



WHERE IS MY CONFIDENCE?

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Many of you reading this article probably grew up like I did. I was born into a Christian home, taken to church every Sunday, and enrolled in Christian schools my whole life. I went to a Christian college, graduated, got married, and entered into ministry at the age of twenty-two. God has been faithful my entire life, yet there are moments when I still have to stop and ask an important question: *Where do I place my confidence?*

In Romans 2:17–29, Paul is writing to a Jewish audience. Just before this passage, he spends time calling out the sins of the Gentiles. I can almost picture the Jewish believers reading along, agreeing with him, maybe even cheering him on. But then Paul shifts his focus. He turns his attention to the “good people.”

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These were the ones who said the right things and looked like they followed all the rules. I emphasize the word *looked* because Paul points out that while they talked about the law, they did not actually live it. Their confidence was not in God but in the law itself. They believed that knowing the law, teaching the law, and having the right religious heritage were enough to save them.

Paul is building toward Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ESV). He makes it clear that the gospel is for everyone—the ones who know the law and the ones who do not. Yet many of these early Jewish believers still struggled to let go of the idea that the law itself was what saved them.

If we are not careful, we can fall into the same trap.

I am not talking about the Mosaic Law, but about the other things we place our confidence in. I thank God every day for the family I was raised in and the environment I grew up in, but I have to remind myself constantly that none of that saves me. Growing up in church, knowing Scripture, serving faithfully, or even being in ministry does not earn salvation.

This is something we must make sure the people in our churches understand as well. Jesus addresses this in Matthew 7:21–23. He says that not everyone who calls Him “Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Some will point to their spiritual activity—their works, their ministry, their obedience—and still hear the words, “I never knew you.”

Jesus is not trying to scare us into doubting our salvation. He is calling us to evaluate where our confidence truly lies. A confidence built on what we do will always be shaky. A confidence built on Christ is secure.

This does not mean we throw out everything we have learned. Prayer, Scripture, and church involvement are of immense value. They are gifts God uses to shape us and remind us of the truth. But they are not what saves us. They are meant to continually point us back to the One who does.

So, the question remains, and it is one worth asking often: *Where is my confidence?* 🏠

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Is the Church Relevant Today?

BY IVAN YODER

I would guess that by the time you have read the title of this article, you have formulated an answer to the question. I invite you to think with me, not *how* the church is relevant, but *why*.

Let me back up a little to explain why I have been thinking about this lately. Several months ago, as I was looking ahead to 2026, I began to ask myself this question. If the church I pastor, Locust Grove Mennonite, ceased to exist, would our community notice? I began to attempt to answer that question, and that process has revealed numerous things.

First, I tried to calculate “how” we as a church community are impactful or relevant. Then, I invited others to think with me about additional ways to relate to our community. This has led to some great discussions and ideas, but largely focused on what we can do. I found myself tempted to compare or look at how other churches are working in the community. I thought through the resources that we share collectively as a church and then looked for places of need in our neighborhood as another approach to finding ways to be relevant. The original question of “Would we be missed?” has led to many great discussions, but they haven’t really answered *why* the church is relevant in our world today.

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(N.T. Wright).

I have found that discussions about how or why the church is relevant can reveal personal perspectives very effectively. For example, if I answer that the church is relevant because of how it impacts the church and cares for those who are a part, it can reveal an underlying perspective that the church is mostly for Christians. If I believe that the church can function as a moral compass for a broken world, then I can be left shattered when Christians—especially Christian leaders—fail morally. If the church is relevant as it influences politics, how do I react when governments don’t completely align with a biblical worldview? What has come to light in all this musing is that I just don’t have a big enough view of God, and also, I need to expand my view of the church.

So why is the church still relevant? We need to think bigger.

“The church is designed to be a small working model of the new creation” (N.T. Wright). One of the church’s purposes is to demonstrate that the God revealed in Christ is the true redeeming God and glory of the world. That’s an incredible responsibility. God is working in and through the church to redeem and restore His creation

and “make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). How can we live together as a church community as we would imagine the new creation? How would our communities be impacted if we invited them to be a part of a community that models a new heaven and earth?

Several years ago, I stood in the spot where Jesus spoke the words, “I will build my church, and the gate of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18 NIV). A large cavern is there where, in ancient times, they believed that you could enter the underworld—the realm of the dead.” Jesus wasn’t commanding us to storm the gates of hell, but was revealing that death would not stop His church. We live in a world that lives in constant fear of death. In 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, the Apostle Paul proclaims victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ. He then goes on to describe a major work of the church: “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

The message of “death has no victory” is our labor in the Lord, a need of this world, and a why of the Church.

My final *why* to consider comes from Ephesians 2:22: “...in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.” In the Old Testament, the tabernacle and temple were the places where God met with and revealed Himself to His people, where His glory was revealed. Our churches are a place where the glory of God is revealed. Jesus talked to His followers about being the salt of the earth, and light of the world individually, but He referred to them collectively as a “city on a hill,” not hidden or obscured in the world, but reflecting the glory of God so that all can see.

The church is relevant in our world, not just for how we impact our communities, but for whom and what we proclaim; it is the reason we exist. We proclaim Jesus as Lord, that He has conquered death, and that God is restoring all His creation. From this starting point, can we now consider what that might look like in our communities and how we can accomplish our purpose? 🙏

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Ivan is moderator of Rosedale Network of Churches and lead pastor at Locust Grove Mennonite Church. He and his wife, Pam (who serves part-time in women's ministry), are the parents of two adult children.



Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs

BY MATT MULLEN



My wife, Malia, and I got married at United Bethel Mennonite Church in Plain City, Ohio, on December 31, 2022. The night before, I was excited, but I was also deeply nervous—a feeling that lingered into the next day. When the ceremony began, I ushered the matriarchs of our families down the aisle, took my place beside my pastor and groomsmen, and watched my beautiful bride proceed toward me on her father’s arm. Surely the nerves would dissolve as she drew near. Nope! But then came a moment of unexpected peace: the sweet sound of God’s people rising together in a cascade of voices, lifting the precious hymn, “The Love of God.”

The church didn’t just stumble upon congregational singing in the modern era—it’s been woven into the fabric of God’s people since the earliest pages of Scripture. The first recorded corporate thanksgiving took place after God delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 15:1). The Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians to address one another in “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your hearts” (Eph. 5:19). The early church would sing Psalms and canticles, patterned after Jewish synagogue worship. Corporate singing pulses at the heart of the body of Christ.

Directly prior to the Reformation, the Latin Mass was the dominant form of worship throughout Western Christendom. Among numerous developments and controversies, one practical barrier stood between the common worshipper and congregational song: language. Men and women in the pews understood little of the service because the liturgy was in Latin and there was minimal expectation of their vocal participation. Clergy-led performance replaced congregational praise. Rather than singing out of an overflow of grace through Jesus, the Mass was generally a liturgical performance, void of assurance of the matchless love of God. Rather than being active participants, God’s people became passive consumers.

Martin Luther embodied numerous concerns regarding the state of the Mass and its witness to the gospel. For Luther, song was a medium for believers to praise the Lord, internalize Christian doctrine, and unite with fellow believers. His biblical grounding for this conviction can be seen in texts such as 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (ESV). Luther didn’t believe in the erasure of church leadership, to be sure. Instead, he believed that as a royal priesthood, the people of God had the privilege—and the responsibility—to read, pray, and sing God’s Word as an expression of gratitude for His grace.

To reform the church, Luther translated the Bible into the vernacular, wrote many hymns, and advocated for congregational participation as New Testament worship: “I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during Mass...” The resounding cry of the Reformation was the recovery of the gospel and assurance of personal salvation—justification by grace alone through faith alone, a glorious truth. However, the recovery of congregational singing often goes unnoticed. God used the Reformation to place the hymn books back in the hands of His people.

Luther’s pioneering work in congregational song was only the beginning. Our Anabaptist forefathers possess a rich history of singing along the path of martyrdom—on the way to burning, drowning, or beheading. The *Ausbund*, the oldest Anabaptist hymnal, was largely composed by imprisoned Jesus-followers, many of whom did not survive their torment. For Anabaptists, congregational singing was not ornamental; it was confessional. Their voices were an expression of the core convictions that often gave way to martyrdom: a free church, a conscious decision of faith, holiness and discipleship, and non-resistant love.

I realize that for some, a “back to the hymns” movement may seem unwelcome. But I didn’t write this article to advocate for hymns, though I do love them. I wrote this article because it seems clear that throughout biblical and church history, God’s people have been a singing people.

In fact, the praises of the saints often accompany great works of the Spirit of God. Singing matters; singing congregationally matters; and singing Scripture matters. The early church understood this, the reformers understood this, and I hope we understand it too. Our voices have long been the primary instrument by which God’s people praise Him across generations. 📖

Photo credit: Kristen Van Gilse Photography



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What's Special About Mennonites as Mission Senders?

BY CANDICE

Candice, Asia Member Care Provider, recently completed a degree in Member Care at All Nations Christian College UK. Part of this degree was a dissertation on church-based missionary support teams from Mennonite senders. The following is a summary of one theme in the discussion called "Missio Dei and Mennonites as Senders." The full project will be made available for pastors and support teams in the coming months.

Recently, through research with Rosedale International (RI) workers and their missionary support teams (MSTs), I explored what characterizes care for missionaries from a Mennonite perspective. In both literature study and my interviews and surveys, two themes emerged: *community* and *mutuality*.

As Mennonites, we inherit a rich history of emphasizing community. This is a solid base for sending workers. But what does community look like once its members are sent and separated by thousands of miles?

When the church sends out workers, we gain the challenge and joy of investing in our sent-out friends. This means lovingly including them in our community and responding to their evolving needs over time, supporting from an overflow of the love of God, our primary caregiver.

In survey results, workers poignantly voiced a need for both *proactive* and *responsive* care. When their support team is proactive in reaching out, praying, and asking sensitive questions, workers feel they are not "alone" or "forgotten"—words I heard often as workers expressed the need that their home church community be extended to include them. MSTs also confirmed this perspective, sharing: "We are not islands doing God's work...God calls us to community." Paul experienced this deep love and connection to his supporters, the Philippians, in their mutual mission: "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:3-5 NIV).

This sense of expansive community—one that embraces global workers and grows into new missional communities—is a compelling vision for Mennonite congregations seeking to participate meaningfully in global mission.

In his book *The Sending Church Defined*, Bradley Bell says, "The continuity and interdependence that result when a church's heart is for both their local and global neighbors make for a holistic and unified mission." *Mutuality*, then, is expressed in two ways: in the exchange of care between workers and their support teams, and in their shared sense of calling in God's mission. These two dimensions add richness

to the relationship and affirm the importance of the church working together as a body.

Andrea Sears, missionary attrition researcher, warns that churches can sometimes unintentionally perpetuate a "superhero" myth by presenting workers as if strong faith eliminates struggle. Support teams counter this when they listen well, make space for honest emotion, observe confidentiality, and avoid placing workers on a pedestal, considering them friends to simply walk alongside. In turn, workers can pray for and listen to the ministry stories of their support teams.

This mutual care fosters a sustainable working relationship in contrast to a model where the missionary is the only receiver of care. MST interviewees described being motivated in their work by love and friendship; workers mentioned meaningful, trusting relationships. One RI worker expressed deep trust for those who faithfully walk alongside, sometimes over many years. "They hold our ongoing story."

As Mennonite senders who place a high value on shared responsibility in the work of the church (1 Pet. 2:58), expanding our community and mutual care could be helpful guiding principles for us. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:24-25a). 

Sources:

- Bell, Bradley. 2021. *The Sending Church Defined* (The Upstream Collective).
- Sears, Andrea. 2023. 'Top Ten Reasons for Missionary Attrition' in *Essentials for People Care and Development: A Collection of Best Practices, Research, Reflections, and Strategies* (Missio Nexus) 33-46.

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Candice works in Thailand as an RI worker. She is a member care provider, teaches adult ESL, and provides refugee educational support. She lives in Bangkok with her husband, Tom, and son, Silas.



From the Archives

BY PHIL WEBER

A search through electronic conference reports yields scores of mentions for Raymond or Fannie (Mrs. Raymond) Byler. Both of them were deeply involved in the conference through missional congregational leadership, program planning, and committee work. Fannie was a major player in the Sisters' Fellowship of CMC, and Raymond was frequently tapped for presentations to the ministers or the CMC assemblies. They were fun and fascinating and forthright. They are the kinds of disciples of Jesus who should be remembered. So they are the focus of this month's [From the Archives](#).