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What is the fast that we must choose?

Eric Massanari, Executive Conference Minister

Note: *This reflection is adapted from a homily that I offered at the Prayer Service for Christian Unity, held at St. James Cathedral in Seattle, WA on Wednesday, January 28, 2026.*

Look, you fast only to quarrel and fight, to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high . . .
Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

ISAIAH 58:4, 6-7 (NRSV)

As someone raised in the Mennonite church, fasting was not part of my early faith formation. Over time, and through engagement with people of many faiths, I've gained an appreciation of fasting.

As it has become part of my practice, I've observed that when I choose to fast it typically amounts to a minor inconvenience—a momentary hunger, a temporary and tolerable absence. More often than I'd like to admit, fasting exposes my inclinations towards spiritual pride, and what we might call “spiritual bypassing” today. Fasting reveals a temptation to be like the earnest brother who approached Abba Poeman, one of the 3rd century Desert Fathers and Mothers, and said, “I have found that place where my peace is not disturbed by other people; do you advise me to remain there?” To which the wise Abba Poeman replied, “The place for you is where you will not harm your brothers.”

The prophet Isaiah is equally direct in confronting spiritual practice that has become little more than an exercise in self-confirming piety:

You call this a fast? Your sackcloth and ashes, your grumbling bellies, your faces bowed to the ground; these mean nothing so long as you remain separated from your neighbor and their suffering. Your piety is a heavy veil that shrouds you. Your fasting leaves you untouched by life in its truth, its beauty and its pain.

Is not this the fast I choose? the prophet continues. A fast that releases you from all that binds you and blinds you; a fast that turns you towards all that is most true and real in yourself, in your neighbor and in this world; a fast that liberates you from self-interest, and invites you to join in the emancipation of all. Is not this the fast that I choose?

A wise Amma of our own age, bell hooks, once put it this way: “Rarely, if ever, is anyone healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.”

God knows, we are a people in need of healing. We, the church; we, the whole of humanity; we, the family of all living beings, are in need of the prophet's call to our greatest liberation and our deepest communion.

I've been giving a lot of thought these days about how a disciple of Jesus is called to stand in this world—in the whirlwinds of injustice, violence, loneliness, and suffering we are witnessing and experiencing. How are we to stand in this world as the Body of Christ?

One thing that has come to me is a literal, embodied posture, much like a pose held in yoga practice. It looks like this: standing upright, gazing wakefully on the world, and holding my arms out in front of me with hands open and palms turned upward. I invite you to hold this posture for a moment. What does your body tell you when you hold this pose and take some deep, mindful breaths?

Reflection by Eric Massanari, continued from page 1:

Notice your spine, how it allows you to be upright and strong, to bend, and even to bow. Notice the front of your body, how your face, your breathing, your beating heart and soft belly are turned towards the world. Notice what it feels like to reach out into the world with your hands ready to give, ready to receive, and perhaps ready to be raised in a pose that says, “Stop! This must cease!”

What sort of fast must we choose so that we can join with one another, and turn to face the world in this way—with courage, compassion, vision, generosity and gratitude? What is the fast we must choose with God’s help?

May we be released from that which binds and blinds us.
May we be released into all that heals and unites us.
May the light of Christ’s Love break forth like the dawn,
within us and among all beings. Amen.

2026 CCC Reflection by Moderator-Elect, Janette Wisseman

The annual CCC (Conference Communications Council) was held on **January 31, 2026** via Zoom. With fear, anxiety and uncertainty in many of our churches, it was valuable to be together as the body of Christ.

Eric Massanari, conference minister, led us in a centering time of welcoming, prayer, and a meditative practice on Ephesians 4:2-6.

Samuel Moran, pastor of Ministerios Restauración was introduced as the speaker for our meeting, with **Magda Moreno’s** wonderful interpreting for the meeting. He gave an update on the two members of his congregation who were violently detained and arrested by ICE. We learned that they were rapidly deported before legal council could be put in place. Amidst this devastating outcome, we join them in prayer for wisdom, guidance and how to proceed next.

Pastor Samuel then led us through highlights of the training manual that he has written titled, “**El Ministerio de TODOS Los Santos**” (*The Ministry of All the Saints*). This manual is designed to help clergy/leaders in churches to equip each person in their congregation in identifying and using their gifts to engage more fully in the life of the church. He reminded us that the people who had significant roles in the Bible did not do their work alone. God surrounded them with others to further their work. Many folks in the meeting expressed deep gratitude for this helpful reminder.

“Role call” for the churches was led by moderator **Karla Morton**, pastor of Salem Mennonite Church. Each church was asked “how does our community invite the ministry of all the saints in our congregational life?” It was encouraging to listen to the **stories of hope and engagement** from each congregation.

Karla gave an update from the 2025 annual conference that included an added footnote to the 2025 Resolution, a ***Call to Discipleship Amidst a Culture of Christian Nationalism***, that was passed at conference against the culture of Christian Nationalism. Find the updated version [here](#).

We heard from **Deren Kellogg** of the Finance Team, and **Dave Hockman-Wert**, treasurer, with financial updates. Although many of us don’t get excited over spreadsheets, this is vital work to the conference. We appreciate their comprehensive reports.

Duncan Smith was introduced as the newly appointed Safety Liaison for PNMC. We look forward to hearing more from Duncan about this important role.

Karla renewed the call to increase giving to further the work of the conference. This call was effective in increasing giving, so we were challenged to bring this to our congregations again.

Karla closed our time in prayer, lifting up the concerns expressed, and for travel protection over the delegation of travelers headed to Palestine.

To purchase a copy of Samuel’s book contact him at samran77@hotmail.com.

A Non-traditional Blessing

MAY GOD BLESS YOU
with discomfort,
at easy answers, half-truths,
and superficial relationships
so that you may live
deep within your heart.
May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression,
and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for
justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears,
to shed for those who suffer pain,
rejection, hunger, and war,
so that you may reach out your hand
to comfort them and
to turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you
with enough foolishness
to believe that you can
make a difference in the world,
so that you can do
what others claim cannot be done,
to bring justice and kindness
to all our children and the poor.

Amen



*This blessing was written for a student group
in 1985 by a Benedictine nun, Sister Ruth
Marlene Fox.*

PNMC CONGREGATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS & MINISTRIES

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

All are invited to attend the upcoming **PNMHS Annual Meeting, Saturday, February 21, 2026**, at Zion Mennonite Church. The luncheon and business meeting are at 12:00pm. At 1:30pm **Jeryl Hollinger** will begin his presentation entitled **Montana Bound—A history of the Mountain View Mennonite Church, Kalispell, MT.** *Jeryl and his wife, Mary, live in the foothills of the Swan Mountains in northwest MT. His spare time goes into a variety of community clubs and fruit trees, berry bushes, and vegetable garden that feed them most of the year. Jeryl is the retired pastor of the Mt. View congregation.* The luncheon is \$15/person. An RSVP is needed for lunch only. To reserve a meal, contact **Jerry Barkman** by **February 13** at treasurer-pnmhs@canby.com or 503-871-6413. An offering to support the work of the Historical Society will be taken and guests are invited to visit the archives following the afternoon presentation.

Drift Creek Camp

A spring Work Weekend is in the works and will take place the weekend of **April 10-12, 2026**. Winter storms brought down many trees both inside the loop and on the road. The team of on-site staff has worked diligently to clean the parking areas, the road and trails, but there is still a lot of work to do. Projects will include traditional spring cleaning in the lodge, repairing building damage and continued processing of firewood. More details will be shared as further plans come together.

Mark your calendars for our next conference gathering!

This year's PNMC Annual Meeting will be June 25-28, 2026 in Albany, Oregon!

Planning committees have been formed and are collecting details to create a meaningful time together as we gather this coming June for worship, fellowship, renewal and discernment.

As details come together, needs will be communicated. We hope that conference members will consider creative ways to get involved, whether that be through making the trip to attend, opening homes to accommodate those traveling from a distance, providing snacks or transportation. *We hope to see you there!*

MENNONITE CHURCH USA & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Mennonite Mission Network

Are you sensing God's call to mentor and guide young adults as they grow in faith, service and community? Want to live in beautiful places like Anchorage, Alaska or Colorado Springs, Colorado? Answer the call and become a **Service Adventure unit leader!** Service Adventure gives young adults a 10-month adventure in service, spiritual growth and intentional living. Participants live in community with other young adults and a house leader. Together with a sponsoring church, participants and unit leaders have opportunities to see God at work in the world and to discover how they fit into that work. As a unit leader, you'll mentor participants and provide some household oversight.

For more information, visit **MennoniteMission.net/ServiceAdventure**

Where: Anchorage, Alaska or Colorado Springs, Colorado

Age: 24+ single, married or married with children

Term: two-year term beginning August 2026

Contact: Michael Oyer at **MichaelO@MennoniteMission.net**

Eastern Mennonite Seminary

[Practicing Conflict Transformation in Community Training Event](#)

Take up the tools you need to navigate conflicts and respond to harms with clarity and compassion. Whether you're a community leader, educator, faith leader, or seeking healthier relationships, this training offers practical, real-life strategies. Through interactive sessions, real-world scenarios, and reflective practice, learn how to transform conflicts into opportunities for growth and positive change. [Learn more and register today.](#) **March 12-14, 2026**, Village Church, Beaverton, OR.

Upcoming e-Bulletins:

Mar 2 (*submissions due by 2/23*)

Mar 16 (*submissions due by 3/9*)

Apr 6 (*submissions due by 3/30*)

Apr 20 (*submissions due by 4/13*)

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>
