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## **Living Faith Requires Support and Accountability**

Eric Massanari, PNMC Executive Conference Minister

The letters of the New Testament convey messages that fluidly move from encouragement to admonishment and back again. Often this is happening within the same epistle, like Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. In one moment, the Apostle sounds exasperated as he challenges the early believers with words like these:

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If you think you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-18*

And in the next moment, Paul speaks poetically of Christ-like love, and encourages the believers with words like these:

*Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous and strong. Let all that you do be done in love. 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13*

Our faith needs encouragement and support, and our faith also needs to be challenged and held accountable to the commitments we make to God, to ourselves, to one another in the Body of Christ, and to all beings with whom we share this life.

In Christ we proclaim a gift of expansive welcome and radical grace, yet it is not some sort of 'cheap grace' that absolves us of responsibility. To commit to the Way of Christ is to commit to a path that is continually unfolding and revealing itself; it is a path that invites joyous recognition of the image of God we each bear and humble acknowledgement of our capacity to wound, to neglect, and to travel pathways of separation from the image and love of God. We need support and we need accountability.

When I reflect on my own faith journey, I am grateful for the many people who've given affirmation and encouragement along the way, but I feel even deeper gratitude for those who offered a timely challenge, a needed rebuke, or an invitation into the hard work of repair and reconciliation. Such lessons in accountability were by no means easy, but they were always transforming.

Recently, all pastors, chaplains and ministry leaders within PNMC were asked to sign our *PNMC Covenant of Pastoral Ethics* and complete a *Support & Accountability Practice for Credentialed Leaders*. Through these practices we commit ourselves to nurture our health and wellbeing in body, mind and spirit, to nurture our relationships with others, and to honor all commitments and covenants we have made within our ministry roles. PNMC credentialed leaders then share these exercises with me and their District Pastor, and they are also encouraged to share them with congregational leaders and other key support people in their personal and professional lives. We renew these commitments every three years.

The need for support and accountability isn't just on the individual level, it is also on the communal level. Our congregations, church institutions and organizations also need ongoing support and accountability to be healthy and to continue to grow in their capacities to express Christ's love in the world.

Recently we have been reminded of this as seven former Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) workers released an open letter on June 11, alleging a pattern of workplace abuse and harmful employment termination practices that disregard health and well-being of workers. The full version of that letter can be found [here](#). For additional information you can find *Anabaptist World* articles on the letter and a statement of response from MCC executive directors at the following links:

[Former MCC workers allege abuses | Anabaptist World](#) and [MCC executive directors respond to online petition and open letter | Anabaptist World](#)

For many it might feel shocking to hear such news about a beloved church organization like MCC whose mission is to "share God's love and compassion for all through relief, development and peace." Yet, it is precisely because of the high standards and calling of this mission—a mission that resonates throughout our Anabaptist communities of faith—that we must humbly remember our collective capacity to do just the opposite. We all have the capacity to do harm to ourselves and one another, intentionally or unintentionally, actively or neglectfully. To ignore such things, to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to allegations and patterns of abuse and harm within our communities and organizations is, in the end, to perpetuate and participate in such violations.

In this particular case, the former MCC workers bringing these allegations, including members of our PNMC community, Dan & Kathryn Smith Derksen of Evergreen Mennonite Church in Kirkland, WA, have made clear their ongoing love for Mennonite Central Committee and their desire to call the organization to the heart of its mission and the faith it professes. It is important that MCC and those of us in the wider church receive such allegations with openness, humility and a desire to do the hard work of investigation, truth-telling, repair and justice-building.

Just as we want to call ourselves and our congregations to the fullest and healthiest possible expressions of the faith we profess, we must do the same with our church institutions and organizations. This is part of the transforming work of love. We are indeed God's temple, and the Holy Spirit of God dwells within us, each one of us. With God's help, may we honor this as fully and compassionately as we are able.

## PNMC CONGREGATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS & MINISTRIES

### Zion Mennonite Church

ZMC held its 2024 Vacation Bible School program in late July with the theme "GOD ROCKS". There were 56 kids, grades K-8, that attended with numerous high school-age volunteers. The \$1269.59 VBS offering was dedicated for global MCC water projects.



### Filer Mennonite Church

August is here! As the seasons appear to be in transition, Filer Mennonite Church will continue with some of the blessings that began earlier in 2024. A young couple, **Michelle and Ben Martin**, have been preparing and providing a Sunday breakfast prior to Sunday School. Superb taste, great variety, wonderful fellowship. For Sunday School time, **Gary Hooley** has been leading our study in the book of Mark. Much history, more background of the culture at the time of Christ, leading to great discussion times. **Berdena Schlaick** uses the Mennonite Mission Network "Mosaic" to list birthdays and anniversaries of the many workers. She weekly has the church sign cards, she scans them, then emails to the mission workers for their special day. **Blessings, indeed!**

### Mennonite Country Auction

[Mennonite Country Auction](#) in Ritzville, WA is **October 5, 2024**. Planners are seeking non-quilt goods to sell. Hand-crafted items, event tickets, and antiques are always popular. If you have items of interest to share, contact [Cleon Claasen](#) at 509-760-3579.

### Oregon Mennonite Relief Sale

The [Oregon sale](#) is around the corner on **October 12, 2024** at the Linn County Fairgrounds in Albany, OR. Items are being gathered for the auction, Menno Market, and more! Contact your local representative to make donation arrangements.

### Drift Creek Camp

Visit [www.driftcreek.org](http://www.driftcreek.org) to sign up for the 2024 Fall Quilt Retreat, **October 17-20!** Participants will enjoy a weekend of creativity surrounded by the beauty of tall trees, the mountain stream, and the comforting circle of friends.

## MENNONITE CHURCH USA



### MCC West Coast Bike Ride

More than 70 bikers participated in the MCC West Coast Bike Ride August 4 – 9 to raise money to fight hunger in Chad. The bikers enjoyed 4 days of loop rides through the beautiful Willamette River Valley, returning each day to the Mennonite Village in Albany, OR, where participants camped or shared guest rooms with Mennonite Village residents. All skill levels of bikers participated on new bikes, old bikes, E-bikes, and tandems; some riders rode 40-50 miles a day while others rode 65-100 miles a day. Local Mennonite churches and volunteers fed the group well and it was a great week of food, fellowship, and beautiful rides.

### Upcoming e-Bulletins:

Sept 2 (submissions due by 8/26)  
Sept 16 (submissions due by 9/9)  
Oct 7 (submissions due by 9/30)  
Oct 21 (submissions due by 10/14)

If you would like to contribute, please send a brief announcement in Spanish & English with website links to [brenda@pnmc.org](mailto:brenda@pnmc.org). Our goal is to provide a valuable resource, not an In-Box jammer. If space is tight, we may omit announcements that are not as pertinent to PNMC. Announcements will run ONE time only, unless specified otherwise. *We welcome your feedback!*

For more PNMC updates : <http://pnmc.org> e-Bulletin Archives: <http://pnmc.org/Resources/eBulletin>