledge will profit us nothing. The fear of the Lord is, as Benjamin Quinn put it, both the threshold and bedrock for wisdom.

In fact, having knowledge without the fear of the Lord is perhaps just as (or more) dangerous than not having knowledge at all. Someone who has lots of knowledge without the fear of God will probably use that knowledge and “discernment” to back up ideas

and biases that he already has. He will use his eloquence to justify the opinions, political views, and lifestyle that he loves rather than using the knowledge to become more in tune with God and His will.

We must ask ourselves some honest questions before we are able to grow into people of discernment:

- Do I have awe and reverence for God?
- Who (or what) is on the throne of my heart?
- Am I trying to promote myself, or am I trying to glorify God?
- Do I fear God—and recognize my own fallenness—enough to recognize that some of my own opinions are probably wrong?
- Do I try to push my own opinions and agenda, or do I try to promote God’s ideas and way?

It is only after we fear the Lord that we can then move on to other aspects of discernment. In the next few articles, we will address those aspects.

As we continue this series, I want to hear from the readers of this column. What are some areas that we as young people need discernment in? What would be good things to address in this series on discernment? Contact me with your thoughts at orthodoxyafame@gmail.com.



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Don't find fault. Find a remedy.

• • • • •

Gratitude is the heart's memory.

• • • • •

Only a mediocre person is always at his best.

• • • • •

Life is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be enjoyed.

• • • • •

If your mind should go blank, don't forget to turn off the sound.

• • • • •

If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?

• • • • •

It's hard to climb the ladder of success with your hands in your pockets.

• • • • •

Things turn out the best for those who make the best of the way things turn out.

• • • • •

You have to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was.

• • • • •

Horse sense is stable thinking coupled with the ability to say, "Nay."

• • • • •

If you want to feel rich, just count all the things money can't buy.

• • • • •

Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet.

• • • • •

If you worry, why pray? If you pray, why worry?

• • • • •

You fall the way you lean.