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In America, the summer of 2016 could well be called the summer of unrest. The two major political parties struggled to rally unitedly around each party's leading candidate. In various confrontations across the nation, cries of prejudice and police profiling followed the use of lethal force by police officers. Protest demonstrations erupted. But the unrest in the world is never confined to one summer or to one country. The problem pervades every society because "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isaiah 57:20). This present world will always be a place of violence and unrest.

In stark contrast to this world of unrest, God's people know true peace because they truly know the Prince of Peace. When He, mankind's provider of peace, was born, the angels declared "on earth peace." But peace on earth seems evasive. Indeed the masses of humanity will never find true peace until they individually find Him.

God had instructed the Jewish captives in Babylon to "seek the peace of the city ... and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7). These principles apply to us as well. We too are interested in the peace of the land in which we live. But how can we help the unrest in the world today? How can we be messengers of peace? We do not take our influence to the protest demonstrations or to the voting booths. The peace we have to offer is neither found nor promoted in those places.

We speak peace to the land when we "pray unto the LORD for it." We are exhorted to make "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks" not only for civil rulers but also for "all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). Are we "helping together by prayer" (2 Corinthians 1:11)? Do our intercessory prayers reach far enough?

Our personal lives should radiate the peace God gives. Certainly the prevalence of violence and terrorism, and the downward spiral of morals in society concern us. But we are not unnerved. God's presence and peace provide a steady calmness. When we discuss current events or deteriorating conditions, we must display and communicate a quiet trust in God, not an arrogant self-confidence. A tranquil spirit that is neither oblivious to nor undone by present world conditions speaks peace to neighbors and business associates.

Our homes and families should speak peace. How important that parents nurture trust in God and instill the character-building qualities of respect and obedience early in life! Customers and others who have contact with our homes will take note. Children who are obviously trusting, happy, and content in family life speak loudly to a troubled, observing world.

Our churches must certainly be peaceable habitations of God's people! A peaceful atmosphere must pervade the public assembly. Peaceable relationships must permeate the whole body. The peace of God must rule every spirit, every interaction between each of the members of the body of Christ. As we faithfully adorn God's provision of peace in these ways, the radiance of God's peace will shine brightly to the surrounding community. We speak peace by active evangelism. God has "an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16) for the troubled world today. We who hold God's true answer of peace must not be silent! We are not the answer, but we hold the answer. God desires that all men come to know His peace, "which passeth all understanding." As God's peace fortifies our hearts and minds, we do not remain silent but readily tell others how to find it. Are we "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope" (1 Peter 3:15) that we possess, even in these unsettling times?

The Scriptures speak of the last days as being times of unrest and turmoil. Even in such a world, God gives His peace to those whose faith and trust is anchored in Him. As His peace rules in our hearts, our homes, and our congregations, our lives radiate hope and our lips speak peace to a troubled world.

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Reflections after Fifty Years Mennonite Messianic Mission 1966-2016

Coming to the fifty-year mark of the beginning of the MMM is an appropriate time to stop and reflect on the path we have traveled and the place to which we have come. This reflection is not intended to highlight the accomplishments of men, but rather to nurture appreciation for what the Lord has provided through His servants. This is also a fitting time to contemplate how different our situation might be today had this movement never taken place. Because of it we are reaping many benefits. Looking back helps to provide perspective for the future.

The story of the formation of the MMM is unique, to say the least. Most, if not all, Mennonite mission efforts before that time were organized by established church groups. However, the Mennonite Messianic Mission was the forerunner of a developing conservative church movement. It was founded by those who were yet members of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference and who were still actively involved in district and congregational responsibilities.

In the years leading up to the beginning of the MMM, various brethren were increasingly concerned about the drift in the church and the gradual departure from time-honored practices. One area of particular concern was the liberalizing influence on the young men who served their alternate (1-W) service in the church's Voluntary Service (VS) program. Many who served in such VS units changed their thinking significantly, and their appreciation for church regulation was actually undermined through this experience.

One large factor that gave impetus to the MMM was the VS unit at Zanesville, Ohio, sponsored by the Conservative Mennonite Fellowship. The brethren involved in that work became aware that the Wilmington Medical Center in Delaware was interested in employing men in 1-W service. These brethren, especially Marion Good, knowing the concerns of some conservative-minded brethren in Pennsylvania, informed them of this interest and encouraged them to begin a VS unit.

So on September 19, 1966, the Mennonite Messianic Mission was officially organized at a meeting in the home of Homer Bomberger. The immediate purpose for this organization was to provide a safe alternative for young men who needed employment for 1-W Service. Five Lancaster Conference bishops--Simon Bucher, Homer Bomberger, Benjamin Eshbach, Aaron Shank, and Isaac Sensenig—gave leadership to this new work. Other interested brethren served with them. When opportunity presented itself, these brethren were ready to step out in faith, believing that God was making a way for their time and situation.

Since the MMM was started to meet the need of providing a VS opportunity for draft-age Mennonite men, why was it called a mission? The VS program in Lancaster Conference was administered by a committee authorized and directed by the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, which was the mission organization for the Conference. Consequently, the brethren who founded the MMM were acquainted with the idea that service of this type fits into the framework of missions.

The VS unit at Wilmington, Delaware, opened in January 1967. During

that year, plans were also made to provide a Bible school for youth. An unused school building was located at Numidia, Pennsylvania, and two three-week terms were offered during the winter of 1967-68. Around the same time, plans were developing to begin a second VS unit at Danville, Pennsylvania.

These efforts definitely helped to counter the liberalizing influences in the church by providing a conservative alternative for those who were interested. The standards established for the units and the Bible school did not represent something new. They were in keeping with the Lancaster Conference Discipline, which was increasingly being ignored.

As time moved on, the MMM gave oversight to various church outreaches in foreign countries. As a result of these efforts, nineteen congregations, with a combined membership of approximately seven hundred, exist today in nine different foreign countries. While many disappointments have come, we must remember the faithful in the churches today and those who await us over yonder. We believe that over the past fifty years, souls have passed from time into eternity to be with the Lord as a result of these mission efforts.

The MMM also oversees the publication interests, literature evangelism efforts, relief activities, rest homes, and other similar church functions and ministries. The MMM's involvement in these many aspects has facilitated the coordination and the administration of the work on a churchwide level. Historically in Lancaster Conference, the board of bishops was considered responsible to safeguard the church and to ensure that she remains on a Scriptural platform. But the mission endeavor was structured in such a way that it was separate from the Bishop Board. While individual bishops had served on the mission board over the years, the bishops as a group had no direct jurisdiction over the mission. For a time, the bishops tried to wield some influence and control over foreign mission policies, but they had limited success. Eventually the mission outreach undermined what the church was endeavoring to uphold.

The brethren involved in the formation of the MMM were deeply concerned that this apostatizing influence through missions would not be repeated. From the beginning, they deliberately planned that some bishops shall be a part of the mission structure and that the primary leadership be in the hands of the bishops. While the bylaws do not direct that all the bishops be part of the MMM, that precedent was established in the beginning and has been followed ever since.

In 1966, the predominant thinking in Mennonite mission circles was that

North American Mennonite applications of nonconformity were not relevant or practical in foreign cultures. When the MMM began foreign mission work, the brethren were strongly resolved that church standards at home must also be the practice on the field.

As we now stand at the fifty-year mark, we reflect on the question that was raised: "Can it be done?" We conclude that, under God's guidance and blessing, it has proven to be possible. One brother, whose father had been a conservative Lancaster Conference bishop, made this comment when visiting one of our foreign missions in 2008: "This is the kind of mission work my father had envisioned."

Also in the early days, the MMM brethren agreed that our primary calling as a church is to present the Gospel and establish churches rather than to pursue humanitarian interests as many missions do. While material aid may be shared, it is more incidental and pursued in the communities where our churches exist. We have avoided establishing humanitarian institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, community schools, and suchlike. We endeavor to keep our focus on presenting the Gospel and nurturing believers. Many challenges have faced the work over the years: how to provide seasoned leadership on the foreign fields; how to maintain a lifestyle that keeps missionary children in touch with life in the States and yet relate satisfactorily with the locals; how to relate to the poverty that pulls at the heartstrings without destroying personal initiative; how to relate to physical threats that come to our missionary staff from time to time; how to discern when to expand the work as requests come; how to provide for families who plan to make the field their permanent home and desire to support themselves. These and many more have challenged the Board many times. Some answers come more readily; others seem to come as we move forward through the years; some seem to remain inconclusive.

We are humbled to see how the Lord has blessed and worked through our feeble efforts. We are overwhelmed with all the needs that we should meet in the great harvest field both at home and abroad. We trust that the Lord will be able to use us through the next fifty years or until He comes.

Brethren HBG and HLM



History of the Lancaster Conference Discipline

Church discipline is a key element of the Anabaptist-Mennonite conception of the church as a called-out group of believers. If the church is to continue to remain separate from the world, she needs a set of standards for maintaining a Scriptural body. Menno Simons stated, "It is evident that a congregation or church cannot continue in the salutary doctrine and in a blameless and pious life without the proper use of discipline. Even as a city without a wall and gates, . . . or a house without walls and doors, so is also a church without the true apostolic exclusion."¹ Through much of Mennonite history, leaders have been guided by an orally transmitted discipline in administering the church. Written confessions of faith date back to Anabaptist times. But only in comparatively recent times have the Mennonites adopted written church disciplines. This article examines the one-hundred-year period in which the Lancaster Conference of the (Old) Mennonite Church used a written church discipline.

Origins

What led the Lancaster Conference to first publish its Rules and Discipline in 1881? Historians have pointed to the numerical growth of the Lancaster Conference and its geographic spread throughout the nineteenth century as reasons why the older oral method of maintaining church discipline was no longer effective. The 1878 handwritten precursor to the 1881 Discipline provides an additional reason. The introduction states, "The reason for this writing is because a dark cloud has arisen over the church in the West." This refers to the issues that led to the Wisler Old Order division in Indiana in 1872. The writer further states that "it is to be feared, if a stop cannot be made, then eventually a universal division will occur." Thus the move to write down and publish a church discipline may be seen as an attempt to nurture cohesion in a time of polarization.

Benjamin Herr, the senior bishop of Lancaster Conference, probably drafted the text of the 1881 Discipline. The Lancaster Conference ministry ratified this document at the fall conference session at Mellinger's Mennonite Meetinghouse on October 7, 1881. The full title of the printed document is Rules and Discipline of the Lancaster Conference. Broadly defined, the rules relate to the organization and function of the church. This includes the structure and function of the conference, the duties and function of the ordained men, the observance of the ordinances, the procedure for receiving members, and the method for dealing with disobedient members. The Discipline refers to practical directives for living out the principles of non-

resistance and separation from the world.

Conference as used in the Discipline may refer to either the collective group of ordained men or to the semiannual meeting of this group to discuss matters of the church. The 1881 edition states that "The conference is necessary" and lists two reasons: "That the bishops, ministers, and deacons become acquainted with each other" and "That they consider, assert, and continue the evangelical rules and discipline of the church advocated by our forefathers." The conference meeting was the heart of church administration, and the Discipline spelled out how the conference functioned. The bishops met together before the conference meeting and received concerns from the ministry. The decision of the bishops was written out and presented to the conference. These decisions needed to be ratified by the conference before being presented to the members as the counsel of the church.

Lay members did not participate in conference decision making. This is not the same as saying they had no voice in conference. Council meetings were held in all the congregations prior to the semiannual conference session. The ministry brought the concerns given by members and shared them at the conference meeting. This feedback ensured that the leaders understood how well the members were satisfied with the housekeeping of the church.

Revisions

The Discipline had no specified procedure or interval for revision. There are thirteen extant editions from 1881 through 1968. The nineteenth-century editions were printed in both English and German. During the twentieth century, the Discipline was revised every decade. The longest period between revisions was from 1954 to 1968.

The 1968 Discipline is more than triple the length of the 1881 Discipline. The initial Discipline was a simple document with numbered points. Over time, more explanatory statements and more Scripture references were added. Early editions issued a general warning against pride. Specific dress standards from a 1937 conference statement were incorporated into the 1943 Discipline. Reflecting in part the influence of Doctrines of the Bible, the 1954 edition contains a separate section on ordinances and, for the first time, lists seven ordinances. The supplement on the Christian Graces was also added at this time.

Institutions such as missions, revival meetings, and Sunday schools began as parachurch organizations. As these institutions developed, church leaders saw the need to bring them under church direction. The Discipline

reflected the need to regulate these institutions and define the duties of their officers. The 1915 Discipline has an article on protracted meetings (revival meetings): "The evangelists who conduct those meetings shall be selected out of the body of this conference, and with the consent of the bishop." In regards to Sunday school, the 1923 Discipline states, "Superintendents shall be consistent communicant members strictly in order." The same edition required the Board of Missions and Charities to present a report of their work to the board of bishops for approval.

The Discipline addressed new threats and changing understanding on issues. Such things as prohibitions on lightning rods and cattle dealing eventually disappeared. The early Discipline did not mention tobacco and prohibited only the sale of liquor. Reflecting the growth of conviction in these areas through sound teaching, later editions of the Discipline protested the use of tobacco and banned alcohol. The changing mores of society brought the need to introduce a statement against divorce and remarriage in the section on matrimony. Lancaster Conference also began to rethink its involvement in politics. In the nineteenth century editions, voting and holding of certain local offices was allowed, but the ministry was requested to abstain from voting. The 1915 Discipline states, "Conference does not approve of members serving in any worldly office whatever."

A variety of factors converged in the mid-twentieth century to increasingly test the authority of the Discipline. As increasing numbers pursued higher education, more members began thinking independently. Emphasis on missions led some congregations to believe that the practical requirements of the Discipline were nonessentials that impeded effective evangelism. The geographic spread of Lancaster Conference and a much-expanded Bishop Board challenged administrative cohesion. As a result, members who disliked a strong application of the Discipline opted to transfer to congregations with a more lenient administration.

Under strong pressure to accommodate to apostatizing trends, the Bishop Board agreed in 1966 to revise the Discipline. The resultant 1968 Discipline marked a shift to a more descriptive type of document. Prohibitions were changed to recommendations. In the most notable example, the new Discipline merely asked the brotherhood to abstain from the use of television, whereas the 1954 Discipline stipulated that the use of television caused a member to forfeit his membership. The adoption of this revised Discipline precipitated the formation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church.

Despite the loosened requirements of the Discipline, members continued

to disregard it. Without a common commitment to a binding Discipline, conference authority diminished, and congregations moved toward autonomous, democratic administration. When, in 1976, the Bishop Board asked the Conference ministry if the 1968 Discipline should be revised, not much interest was aroused. At the spring conference of 1981, Lancaster Conference approved a plan whereby each congregation decided whether to retain the 1968 Discipline or to adopt the 1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith. Subsequently, only a handful of congregations opted to use the Discipline. This marked the virtual end of a written Discipline for Lancaster Conference one hundred years after the first printed edition. Lessons

Failure to administrate the Discipline leads to its irrelevance. A Discipline is understood by what is enforced, not by what is written. The authority of the conference was undermined by uneven enforcement of the Discipline. This led to "district hopping" by members seeking more liberty. Moving the line does not relieve the tension. As members increasingly flouted the Discipline, eventually those bishops who insisted on adherence to the Discipline were accused of radicalism. The 1968 revision attempted to make administration easier by moving the line to accommodate the drift in standards. A historian noted that, "although the 1968 Discipline was more positive in its tone, more lenient in its requirements, and the product of ministerial discussion instead of a committee of bishops, it pleased few. Progressives chafed under the regulations that remained."²

A written Discipline cannot compensate for a lack of spiritual life. The increased length of the last three editions of the Lancaster Conference Discipline could not stem the apostatizing tide. No amount of regulation and no lists of Scriptural bases for doctrine could arrest the course of those bent on the acceptance of the world.

For many years, the written Discipline was a unifying force in the life of the conference. It provided a clearly understood basis for church administration. "Mennonite history has often proved that proper discipline, combined with good pastoral work and effective preaching, produces a wholesome church administration and leadership, which makes for a strong and vigorous church with high standards, in contrast to the church without discipline, when each `does that which is right in his own eyes'."³

Brother Brian

¹ John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1942), p. 349.

² Steven Nolt, *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, October 1992, p. 14.

³ *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II (1956), p. 69.

Wholesome Marriage Relationships (Part 3)

Continuing Commitment

Moving into a new house is exciting. All the planning, the noise, and the dirt of construction are over. The work seems complete—the enjoyment just begun. But in reality, the process of owning and maintaining a house has just begun. Considered individually, the maintenance tasks might seem unimportant. But if a homeowner neglects to fix the dripping drain, to replace the broken shingle, or to clean the furnace, his house may eventually become unfit to live in.

A new marriage has similarities to a new house. The planning and work of the courtship and wedding are behind. In their place is a new home and a happy couple. The work seems complete—the enjoyment just begun. But just as a new house will age and require maintenance, so the journey of marriage will require continuing input from both partners. And like a home-repair list, these small tasks determine the long-term health of the marriage. A wise couple's marriage maintenance list should include ...

Maintaining the commitment of marriage. God declared that a man shall "leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). A wise couple nurtures that cleaving by the discreet, chaste way that they relate to others outside of their marriage. They review the binding promises that they made to God and to each other, jointly beseeching God's help in keeping them. They embrace the Bible's teaching that marriage is to be permanent. They water their marriage garden daily with loving words and actions.

Maintaining the companionship of marriage. A newly married couple does not normally need to be coached to spend time together. But as the years roll on, the competitors of that time together multiply. God-given children bring their demands for food, clothing, and nurture. Many times other good things—school and church responsibilities—also compete for their share of quality time. Without thoughtful living, time together can dwindle—starving the feeling of companionship that a couple once shared. A wise couple realizes that part of balanced living must include spending some quality time cultivating their friendship. A short walk together, a note in a lunchbox, a good book read together a chapter at a time, or a few minutes spent sharing interesting happenings from the day are all meaningful ways of nurturing friendship amidst the pressures of daily life.

Maintaining a joint concern for others. Every godly marriage partner strives to bless his spouse. But a God-fearing couple recognizes that God's intent for marriage extends much farther than satisfying their personal de-

sires. God intends for godly couples and godly homes to be among His world-changing forces. Every godly couple uses some of their resources to meet others' needs, their hospitality to encourage searching folks, their joint prayers to minister to those in distress, or their children to fill service needs they themselves might never reach. The couple who joins in ministering to others will find their commitment to each other growing deeper and richer as they serve together.

Most importantly of all, a godly couple maintains their relationship with God. They recognize that "except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

—*Brother Keith*

PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

Pray for the September conferring meetings. These meetings fill a vital role in providing cohesion among the ministry and the church at large. They also serve to provide inspiration and encouragement for the ministry.

Pray for the people facing unrest in the Middle East, especially for the persecuted Christians. May the knowledge of persecution in other parts of the world help us to appreciate our freedoms and to actively promote the Gospel message while we have the opportunity to do so.

Thank God for the many open doors and opportunities for having foreign missions. The fields are ripe for harvest. Staffing the foreign missions is an ongoing challenge. Pray that the Lord of harvests may move His people to respond to the needs. Pray for the workers on the field that they may find the grace of God sufficient for the challenges and responsibilities that they face. Also pray for the native believers that they would remain faithful.

Thank God for another bountiful harvest and for the privilege to live in a land of plenty.

May we use these blessings to further the kingdom and not to pursue our own selfish interests.

