

From the Archives

My first recollection of the Raymond Byler family is from the late 1960s when two of the sons came to our house along with others to join my older siblings in making an early version of “homemade” pizza. It was a group project that got the men to wear aprons, which might be why it sticks in my mind. I’ll bet some readers remember those small tins of purchased tomato sauce that seemed so exciting to pour onto pressed-out dough and make . . . pizza!

In time I became friends with son David and was a guest in the Byler home on occasion. I knew Raymond and Fannie were “good people,” but as is so often the case for young people looking on, I failed at the time to appreciate just how much commitment it must have taken for them to serve God, the church, and their family in the many ways they did. They were remarkable, and it is appropriate to honor their memory and introduce them to RNOC members who did not know them. —PLW

At the age of 25, Raymond Byler (1914-1993) was selected by lot and ordained to the ministry



at Pigeon River Mennonite Church, just a few miles from the family farm. At age 31 he married Fannie Miller (1920-1996), a young woman from Iowa he courted while she was assisting with the church plant in Flint, Michigan. In a 1978 address to the women of CMC, Fannie remembered how excited she was in the summer of 1946 to become Raymond’s bride.

In April 1953, after eight years of marriage and the birth of four sons, the couple moved to Blountstown, Florida, to pastor the congregation that was emerging there as part of the “Evangelization through Colonization” mission

strategy. Raymond and Fannie poured their energies into pastoring and farming in Blountstown for 20 years and gave birth to four more children there before uprooting again to plant an urban church. Today, the legacy of their 1950s outreach in the Blountstown area has grown to two congregations worshipping in four locations.

Beginning in 1973, Raymond and Fannie spent ten years church building and pastoring Open Door Mennonite Church, an integrated CMC congregation in a black community of Jackson, Mississippi before retiring to Williamsport, Pennsylvania. In their final years Raymond and Fannie were involved in ministries out of their home including prison ministry, hospitality, Byler Book Service, Marriage Encounter, and hospice.

Throughout their lives Raymond and Fannie ministered as a team, with Raymond focusing on thinker aspects and Fannie on interpersonal aspects of sharing God's love with others. Their home was open, their table was inviting, their warmth drew people in. Raymond's favorite tool was a good book; Fannie's a good meal and a listening ear. Many people from widely divergent backgrounds still comment that Fannie was a person who made them feel they really mattered. Many young pastors got inexpensive study materials from Raymond through Byler Book Service, in which Raymond purchased Christian books in bulk and sold them as cheaply as possible or gave them away. Many international students found a home away from home under their roof.



Another key aspect of Raymond and Fannie's life was their generosity to missions. When they moved from Blountstown and from Jackson, they found their property values had appreciated dramatically. Raymond saw this increase as financial resources God meant for him to steward for the benefit of others.

Today, the name Jesse, Raymond's father, and its conversion to the middle initial J is alive in the names of six of the Byler sons and grandsons. The 126 descendants (including in-laws) of Raymond and Fannie are scattered far and wide, but they still value the emphasis on church, family, work, education, and community that they acquired in their godly heritage.

—Source: Rhoda Byler Yoder, June 2003, with updates by David Byler, February 2026.

SUMMARY OF OFFICIAL CONNECTIONS (Incomplete, but illustrative)

RBI/RBC

- Raymond was involved with the push to establish Berlin Bible institute and served on the Board of Trustees from 1952-56.
- Raymond served on the faculty for three years, 1967-69. Son David remembers Raymond traveled home to Florida for the weekend by bus, maybe once a month or so while he taught. His family joined him for three months during the winter of 1968.

RMM/RI

- The church plant in Jackson was an RMM outreach.

CMC/RNOC - Raymond

- 1945, 1946, 1952 – Resolutions Committee
- 1947-1951, 1968-1969 – Executive Committee Member
- 1952-1963 – Editorial Team or Editor for *Missionary Bulletin*

- 1960-1968 – Representative to the Mennonite Publication Board
- 1965 – Conference Sermon
- 1972-1977 – Peace Witness Committee
- 1972-1975 – Stewardship Committee
- 1973-1974 – Nominating Committee
- 1980-1984 – Publication & Literature Committee

CMC/RNOC - Fannie

- 1948-1949, 1958-1960, 1973-1975 – Women’s Program Committee
- 1942 – Sunday School Program Committee
- 1951 – Moderator, Sisters’ Fellowship

1968 FAMILY+ PHOTO



Back row (l-r): James, Massachusetts; John Ivan, Virginia; Philip, Pennsylvania; Israel (not family), Marcus, deceased. Front row (l-r): Jon, Pennsylvania; Raymond, Fannie, Rhoda, Mississippi; David, Pennsylvania; Joanna, Mississippi.

Raymond and Fannie’s children have been involved with church leadership or missions in various capacities. Professionally, they have been involved in preaching, education, medicine, authorship and entrepreneurship.