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Our Need for Epiphany

Eric Massanari, PNMC Executive Conference Minister



H.O. Tanner. Study for Nicodemus Visiting Jesus (1899)

Growing up in the Mennonite church, I was familiar with the observance of Advent and Christmas. I did not, however, learn about Epiphany until much later in my life. Epiphany comes from a Greek word that means “to manifest,” or “to appear.” On Epiphany (January 6) the church marks the end of Christmas and celebrates the first moments in the gospel accounts where Jesus’ identity as the Messiah is “made manifest” to a wider audience. In the Western streams of Christianity, the traditional story of Epiphany is the visit of the Magi to the newborn Jesus. In the Eastern church the traditional story of Epiphany is the baptism of Jesus. Both are stories of new revelation.

Of course, moments of epiphany abound in the gospel stories. One of my favorites is found in the third chapter of the Gospel of John, where Nicodemus the Pharisee comes to visit Jesus at night. It, too, is a story of illumination and revelation, however, it captures the truth that sometimes we must pass through shadows of uncertainty, confusion and wonder before we are able to make meaning in a new way. A number of years ago I wrote the following poem as I reflected on Nicodemus’ night of epiphany:

Born of Spirit: A Song of Nicodemus

The wind blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. -JOHN 3:8

See the scrolls and volumes on the shelf,
reams of pages written,
countless sermons spoken (most forgotten)—
words upon words
within words.

Know that all speech of the Beloved
remains one step (or more)
removed from the Source.
All of our descriptions
mere stammerings.

We speak our holy names
and utter precise explanations.
Some, exquisite and beautiful,
others seem quite reasonable
and altogether possible.

Our utterances are stones,
piled into weathered cairns,
marking a path through wilderness.
They show us the way,
we hope.

Sometimes they are joined
with the mortar of fear and time
and they become a shrine,
a sanctuary, a fortress.
“Lord, it is good for us to be in this place!”

Only, we come to discover that
to remain in this place
is to lose our way.
We must go back
down the mountain.

We are called to wander
away from the well-lit path,
away from roads of exposition,
into the wildlands
of encounter.

So, leave the books to collect dust,
let the parchment remain bare,
trust that silence will not fail you.
Blessed are the beginners,
and those who wonder in the dark.

Here you will know Jacob’s struggle,
and blessing, and wound.
Here you will know Mary’s joy,
and surrender, and lament.
All of it, here.

Here, you dwell in the Teacher’s questions:
“What are you looking for?”
“Who do you say that I am?”
“Are you willing to drink the
cup that I drink?”
All of them, here.

Do not rush your responses.
Live fully your momentary answers.
Live possibilities alongside others
with whom you trust to try.
Watch for Wind That Blows Where It Chooses.

Let It pass through you,
so that you might be born of It
again
and
again.

Conference Christmas Celebrations . . .



Photo by Amy Epp



Photo by Curt Weaver



Photo by Don Bacher



L-R: Ciela & Mana Acosta, Trudy McKinnell;
 Photo by Marlene Kropf



Top: Evergreen Mennonite's Christmas pageant where all were in costume, even guests!

Middle Left: PMC's annual Advent Workshop with stations to build gingerbread houses and create ornaments.

Middle Right: Children at Albany Mennonite focused on where Jesus would come as a baby. Two types of places were depicted, one a shiny, nice place and the other a broken down ruddy sad looking place. Drawing on prophecies from the book of Micah, children were drawn into the idea that Jesus is likely to show up in places of need. Through Advent, they contributed to making the sad place less barren. This also tied in to one of our two Advent Giving Tree projects which supported MCC's work in Gaza, Lebanon, and Palestine's West Bank.

Bottom: Interim Pastor, Marlene Kropf reflected on Salem's candlelight service saying, "The Christmas Eve celebration of the birth of Jesus was a gift to me -- and to many in the congregation as well. Thank you to all who participated, and especially to all those who helped lead the service."

Bottom middle top: First Mennonite of Aberdeen closes its Christmas Eve service with a candlelit rendition of Silent Night.

Bottom middle lower: Hyde Park filled a manger with items for Faces of Hope, which provides a safety net of immediate crisis intervention resources for men, women, and children experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, stalking, or human trafficking.

From the PNMC Office

If you would like to receive the e-Bulletin directly into your inbox, please add your name to the email list at [this link!](#)

And, speaking of signing up, now is the time to [register](#) for the 2025 Conference Communications Council coming up **Saturday, February 1 on Zoom**, 8:30am—12:30pm. 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. ([Download Printable Agenda Here](#)) *Guest speakers will include:*

- **Olivia Krall**, MCUSA Archives – Why does our history matter? How does it shape who we are called to be as Anabaptists today?
- **Amy Gingerich**, Executive Director of MennoMedia &
- **John D Roth**, Mennonite historian and author – The Anabaptist Community Bible and resources in the Anabaptism at 500 Toolkit
- **Lin Rush**, Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

This is a wonderful opportunity amidst the mid-winter doldrums and connect with familiar and friendly faces from across the conference!

PNMC CONGREGATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS & MINISTRIES

Albany Mennonite Church

On **Saturday, February 22, 2025** from 9-3, AMC (3405 Kizer Ave, Albany) will host a **Winter Warm Up for MCC**. Anyone interested is invited to participate. If you'd like to learn to tie comforters, there will be willing teachers. If you have tops, batting and backing to share, please bring them along. Beverages will be provided but please bring your own lunch. Questions? Contact Nancy Friesen at 541-979-9759. Participate as long as you are able!

"Last year, 53,601 comforters were donated by people like you and sent to countries including Ukraine, El Salvador, Malawi and Zambia. Your time and creative talents are helping to share God's love with people dealing with conflict and disaster around the world." MCC website stated.

Drift Creek Camp

DCC is seeking to build a team of passionate young adults to create meaningful experiences for campers! Serving on summer staff provides an opportunity to unplug from technology, explore nature, reflect, build relationships, hone leadership skills, laugh until it hurts, and be part of a nurturing faith community. At camp, staff members will likely eat too many carbs, but will also fall asleep each night feeling both exhausted and satisfied. We hope you will join the team! [Apply here.](#)

MENNONITE CHURCH USA & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

West Coast MCC

Mennonite Central Committee is seeking a **Borderlands and Migration Director** who will oversee the identified local partnerships and is responsible for leading the work of Borderlands and Migration throughout the West Coast region. This includes planning and implementing program partnerships, organizing and equipping congregations and other partners to support migrating peoples, becoming advocates for immigrant justice in their communities, and facilitating educational workshops for deepening constituent awareness and understanding of the complex issues related to migration and immigration. More info? [Click here.](#) **Apply by 1-13-25!**

Join in in imagining a sustainable future for ourselves, our children and our planet by participating in an online book study of the compelling and timely book, *"So We and Our Children May Live"* by **Sarah Augustine** and **Sheri Hostetler**. In five sessions (**Jan. 16 through Feb.13, 2025**), we will engage in discussions in both large and small groups, interact with the authors, and explore how we – and our communities – are called to contribute to creating a more just and vibrant world. [Register today!](#)

Mennonite Church USA

- Celebrating 30 Years of Damascus Road and Its Legacy | February 28-March 2, 2025 | Goshen, IN | [Register here.](#)
- Join the Global Anabaptist Bible Read-a-thon!

This is your opportunity to take part in a once-every-500-year moment of unity and faith! MennoMedia's Anabaptism at 500 is collaborating with Mennonite World Conference in this extraordinary event as 500 voices will join together to read through the entire Bible – from Genesis to Revelation – in multiple languages. [Register here.](#)

Learn more about what is happening throughout MC USA:

[MC USA's Hope for the Future conference to celebrate 30 years of the Damascus Road anti-racism process](#)

[MC USA announces Follow Jesus '25 registration opens Jan. 6, shares convention details](#)

[MC USA names Leah Hoffner as executive assistant](#)

Upcoming e-Bulletins:

Jan 20 (submissions due by 1/13)

Feb 3 (submissions due by 1/27)

Feb 17 (submissions due by 2/10)

Mar 3 (submissions due by 2/24)

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>