

THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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A mission is a calling, a responsibility, or a work that is placed upon a person by another. Our Lord Jesus viewed His life's work as a mission assigned by God the Father. His response to that mission was "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." All who truly follow in the footsteps of Christ have surrendered to the calling of God for all of life. Like Christ, we bow in submission to the Father's will and make it our will, our purpose, and our joy. Submission involves the bending of our will to the authority of another when our natural inclination is to take our own way.

The call to submission not only affects our response to our Lord but also becomes our mission in human relationships. God calls us as members of the body of Christ to submit "one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). Submission is also our mission to civil authority. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13). To spiritual leaders set up in the church by God, we submit ourselves in obedience, "for they watch for your souls" (Hebrews 13:17).

Since we tend to be self-centered by nature, we must first be broken by penitence in order to express the grace of submission from our hearts. Contrary to how the natural man thinks, submission to the will of God and for the benefit of others does not stifle our potential as individuals. Instead, it enables us to be of greatest use to God and the church. However, submission leads us to deny our claim to self-identity and to blend with the brotherhood.

The church consists of differing personalities from various backgrounds. And God has given a diversity of gifts to the brotherhood. The key for harmony, peace, and unity among us is to fulfill the command to "be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5).

Submission is demonstrated by a selfless attitude toward recognition by others or toward personal promotion (Philippians 2:3). How do we feel when others have been assigned a role that we felt capable of filling or when our opinion was rejected in favor of a brother's advice? Humbly accepting God's placement of our sphere of service brings rest to the soul and peace with our Lord and our brethren.

When conflicts arise among brethren, an attitude of submission will lead us to question whether our own opinion or view of the issues may be faulty. This grace of submission enables us to stay kind and courteous

when differing with our brother. It also provides a redemptive platform from which to win an erring brother back to the truth. Submission helps us to more readily admit and correct our own error when pointed out by others.

An attitude of submission to Scriptural authority moves us to obey, even when we do not fully understand why or even agree. A willingness to submit is often the key to understanding the purpose for our obedience. Jesus explained this truth in these words, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).

Our willing submission to group voice promotes harmonious brotherhood relationships whether it relates to decisions that are made by voting or by the group consensus. We will not always completely agree with the decision on every issue. But our hearts should throb with the pulse of a Scriptural brotherhood and support the group decisions as our own.

For the child of God, applying the mission of submission in daily life becomes a way of life. It frees us from the bondage of taking our own way, enhances brotherhood relationships, and enables us to be of humble use to our Master.

—ELG



The Historical Development of Our Discipline (*Church Standards*)

Our Discipline is the printed rules and discipline of our church. It is the body of rules and regulations governing the exercise of the authority of the church over the membership. Usually, a discipline specifies those things that are forbidden, the penalties for the disobedient, and the conditions for forfeiture and restoration of membership. Disciplines also outline the duties of church officers.

The story of our Discipline recalls Lancaster Conference history in particular and also the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite context in general. The Biblical Anabaptist-Mennonite Context

A key element of the Anabaptist faith was the concept of a voluntary church. Only those who chose to join the church could be held responsible by the group. Only adult believers who voluntarily submitted themselves to Christ and the church, and who readily accepted the responsibility to give and receive counsel could join.

A unique feature of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church discipline was its nonviolent methods. Only the rule or command of Christ served as the basis for church discipline. No violence was to be part of the process. Excommunicating the unrepentant, offending member with an appeal for them to return was the end of the matter.

This stood in contrast to the broader, religious context in Europe at that time. In the 1500s, one was automatically a member of the church that controlled the province in which he was born. He had no choice in the matter. The state church's method of dealing with offenders was exile, torture, or even death.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite belief in a voluntary church and of a nonviolent approach to church discipline also included a specific view of obedience. Obedience must take form. A practical, everyday expression of Bible teaching in every believer's life, with the church directing this expression, was considered a necessity for fulfilling New Testament teachings on the church and holy living (Matthew 16:18, 19).

This New Testament concept of the church and obedience issued into various practical considerations: (1) that the body of the church exercises her authority over individual members; (2) that the church needs clearly-defined concepts of faith and conduct, which must be applied; (3) that the church is not only a worshipping fellowship of believers or saints but also a body, with a specified order as an essential part of its life; (4) that the church has the duty to maintain this order by the exercise of spiritual pressure such as rebuke and discipline, as well as by the preaching of the Gospel and the proclamation of standards of righteousness and holy living; and (5) that the spiritual pressure serves to impress upon the individual the serious nature of sin and transgression. This understanding of the Scriptures aligns with one present-day historian, who said, "If the Mennonite Church is to survive, there will need to be a planned separation."

This concept of church rules was based upon Matthew 16:18, 19. Jesus told Peter in verse 19, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." A key was given to the scribes at the time of their graduation. It symbolized their authority to teach the people, to help the people apply the Scriptures, and to insist through punitive action that the people live the Law. Peter certainly understood that now the church leaders were to function in this same manner in the New Testament church.

The Printed Discipline of the Lancaster Conference

Only a few documents describing Lancaster Conference church practices and discipline appear before 1881. Resident bishops, guided by a strong respect for church tradition and conference voice, carried out conference business and maintained its organization and standards. During the nineteenth century, the close geographic proximity of members and the traditional semiannual church conferences united the church. The unique practice of having the bishops meet the day prior to conference to discuss and decide business before presenting it to the larger ministerial body provided the Conference a very stable, organizational framework. Written rules or discipline were not considered necessary in such a face-to-face exchange. But as time moved on, the Lancaster Conference grew both in membership and in geographic spread. Travel to and from conference was more of a challenge. These factors challenged the face-to-face relational and oral tradition approach to church administration. As a result, the interest in a written discipline grew, and George Weaver, the senior bishop, drew up a handwritten discipline in 1878.

The introduction to this Discipline indicates that several other factors besides growth also propelled its formation. The Old Order divisions in Indiana and Ohio and in Ontario, Canada, prompted Weaver to state the church's views in an effort to clarify that the (Old) Mennonites also had a conservative position and practice. Weaver hoped that reiterating the church's conservative stance would forestall an Old Order division within the Conference.

The introduction to the 1878 Discipline further indicates that revivalistic currents infiltrating the ranks also prompted the producing of a written discipline. The more enthusiastic worship style, camp meetings, and an emphasis on testifying held an appeal to some segments of the Conference. Crystallizing the church's position served to show that obedience, rather than mere emotion, is the criterion for New Testament church life.

It seems that the various challenges served as the impetus for the first written Rules and Discipline in 1878. What could no longer be held by oral tradition necessitated a written form. The bishops and ministers felt the need for a more specific definition in the face of different interpretations of conference rulings. Hence conference approved the handwritten 1878 Discipline.

The Development of the Lancaster Conference Discipline Disciplines from 1881-1899

By 1881, with some variations, the 1878 handwritten Discipline was printed. Twelve known English revisions of the 1881 document exist; ten are dated.

The various editions remained the same in content with only minor wording changes. About 70 percent of the document was rules; 30 percent pertained to discipline. Each edition increased in length 5 percent. In this period the Discipline was approximately fourteen hundred words in length. The 1892 revision allowed bishops and ministers to marry nonmembers. This reflected the times. Many Mennonite youth did not join the church until after marriage.

During this period, church services were not held every Sunday. Communication and travel were very limited. Horses and buggies were the primary mode of local transportation. Mennonites were very rural and agriculture-oriented.

Revivals and Sunday schools were beginning. This brought tension within the Mennonite Church, resulting in the Old Order division in 1893 by Bishop Jonas Martin.

Conference structure was guided by oral traditions rather than parliamentary policy and procedure. A face-to-face consensus directed church structure. Little was stated on church procedures in the early disciplines. Details of lifestyle were not mentioned. Plain clothes and no picture taking were understood.

Few major changes to the Discipline were made during this time. One short-lived statement in two editions prohibited the fellowship of members with those who advocate "the Doctrine of Divine Healing" or "Faith Cure." Conference did strengthen her conference authority by including "that if any member shall willingly and knowingly violate the rules of conference," he would be dealt with. A slight move away from informal consensus was made by requiring a two-thirds, rather than a unanimous, vote of the bishops. Only ordained leaders could vote at conference.

Strange to us, the disciplines of this period permitted voting and serving as bank directors. Members could serve as jurors except in criminal cases. This again reflects the times. The church was learning how to relate to a "free" world.

Disciplines from 1903-1935

Again, the disciplines of this period were uniform in length (approximately eighteen hundred words). Some rules were added which reflected the Sun-

day school and revival developments.

The four disciplines released in the early part of this period represented mostly a continuation of the earlier ones. Additions included amore defined position on divorce and remarriage and on alcoholic beverages.

But as time moved on, many changes confronted the Conference. Revivals and Sunday schools were the norm. Regular Sunday morning and evening services were held. The broader church was calling for missions, colleges, and a more centralized church structure. The Conference struggled to know how to relate to this.

Further, the social and cultural changes in society influenced the Conference. The car and the telephone brought the influence of society closer. The Industrial Revolution brought manufactured clothes, farm machinery, and other changes which pressured the church with fashion, leisure time, and affluence.

The disciplines toward the end of this period reflected these pressures. Sabbath keeping was reaffirmed. Camping-out parties by unmarried members, attendance of circuses, movies, and theaters, and suchlike were prohibited.

More space was given to plainness of attire. Rules against ties, stylish hats, jewelry or bright chains, braided bonnets, and white or tan shoes became part of church restrictions. These were made to curb the pressure of worldly fashions introduced by manufactured clothes and affluence.

Matters were added to the Discipline only when the consensus was threatened. If the understood stood without challenge, it was not mentioned. If something was no longer a threat, such as cattle-dealing, the matter was dropped.

During this period a movement began against voting and jury duty and holding offices in public services. More attention was given to the seven ordinances. Conference procedures became more formal and standardized. Interestingly, while Sunday schools and revivals were at first discouraged and slow in coming, in the later disciplines, Sunday schools and revivals are forthrightly encouraged.

Disciplines from 1943-1968

The three disciplines of this era grew in length. The 1943 Discipline had 2,401 words, the 1954 edition had 3,532, and the 1968 edition had 4,677. These editions also included more attention to discipline. Attire regulation for the first time was given in detail, including what was required in church uniform. In the first two periods, Bible references were limited; in the last

two periods, Bible references were added. These disciplines were more explanatory in nature.

The 1943 and 1954 Disciplines were more strict than any of the previous ones. This reflects the rapid changes in society. Modernization and industrialization shaped these changes. Mennonites moved from being mostly agriculture-oriented to being more urban. The various culture shifts, resulting from the World Wars, created a worldlier, godless environment. This required the church to be more forthright and definite.

This was a very turbulent time for the Conference. The pressure from foreign mission involvement started in 1934. The pressure from the college and higher education emphasis of surrounding conferences and pressures from the apostatizing influences of the western conferences converged to test the strength of the Conference. Forces were at work early in this period that resulted in the later drift and apostasy of the Conference.

During this period, a desperate attempt to maintain the faith was made. Congregational life became more complex with all-day meetings, prayer meetings, and so forth. A tremendous increase in membership taxed the bishop oversight. This rapid growth challenged the ability to maintain unity and to shore up the weak areas.

During this period the section called "Restrictions" was added. Membership transfers were addressed. Clothing requirements were spelled out in greater detail. The Christian Woman's Veiling and the Christian Salutation were addressed, as well as Anointing With Oil. Musical instruments were banned for worship services. Radio and television became issues.

Increasingly, through the sixties, the Discipline was not administrated. The written Discipline and the actual practice moved apart. This resulted in disunity and the undermining of Conference authority.

The changes in the 1968 Discipline reflected these realities. More positive in tone and more lenient in its requirements, it was the product of ministerial discussion rather than an agreement of the bishops. It was more suggestive than authoritative.

Consequently, five bishops requested a release from Conference to provide for those who wished to continue with the 1954 Conference Discipline. Conference granted this request, resulting in the forming of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church in 1968.

Our Discipline wording is still based on the 1954 Lancaster Conference Discipline. Numerous upgrades have been made. Tobacco and the radio have been banned. A statement on education has been added to serve as our official statement on higher education and state funding. Various new

issues have been faced, such as the computer, VCR, and suchlike.

Pertinent Observations

A church discipline represents the church's effort to fulfill the command of Christ in Matthew 16. The church is to teach the truth, to help her members know how to live the truth in "shoe leather," and, finally, to insist on a lifestyle in keeping with the doctrines of Scripture (Philippians 3:16). The church discipline is part of the way the church takes seriously her responsibility before the Lord.

A church discipline helps us preserve and transmit the faith. Truth lived is truth preserved. Truth not lived is truth lost. Our church Discipline is the church's agreed-upon "plan" for expressing truth in practical everyday life. Truth expressed in practical living is truth transmitted to the next generation.

A church discipline is not meant to address every possible issue that might face us. Mennonite disciplines address pertinent and pressing issues. They provide a forum for facing the present evil world. They set forth a pattern, a spirit, and a tone that helps us know how to do as we move against the currents of our time. Mennonite disciplines have been "brief" in comparison to other denominations. They serve as a minimum standard.

A church discipline is effective only when a spiritual people honestly desire the truth and are ready to live by the spirit of the Scripture and the church discipline. No church discipline can establish a thorough or complete enough description to hem in a carnal spirit. No church discipline can be effective to one who seeks loopholes through the letter of the discipline. A church discipline that is administered keeps alive the right view of the authority of the church in the life of the believer and the right view of holy living. Too much deviation weakens the right view of the church and makes holy living seem relative. A church discipline that is administered upholds and reinforces right thinking. Our teaching is understood more by our administration than by our preaching.

A church discipline should be kept current. An out-of-date discipline seems irrelevant and tends to foster a spirit of disregard. An outdated discipline also clouds the place of the church in helping each generation face their challenges.

Today we face the pressure to follow a less demanding way. We are told that good preaching is enough. We are told to focus on the heart; then supposedly, outward rules and church discipline are less important. While we need good preaching and while we need a focus on the heart, we also need

an equal emphasis on a right walk—a "shoe-leather" expression of the teachings of the Scriptures. Our church discipline helps us with this endeavor.

A community lady asked one of our sisters, "Do you dress this way out of personal taste, or does your church ask that of you?" Our sister answered that it is both her taste and the requirement of the church. The community woman responded, "Your church does a lot for you." Indeed it does! The church helps us know how to best give expression to holy Biblical living in a crooked and perverse generation.

Lynn Martin

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Church Committee Report Publication Board Report

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Bible-based literature is one avenue in which God is extending His long-suffering. He uses this means to call men to repentance. As a church publisher we sense our accountability and responsibility to safeguard the materials we develop and endorse so that God's character is clearly portrayed.

The Publication Board continues to work with Rod and Staff on several projects. The Sunday school quarterly development is the largest ongoing effort. Writer's meetings are held monthly at the Eastern Mennonite Publication office to discuss lesson material and prepare the writers for their responsibility. We sense the need to include writers from across our church constituency, but this does pose a challenge since not all writers are able to be present for the meetings. EMP also provides Rod and Staff assistance with music, geography, and math courses.

The Publication Board continues to develop study guides to be used in Bible schools as well as for prayer meeting discussions. Three manuscripts are in the early writing and editing steps: The Doctrine of Christ (reviewed by brethren from the Northwest District), Mennonites in Holland, and The Christian Ordinances (reviewed by brethren from the Illinois District). The Doctrine of Heaven and Hell is nearly through the editing and review stages.

Two school curriculum projects have recently been printed: Grade 2 Reading and Ready, Set, Read. A handwriting course is in the writing and field testing stage. Curriculum projects continue to require the most investment of personnel and finances.

The hymnbook project is an effort of the Joint Publication Council. Since EMP will be the publisher of this project, we are presently involved in some pre-publishing details. This is a very large project, and we trust it will be a blessing to many.

The Spanish literature work continues to grow. A new editorial team has recently taken over the bimonthly production of Sendas Derechas. Obtaining adequate material and personnel for all the involvements of the Spanish work remains a continual challenge. Since much of the Spanish material is priced under cost and the Sendas Derechas subscription is free, we depend on contributions from individuals and congregations to cover the costs.

Recently, the bound volume number 4 of the Eastern Mennonite Testimony was reprinted. This leaves only one volume that is not currently available. Plans are in place to complete the set.

Currently, the following quantities of our periodicals are printed each month: EMT-6,100; Home Horizons-5,400; Living Waters-91,500; and Sendas Derechas-2,200.

As a Board we express appreciation for the many who labor as writers, editors, and reviewers. We also count on our constituency to read and hopefully benefit from these labors. May God receive the glory.

Brother Dwight For the Publication Board



Blessings of Home (Part 6)

Satisfaction of Service

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). The King's commendation was mostly for domestic duties: giving food and drink, providing clothes, being hospitable, and tending the sick. These individuals obviously had found their service to others satisfying because they did not expect further reimbursement. How can we develop this selfless spirit of service in our homes?

A parental example that demonstrates living for others will aid in teaching our children to serve. What better service can we do for our families than to perform our regular duties well—father providing and mother keeping house. Many small areas of not-so-regular service will also call for attention: a kitchen cabinet drawer to fix or torn coveralls to mend. Small things, when done without request, are meaningful to our partner and teach children to be alert for areas where they can serve others. Jesus promised that giving even a cup of cold water will not lose its reward.

If children will be good servants, they must first learn a good work ethic. Chores must be done willingly and thoroughly. Enough work should be given to them that they become skilled at prioritizing and managing. When God needs people to do His work, He recruits those who are busy. Those who see no urgency about physical work seldom feel an urgency to serve others.

A generous spirit must be cultivated at home. This begins at a young age by teaching children to share toys, give a coin in the Sunday offering, or pick a bouquet of flowers to take along to Grandma. School-age children can make cards for their sick friend, polish shoes out of turn, or mow the lawn for the aged neighbor man. Youth can spend a day helping a busy mother, give a month to tend an invalid grandparent, or offer to drive the minister to a distant preaching assignment. Parents should look for these opportunities and encourage their children to take them. Family members of any age discover that Jesus first, Others next and Yourself last produces JOY.

Children must learn cooperation with any authority figure they are working under. Parents must be perceptive enough to know when children are

simply doing "eyeservice, as menpleasers." Good servants have been taught to "endure hardness." They do not expect monetary reimbursement for every job they do. They are quick to volunteer their assistance when they have time and energy but another does not. "I'll do it all for Jesus" should be the family's chorus.

Our Lord Jesus said, "It is more blessed [happy] to give than to receive" and indeed, those who try it find it so. The satisfaction of service is a fulfilling life presently, and we can anticipate hearing God's words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

Brother Harold (end of series)

