

DIRECTOR'S DESK

I'm a firm believer in paper trails, or as is more commonly used today, computer files to save important papers and documents. In 1527 the newly formed Anabaptist group hammered out a document with seven articles. This meeting happened in the city of Schleithem, Switzerland, and became known as the Schleithem Confession. This confession became a powerful testimony that peace as a way of life is the only option for those attempting to live faithfully as the people of God. This document functioned well for the early Anabaptists for life within the brotherhood, as well as a witness and mission to all people.

Today this fledging group from the radical wing of the Reformation has grown to a small but respectable number of 1,616,126 baptized members in 80 countries (see MWC figures, page 2). The Mennonite World Conference has published a similar confession entitled *Seven Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists*. They are as follows:

- God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.
- Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world, and offers eternal life.
- As a church, we are a community of those whom God's Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.
- As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ, to discern God's will for our obedience.
- The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need.
- We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.
- As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

It is the hope of Menno-Hof that these convictions will be helpful to our readers and supporters in more faithfully following Jesus.

—Joseph Yoder



MENNO-HOF

AMISH-MENNONITE VISITORS' CENTER

P.O. Box 701

Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

*See and Hear
the Amish-Mennonite Story*

AN INVITATION

We invite you to help in the ministry of Menno-Hof with your tax-deductible contribution. Menno-Hof works at telling the story of how God works in people's lives, past, present and future. Your help in telling that story is greatly appreciated.

Comments: "I liked the stories of people who braved persecution because of their faith and belief in what was right."

"Excellent presentation of your history."

"Your presentation honors Jesus Christ and is very informative."

Visitors:

May 1988–October 2009
824,523

Reunion is published quarterly to keep our friends informed of happenings at Menno-Hof.

Direct questions or comments to Joseph Yoder, director, at jyoder@mennohof.org

Menno-Hof Amish-Mennonite Visitors' Center

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The Menno-Hof Newsletter

reunion

A Blessing in Disguise

By David D. Bontrager

Recently Menno-Hof asked me to share my thoughts about the current economic recession and its impact on the local Amish community. It is perhaps a bit ironic that I should have been asked to do this since my own situation is quite the opposite of what has happened to many people in my own community. Many people lost their jobs and were pushed into a position where they needed to start a home-based small business or work for a neighbor who has such a business. I left a small dairy farming business in charge of my two eldest sons and found a job in the RV industry. This was not my own personal preference but the low milk prices through the last year have forced our family to make some changes. While it would not have been my preference I am still very grateful for my job. There are many people who have not been so fortunate.

In general, however, I believe home-based businesses and small farms are an essential part of any community that expects to thrive or even to survive in any given economic situation, whether good or bad. Each individual family must analyze its own financial situation and decide what course it needs to pursue. It must surely be extremely shortsighted or even suicidal for a community in general to become entirely dependent upon the payrolls of large corporations to provide all of its financial growth. In that respect one might view the recession within the larger economy to be a positive point within our own community. For as is being demonstrated today, such a dependence is fraught with dangers not only financial (collapsing financial institutions), but moral (shattered family values) and physical (massive tainted food recalls) as well.

Recently I read about the 100th financial institution to collapse since the beginning of the recession. This was a large bank based in Florida. That makes 100 companies, some of them older than the people who run them, who existed for the sole reason of

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CHANGES NEEDED

By Joseph Yoder

Most authorities place the beginning of our current recession to December, 2007. This recession is longer and deeper than any recession since 1929. Perhaps we are a bit better prepared and the Government has taken steps to curtail some of the harmful effects. Nevertheless most of us have experienced hardship in one way or another. It could be loss of employment, shrinking retirement funds, home foreclosures, bankruptcies, mental health issues, family problems, etc. In my neighborhood I am surrounded by the effects of the recession. Of my three closest neighbors, one has been unemployed for over a year, another's house is being sold by the bank, and yet another one had their entire family move home, packing their house to capacity limits.

As we attempt to find the causes of this harmful recession, one must admit that good old-fashioned greed lies at the bottom of much of our morass. When Wall Street bankers and brokers who received bailouts from the Government continue to pay out multi-million dollar bonuses to the very people who caused the institutions to fail, then we know that our dilemma is more than financial. It is a moral and spiritual dilemma that reaches deep into our national consciousness. David Bontrager articulates this concept in his article *A Blessing in Disguise*.

In contrast, our Amish, Mennonite and English communities will come out of this recession even stronger

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January Event at the Hof

The first Anabaptist baptisms will be remembered and a discussion of Anabaptist baptism traditions will be led by a panel of leaders from the Amish Church, Beachy Amish Mennonite Church, Conservation Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church USA at Menno-Hof on **Sunday, January 24, 2010, at 5 and 7 p.m.**

This public event, '**Walking in the Resurrection**,' is to commemorate the 485th anniversary of the first Anabaptist baptisms in Zürich, Switzerland on January 25, 1525. The program will be moderated by John D. Rempel, Professor of Historical Theology and Anabaptist Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart and member of the Menno-Hof Board. Panel members will include John D. Roth and others. Tours of the Menno-Hof interpretive center will be available and a free will offering will be collected.

Volunteer Perspective

By Arlan and Ellen Ortman

In August of 2008, while we were in the Goshen area, we had a block of time in which to explore the greater community. We had heard of Menno-Hof but never visited it, nor had we visited Shippshewana for many years, so we decided this would make an interesting afternoon. We visited Menno-Hof and learned a great deal about church history and our own faith heritage. As we thought about and discussed our visit, we were prompted to inquire if they needed longer term volunteers in the foreseeable future. The director, Joe Yoder, met with us and we agreed on a possible three-month assignment from September 1, 2009 to December 1, 2009.

So here it is November, 2009, and we have had such a fine experience that time seems to be slipping away too fast!

To review our own spiritual heritage is a great experience in its own way but to also have the opportunity to meet visitors from around the world

of all races and faith backgrounds on a daily basis is truly very special. Many visitors come here only as curious tourists to have an interesting time but when they leave, they report a new appreciation for their own faith background and a new understanding of church history, the Reformation, and, of course, a broader knowledge of the Anabaptist faith family. Old misconceptions and ideas are challenged and replaced by solid information in such a way as to be interesting and non-threatening.

For us there is another benefit. We are meeting many Menno-Hof volunteers from this area and are able to visit many Anabaptist churches on Sundays. The Shippshewana community is a great community to experience for several months.

Arlan and Ellen Ortman, Marion, South Dakota, are the current live-in volunteers at Menno-Hof. They are the parents of four adult children, 14 grandchildren and are active members of Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota.

Happenings At The Hof

The Menno-Hof 2009 'Dove in the Window' quilt garden was weeded and cared for by youth from Marion Mennonite Church. This lovely garden was viewed by thousands of visitors who enjoyed the various quilt gardens throughout the area. The pattern for next year's garden is 'Path to Peace.'



The first Singspiration at Menno-Hof featured good singing, fellowship, pretzels and ice cream that were enjoyed by approximately 550 persons. Watch for an announcement of the next singspiration as well as other planned events.



Miller's apple butter, fruit butters and peanut butter on display in Menno-Hof's retail shop. Many more locally crafted items such as baskets, pottery, wood crafts, etc. are available in our shop. All items are made by Amish and Mennonites.

Anabaptists Around the World

WORLD 1,616,126
(all figures include baptized members only, if children and unbaptized participants were counted, the church population would be 2-3 times larger in some cases). Anabaptist world membership has grown 9.3% since 2006.

CONTINENT
(Mennonite World Conference Groups)

Africa	592,106
North America	523,969
Asia	265,447
Latin America	169,864
Europe	64,740

LEADING COUNTRIES (MWC Groups)

United States	387,103
Congo	220,444
Ethiopia	172,308
India	155,922
Canada	136,866
Indonesia	88,458

ANABAPTISTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Mennonites	236,855
Brethren	174,825
Amish	101,600
Brethren in Christ	23,950
Mennonite-related	14,600
Hutterites	5,075
Total US Anabaptists	556,906

These figures were compiled from Mennonite Weekly Review, October 19, 2009 issue

A Blessing in Disguise ...cont. from page 1

accumulating wealth, not only for themselves and their shareholders, but also supposedly for the people they did business with. There were 100 companies whose management decisions were made by people trained by the highest educational systems in the world strictly on how to manage and increase financial assets. The financial collapse of so many institutions whose entire structures—from their foundations through their framework and on up to the roof tops—were based upon money and money management might be astonishing to anyone who believes that financial resources can be viewed as something entirely apart from faith, family and community. To those of us who believe true financial increase must first of all be based upon sustainable natural resources, communities anchored to those resources, and family values rather than numbers on a computer screen, it comes as no surprise at all.

Today's world is trying to fragment and separate each part of peoples' lives into its own neat little cubbyholes cared for by its own trained professionals—health care, food production, education, financial management, etc. While many people within our own community were and probably still are, to a certain degree, being drawn into the fragmentation and specialization of the larger society, the current recession is causing many of us to face reality in a different way. Many of us needed to make some changes in our lifestyles. But I am unaware of anyone who faces utter financial collapse. I believe this is mostly due to what I like to call the 'Grandpa' factor.

While each family is free to make its own financial choices, I like to think that most people in our community would not place the advice of 'experts' above the good and valuable (and sometimes unvoiced) opinions of Grandpa and Grandma who have acquired their vision only after a lifetime of human experiences, a vision that has gained length and depth of perception from years of observation. Much of this observation was viewed across a broad and well-rooted human landscape made up of the endlessly varying forms of human nature with all of its foibles, schemes and the results of its actions.

In many situations there is financial strength

Changes Needed ...cont. from page 1

than when it started if we continue to heed Bontrager's advice.

- Resisting the fragmentation and specialization in our society
- Return to the land—use of gardens and storing food
- Practice stewardship in sustainable natural resources
- Extended family values (Grandpa and Grandma effect)
- Realize the strengths of faith, family and neighborhood

My hope is that when this recession is finally over, we will have learned something so valuable that we might even be able to say, "It was a *blessing in disguise*."

in the multi-generational family unity which is so much a part of the traditional lifestyle within our community. The close connections the older generations have to the younger generations allows their advice to be tailored specifically to each child's or grandchild's own unique character and situation in such a manner that no expert or professional can ever hope to attain.

Many of the outside jobs that were available before the recession and some of the jobs that are still available place the workforce of a traditionally farming community in a position where they associate daily with a disconnected and violent culture—a culture that is many generations removed from the land and all of its endlessly complex interconnectedness to the preservation of traditional values. It is a culture that has largely lost, along with its connection to the land, its priceless strengths of faith, family and neighborhoods. It is a culture where broken homes, fatherless children and utter strangers living next door are a normal part of life.

While we should not and probably could not at this point entirely reject the sources of income from the larger and ailing economy we might view the recession and its new realities a blessing in disguise.

It seems to be causing many of us to live more frugal lifestyles than we had been living and brings us closer to the realities of the true costs of living. More people have returned to the land to keep food on their tables. Some are planting bigger gardens and growing and storing more of their own homegrown foods, which has proven to be healthier for our bodies. More small home-based businesses have sprung up across the community as high paying jobs became harder to find.

I think most people in our area have responded in a positive manner to neighbors who are experiencing financial difficulties. I know of quite a few cases where payments have been overdue for some time, yet the creditors have been sympathetic and granted extensions without imposing harsh penalties. This is one of the benefits of belonging to multi-generational family units. In each instance the debtors feel unworthy and try to act responsibly to their creditors.

Our community will probably always be somewhat dependent upon the outside economy for its financial growth, whether that economy is growing or whether it is receding. In my mind that is acceptable, maybe even a good thing, as long as we don't lose our connections to the land and we continue to cherish the vision and the opinions of those who have acquired the broader view.

David D. Bontrager, sustainable farmer, minister and RV worker lives with his family near LaGrange, Indiana.