



FAIRLAWN MENNONITE CHURCH APPLE CREEK, OH

BY KELSEY JURKOVICH

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Reflections on God's Work – Part 11

God is at work. In 2023, the *Beacon* feature articles 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

One reality that marks Fairlawn Mennonite Church is the abundance of children the Lord has blessed us with. Our senior pastor is fond of saying, "We take the command to be fruitful and multiply seriously at Fairlawn!" It's true! Seeing someone with a newborn baby is a regular occurrence in our church.

We are starting to see the stirring of God in the context of our families. With every child born, a new responsibility has been given to the child's parents—to teach them to love and follow God (Deut. 6:4-9). With the birth of every new parent, a new responsibility is placed on the church leaders—to equip them for the work of discipling their children (Eph. 4:11-16).



In efforts to fulfill our responsibility to our parents, this past April we launched an annual Family Discipleship Conference aimed at equipping parents to pass

their faith on to their children. The theme of the first year was *God's Design for Family Discipleship*.

Through preaching and breakout sessions, we showed parents their God-given responsibility to disciple their children as well as help them think through some of the cultural issues confronting their families.

There was a modest attendance of just over 50 parents. This number represents about 25% of parents with children under age 18 at Fairlawn. While the attendance was lower than I would have liked, these parents account for nearly 70 children.

The way I saw God working in these families came through some of the results we received from our conference survey. The last

survey prompt was, "Write down 1-2 things you will implement or change with your family discipleship based on this conference."

Here are some of the responses:

"Create a disciplined rhythm for worship in our home. Focus on the importance of being honest and devoted role models for our children."

"Family meals together. Pray together as a family more often."

"More structured Bible study with the kids. Bible reading with them and more missional living."

"We want to be more intentional in our family worship."

"Work on myself so I can help my family."

"I want to determine the goals we have for our kids and then begin to think about/prioritize our time with them based on those things."

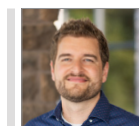
"We want to get better at sharing our story with the kids and being more intentional about family time."

"Preparing our children to care for their own family and home someday."

"Consistent family worship time. Intentionality with kids on planning things to do together."

Of all the many hours spent planning and executing this conference, the best part of the whole thing came a few days

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Kelsey is the associate pastor of Fairlawn Mennonite Church in Apple Creek, Ohio. He and his wife, Abbie, have four sons.



A Proposal for the Commander in Chief

BY PRESTON YODER

On January 10, 1940, seven delegates of the Friends, Mennonite, and Brethren churches gathered at the Lee House Hotel in Washington, D.C. They worked non-stop from morning until noon to finalize their agreement. With agreement confirmed and little time to spare, they signed the document. They put on their coats, stepped out into the cold noon air, and walked west on snow-covered Pennsylvania Avenue. They did not want to be late for their 12:30 p.m. meeting with the commander in chief of the United States Army, President Franklin Roosevelt.

Their three-minute walk to the White House gave time for silent prayer. The idea for this visit emerged in October at a Mennonite church conference in Goshen, Indiana. Other historic peace churches also sensed the escalation of war in Europe, which echoed the global climate of war just two decades prior. The Selective Service Act in World War I removed the possibility of exemption from military service. As a result, many draftees who followed Jesus' command to love their enemies, refusing to take up arms in military service, suffered persecution or imprisonment. As the White House came fully into view, the delegates prayed that a better law would be drafted before World War II broke out.

[D]rafted young people who were members of peace churches could register as conscientious objectors.

President Roosevelt cordially welcomed them into the Oval Office at 12:30 p.m. He expressed interest in how the Mennonite colony in Paraguay was getting along. His knowledge of the colony, and friendly manner, put the delegates at ease. The peace church delegates expressed their appreciation for President Roosevelt's attempts to keep the United States out of the growing war in Europe, thanking him for his efforts to bring peace to that region. They promised to support those efforts in any way they could.

The delegates presented their signed proposal and the President considered its contents. The proposal contained a conscientious objector clause to be included in any draft law made by the United States. President Roosevelt appeared receptive to the group's proposal. He appreciated the delegates' specific suggestions on how civilian service could be

written into law. Yet, when the meeting ended at 1:00 p.m., he had made no promise to support any of their proposals. He urged the delegates to speak to the Attorney General, who would be responsible for overseeing the writing of a draft law.

In meeting with Attorney General Murphy, the delegation handed him the same proposal they had given the President. In return, they received a promise that the matter would be brought before his cabinet before he left office. Attorney General Murphy also agreed that conscientious objectors were valuable to the United States. The delegates were grateful to hear his perspective and eager to include it in their report to their home churches. The delegates left with gratitude in their hearts to God for blessing their meetings with such positive outcomes.

Nine months later, the new Selective Service Act went into place. The peace churches gave thanks when they read these words in the new law: *Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to require any person to be subject to combatant training and service in the land and naval forces of the United States who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.*

Thanks to answered prayers, the work of the delegates, and the initiation by the U.S. government of the Civilian Public Service program, drafted young people who were members of peace churches could register as conscientious objectors, providing voluntary service as civilians in matters of national interest. The United States benefited from millions of dollars' worth of voluntary labor, while the churches were able to live out their peace convictions, without fear of hostility and imprisonment.

Thanks to the bold proposal and divine favor granted these visitors to the White House in 1940, historic peace churches continue to have the legal right, in the event of a draft, to serve

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Preston is pastor of Shiloh Mennonite Church and moderator of Rosedale Network of Churches. He and Liz serve as pastoral marriage counselors and enjoy volunteer work and outreach in their community. They have three young daughters and live in Plain City, Ohio.



Surviving Church Hurt

BY JESSICA MILLER

Growing up as a pastor's kid, I encountered some of the best and worst of the American church. I even felt somewhat alienated from the church for some time in my late teens. My dad was treated horribly by several church members, and the church leadership didn't handle the situation very well.

People have left the church over less brutal circumstances, but my three siblings and I all pursued vocations in church or parachurch ministry. What caused all of us to want to support and advance the church after what we went through? As I pondered this, several reasons came to mind.

Drawing of the Spirit

When the church is flourishing as God intended, believers, and often non-believers, are drawn to her. Just as the Old Testament temple was physically beautiful, the bride of Christ is spiritually beautiful because she is "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22 NIV). Those who have experienced a taste of the Holy Spirit's presence in the church are often inspired to work for her growth and advancement.

As a young teenager, I remember a particularly sweet taste at one church where my dad was pastoring. A spirit of love, gentleness, unity, and openness to the Holy Spirit was present. Some Pentecostals joined who were disillusioned with their denomination and sensed the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. Several young adults with wild pasts were coming to Christ, including one who formerly had "The Blade" as a nickname, due to his violent past. There was great anticipation about what God was doing and what might happen next.

Recognizing Our Real Enemy

Would it surprise you if the church I just described was the same one I also mentioned in the introduction? If you are at all familiar with church, you won't be surprised. You know that churches go through different seasons, and sometimes—precisely because a church is flourishing—it becomes a target for spiritual attack. This understanding helped my siblings and me navigate that tumultuous time. Rather than blaming the humans involved, we recognized that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12), and we deployed our spiritual weapons to fight.

Keeping Jesus Central

One of the biggest reasons I believe my siblings and I survived the church hurt we experienced was because we had been disciplined into personal relationships with Jesus, primarily through devotional Bible reading and prayer times. One purpose of the church is for its members to learn and grow closer to the Lord.

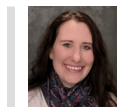
I was convicted recently while reading the Psalms. David writes about wanting to spend all his days in the temple where he can "gaze on the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). I confess that there are many social and emotional benefits of church that can steer my focus away from Jesus. Church hurt can be a time of testing to see if one's heart is truly grounded in the Lord or, rather, tied to the benefits of a church community.

Final Thoughts

Later in life, I spent two years as part of a simple home fellowship with a few other families, living in a remote location overseas. Our fellowship and prayer times usually centered around discussion of what God was doing and prayer for those who were close to the Kingdom. I lived with expectancy, anticipating God to move in people's hearts and draw them to Himself.

If the church hasn't appeared very attractive to you recently, try taking the initiative to ask your fellow congregants what God is doing, what He is teaching them, or how you can pray for them. You might be surprised to hear how God is dwelling among us—His people—working in our lives, sanctifying us, and preparing us for the good works that He has for us.

Despite her brokenness and failures, Jesus loves the Church. He founded her, sacrificed Himself for her, and is shepherding her. When she is operating as she should, with each member contemplating Him and being transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18), she is glorious!



Jessica is co-director of the Explore and Bridge programs at Rosedale Bible College, where she loves serving the Lord together with her husband, Jeff. They have a daughter, Joy, who was born in May 2023.



The Thread That Follows Through

BY MADALYN



In the summer of 2015, a school bus stuffed with young fruit trees made its way down a Nicaraguan highway. By the end of the day, these saplings had been gifted to local families, planted, and prayed over by the youth group of Shiloh Mennonite Church. They didn't know it then, but these teens had also planted the first seeds of Rosedale Business Group (RBG)'s annual Christmas Giving Brochure.

A short time later, Shiloh member Wayne Yoder approached Andrew, former Rosedale International (RI) Director of Partner Development. "He said, 'All these other brochures go around at Christmas time. I would love to see something from the [Rosedale Network] constituency,'" remember Larry and Dot, RBG Directors. "Andrew said, 'Let's do it—but let's start with Shiloh, and see how it goes.' Shiloh's response was incredible, so we started growing it from there."

Each project, from fruit trees in Nicaragua to sewing machines in Asia, directly benefits the spiritual generations born from RI's work overseas.

Since 2017, over 2,500 fruit trees have blessed Nicaraguan families and are beginning to bear an abundant harvest of lemons, oranges, and avocados—a consistent source of nutrition and a potential source of income. Thousands of school kits provide essential classroom supplies to children in Nicaragua, Spain, and Thailand who could not go to school without them. Scholarships enable adult believers to attend leadership training programs and Bible school. RBG's Christmas Giving Brochure has grown to become a network-wide publication, featuring projects that impact communities where RI workers currently serve or have served in the past.

It's no secret that organizations lean into the holiday season when asking for donations. Already, a crowd of ministries is lobbying for our end-of-the-year empathy, attention, and money. When we are offered a myriad of good causes to support, why choose Rosedale Business Group's Christmas projects? When asked this question, Larry and Dot did not hesitate to answer—their words were full of excitement about RBG and their model of support.

Perhaps the most meaningful aspect of RBG's Christmas projects is the relational connection between the giver and recipient.

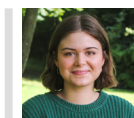
Each project, from fruit trees in Nicaragua to sewing machines in Asia, directly benefits the spiritual generations born from RI's work overseas. "The gift actually reaches people who are connected to the RI family," Dot emphasized. "It's like the Rosedale Network blessing our own family, our own people."

But RBG's care for our communities extends further than "visiting family" once a year to hand out Christmas gifts. They carefully steward each project's funds and focus on empowering local churches to serve their neighbors.

The school kit project is an excellent example of this model. Rather than purchasing notebooks, pencils, and other classroom essentials in the States and shipping these items overseas, RBG simply transfers funds to Lois, the project's point person in Nicaragua. Lois then buys supplies directly from merchants in her community—boosting the local economy, eliminating the cost of shipping, and ensuring that the kits will reach their destination, rather than getting caught in customs or rerouted to a market and sold at a profit. In addition, Lois provides temporary income for several other women who assemble and distribute the kits.

No matter the project, RBG is intentional about empowering local churches to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their community. This manifestation of the gospel "reaches out to those who might not be in a church," observes Larry. "It becomes a way for the church to bless those around them." The unique "familial" connection with these communities is what allows this, says Dot. "We give [the funds] to people RI is connected to, and in turn, those people give them to somebody else. It's the thread that follows through." The result is an economic and spiritual impact that radiates far beyond the Rosedale Network family.

You can find RBG's Christmas Giving Project page at give.rosedalebusinessgroup.org. In a few short weeks, physical copies of the brochure will arrive at each Rosedale Network church. We invite you to take part in blessing and connecting with RI's communities overseas by supporting an RBG project. Will you partner with RBG and RI to bring Jesus to the world this Christmas?



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

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later as I was sitting in my office reading these (and many more) responses.

The responses were like a window, allowing me to see how God was stirring and moving the hearts of these parents. God was working to convince parents of their need to love and follow Him. He was working to convince them of their need to prioritize the things of God in the lives of their children. He was working to establish consistent family worship in their homes.

Because of the way that God moved and will continue to move, every one of those nearly 70 children will have the chance to see God and the gospel more clearly through their parents. Lord willing, in March 2024, God will do the same in more parents and more children's lives.

God is moving in the parents of our church—establishing, renewing, and reviving His call to hand down their faith to their children. May the Lord extend this movement to restore faithful family discipleship beyond Fairlawn Mennonite Church to His Kingdom at large, so that the generations that follow us will know and love the Lord.

“One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4 ESV).

A Proposal for the Commander in Chief *cont'd from page 2*

our country in the way of peace. A draft has not tested our peace convictions for over fifty years. If a draft was issued tomorrow, how many across the Rosedale Network would enroll as conscientious objectors? We will only exercise the freedom to serve as conscientious objectors if we continue to believe that our allegiance belongs to Jesus, our Prince of Peace. We will only continue exercising this freedom by believing that Jesus' call to love our enemies is incompatible with taking up weapons to kill them. I believe this. Do you? 🙏

*To access Rosedale Network's **Conscientious Objector Form** or the booklet entitled **What Does It Mean to Be a Conscientious Objector?** visit our website at <https://rosedalenetwork.org/administrative-resources/> and scroll down to the Conscientious Objection box.*