



## FAIRVIEW MENNONITE CHURCH ALBANY, OREGON

BY BRANDON FUNK

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### Reflections on God's Work – Part 9

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

Fairview Mennonite Church is a gathering of Jesus followers and seekers with a long history, and, I believe, a bright future. We are a mix of generations and backgrounds. While nurseries are available during the service for parents to take their children, we don't have scheduled programs for kids during our services. The result of this is a service in which all ages join together in worship and the teaching of the Word. Our youth group fills the front benches of the sanctuary each week, while the rest of the congregation fills in around them.

The word "discipleship" comes to mind as I reflect on what I have been witnessing take place in our church. Over the years, I've heard so much about methods and approaches to discipleship, and yet in this season of our congregation, I've been struck with the reality that, while strategy is important to some degree, strategy can never replace what happens when people simply care for and walk with others in sincere love and concern. A wise friend once told me, "Brandon, culture eats strategy for lunch...and breakfast." This has stuck with me ever since, and helps me understand what the Apostle Paul was driving at in Romans 12:9-13: *"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality"* (ESV).

While we will never live these out perfectly, I see the desire to be these things, and the posture of many to live them out in our fellowship. We all need each other if we are going to turn against evil and toward what is good. If we are going to love one another and show honor, someone has to go first. If we are going to maintain lives of purpose and direction instead of apathy and service to the Lord, we need other people to work alongside. Rejoicing on one's own can be difficult and being patient in tribulation extremely lonely. It is difficult to

be constant in prayer without others testifying to the power of prayer in their life. Whether these commands of Paul are being lived out by mature, long-term Christians walking through unprecedented circumstances in their lives, or new believers coming out of various backgrounds into faith in Jesus, both parties have something to learn from each other and to contribute to the spiritual well-being of their brother or sister.

My friendship with Mike is one that has meant a great deal to me recently. Mike came to faith in Jesus out of a long history of Mormonism. Before Mike and I knew each other, we both went to an event where the host of a call-in radio show was speaking. After one of the sessions, we both got to the front of the line at the same time to visit with Steve. Steve introduced the two of us. Steve had led Mike to the Lord through the program, and baptized him not long before this. But since he lived in California, Steve and Mike's relationship was from a distance. On that day, Mike and I exchanged numbers and a friendship started. Mike has become a regular attender of our church and while we have journeyed together through discipleship material in recent months, the real blessing has been the gain of a friendship and a brother in Christ to share life with as we both seek to walk with Jesus.

My prayer is that our desire for impressive programs and growth strategies would be replaced with desire for authentic community. Not one where we wallow together in defeat and call it authenticity, but one where we are honest about struggles and encourage one another to continue to pursue victory in Christ, and genuine evidence of the fruit of the Spirit exist. May we be known most of all by our love. 🙏



Brandon is the pastor of Fairview Mennonite Church. He enjoys playing guitar and exploring the Pacific Northwest with his wife, Cindy, and their four children.



# Average Joe

BY ANDREW SWARTZENTRUBER

Today has been a long day of being reminded again of everything I am not. Perhaps you can relate. I'm not wealthy, not a model student, I won't be on famous podcasts, I'm no speaker, I'm not a pastor, I have no PHD, I've started no businesses, or revolutions, and this article isn't going to start a revival. I'm simply an average joe.

**My heroes are not the people who are doing epic things or having sensational adventures, though they used to be.**

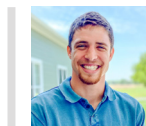
This is a hard pill to swallow—to look around at my peers and see all they have accomplished, how far they have gotten in life, and the people they are impacting. Often, I can brush off these feelings of inadequacy by telling myself that I don't really want the lives they are living. But that is a lie. I do! I want to make an impact, to make a difference. I want to have a family and work as a youth pastor, lead worship, or pastor a church. But God just hasn't gifted me that way. I don't stand out above the crowds for my wit or prowess with words or my great accomplishments. I'm an average joe.

Here is the truth. My heroes are not the people who are doing epic things or having sensational adventures, though they used to be. My heroes are a maintenance man that takes time to tell tenants about Jesus, a retired missionary who seeks to simply know God more, a farmer whose heart breaks for his unsaved neighbors, a woman who sits with an elderly mother so her kids can have a break, the man up the street who was hurt by my church yet chooses to forgive and hold no offense, a grandpa who faithfully visits prisoners without accolades or recognition, and a recent high school graduate who wanted to be a first responder but knew he couldn't handle the atmosphere, so he changes his path.

Most of us will not die extraordinary deaths or do remarkable things for Christ. But what if the prize is in the ordinary? The

world will not be changed on Sunday morning. The world is changed Monday through Saturday by a host of average joes, one kind word at a time, one intentional deed at a time, one toilet scrubbed to perfection, one more child disciplined, one leaky pipe or tire changed by the road, one more wrench turned, one more paper written, one more round on the tractor, one choice at a time. And only you can make that choice, only you will be sitting next to that person on the airplane, only you will be in that fender bender, only you work with those coworkers, only you are the father or mother of your kids, only you. That is who God wants, only you! Not your job, your fancy ideas of who you could be, or what you could do. God uses you in the everyday mundane things in life.

This life is not about us and we are fools to think it is. I used to pray for God to use me, but realized I prayed that because I didn't want to feel left out. I wanted to feel needed by God. Praying for God to use US still puts too much of US in the picture. Words that have changed my life are rarely remembered by the speaker. That's how it should be. So, take time to listen to others, hurt with those who are hurting, kick in the pants those who need it, seek to live a peaceful and quiet life. Send a text simply telling someone you are thinking of them, phone a friend, or an enemy, help put chairs away or simply say good morning to someone. The world will keep spinning when we are gone—read Ecclesiastes. We can't change the world. But God uses average things to change the world. So do your average things and let God change the world. 🙏



Andrew is a fifth-generation farmer and EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) from Greenwood, Delaware. He's an avid outdoorsman and has spent 87% of his life barefoot.



**Side note:** For a photo overview of Multiply 2023 please visit our website at:

[www.rosedalenetwork.org/media/photo-gallery/](http://www.rosedalenetwork.org/media/photo-gallery/)



# How We Celebrate Communion

BY RBC

**Arepas**  
Venezuelan

**Challah**  
Jewish (Israel/German)

**Injera**  
Ethiopian & Eritrean

## ***This or That?*** Part 8

RBC's series of Beacon articles this year showcases a wide variety of differing practices encountered among Rosedale Network congregations. We hope these articles promote thoughtful discussions and spark new ideas about the differing ways our churches are faithfully seeking to honor Christ as His Body.

### ***...at Pigeon River Mennonite Church*** –Dave Maurer

**Preparation:** Communion is usually announced at least a week ahead with the encouragement for everyone to prepare their hearts and to come at peace with their brothers and sisters and the Lord.

**Frequency:** Usually twice a year on World Communion Sunday and Maundy Thursday. Occasionally we add a third time on another Sunday morning such as Valentine's Day, when it connects to the morning theme, or we sense the importance of a unifying practice.

**Elements:** Typically, homemade gluten free wafers and grape juice. We also provide a dairy-free option for those who need it. During COVID, we used prepackaged elements but have moved away from that now. On World Communion Sunday, we have offered "breads from around the world" such as arepas from Venezuela, injera from Ethiopia, and challah from Israel/Germany.

**Mode of Distributing:** Most often, we pass the elements on trays on Sundays and around the dinner table on Maundy Thursday. We have also practiced coming forward (for those who are able) to receive the elements personally. And at times we have gathered around three tables at the front of the sanctuary at which elders serve as table hosts for more of an intimate community feel.

**Words Spoken:** After introductory comments are made about our open table, the mode of distributing, the elements offered, and the children's blessing, a prayer is offered that ends with the Lord's Prayer in unison. The elements are consecrated and a unison prayer from the back of the hymnal is read before the elements are distributed.

**Who may partake?** We practice an open table for all those who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

**What about children?** Children are invited to come to a pastor at the back of the sanctuary. We then offer them fish crackers and grapes along with a blessing.

**A few concluding tidbits:** we view communion as primarily symbolic. Our Maundy Thursday service typically begins with a simple meal and also includes footwashing. Along with communion, we usually take up an offering for the sharing fund.

### ***...at Steel City Mennonite Church*** –David K. Kochsmeier

We observe communion at least four times per year, with two being a part of the regular worship service. The other two observances of communion are usually held on Good Friday and during our Christmas Eve service.

We practice "open" communion when sharing the bread and cup. Everyone who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is welcome to participate regardless of church membership or denominational affiliation. Children under the age of accountability are also invited to partake, provided the parents (or grandparents) use the communion time as a time of teaching regarding the sacrifice of Jesus.

As an aside, we announce there is grape juice in the cups. While this may be an understood fact by many, it isn't always known, especially to those from other denominational traditions. Several years ago, a newer Christ-follower did not partake of the cup because this person was a recovering alcoholic and did not want to jeopardize sobriety. A lesson was learned. Now we always announce that grape juice will be used.

Our methods of sharing communion vary broadly. We have often used the traditional communion serving trays passed through the rows. We have also used those same serving trays to invite people to come and be served by the elders. Other times, the elements were stationed throughout the sanctuary, and people were encouraged to meet in smaller groups of six to ten people, serving one another.

Another way of serving communion that has become meaningful is having people tear off a piece of bread, dip it into the cup, and then eat. There is something about the tearing and dipping that makes it rather poignant. Through our actions, we are reminded of Christ's death for us.

Regardless of the "how" and "when" of our practice of communion, we desire to do all in remembrance of Christ and in doing so, proclaim His death until He returns. 🕊️



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



# Only the Beginning

BY MADALYN



This summer, 240 youth and leaders from ten different groups converged on the Rosedale International Center (RIC). They came to spend a week completing Rosedale International (RI)'s City Challenge program. For a total of five weeks in June and July, this current of high school students filled the building and rushed out into the broader Columbus metropolis, buoyed by their love for Jesus, their energy, and their excitement to serve.

The mission of City Challenge is twofold: impact the neighborhood, and impact the individual. Through times of worship and teaching, neighborhood prayer walks, service projects, work with local nonprofits, and a city-wide prayer challenge, youth "discover what they are willing to give to follow Jesus" and serve as His hands and feet in the city.

**As they willingly stepped out of their comfort zones to follow Him, God worked in and through each individual City Challenger.**

This year, the Monday-evening street outreach called "brown bagging" seemed to have a particular impact on the City Challengers. This first outreach sent the youth directly into Columbus carrying two sack meals apiece—one for themselves, and one for a homeless member of the community. "This was the first time in the week where [students] were asked to talk to a stranger, producing situations where they had to step out of their comfort zone and share the love of Jesus with someone," explains Phil, RI Short-Term Programs Facilitator. "Every week when groups returned to talk about their experience, we would hear, 'I never knew how impactful I could be if I stopped to really see the people I was walking by, and to recognize their desire for someone to listen.'"

Rochelle, RI Administrative Intern, also brought up brown bagging as an example of God's movement in the City Challengers. When her group ran out of meals designated for others, they didn't hesitate to sacrifice. "They started giving out their personal meals, knowing they wouldn't get anything

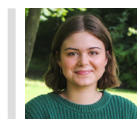
else to eat for the rest of the day. They didn't once complain—they just kept searching for others who needed it more."

As they willingly stepped out of their comfort zones to follow Him, God worked in and through each individual City Challenger. "One student shared that he has always struggled to pray," Rochelle remembers. "He never knows what to say. But when he prayed for the people he met while brown bagging, he was suddenly filled with words to say. He was so excited that he was able to pray for others. He kept sharing that experience with us all week! It meant so much to him that when he was praying for others, God gave him the words to say."

"Prayer seemed to be where students experienced the most growth and fruitfulness throughout the week," observes Phil. "Students learned that prayer is impactful, can be done anywhere, and is born out of a relationship with Jesus."

Watching God move in His young followers during City Challenge is exciting—but it is only the beginning. The moments spent in worship and prayer, the practices of fellowship and accountability, and the sacrifice of outreach are all seeds planted and tended. As youth groups return home, Rosedale International hopes that they will take what they've learned and reproduce it as fruit in their own communities. "The needs can look different, but they are always there. City Challenge strives to show that we have a responsibility even if it manifests in small acts of service or small sacrifices. We can do things, no matter where we are, to serve God's kingdom." 🙏

*Rosedale International is grateful to see God make Himself known to Rosedale Network youth groups, and through them, to Columbus. City Challenge is a thriving program, and the demand from Rosedale Network churches is much greater than the number of openings per year. We see this as a positive sign of life, and celebrate that God is using City Challenge to work in a new generation of believers.*



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