

DIRECTOR'S DESK

In the April 21 edition of *Mennonite Weekly Review* there is a front page article entitled **First, Be Followers of Jesus**, the subtitle is "McLaren sees connection between Emergent movement and Anabaptism." I would like to comment on a few comments Brian McLaren made which I found instructive and insightful.

He said, "It is important in the current global context to distinguish between being affiliated with the Christian religion and being a committed follower of Jesus." Last summer our son Michael Yoder traveled to Egypt on a government sponsored trip to promote better relations between Muslims and the Western world. He would always identify himself as a "Christian pacifist." Think about how confusing it might be when other religions look at America and our leaders who claim to be Christian and the atrocities we are committing in other parts of the world. Or what did it mean when the state churches of Europe tortured and killed numerous Anabaptists in the name of Christianity? In the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church instituted the Crusades, whereby Christians sought to retake the Holy Land from Moslem hands. It is quite understandable when persons from other religions shy away from today's Christianity. In North America it can be difficult to tell the difference between Christians and non-Christians.

"The distinction is clear when he considers early Anabaptists. By refusing to be baptized as infants, they were in a way opting out of being affiliated with the Christian religion even if it meant they would be misunderstood and killed and persecuted. It was a sign of radical identification as followers of Jesus." I along with McLaren lament what is happening to many descendents of Anabaptists as many in our group assimilate into mainstream Evangelical Protestantism.

I found McLaren prophetic with these words to Mennonites: "Denominations should look back over their histories and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Mennonites would have to say, We have been very good at opposing violence, but we have not been very good at evangelism and making new disciples. We have been very good at being faithful to Christ in a rural setting. We've not been very good at being faithful to Christ in an urban setting." I will need to hear more from this modern day Christian.

Brian McLaren will be at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana on May 9-10 to conclude his 11-city tour of "Everything Must Change."

—Joseph Yoder



MENNO-HOF

AMISH-MENNONITE VISITORS' CENTER

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Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

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the Amish-Mennonite Story

VISITOR COMMENTS

"I loved it. It helped me understand my ancestors' plight. Thanks for the religious truth included in the presentations."

"Very well done! Engaging and instructive."

Visitors:

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1,975

May '88 – March '08
782,027

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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DIRK WILLEMS AND DISCIPLESHIP

By Alan and Eleanor Kreider

In 1569—four hundred thirty-six years ago—Dirk Willems turned back. Within a couple of months of his dramatic action he was burned at the stake for heresy. And ever since then, his story has had an astonishing impact. Dirk's life and death—made visual in Jan Luyken's engraving which freezes the moment of his turning—provide our third window to Anabaptism.

Dirk was a young man. He grew up in the small town of Asperen in the Netherlands. As a teenager he met some Anabaptists. Their vision of Christian discipleship gripped his imagination, and he was (re) baptized in the neighboring city of Rotterdam. He returned to Asperen, where he in his house "harbored and admitted secret conventicles and prohibited doctrines." This is how the legal document which sentenced him to death put it. That is, Dirk took part in a church that broke the law by meeting in his home where he and others taught a way of being Christian that was unacceptable to the established state church. The authorities arrested Dirk and imprisoned him. But somehow Dirk managed to escape from the prison. How did he get out? Did someone let him out? Did he climb out a window and clamber down a rope made of knotted cloths? Dirk ran for safety; he ran for his life! It was early spring. As Dirk approached a still-frozen canal a guard was chasing him. Dirk, who had been eating prison food, made it across the cracking ice. The guard, who had been eating richer food, weighed more and broke through the ice. In terror the guard cried out for help, "Help! Save me!"

Reflexively Dirk turned back. The picture is the freeze frame of that moment. Dirk had no time to think; no time to engage in a discernment process; no time to consult his house church; no time to look in his ethics books; no time even to pray. His action was reflexive, and desperately risky. Dirk reached out across the cracking ice to rescue his pursuer. And then (pause) the pursuer re-arrested Dirk. Why did the guard do that? Was it, as the account says, that the guard wanted to let Dirk go, but that the local burgomaster was watching and shouted out that the guard must "remember your oath!"?

For whatever reason, the shivering and dripping guard re-arrested Dirk and placed him in a more secure prison—the tower of the Asperen parish church. This time there was no escape. The authorities tried Dirk for heresy, and condemned him to death. According to the death sentence, Dirk was to be burned to death "for an example to others." "For an example to others." For good measure, Dirk's property was to be confiscated "for the benefit of his royal majesty." The execution, the



20TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By Joseph Yoder

On May 2, 1988 Menno-Hof opened its doors to the public. Since that time many people (almost 800,000) have heard the story of the Anabaptists here at Menno-Hof. True, most people don't understand that term. What was once a nickname given to a radical tough skinned group of people has now become the official name for the Hutterites, Amish and Mennonites. Some tourists ask us what we have against baptism mistaking *ana* for *anti*. This little known term means re or again. This radical group believed in believer's baptism, and would not accept infant baptism. In 1525 this radical group would be rebaptized as followers of Jesus since they felt that infant baptism was really no baptism at all.

Dirk Willems, as a young man between the ages of 15-20 years old, was severely tortured and burned to death because of his rebaptism and for being part of the Anabaptist movement by the state church. He never wavered in his decision to follow Christ regardless of the consequences. Menno-Hof has a Dirk Willems room where his story is retold for visitors. In our Dirk Willems martyr room, this quote written by an Amish historian says:

"We keep the martyr stories alive, not in a spirit of revenge, but to remind us to remain steadfast in the faith for which our forebearers so courageously gave their lives."

That's precisely why Menno-Hof chose the play *The Moment of Truth (The Story of Dirk Willems)* written by Joanna King (see inside) as part of our 20 year anniversary.

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Twentieth Anniversary Events

At least four events will help us celebrate Menno-Hof's 20th Anniversary. There may be more, keep watching!

✿ **Quilt Garden** – We're delighted to be chosen as one of the sites for a Quilt Garden by the Elkhart County Convention & Visitor's Bureau. The garden will be located in front of the barn planted with blazing red and white begonias using the Menno-Hof logo for our design. This will correspond to the logo on the upper side of the barn. Check www.QuiltGardensTour.com for more information. Signage by the quilt garden will read as follows:

As a non-profit center dedicated to creating a fascinating window on Amish/Mennonite life and traditions, Menno-Hof took particular care in picking a design for its quilt garden. Our pattern is built around a diamond shape, representing the core values, "treasury," of the Amish/Mennonite faith. The outward points surrounding the diamond symbolize the sharing of those values. The theme, which also is incorporated in Menno-Hof's logo, is adapted from a quilt crafted by a group of Amish women in the 1980s.

We will be planting flowers the middle of May.

✿ **Wall of Faces** – Twenty-four brand new pictures are in place. These are high quality translucent photos that need a florescent light behind them to properly illuminate the pictures. In the upper right hand corner will be a 42-inch TV screen that will have rotating pictures of Anabaptists from 75 different countries. We hope to have this project completed in May.

✿ **The Moment of Truth** (The Dirk Willems Story) – The Jones family will be performing this play, written by Joanna King, the end of June. Dirk Willems is our most popular martyr from Anabaptist history. Our hope is that this will keep the memory alive and spur all of us on to a greater faith and obedience to Christ. **Call for free tickets.**

✿ **Volunteer Appreciation Event** – Our volunteer event, which is generally held in the spring, will be in the fall. This will be advantageous in a number of ways as we attempt to keep new happenings spread throughout the year.



See the fascinating story of a radical Christian who gave his life for his enemy

The Moment of Truth

The Dirk Willems Story written by Joanna King

Performed by The Jones Family

PERFORMANCES ON MENNO-HOF GROUNDS
 Friday, June 27, 7 p.m.
 Saturday, June 28, 4 p.m. & 7 p.m.
 Sunday, June 29, 4:00 p.m.

For free tickets, call (260) 768-4117 or e-mail: info@mennohof.org

A free-will offering will be taken to cover expenses and support the Menno-Hof ministry.

MENNO-HOF
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 510 S. Van Buren St. / S.R. 5
 Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

Celebrating 20 Years of Service and Ministry

MEET OUR VOLUNTEERS

By Miriam Yutzky

The first of April we welcomed Sue Bontreger, Phoenix, Arizona, who began a one year voluntary service assignment and Richard and Annie Boshart, Lebanon Pennsylvania, who will be with us for three months of service.

Sue grew up in Ohio, and moved to Indiana in her late teens. She has lived in Phoenix for many years where she worked in a physician's office as a receptionist/bookkeeper. She is very energetic and enjoys having fun. Spending time with her family occupies some of her leisure time. Sue also enjoys quilting, knitting and crocheting.

Richard retired after 32 years of teaching elementary school music. Among Richard's many interests are bird watching, photography, biking, playing tennis, genealogy and Anabaptist history. He also finds time to tune pianos. Annie is recently retired from social work in a retirement center. She enjoys being a hospice volunteer, being a grandma, homemaking and family-oriented activities.

Richard and Annie are parents of two children and grandparents to four grandchildren. They are former missionaries in Jos, Nigeria, and are active in their home church, Gingrich's Mennonite Church, Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

Sue, Richard and Annie are a great addition to our staff. We appreciate their friendliness and attention given to their assignments.

Dirk Willems ...cont. from page 1

burning, was exceptionally painful. The wind blew the fire away from Dirk's upper body, so the fire did its work slowly. People in the neighboring town of Leerdam are recorded to have heard Dirk cry out over seventy times, "O, my Lord, my God."

Today, you can look at Jan Luyken's engraving of Dirk's turning, which we provide for you; this has now appeared in over 130 publications. You can read Jim Juhnke's play—*Dirk's Exodus*—which makes Dirk's experience come alive for readers—and is powerful when staged in the theatre. You can even visit Dirk's town of Asperen. You can climb the steps of the church tower, where Dirk was imprisoned. You can walk along Dirk Willemsstraat, which local people named in his memory. You can walk further, to the spot by the river where Dirk was burned.

But the most potent effect of Dirk's short life is in the lives of countless Christians in many countries. Dirk's story is visual. The picture helps us remember it. Dirk's story is powerful. Ironically, Dirk's life *has* been, in the words of the people who sentenced him to death, "an example to others." And Dirk's story continues to raise questions. Why did Dirk, spontaneously, reflexively, turn back? Was it his commitment to love Jesus Christ, who had saved him and called him to follow in costly discipleship? Was it because he was a member of a faith community in which his reflexes had been transformed, made Christlike? Was it the right thing for Dirk to turn back? Would I have turned back?

Sources: Thieleman J. Van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1951). 741-2; John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1990), 36-37; David Luthy, "Dirk Willems: His Noble Deed Lives On," *Family Life* (February 1995), 19-22; James C. Juhnke, *Dirk's Exodus: A Historical Drama*, R.J. Buckman and R.N. Lawson, eds., *Four Class Acts: Kansas Theatre* (Topeka, KS, Woodley Memorial Press, Washburn University, 1992), 85-183. [This article appeared on the website of Mennonite Education Agency, www.MennoniteEducation.org. Reprinted with permission by authors.]

Alan and Eleanor Kreider, Elkhart, Indiana spent many years as missionaries with Mennonite Board of Missions in England. Alan is Associate Professor of Church History and Mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart. They are active members of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

Volunteer Discovers Past

By Richard Boshart

"IT WAS WEDNESDAY EVENING, January 25, 1525 in Zollikon.

Two men with a torch stood by the front door of the house where Rudi Thomann and the Bosharts lived. So begins the fourth chapter of Joseph Stoll's book *Fire in the Zurich Hills*.

At Menno-Hof in the Courtyard Room is a replica of the very fountain that stands to this day in the city of Zurich. The city has enveloped the small village of Zollikon but the fountain still stands as a reminder of the warm reception Rudi offered to those two men who came on that night. Marx Boshart, Rudi's son-in-law came to the door and welcomed the two men into that warm home. They were Georg Blaurock and Felix Mantz who had come with the intent to start a new church by baptizing the families of Zollikon.

That night they read the word from scriptures. One of the guests was Marx's uncle, Hans Bruggbach, who after hearing Georg Blaurock preach and Felix Mantz expound on the scriptures, asked for the sign of baptism. This emotional and highly unusual experience so moved Marx Boshart that after a night of sleeplessness and wrestling with his conscience, he requested baptism the next morning. Georg baptized Marx and the rest of the family that morning and on succeeding evenings many of the villagers came forth for the sign of baptism.

At Menno-Hof the Courtyard Room of the Thomann Hof is very special to me. I am Richard Boshart, a certain descendent of Marx Boshart who was baptized there and traveled and preached with Conrad Grebel. This is evidenced in John Ruth's book, *Conrad Grebel, Son of Zurich* and Myron Augsburg's book on Felix Mantz, *I'll See you Again!* Eventually, Marx and his family most certainly settled in Alsace south of Strasbourg.

John Boshart circa 1750-1794, and Anna Maria Muller were Swiss Anabaptist refugees who lived in Alsace, France, direct ancestors of mine.

Richard and Annie Boshart, Lebanon, Pennsylvania, began a three-month term of voluntary service on April 1.

You can now get the current issue of **Reunion** on line at www.mennohof.org. Also get our **Ponderings from the Hof**, (short meditations) and up-to-date happenings under "**What's Happening**" on our website. We welcome your response by email or regular mail.