There's more to the story at Menno-Hof

If you take the Menno-Hof tour, you will hear the Amish-Mennonite story beginning with the birth of Christ to present-day. The fourth presentation during the tour is named The Dungeon and tells visitors about the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century and how these “Radicals” were quickly met with resistance from the state church. Anabaptists were imprisoned, tortured and executed because of their call for a church free of state control and because of their rejection of infant baptism, choosing instead believer's baptism. The name Anabaptist means “one who baptizes again.”

For centuries thereafter, there was mutual mistrust and suspicion between Anabaptist groups and Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches. In the last thirty years, however, these churches have persistently reached out to Anabaptists. What has unfolded is truly remarkable. Many would say it is a sign of God’s Spirit at work.

One such example is dialogue between Mennonites and Lutherans that has been marked by earnest conversation, deep soul-searching, humility, and openness. From 2002 to 2004, these conversations (continued on page 3)

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Surprising Blessings
by Dave Stobbe, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada
Menno-Hof Host | October 2018

Some days a Menno-Hof tour host is kept busy; introductions for each of the opening rooms need to be ‘on script’ and timely such that multiple groups can move along smoothly. An additional challenge can be honouring the time constraints of some guests.

But on other days things are more relaxed. As I get a feel for the pace and interests of each group, I take time to answer their questions in a more extended manner and offer a few observations that might be relevant to their perspective. On those days I have often been blessed beyond my expectations.

I met one such tour group lingering in the *Coming to America* room. This room highlights how the Anabaptists found peace, prosperity, and some new problems in the New World. As we chatted and they asked a few questions, I recognized their accents and so I employed my limited German vocabulary. The middle aged man mentioned that he was visiting the U.S. and would soon be returning to East Germany to resume his mission work. I commented that it must have been very difficult to practice Christianity while the ‘Iron Curtain’ was in place. He affirmed this.

A childhood memory floated into my consciousness. I shared that as a child in the 60’s, we designated our Canadian Mennonite church Sunday school offering to help get Bibles through the blockade to fellow Christians in their anti-Christian Communist country. His eyes widened and he exclaimed: “I got one of those Bibles! It was smuggled over the heavily guarded border by being hidden in the frame of a car.”

Needless to say, we were both (cont. on page 2)
Surprising Blessings (cont. from front) moved and a spontaneous hug only seemed natural. What a wonderful moment for both of us. Creator God took my childhood obedience to help struggling Christians in a far off land... and some 50 years later we meet!

Another day Susan Miller, Menno-Hof managing director, asked if I would be interested in guiding a group of Russian speaking guests who were visiting the U.S. from the Ukraine.

Earlier I had shared with her how my Mennonite grandfather fled the Molotchna area of the Ukraine in 1924 when my father was but an infant. They left family behind in their once peaceful villages that were being victimized by violent civil war. In recent years I have been researching connections to this “lost” family who were exiled from the Ukraine to Kazakhstan, Northern Russia, and parts unknown.

After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, some of these exiled Mennonites had moved to the Osnabruck area of Northern Germany. Miraculously, our family has “found” each other—partly because in 1949 my grandparents sent a family photo to relatives behind the Iron Curtain. Creator God certainly had a part in our reconnection. I have been toying with the idea of a trip to the Ukraine to visit the area where my father was born. The towns and villages have long been Russianized with new names, but they still exist near Zaporozhia and Tomak. Coincidentally, many of these “lost” people have relocated from Germany to my home area in Winkler, Manitoba, Canada. It appears they were exiled to Kazakhstan and then moved to Germany after the collapse of the Wall. Hundreds of families have settled in my community so I have developed a smattering of Russian. Hence, Susan thought I was a good match for a Russian speaking tour group.

As I guided them through Menno-Hof, we were able to connect with the help of my very limited Russian vocabulary and their skilled interpreter. This group of 15 Seventh Day Adventists were visiting the U.S. and then returning to the Ukraine to continue their mission work. Indeed, some of them knew the Zaporizhia area where my family had lived. Despite the language challenges, we had a lively time exploring the Menno-Hof story.

At the conclusion of the Meetinghouse presentation, they asked if they could sing for me. The room swelled with the old familiar hymn, When Peace Like a River, but in Russian. The language barrier certainly didn’t stop the song’s message. Wow! Creator God had another blessing for me!

I could go on to describe other significant learning adventures during my time in the Shipshewana area: my first haystack supper in an Amish home or my visit to a local Amish school... perhaps at another time!

Dave and his wife, Candace, live in Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, and attend Covenant Mennonite Church. They have three children and three grandchildren. Dave and Candace have volunteered at Menno-Hof in the past but Candace was unable to join Dave this time because of prior teaching commitments. Dave was excited to accomplish his goal of not driving a car the entire month he was in Shipshewana!
There’s more to the story (cont. from front)
examined the history between them and explored
the issue of baptism and church-state relations.

The Augsburg Confession, the confession of
faith of the Lutheran Church written in 1530,
condemns Anabaptists on seven occasions. In
2006, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
(ELCA) Conference of Bishops adopted a
Declaration on the Condemnation of Anabaptists,
which the ELCA Church Council then adopted
unanimously. The Declaration expressed deep
sorrow and regret for the persecution and
suffering the Anabaptists experienced during the
religious disputes of the past. It also declared that
all such condemnations of Anabaptists in the
Augsburg Confession do not apply to present-day
Mennonites. Mennonites responded with gratitude
for their honesty, courage, and humility and
accepted the apology in a spirit of forgiveness
acknowledging that everyone is living generations
after these events and no one has personally
caused or suffered this persecution. “Nonetheless,
we pray that God will use this gesture to release
both Lutherans and Mennonites from a past that
may have bound us in ways we did not even
know. We pray that God will use this step as a
witness to the world.” (excerpt from April 24, 2007,
letter from Jim Schrag, Mennonite Church USA
Executive Director, to Rev. Mark S. Hanson,
ELCA Presiding Bishop)

In recent years, Menno-Hof Board members,
staff, volunteers, and other area Anabaptists have
felt that these developments in the Amish-Mennonite
story need to be told to visitors in an effort to
communicate a more complete story. This finally
became a reality September 2018. A display at the
end of the Menno-Hof tour titled “Reconciling in
Christ” was completed with the help of Gayle Gerber
Koontz, Professor Emerita of Theology and Ethics at
Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS);
John Roth, Professor of History at Goshen College;
and André Gingerich Stoner, Neighborhood
Networker for the Near Northwest Neighborhood in
South Bend, Ind., and former Director of Interchurch
Relations for Mennonite Church USA. With
assistance from Kathryn Johnson, director of ELCA
Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, these
individuals worked together to gather information,
facts, and photos of formal reconciliation events
that have taken place between Anabaptists and
Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed Christians.
“The experiences of persecution traumatized the
Anabaptist community,” said André. “Five
hundred years later, many of us still carry a
sense of self-righteous victimhood. This is not
attractive or healthy. It hinders us in our life
together and our witness to the world. Wholeheartedly receiving [the apologies] and offering
giveness can change us and free us to be
more fully the people God intends us to be.”

Thursday, December 13, Menno-Hof Board
members and staff, along with Gayle Gerber
Koontz, John Roth and André Gingerich Stoner
and friends gathered to celebrate the completion
of the display. After refreshments, the group
assembled for a brief service of recognition and
dedication. Menno-Hof staff member Charlotte
Long was also identified as a key player as she
led the design and layout process. Jerry Beasley,
executive director at Menno-Hof, voiced
appreciation for being able to share about these
reconciliation events with visitors and that “there
continues to be ongoing efforts between these
faith bodies to love each other and respect our
differences.”

### 2019 Menno-Hof membership

Yes, please enroll me as a member as indicated below:

☐ **Individual**—$35 includes free admission for you; 6 admissions for your family
and/or friends

☐ **Family**—$50 includes free admission for you, your spouse and children;
10 admissions for your family and/or friends

Enclosed is an additional gift of $___________. Gifts in excess of membership fee are tax-deductible.

My Name ___________________________ Address ________________________________

City ______________ State _______ ZIP _______ Phone __________ E-mail ___________
I want to thank those who responded to our fund raising needs. We exceeded the target we had established and now hope to attend to a few needs that have developed and further refresh some of our facility and presentations. Thank you so much! As a supporter, if you ever want to know more detail about how we use funds, I invite you to contact me at 260-768-4117.

As many of you know, 2018 was a milestone year. We celebrated our 30th year of operation and our one millionth visitor. It is such a blessing to be part of the Menno-Hof staff and we look forward to positively impacting lives each time a visitor arrives.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:13-16, as Christ-followers, you are the seasoning and light of the world—don’t lose your flavor or hide your light. As Christians, we each have this responsibility and sharing the Anabaptist story is but one way to flavor the world and let our light shine. The faith stories we share very effectively tell some of the challenges faced by those early individuals who laid a foundation and flavored the world in a way that many of us still embrace today.

You may want to consider joining us in this witness as a volunteer. If so, please call and talk to Ruth or Susan at 260-768-4117. We will provide training and work hard to help you feel the joy that comes from being part of the Menno-Hof team.