

## THANK YOU

By Joseph Yoder

The staff, board and director of Menno-Hof wish to thank all of our faithful supporters who help Menno-Hof carry on its story and message of the Amish Mennonite story. But in a larger context, it is the message of the Good News of Jesus. Many lives are affected and changed as they visit Menno-Hof and dialogue with our staff and volunteers. This is a place of mission, education, culture and story. Thank you to the board members, staff, volunteers, donors, members, business and churches who help us keep the doors open in this wonderful ministry. There's still time to donate for this year.

We have been working diligently in having our Anabaptist churches use Menno-Hof as a resource for instruction, history and faithful discipleship. We encourage churches to use Menno-Hof with their Baptismal classes, youth and adults to help keep the Anabaptist vision alive in the 21st century. Currently we have 12 Partnership Churches. These churches place Menno-Hof on their budget and Menno-Hof reciprocates with free admission for their church groups. This past year gifts have been received from the following churches: Clinton Brick Mennonite, Clinton Frame Mennonite, College Mennonite, East Goshen Mennonite, Emma Mennonite, Fairhaven Amish Mennonite, First Mennonite of Middlebury, Griner Mennonite, Marion Mennonite, Milford Chapel, Pleasant View Mennonite, Shore Mennonite, Siloam Fellowship, Topeka Mennonite, Walnut Hill Mennonite and Woodlawn Amish Mennonite.

Thank-you!

## Faithfulness and Patriotism in a Time of War

By Keith Graber Miller

**T**he *Goshen News* headline smacked me like a punch in the gut: “Dissenting Voices Not Welcome in a Flag-Waving Chorus Across America.”

It was just two weeks after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon, and retributive rhetoric still flew across the airwaves as the country sought to recover from its horrific trauma. Small pockets of U.S. citizens—some pacifists, some cautious just-war theorists, some veterans and military officers—raised their voices for a reasoned, moderate, multilateral response to the 9/11 violence.

Those voices, though, were a minority. We had entered a new world, a world of suspicion and terrorism, smart bombs and collateral damage, patriotism and freedom fries.

By now, with the muckiness of the war in Iraq, the calls for unswerving patriotism have lessened. But the post-September 11 years have revealed significant differences among many U.S. Christians. Some have too fully imbibed and embraced American patriotism, too uncritically accepted the rhetoric of the (Christian) right. Others have too comfortably embraced the left.

Divisions have been evident within congregations and across denominations, including among Mennonites, regarding appropriate Christian responses: Can we be faithful to Jesus, whom we call the Prince of Peace, hold our government accountable and still acknowledge gratitude for our country? Can we be both Christians and patriots? Because we are both citizens of this world and of the world to come, I believe God calls us to do just that.

Partly because of our pacifist past, Mennonites have not developed a nationalistic or patriotic spirit, in the ways these terms are understood in the United States. Mennonite ethicist J. R. Burkholder once responded to a critic by noting that what the critic had called “anti-Americanism” could better be described as “more-than-Americanism.” “At their best,” said Burkholder, “pacifists consciously adopt a more global worldview that most Americans. They wear tribal identifications lightly and see themselves as global citizens.”

The question of citizenship is essentially a question of competing loyalties, all of which may demand our wholehearted—and perhaps contradictory—allegiance. Pacifist Christians traditionally have viewed themselves as first and foremost disciples of Christ and citizens of God’s reign, then citizens of the world and finally citizens of a given country. In contrast to that ordering, during times of warfare many Christians believe national citizenship should trump other loyalties. For pacifists this is not possible, especially if we are citizens of a powerful nation that is frequently at war.

...Continued on page 2

## Faithfulness and Patriotism ...cont. from page 1

But I want to look for ways to be creatively Christian and creatively American, drawing on the best from both traditions. Among the postures and practices that may allow conscientious, peaceable Christians to work at God's calling at this point in history are the following:

**1. Maintain our humility as we talk with our neighbors and speak to national leaders.** All of us must admit that we do not have quick or easy answers for responding to complex 21st-century world conflicts. When we disagree with decisions our political leaders make, we must respond in a more gracious manner than our inclinations may take us. As good citizens of the United States who anticipate with hope God's reign, we should respect and pray for our country's decision-makers, even while we challenge and critique their decisions, when necessary.

**2. Listen to those who believe differently from us.** We need to seek out ways to share with those who don't agree with us and genuinely listen to their stories. We need to listen to Muslims, Jews and other Christians, to peacemakers and patriots, to people in our communities and country and to those in other parts of the world. Also we should at least commit ourselves to nonviolence in our personal lives, seeking to address conflicts with others in direct, honest and loving ways.

**3. Recognize the dangers of the myth of redemptive violence.** Redemptive violence is the belief that violence saves, that war makes peace and that death brings life. Such a view is problematic in theory as well as practice. A month after the September 11 attacks, Colonel Richard Dunn, former chief of the Army's internal think tank, said, "You can go and kill every one of their terrorists and hang bin Laden in front of the White House and you will not have solved the problem—and you probably have created hundreds of new terrorists." By fall 2004, the U.S. Defense Department acknowledged that Iraqi bitterness was a greater threat to the United States than the terrorism that purportedly prompted the United States to attack Iraq.

In a similar vein, a student in my Liberation Theologies class wrote: "War never brings peace—only uncertainty and fear for the civilians left behind when the soldiers go home. ... We can say our military beat yours, but how many families will never be the same? How many children will be consumed by hate? What new enemy might spring forth from the rubble left in the wake of a passing army? Violence never brings about peace; it just brings more violence." The student's statement moved me, partly because she was not a pacifist but a 30-something Presbyterian—and a veteran of the first Gulf War. She continued: "I have

many conflicting feelings about the role I played in the first Gulf War. On the one hand, I wanted to help save lives, yet in the process of doing so I was taking lives, taking freedoms and taking hope from those very people I so longed to help."

**4. Challenge our nation to end its reliance on violence to solve problems and call for more international awareness and creativity.** As one sage put it, "If your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." Christian peacemakers hope the United States and other countries will work at the roots of terrorism—poverty, gross economic disparity, imperialism, exploitation, injustice—rather than react only militarily. Following the Apostle Paul's directive in Romans 12, we cannot destroy evil with evil but must seek to overcome it with good.

For decades the United States has been last among the industrialized nations in the percentage of its federal budget and Gross National Product we contribute for humanitarian aid to other countries. We give less than 1 percent of our budget and 0.1 percent of our GNP to foreign aid. What we give annually in total foreign aid would run the Iraq War for about three weeks. Overall, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have cost the United States more than the sum needed to pay off the debts of every poor nation on earth. What if as a nation we became known for our humanitarian generosity rather than our militaristic reflexes?

**5. Seek out the truth and hold our military, political and media leaders responsible for basic honesty and integrity.** Americans often are in the dark about the extent of the casualties of our military actions. By now the number of Afghanis and Iraqis killed in the ongoing war is between 30 and 60 times the number of Americans killed in the September 11 tragedy. At a minimum we need to believe some of the alternative and even mainstream news accounts about the stew of disinformation, deception and disrepute brewing among some of our senior political officials. As President Theodore Roosevelt said, "To announce that there must be no criticism of the President or that we are to stand by the President right or wrong is not only unpatriotic and servile but is morally treasonable to the American public." This isn't about being a Democrat or Republican, conservative or progressive, but about making independent moral judgments.

**6. Serve our brothers and sisters at home and around the world.** For those unwilling to participate in warfare for conscientious reasons, we need to work to find contemporary moral equivalents to the sacrifices of war. We should encourage all those who believe in peace to participate in a one-year or multi-year service assignment, at home or overseas, through

...Continued on page 3

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## Faithfulness and Patriotism ...cont. from page 2

one of our many faithful church agencies or through other worthwhile humanitarian organizations around the world.

In short, pacifist Christians can be good U.S. citizens in a conflict-ridden time by being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, impassioned peacemakers and hospitable friends to those we perceive as “the other.” In a complex, 21st-century world, conscientious Christians can be good citizens by

giving our first allegiance to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. We can live our lives in ways that are faithful to the gospel. And we can share Christ’s message of peace in a world often drawn to violence. Such a way of life is faithful to Jesus’ teaching, and that may be sufficient. But it also is a way of being that—we can humbly hope—is as relevant in a violence-prone world as are alternative responses.

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## DIRECTOR'S DESK

My father, John J. Yoder, was drafted into the U.S. Army in the closing months of World War I. When he refused to wear a military uniform to perform non-combatant work he was treated most shamefully by various army officers. His persecution included beatings, a sweatbox experience, handcuffs and constant intimidation. I have checked the listing of soldiers from Ohio in WWI, and my father is listed along with the caption, "discharged." He did not receive the customary honorable discharge which made him dishonorable.

Now I never thought my father was dishonorable. He was a farmer, father of 12 children, an active churchman, cooperated in community civic affairs, made friends with whoever he met. In retrospect; I would have considered him to be a model citizen. My father died when I was a teenager. During the short time I knew him; he told me many good stories. I never detected bitterness toward the army for his mistreatment.

Keith Graber Miller's insightful article should give all us Christians more courage and fortitude to be both faithful Christians and good citizens. My Amish ancestors came to America in the middle of 18th Century. They helped to make America what it is today. But they never killed anybody in war or civilian life. They were pacifists. Most of them would have said in words or by their lifestyle that "being part of the kingdom of God was their first priority." It is precisely that core value that makes us good citizens of the Kingdom of God and our earthly country.

—Joseph Yoder

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January 21, 1525,  
beginning date of the  
Anabaptist Movement

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