



Beacon

FEBRUARY 2023

LOCUST GROVE MENNONITE CHURCH Belleville, PA

BY IVAN YODER

VOL. 53 | NO. 2
A CMC PUBLICATION

Reflections on God's Work - Part 2

God is at work. In 2023, the *Beacon* feature articles will seek to capture a snapshot of the ways God is working in churches across our conference. We pray that these articles encourage your faith and spur you on to join God in the work he is doing in your local congregation.

~Kelsey Jurkovich, Publication & Literature Committee

Locust Grove Mennonite Church is located in central Pennsylvania. While that location is important to who we are, what God is doing in and through Locust Grove is even more important. We can see God working in individuals' lives and rejoice in His work in this body of Christ-followers in rural Pennsylvania. Locust Grove, while fitting most categories of a rural church is increasingly diverse. We are blessed as a body to come from a variety of backgrounds and have a wide spectrum of ages.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose (Phil. 2:13 NIV).

God's faithfulness and work have been evident, especially over the last few years during our pastoral leadership transition. In addition, God's direction has been clear through the challenges many churches have weathered with COVID-19 and other cultural influences. The unity that God has brought to the elders and leadership team has been a special blessing for Locust Grove. We are witnesses to His desire for the church, Christ's bride, to be unified and serve Him with purpose.

...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13 NIV).

Collectively, we strive for the spiritual maturity of all who call Locust Grove home. Locust Grove embraces God's call to minister to and disciple children and youth. Nearly 40% of individuals attending on an average Sunday are under the age of eighteen. Countless people at Locust Grove use their gifts to teach and mentor these young lives. One of the real ways we are seeing the fruit of this labor is in the large number of young adults now investing back into our youth and the larger church body. This call to minister to children and youth spills over into our community through Vacation Bible School and

Mega Sports Camp. These outreaches have touched the lives of many children and parents.

God's direction has also been evident in our ministries to single parents. In a country where 35% of children, ages 0–17 years old, are being raised by single parents, Locust Grove has found a mission field. In January 2015, the church's leadership team authorized a Single Parent Family Ministry (SPFM). In the seven years since, the Holy Spirit led SPFM in implementing several programs including a Single Moms Support Group led by the ministry's coordinator. As a result, six single moms have committed to sharing Jesus while living a life of purity. Most recently, the ministry has two dads working to initiate DADS MATTER, a ministry for single dads.

The Single Moms Support group meets two Friday nights/month at a local church's café, serving dinner from 6:30–7 p.m. followed by children going to activities while the mothers meet for the next hour with a time of sharing, prayer, and Bible study. Attendance ranges from 25–40 moms and children. Attendees are invited to experience the love of Jesus regardless of lifestyle. A thought-provoking encouragement recently has been to hear single moms ask, "Do we have church this Friday?"

God is continuing to mold and shape the ministry and mission of Locust Grove. That purpose is increasingly focused on the unreached, not just around the world but especially in our own community. We anticipate God's work in and through Locust Grove in the years ahead because we can attest to His faithfulness in the past. 🙏



Ivan has been a CMC minister since 2010 and lead pastor at Locust Grove since early 2021. He and his wife, Pam (who serves part-time in women's ministry), are the parents of two adult children.



Sharpen Your Axe

BY BRIAN HERSHBERGER

The story is told (source unknown) of a strong, young man who was approached by the foreman of a logging crew who was looking to hire a woodcutter. The offer was good and the people were great, so the young man took the job, determined to do his very best. He showed up early Monday morning, was given an axe, was shown where to work, and he began chopping down a tree. The foreman was impressed. Proud of his new hire, he said, “You are going to do great here!”

The first day the new woodcutter cut down 18 trees. Motivated by the praise of his boss, he worked even harder the next day, but was only able to cut down 15 trees. The third day he tried even harder, but only cut down 10 trees. Day after day passed, and his production continued to decline. Pretty soon the woodcutter was coming in early, skipping his breaks, and staying late, but to no avail. Finally, the foreman said, “We’re going to have to let you go.”

The woodcutter was devastated. “But I’m working as hard as I can,” said the young man. “I arrive early, I leave late, and I even work through my breaks. Please give me another chance.”

There’s also something to be said for careful preparation—investing time and energy into learning, training, and preparing for ministry.

The foreman knew this to be true. He was impressed with the young man’s integrity and work ethic, so he stopped and thought for a bit. Then he asked, “When is the last time you sharpened your axe?”

The young man replied, “Never. I haven’t sharpened it. I’ve been much too busy cutting down trees to take time for that.”

Ecclesiastes 10:10 NIV

If the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.

Abraham Lincoln, one of the most influential presidents in American history, is credited with saying, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

Perhaps you know where I’m going with this—especially if you remember an article with a similar title written by Steve Swartz several years ago. In case you don’t, let me just say it... There’s something to be said for a willingness to roll up your sleeves and jump right into ministry; a willingness to be in over your head and depend completely on the Holy Spirit to lead you. There’s also something to be said for careful preparation—investing time and energy into learning, training, and preparing for ministry. Perhaps a combination of intentional preparation and then still being thrust into situations where you are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit is the ideal space to live in.

Could I be so bold as to make a suggestion? Rosedale Bible College offers an exceptional axe-sharpening opportunity through its *Training in Ministry* program. This program offers several tracks of online courses designed to give individuals practical skills for effective ministry in the local church. Last year, I took a course titled *Congregational Gift Development* that, quite frankly, I wish every pastor, elder, and ministry leader in CMC would take. In the months that followed, I found numerous ways to apply what I learned in my role on the leadership team of Lighthouse Fellowship.

CMC believes enough in the value of training and preparation for ministry that we offer to those who attend a CMC church what is called the *Leadership Development Scholarship* for classes taken through RBC’s *Training in Ministry* program. The scholarship covers one-third of the cost of each class taken. Contact the CMC office for more information.

While we’re already into the second month of 2023, perhaps it is not too late to set another goal for this new year. Along with other personal goals you may have for yourself, how about setting a goal to sharpen your ministry axe? Get intentional about growing and developing as a disciple of Christ, a student of God’s Word, and a worker in His kingdom. 🙏



Brian serves as executive director of CMC. He and his wife, Sharla, live in Marysville, Ohio, and are involved in community outreach and worship ministry at Lighthouse Fellowship.



BY RBC



This or That? Part 2

Why we have a “Sharing Time” at Turkey Run Mennonite Church in Logan, Ohio

~ Mike & Ruth Bender

The open sharing of testimonies, praise reports, and prayer requests has been a regular part of the faith family gatherings at Turkey Run as far back as can be remembered.

Located close to where Fairfield, Perry, and Hocking counties join, Turkey Run congregants have been meeting since Ohio became a state in 1803. Ellis Good, a grandson of one of the founders, was born in the early 1900’s and is remembered to have regularly shared encouraging testimonies, though not a preacher.

There are several reasons why the opportunity of sharing is important to us—one being the seeming trend of the modern church for less congregational participation. A leadership-team-driven mentality can create an atmosphere that makes one feel like worship is something to be observed rather than participated in. The current trend in worship music is another example of what can sometimes feel more like “performance” than “participation.”

Paul says in Romans 1:12 that in our gathering together we “may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (NIV).

Our physical presence is important, but the sharing of our joys, sorrows, and needs draws us closer together as a family. We have found that some children even feel comfortable to share what is on their hearts with the congregation. Children need to feel that they are an important part of the life blood of the church. That being said, there is a level of risk, which takes wisdom on the part of the one moderating.

The idea of church is to draw the congregation together as a family. Not only do we invite participation in sharing, but also in offering prayers for the things shared. With our lives being so busy and pulled in multiple directions, we believe public worship is an important time for congregants to connect as the Body. So, for the church at Turkey Run, with close to one hundred attendees, we cherish this time of open sharing.

Why we don’t have a “Sharing Time” at Maple City Chapel in Goshen, Indiana

~ Todd Miller

Once upon a time...we had an open mic-sharing time. Congregants shared updates and prayer requests. While it provided a sense of care and community, there were both significant and cringe moments.

When I was a teen, such times often felt long and impersonal—like Aunt Mary sharing about her friend suffering from gallbladder complications, Mr. Yoder talking every time the mic was passed (which somehow always ended on politics), or the mysterious “unspoken” request. Five to ten minutes of sharing was often followed by a five-minute prayer detailing each request. (I know it was at least five minutes because I used to see how many times I could hold my breath. Don’t judge me too harshly!)

Authentic sharing and prayer provide opportunities to care for one another. As Maple City Chapel grew, we found several alternative ways to effectively meet this need. Small groups provide an intimate setting to share deeply with people who know us well and are invested in our lives. That just couldn’t happen as we grew to 300, 500, then 900.

On Sunday mornings, our Prayer Team stands ready for anyone who responds to the sermon or desires prayer. Our Intercessor Team meets weekly to pray for the church and each request that comes in. We also send out Care Notes, which are updates or immediate prayer concerns to those who are signed up to receive them.

With these approaches, not only are we better meeting many of these needs, we are freed to use our limited meeting time to build the Body and connect meaningfully with guests without making them feel like outsiders.

In today’s online world, privacy is also a factor. It is a priority for us to have a strong online presence. Most who visit Maple City first watched our services online. Do people want their personal prayer requests aired to the world?

Sharing needs and caring for each other will always be part of the church. How we achieve it sometimes changes. We have found what for us feels like a better way. 🙏



RBC is the educational arm of CMC, helping students lay the groundwork for their future by providing two years of mentorship, community, and biblical education in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition.



This Next Step

BY MADALYN

In the midst of tradition and cultural Catholicism in the 1970s, a group of young Spaniards began to search for something new as they felt the Holy Spirit call them to more. Together, they formed a small faith community, read Scripture, and pursued a deeper relationship with Jesus. From these small beginnings grew *Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas*, a Mennonite church in Burgos, Spain. Over the years, various Anabaptist workers have dedicated time and energy to nurture this fledgling movement into a thriving congregation. Included in this group of mission partners are Rosedale International’s newest workers: Brian and Noelia.

Brian—a Mennonite boy from Indiana—and Noelia—the daughter of *Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* founding members—first met and fell in love through a short-term missions program in the United States. Together, they followed God’s call to Spain, where for fifteen years, they have served in Burgos, investing in *Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* and the surrounding community. This couple began in youth ministry, helping to disciple the church’s young adults; as their ministry evolved, they took on work with young couples and families. Now, as they transfer to RI as their sending agency, Brian and Noelia will take on a new role once again.

“We will be stepping into more of a pastoral role within the congregation,” Brian explains. For the next few years, they will work alongside their pastor, learning the ins and outs of church leadership. “Once he retires, the plan is that I will take his position as pastor of the church.”

As this new aspect of their ministry takes shape, where do Brian and Noelia hope to lead their congregation? “Many of [our young people] are starting to look to the stories of their parents and how they were part of this great Jesus movement in the ‘70s and ‘80s,” Brian shares. “They are asking the question, *what is God wanting to do in our time, with our generation?* Part of what [Noelia and I] feel God calling us into is to lead and nurture and guide that process of discovering what this next step is.”

Something that weighs heavily on Brian and Noelia’s hearts is the reality that, despite an overwhelming Catholic presence in the country, Spain remains spiritually barren—and many communities have no evangelical or protestant witness. In recent years, *Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* has begun to grapple

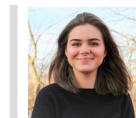
with this, beginning a small cell group in a neighboring town with the hopes of establishing a church in the community. “As we’ve watched this process and seen how different people—including missionaries from other congregations—have gotten involved, it’s begun to stir a new vision” for the church to become a hub that trains and sends people into Spain’s smaller towns.

Brian and Noelia also look to the church’s history of service to inform its present and future. “We’ve always been a church that has reached out to those who need it most. In the ‘80s and ‘90s, that looked like running drug rehabilitation centers and homes for people who were terminally ill with AIDS. Later in the ‘90s, they got involved with a ministry in Africa to start a home for orphaned children, a school, and a small business.”

Now, *Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* has seen and responded to the need of those seeking refuge in Spain. “Over the past ten years, we’ve seen a large number of refugees coming from Venezuela, from Colombia, from Ukraine. The church has opened its arms and welcomed them—giving them food, clothing, and a place to stay, helping them find jobs, teaching them the language.” This outreach, coupled with a merge with a Baptist church a decade ago, has created a diverse congregation of 200—“for Spain, a pretty large church!”

As they look toward leading this community of believers, Brian and Noelia are open to whatever God has for them. “God has always had different challenges for us over the years; there have always been different steps of faith to take. We are walking into this very humbly, not really sure *why* God has called us into this role, but certain that he has.” 📍

Rosedale International is excited to be a part of this important work! Please join us in praying over Brian, Noelia, and their daughters Mikaela, Elisa, and Norah as they navigate this new stage of life together. Ask for trust in God day by day; for balance between ministry and family time; for wisdom as they mentor other believers; and for deep relationship with Christ and each other.



Madalyn serves as Media Coordinator for Rosedale International. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, and attends Shiloh Mennonite Church.