

The Menno-Hof Newsletter

reunion

Embracing forgiveness

by Larry Miller

Hans and his wife, Ursula, are from Germany and were not like most of the visitors that come through Menno-Hof. Hans is a Lutheran theologian and retired professor—Ursula is an educator. They visited Shippshewana in Oct. 2010 as church enthusiasts.

Hans' interest in different aspects of the Amish and Mennonites went beyond the horse and buggy and disaster relief work tags we are often questioned about at Menno-Hof.

Hans asked me if I knew about Andreas Karlstadt, a German Christian theologian during the Protestant Reformation also a priest and contemporary of Martin Luther.

Karlstadt wrote a series of thesis in 1516, attacking the church practice of indulgences. He rejected violence in the name of religion. Luther distanced himself from Karlstadt, especially in his identification with German peasants and destructive acts toward statues and images in the cathedrals.

I was enthralled with my new German friend's wealth of historical knowledge. After they finished the Menno-Hof tour, I asked him if he knew about the recent apology and forgiveness that took place at the assembly of the Lutheran World Federation with leaders of Mennonite World Conference. "Yes, I witnessed that at the time it happened" he told me. What else could we do but embrace and offer each other forgiveness and reconciliation.

Hans' parting words to me were, "your (Anabaptist) peace and non-violence fascinates me."

Larry and his wife, Maxine, were hosts at Menno-Hof Sept. 2010-Feb. 2011. They live in Macon, Miss., and attend Mashulaville Mennonite Fellowship.

Remembering in a new way: apology and forgiveness among Anabaptists, Lutherans and Catholics | by Rachel Nafziger Hartzler

"God can re-write our story," said one Amish participant in the "Healing of memories" event at Menno-Hof in Shippshewana on Jan. 20, 2012. Presenters John Rempel and André Gingerich Stoner encouraged the group of about 70 attendees to reconsider the way martyr stories are told in Amish and Mennonite settings. Prompted by apologies from the descendants of Christians who persecuted Anabaptists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, twenty-first century Anabaptists have an opportunity to forgive and remember in a new way.

Along with the stories of thousands of martyrs in the *Martyrs Mirror*, Menno-Hof has kept alive the memory of persecutions of early Anabaptists. Over the years, many individuals have apologized after listening to stories in Menno-Hof's "dungeon" room. The following historical proceedings were summarized at the Jan. 20 event.

In recent years official apologies have been made by organized church bodies. Beginning in the 1980s, Mennonites and Lutherans in Europe began to experience reconciliation. Conversations continued in North America where leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) expressed "deep and abiding regret" and remorse for persecuting and killing Anabaptists because of what they believed. The apology was made to Mennonite Church USA but was intended for all Anabaptist groups.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) took this process to the global level in 2010. At the LWF international assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, delegates unanimously approved a statement expressing their regret and sorrow for past wrongdoings towards Anabaptists and asking for forgiveness "from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers."

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) president Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe responded with emotion and humility, saying, "We believe that today God has heard your confession and is granting your appeal for forgiveness. We joyfully and humbly join with God in giving forgiveness." Ndlovu presented LWF president Mark Hanson with a wooden foot-washing tub and a towel, "a sign of our commitment to a future when the distinguishing mark of Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships is boundless love and unfailing service."

At the invitation from the Catholic Vatican, representatives from MWC engaged in conversations with Catholics over a five-year period (1998-2003), about the persecution of early Anabaptists by Catholics, questions of theology, and issues of peacemaking. These conversations concluded with a document *continued on back cover*



The January 20 presentation did not address the interactions between Anabaptists and the Swiss Reformed tradition in part because of time restrictions. Although a significant and dramatic event in Zurich, Switzerland, in 2004 involved people from Europe and North America, it was not international in its scope as the Lutheran and Catholic conversations have been.

“These people believe what I have felt in my heart for years.”

—Karen Mascho after her 2010 visit to Menno-Hof.

Read more about how Karen's visit to Menno-Hof was the beginning of her journey to become Mennonite and to plant a Mennonite church: mennoniteusa.org/2012/02/10/following-the-cloud-one-step-at-a-time/

The **new cash register system** is up and running smoothly! Susan Miller, managing director, worked diligently for several months to get everything set up.

Thank you to donors that contributed funds to make this upgrade possible!



Why I give

“An authentic message.

Menno-Hof tells a gripping story of horrendous persecution and extreme personal sacrifice—a reality that is difficult to grasp from the vantage point of our modern and comfortable middle class lives. On a recent visit to Menno-Hof, this contrast of experiences was brought home to me forcefully as I gazed down at the straw covered floor of the ‘dungeon’ more than ten feet below. I felt a shiver of claustrophobia as I took in the confined space and the high walls of the narrow chamber. I found myself gripped by the sheer inhumanity of the torture chamber and what the Anabaptists had endured more than four centuries ago. A question intruded my thoughts: would I have been able to endure and survive this kind of treatment? The scene spoke to me as if centuries had elapsed and I was on the straw floor looking up for deliverance.

Preservation of the historical roots of our Anabaptist heritage. Preserving the historical and religious heritage of the people of the traditional peace churches is important—for this and future generations. At Menno-Hof this is not simply a matter of preserving artifacts, documents and other records. Rather, it is the use of these stories in a compelling way to inform the current generation of their place in a unique history and religious heritage. To the extent that our Anabaptist religious orthodoxy allows us to indulge in a sense of pride in our historical roots, we are grateful to Menno-Hof for constructing a bridge connecting us to our unique past.

Validation of a people. The story that Menno-Hof tells is a great one and worth telling to insiders as well as the general public. The story of a people who emerged from brutal religious persecution and over the ensuing centuries developed a variety of expressions around the world is a compelling story. In every iteration of that story, Menno-Hof validates the people of that story.

In the final analysis, the simple answer to why I give to Menno-Hof is so that it can continue to tell—to present and future generations—the unique story it was founded to tell.”

—Duane J. Gingerich, Jakarta, Indonesia

Menno-Hof Board changes

Leanne Farmwald and **Mark Regier**, both Mennonite Church USA representatives on the Menno-Hof Board, have each announced their resignations effective Dec. 2011. Leanne has served on the board since 2006 and Mark since 1998. Both of them have expressed their ongoing support and care for Menno-Hof. Leanne brought expertise in marketing and advertising and was chairperson of the Marketing Committee for several years. Mark served as board president for five years and more recently as the chairperson of the Marketing Committee. Thank you to both of you for what you have contributed to Menno-Hof. God bless you as you go from here.

Beginnings and endings

hosts & hostesses:



Frederick & Sandra Gingerich (photo at left)

Au Gres, Mich.
Jan. 14—Mar.

Fred Tillery
Mar.—Apr.

Thank you for giving your time and care to Menno-Hof. May you be blessed as you have blessed us and the Menno-Hof visitors!

Mailbag | Nov 2011

Below are two of the notes we received from 4th graders of a local public school after their visit.

Dear Menno-Hof Staff,
I liked coming to Menno-Hof because of how interesting it was. I liked the tornado room because it was cool how the floor shook and the “wind” blew. I also liked the dungeon. I want to come back sometime.

From: Conrad

Dear Menno-Hof staff,
Thank you for having my class go to Menno-Hof. I have gone there before with friends but having a second chance to go helped me remember. It was a good opportunity to be able to experience it again and be able to talk with my classmates about it. I had a great time.

Sincerely, Katie

by the numbers | 2011

20,405 visitors from

73 different countries

all 50 United States

868,374 visitors to-date (Dec. 2011)

Peace & Popcorn: a Menno-Hof winter series



~come and
enjoy popcorn
after each event!

🕒 February 19, 2012, 6 p.m. at Menno-Hof (RSVP required)

Is the Gospel of peace still relevant?

John D. Roth, professor of history, Goshen (Ind.) College

Since 9/11 and the growing divisions within our national political culture, some Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations have begun to reconsider traditional understandings of nonresistance. Our young people today do not face the question of military conscription and arguments supporting the “war on terror” can sound compelling. In light of all this, some are asking whether the gospel of peace is still relevant, especially since this conviction sometimes seems to be an obstacle to mission. Join in a conversation focused on these important questions.

🕒 March 25, 2012, 6 p.m. at Menno-Hof (RSVP required)

Forgiveness in an unforgiving world?

Steve Nolt, professor of history at Goshen College

The response of the Amish community in Nickel Mines, Pa., to the horrific school shooting that took place there October 2006, stunned, inspired and sometimes angered observers near and far. Did the Amish immediately forgive a killer? Was that possible or even proper? Steve Nolt will explore some of difficult issues and questions that the Nickel Mines story raised and consider the Christian witness that an honest understanding of forgiveness can offer an unforgiving world.

🕒 April 29, 2012, 6 p.m. at Siloam Fellowship, Goshen, Ind.

Swords into plowshares: How the Seagoing Cowboys helped repair a broken world

Peggy Reiff Miller, Milford, Ind.

They were students and farmers, bankers and preachers, laborers and teachers. They were the seagoing cowboys—men and boys who volunteered to tend the livestock shipped to war devastated countries after World War II by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the Heifer Project. Of the approximately 7,000 seagoing cowboys, nearly 1,000 of them were Mennonite and many more were Amish, some of who will be sharing their stories at this event.

“As we welcome visitors day-to-day and invite them to see and hear the moving chronicle of our Anabaptist story, it inspires us with courage and persuades us to a more faithful walk with God.”

—Frederick & Sandra Gingerich, current Menno-Hof hosts

Help keep the Anabaptist story alive: become a member

Become a member and help us continue to tell the story of how God is working in people’s lives—past, present and future. Your support is vital to Menno-Hof. Thank you!

Membership benefits

- the joy of supporting an organization with values similar to your own
- free admission for you, your family and friends
- quarterly *Reunion* newsletter
- e-mails with promotions and upcoming events
- entry to special events by invitation only
- 15% discount on gift shop items and books.

2012 Menno-Hof membership

Yes, please enroll me as a member as indicated below:

Individual—\$35 includes free admission for you; 6 admissions for your family and/or friends

Family—\$50 includes free admission for you, your spouse and children; 10 admissions for your family and/or friends

Enclosed is an additional gift of \$_____.

Gifts in excess of membership fee are tax-deductible.

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Make checks payable to Menno-Hof and mail to PO Box 701, Shipshewana, Ind., 46565



DIRECTOR'S DESK

I welcome the use of the Director's Desk for this article because I feel it is important that we are aware of these recent events that continue to shape the Anabaptist story.

—Jerry Beasley, executive director

Remembering in a new way (cont. from cover)

“Called together to be peacemakers.” A 2008 joint Catholic/Mennonite document says, “We affirm Jesus’ teaching and example on nonviolence as normative for Christians.”

John Rempel, professor of theology and Anabaptist studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., caught the attention of the Menno-Hof audience by stating that Anabaptists were not the only religious martyrs of the Reformation. Lutherans were persecuted and martyred by Catholics and Catholics by Lutherans. The practice of pressuring religious dissenters into accepted church practices has roots that go back into church history. Anabaptism is unique in that it insisted on a separation of church and state, never affiliating with the state as did other churches in Europe in Reformation times and earlier.

André Gingerich Stoner, director of holistic witness and interchurch relations for Mennonite Church USA in Elkhart, described ways in which Anabaptists have been shaped by the persecutions of their spiritual ancestors: many Amish and Mennonite folks migrated to North and South America, and Anabaptist immigrants tended to isolate themselves and became “the quiet in the land.” André boldly suggested that

the way the martyr stories have been told can lead to a sense of self-righteousness.

These dramatic apologies have created an historic shift which means that Mennonite and Amish folk must no longer hold on to a victim mentality. Although Anabaptists were shaped by the martyr stories of the sixteenth century, something new is now being asked. Accepting apologies and offering forgiveness is transformative. A new way to read and re-tell martyr stories is to emphasize that following Jesus sometimes leads to persecution. Rather than focusing on “what they did to us,” the martyr stories can challenge Anabaptists to be more courageous in following Jesus.

César García, the new General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference also gave a brief update on the activities of MWC at the “Healing of Memories” event.

It may seem as though God is re-writing the Anabaptist story. Can Amish and Mennonite believers now consider where and of whom they need to ask for forgiveness? Hopefully next steps will honor the open-heartedness and courage of Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Christians who have reached out to renew relationships with Anabaptists and will draw all involved closer to Jesus Christ.

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Reunion is published quarterly to keep our friends informed of happenings at Menno-Hof. Direct questions or comments to info@mennohof.org

Menno-Hof

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