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Lord, Make Us Instruments of Your Peace

Eric Massanari, Executive Conference Minister




You will receive this *e-Bulletin* on the eve of a much anticipated and much feared election in our nation. We have been collectively simmering in a stew of diatribe, dehumanizing rhetoric, and increasingly violent division in our society. It feels like much is at stake, and it is. Our hope is that this issue of *e-Bulletin* will offer some insights and tools for living with Christlike love amidst this turbulence, and in the face of great suffering in our world.

Each time an election rolls around and appears in the first week of November, I am struck by how the timing coincides with the Christian observance of All Saints Day (Nov 1) and All Souls Day (Nov 2). Traditionally, Mennonites have not been close observers of such holy days, however, I notice that many

Mennonite congregations have begun taking time in this season to give thanks for those who have come before us and revealed something of the Way of faith, hope and love.

It feels right, and frankly even necessary, to invoke the names and the stories of these faithful ones at this time. In the polarization and anxiety of our days we need all the help we can get to reorient ourselves to the Christ of Love in whom we place our faith and our deepest allegiance. We orient to Christ as our gravitational center, rather than to a political party, an ideology, a charismatic leader or a platform. With so much pulling at us, begging for our attention and our assent, we choose to begin with Love as our center. Having first chosen Love, we then face into the world and allow this Love to guide our words, our listening, our giving, our receiving and, yes, our voting.

I am struggling to know how to pray in these days. I considered composing a prayer for this space, a prayer to share with all of you. In the silence, these are the words that arose, and I can think of none better:



The Prayer Attributed to St Francis of Assisi
Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen*

Making Peace by Making Connections

Rob Hanson – Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship - Boise, Idaho

I saw the “Mean Tweets 2024” sticker on his RV as I walked my dog by his house. My initial thought, as one who leans left politically, was, “Oh, man! Why?” But as a follower of Jesus who is called to be a peacemaker, I checked myself. I needed to think about my neighbor as a person created in the image of God worthy of love, respect, and dignity. Fortunately, as a trained volunteer for Braver Angels I had the skills to put my faith in action and talk to people who think differently from me. Having the skills and using them are a different story.

I took baby steps and made a point to get to know my neighbor. At first, we talked mostly about my dog. We then found some things in common like living in Wyoming. *Stories about enduring the Wyoming wind is a great way to bond.* When he saw Meka and me coming down the street, he would greet us with a wave and a smile. One day he was talking about retiring, but didn't know how he would spend his time. I had recently retired and had the same concern. I wanted to share how volunteering for Braver Angels answered that question. It kept me busy and gave me purpose. This was my opportunity to talk about Braver Angels, that also meant talking about politics.

It felt like the first time I did a zipline – scared and not sure if this was going to be a good thing. I took the leap. Luckily, his first response was “I'm so glad you're doing that. I'm just tired of the political fighting”. I was happily surprised that we shared dismay and concern about the state of our politics and wanted to see things change. We made a connection that started with finding something in common beyond small talk. **There were now opportunities to build trust and share ideas.**

Braver Angels is a national civic non-profit organization that has the mission of teaching people how to start and continue hard conversations to depolarize the politics in the US. The goal is not to change people's political views, but to change how people view each other. When people create relationships and build trust, they learn how to be more comfortable with differences, and see the richness of talking with someone who thinks differently than we do.

Braver Angels has been a revelation in my Christian life. It taught me the skills to engage with someone not in my group and helped me see how I could put Luke 6:32-36 into action. How was I different from a political partisan if I only love those who love me or only do good to those who do good to me. **I needed to find a way to love my enemies as Jesus said -** *“Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of God, who is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your God is compassionate.”*

The revelation in my life came in experiencing what that reward from heaven can be. Reaching out to someone different or new is like discovering a new hike through a breathtaking landscape or a new food that you couldn't believe you didn't know about until now. The discovery is the making of that connection - **that holy space - where I can see Jesus in them as they see Jesus in me.** It doesn't happen every time, and the other person may not feel it. But it's a step into the holy space of peacemaking.

I learned about Braver Angels in 2018 when **Hyde Park Pastor Marc Schlegel-Preheim** and his intern Jessica Ice wanted to find a way for us to reduce the political tensions in our country. They found Braver Angels.

The Braver Angels journey starts with recognizing that the political differences in our country are not as deep as we are taught to believe and that we hold many common values. With that understanding, the next step is to learn the skills to Listen, Acknowledge, Pivot, and Perspective. These are called the LAPP skills. (One of the Braver Angels founders is David Lapp, who grew up in a conservative Amish family in PA).

Braver Angels taught me how to lower the risk of having a conversation by starting with humility and curiosity. Too often our goal is to win an argument. It taught me to **Listen** for new things and things we have in common and then **Acknowledge** what I heard by sharing those observations with the speaker. This shows that I am listening and understanding. If you have ever been listened to this way, you know that it is a gift – a way to show love. Finally, Braver Angels showed me how to **Pivot** in the conversation to make sure the other person is ready to listen to what I have to say. If they agree, then I share my **Perspectives** by telling stories and talking about why an issue is important to me in ways that don't provoke defensiveness.

I have always wanted and tried to be a peacemaker and have found various ways to do that in my life. However, being part of Braver Angels has given me the skills and opportunities to be a better peacemaker. I don't know where we're going as a society or in our politics, but I do know that our God of reconciliation is calling us to love those around us no matter who they are.

How can you get involved in Braver Angels?

- Email Rob Hanson: rhanson@braverangels.org
- Attend a workshop in-person in your area or online. Find events at <https://braverangels.org/events/>.
- Braver Angels has a Braver Faith initiative that “partners with religious groups who use our tools in the context of their own religious traditions. For people of faith, civil discourse often begins in recognizing the image of God and/or the inherent dignity in our conversation partner. As a result, our approach should involve mutual respect. Respect, not agreement, is an essential key for a healthy discussion.” You can learn more [here](#).
- Braver Angels has Alliances in Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Idaho. You can find the Alliance in your area [here](#).

Media coverage of Braver Angels in the Pacific Northwest:

- This [12 minute video](#) aired on local TV news is of a Braver Angels Red/Blue Workshop held in Boise last Spring.
- This [NPR story](#) is about Braver Angels at a Washington County Fair in Hillsboro, OR

Recommended Reading for Individual or Group Study

Eric Massanari, Executive Conference Minister

The Pocket Guide for Facing Down a Civil War

Surprising ideas from everyday people who shifted the cycles of violence



At a recent gathering of the Mennonite Church USA Constituency Leaders Council (CLC), the question was posed, *What is happening in your conference to address the highly polarized political atmosphere in our nation at this time?* Those of us representing PNMC shared about some of the efforts at our conference gatherings over the last two years to develop skills in Nonviolent Communication (with Dr Malinda Berry at the 2023 CCC and Annual Meeting), and also Rob Hanson’s workshop this past summer on “How to Have Braver Conversations” (see Rob’s reflections in this issue of the e-Bulletin). Together with all of the conference leaders, though, we had to acknowledge that we are struggling to find ways to confront the almost overwhelming currents of division and rising waters of polarization in our society and within the church.

One conference leader mentioned John Paul Lederach’s recently published booklet, *The Pocket Guide for Facing Down a Civil War*, as an excellent resource. I found the booklet available as a free download (see link above) and found the 100 pages to be a very accessible, engaging read.

Lederach’s decades-long work in conflict transformation in situations of civil strife and violence around the world informs the stories, insights and practices shared in the ten chapters. His reflections are humbling, for their sober reminder that we are now witnessing in our nation the ingredients that make

for a civil war; and inspiring, for the way he provides practical wisdom and steps we can take to practice a more just and peaceful way, and avoid further violence. In Lederach’s own words:

*The simplest practices for facing down a civil war?
Start with noticing if you listen with your eyes.
Open just a slightly wider set of relationships.
Let curiosity instead of quick judgment guide your conversational journeys.
Stay in relationship with people even when you disagree. (p.46)*

John Paul Lederach The Pocket Guide for Facing Down a Civil War (FREE DOWNLOAD!)

[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 – 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 global guests 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



Hyde Park Mennonite Church

It was a party! About 150 Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints met for a **Comforter Bash**. Prior to the gathering, we visited women's groups at other churches and invited them to join us. Several of them came which made our Bash more ecumenical than the past two years. A carload left Filer Mennonite early in the morning, for a 2 1/2 hour drive and joined us for the day. We completed 31 comforters for MCC and 15 went home with families for completion for 46 total. We received tops from Virginia, Indiana and are especially grateful to women in Oregon that shared tops with us.



Mennonite Country Auction

The Mennonite Country enjoyed a wonderful event on Saturday, October 5. Following high winds on Friday, Saturday's gathering was blessed with ideal weather. Attendees enjoyed a delicious breakfast, the welcoming of familiar booths, and connecting with good friends. The auction raised a record-breaking \$70,400 dollars! With the overall sale bringing in \$132,737, an overall record for gross income for the Mennonite Country Auction. We enjoyed time together in communion and thanksgiving on Sunday morning, enjoying all that God has done in our midst. We are grateful for the many ways that these efforts are shared and supported by so many throughout the conference.

Oregon Mennonite Relief Sale

On Saturday, October 12, the Oregon Mennonite Relief Sale brought in a little over \$118,000 with a bit more anticipated. The online auction raised almost \$20,000 with a combined total of over \$138,000. With the summer bike ride total of \$39,698, the grand total is \$177,698, surpassing our fundraising goal of \$150,000 to benefit the work of MCC. Thank you to all who supported these events and volunteered to make them possible!



MENNONITE CHURCH USA & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

AMBS's distance-friendly options include Apocalypse Against Empire: The Book of Revelation; Doing Theology in the Anabaptist Tradition; Faith Formation and Spirituality: Youth and Young Adults; Immigrant-led Movements; Practicing and Embodying Nonviolence; Spiritual Practices: Water of Life; and more. In-person courses are also available. Nonadmitted students get 50% off their first three credit hours. **Courses run Jan. 14 – May 2**; sign up by **Jan. 6**. ams.edu/upcoming-courses

Mennonite Arts Weekend

"Engaging in the Mysteries of the Creator" is the theme for the **Mennonite Arts Weekend, February 7-9, 2025**, in Cincinnati, Ohio. The gathering celebrates the creativity and discipline of Anabaptist Mennonite artists. Presentations and workshops start on Friday evening and conclude with Sunday morning worship. Now is the time to take advantage of the early-bird registration offer and sign-up for limited spaces in workshops. Find the list of presenters and registration, location, and lodging information [here](#). *Early-bird registration is now open!*

Mennonite Church USA

Check out the latest edition of *PeaceMail* [here](#).

Mennonite Education Agency

Look [here](#) for daily prayer requests from the schools partnered with MEA. They are from early childhood through grade 12 schools, undergraduate schools, graduate schools, seminaries, and MEA's Hispanic Ministries' programs, SeBAH and IBA. By partnering with these schools and programs and helping them flourish, MEA works to fulfill the educational mission of Mennonite Church USA. To subscribe to this free monthly publication, please contact editor, Jessica Griggs, Jessica.G@MennoniteUSA.org.

Upcoming e-Bulletins:

Nov 18 (submissions due by 11/11)
Dec 2 (submissions due by 11/25)
Dec 16 (submissions due by 12/9)
Jan 6 (submissions due by 12/30)

If you would like to contribute, please send a brief announcement in Spanish & English with website links to 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>