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## The Transforming Church

Eric Massanari, PNMC Executive Conference Minister



### at FIVE HUNDRED

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 1525, Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock and others gathered in Zurich, Switzerland, in the Manz family home. Over the course of that wintry evening, the adults present joined in baptizing one another as an outward sign of their inward confession of faith in Christ.

As difficult as it might be for us to imagine, this act was considered both heretical and seditious—an affront to the Zwinglian reformed church of that region (not to the Roman Catholic church that still dominated much of Europe) and the local municipal authorities, which were, in actuality, one and the same. It marked them all for arrest and eventual martyrdom. That night in Zurich is also recognized as the inception point for the Anabaptist (lit. “re-baptizer”) movement, out of which our own Mennonite tradition arose.

In 2025 we mark the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our unique lineage of Christian faith. In many ways and in many places around the world, people from varied Anabaptist traditions will reflect on our origins and historic pathways that have led us to this moment and to our contemporary expressions of Anabaptism.

Hopefully, our remembering will include not only that which we honor and celebrate, but also the painful, shadowed and tender places in our history; the moments when, by action or omission, we participated in and expressed the brokenness that we are capable of in our humanity. The fullness of this has shaped who we are today.

Gratefully, through the centuries we’ve also been shaped by the inclusion and presence of siblings in faith from across many racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. To be an Anabaptist today does not mean being Swiss, German or Dutch. Thanks be to God for the ways the circle has expanded, and may God have mercy on the ways we have struggled to welcome others. We must mark this anniversary with joy, gratitude and great humility.

We will also do well to welcome this as an opportunity to explore who we are called to be today as followers of Jesus. In 2017, Mennonite scholar Palmer Becker wrote a book entitled *Anabaptist Essentials*. In it he offered three very basic statements to summarize what it means to live as Anabaptist Christians:

**Jesus is the center of our faith - Community is the center of our lives - Reconciliation is the center of our work.**

Yes, the distillation of faith into succinct statements can be risky; and yet, in these three statements, Becker has done well at speaking into some of the most essential and enduring elements of Anabaptism.

In a recent conversation, **Pastor Craig Morton** (Meridian Mennonite Church, ID) commented that it is important to remember that Becker’s three Anabaptist identifiers are not meant to unfold in a linear or orderly fashion. Centering our faith and our lives on the way of Jesus, committing ourselves to the complexities and gifts of community, and dedicating our intentions and efforts to sharing the gospel through prophetic proclamation, compassionate service and working toward a just peace, all happen in a dynamic and creative admixture. This is the dynamism and ongoing evolution of the church.

**As we approach 2025 and commemorate this anniversary in our PNMC congregations and conference gatherings, I want to offer the following overarching theme and centering scripture:**

### *The Transforming Church*

*Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.* Romans 12:2 (CEB)

We are, in a very real sense, experiencing another period of great reformation in the Body of Christ. In the midst of profound change we remember that it is God who has the power to renew and *transform* us most fully. Romans 12 was an important guiding scripture for the early Anabaptists in describing the nature of that transformation. In one sense it reads as a redux of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, another grounding text for those radical reformers. May this theme and text help guide us into an important season of remembrance and emergence in our churches today.

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## Important Resourcing and Gathering Points for *Anabaptism at 500*:

[The Anabaptism at 500 Toolkit](#) – This is a great collection of resources that have been gathered to help resource and guide your congregation in reflection and commemoration of the 500th anniversary.

[PNMC Conference Communications Council \(CCC\) gathering on Zoom – Saturday, February 1, 2025, 8:30am-12:30pm \(PST\)](#) The CCC is an annual gathering of our PNMC community. All are welcome, and we especially ask that ministry staff and congregational lay leaders please attend this event. Along with sharing from congregations and reporting by the Board of Directors, we will hear from resource people who will help you plan for your own commemorations and reflections on Anabaptism at 500. *More details coming soon!*

[2025 PNMC Annual Meeting – Thursday, June 19-Sunday, June 22 at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp on Flathead Lake, near Kalispell, MT.](#) We are so excited to gather in this beautiful place and be hosted by MVMC. Our gathering will center on our theme for the year “The Transforming Church.” We plan to explore what it means to be Anabaptist Christians in our own time and place. *Why do we center our lives on Jesus? How do we commit to community in the church and beyond? How do we practice the way of reconciling love?* More details will follow!

[Mennonite World Conference commemorates birth of Anabaptism in 2025](#) – On **May 29, 2025**, MWC will welcome guests from around the world to [The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500](#). The day-long celebration commemorates the birth of the Anabaptist movement.

[MC USA Convention – Follow Jesus 25](#)— Planners are pleased to announce that the 2025 MC USA biennial national gathering and leading faith formation event, [Follow Jesus '25](#), will take place **July 8-12, 2025**, at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, NC.

## PNMC CONGREGATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS & MINISTRIES

### Community of Hope

[Poetry as Prayer: Encountering the Trans-cendent God: Queer Theology Sunday School, October 27, 2024—Register here.](#)



Many people feel as if God might be hiding themselves, or at least be a mystery too big to approach or know. For some, especially for the LGBTQIA+ community, the idea that they are made in the image and likeness of this God might seem improbable or even beyond imagination. Luckily, poetry has the ability to stretch the imagination, open doors to fresh possibilities, and make the everyday new. Together, we will see how poetry can help us experience our **Loving Creator** in new ways, give shape to our longings, and revive our spirits. No previous writing experience necessary. All are welcome. Speaker, **Jory Mickelson** (they/them) is a trans, non-binary Lutheran pastor in Washington. They are the author of three collections of poetry, most recently *All This Divide* (Spuyten Duyvil Publishing, 2024). They have received awards and fellowships for their writing and were named a Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholar, which recognizes LGBTQIA+ people working for justice.

### Zion Mennonite Church



A few years back the Zion congregation began to consider how it could take tangible steps to care for the creation God has entrusted to us. Multiple ideas were being considered so we did what we do best: formed a committee. The committee was tasked with hearing the ideas, doing some investigation, and coming up with a proposal for some action we could take. Solar panels quickly emerged as an actionable option. None of the existing roof space at Zion met both the pitch and directional requirements and a ground installment meant committing land exclusively to solar panels, which was not preferred. We eventually decided to build a pole structure to accommodate the panels. The system will generate an estimated 36,000 kWh per year, offsetting 100% of our annual consumption. Since being installed in May 2024, we have already produced 10,000 kWh, keeping 8,000 kg of CO2 emissions from entering the atmosphere. Plus we have a beautiful solar-powered open-air space for future events.

In addition to the positive environmental impact this project has been meaningful and encouraging for our congregation on another level. Through the committee's leadership we were able to gather a diversity of perspectives, work through multiple ideas, commit to a plan of action, and come together to make these changes happen. The structure was dedicated at a celebration on September 8th.

## MENNONITE CHURCH USA & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

### Mennonite Central Committee

MCC brought 22 young adults and facilitators from across the country to Drift Creek Camp for part of their **Young Adult Peace Camp**, in September. Peace Camps are hands-on learning experiences for young adults to learn and explore dynamics of social change, experience personal transformation and apply Anabaptist, Biblical foundations of peace and justice to real world issues. The program was run in collaboration with the Christian Community Development Association annual conference in Portland. During their stay, MCC staff facilitated learning sessions on Envisioning Shalom, Embracing Conflict and Embodying Reconciliation. It was a valuable time of growth, learning and resourcing for everyone involved!

### Mennonite Church USA

MC USA's Peace and Justice ministry has launched the latest [Learn, Pray, Join](#) initiative with a focus on conflict transformation.

*Look to our upcoming edition of the e-Bulletin for reports on our regional MCC Relief Sales.*

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### Upcoming e-Bulletins:

Nov 4 (submissions due by 10/28)  
Nov 18 (submissions due by 11/11)  
Dec 2 (submissions due by 11/25)  
Dec 16 (submissions due by 12/9)

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>