



Growing

Leaders

Fall
2007

volume 9
issue 2

*a leadership publication of
Franconia, Lancaster, and Virginia Mennonite Conferences*

Why do we fear them?

Cultivating Leadership and Authority

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During the past ten years, more than a dozen congregations in Franconia Conference have experienced a significant crisis in their life together. In nearly all cases, the themes of leadership and authority were important challenges that needed to be addressed in order for the body to be restored to health. In general, the role of the pastor, the organizational structures of the congregation, and patterns of decision-making needed to be revisited and clarified.

What is happening that leadership and authority so often appear as front-burner agenda for the church? Too frequently I hear the issue reduced to a simple polarity between overbearing authoritarian leaders on one end of the spectrum and glorified congregationalism on the other end. The “congregationalists” carry a mission to protect the church from rampant takeover by power hungry leaders insensitive to the voice of the members. Now to be sure this polarity suffers from caricature. Some issues of substance surely lie beneath the surface of this fear of leadership. But really, how many pastors and lay leaders do you know that covertly seek to selfishly gather power for themselves and dominate the people they serve?

For my generation the collective memory of “bishops” provides grist for this fear of authoritarianism. In many cases it finds theological and Biblical foundation in teaching and writing that purports to be Anabaptist in its promotion of the gifts of all members for ministry and consensual decision-making. While I find it commendable to speak of “every member as a minister” (and I have done my share to promote this perspective), the net effect has been to denigrate leadership in favor of a Mennonite version of democratic group process. Borrowing from our Lutheran sisters and brothers, the “priesthood of all believers” provides a “bumper sticker” slogan for safe-guarding the church from the domination of leaders.

However, most of the folks using this slogan seem unaware that prior to his death in 1994, Marlin Miller (former president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, IN), debunked such thinking and stated there is nothing in Anabaptist writing or in New Testament teaching on gifts



Jim Lapp preaches at a baptism service for Blooming Glen Mennonite Church at the Perkiomen Creek.

that calls designated leadership into question. This is all the more amazing given the current generations in the church for whom bishops are almost as extinct as dinosaurs and for whom the above polarity carries little energy. For these young people, leadership and authority are treated almost innocuously. In fact, after enduring laissez-faire leadership by permissive parents, they welcome direction for their lives. So we are left with multiple generations at different places on this topic, and the boomers somewhere in the middle of a very confusing context where they are expected to provide primary leadership for the next decade or two.

I won't presume to offer a resolution for this “adaptive” challenge. However, I will propose some focal points for conversation around healthy leadership and authority.

- **Freedom from fear and control** – In some way we need to let go of fear of leadership excesses, forgive the bishops for their misbehavior, and trust current leaders without second guessing their motives or intentions.

...continued on page 2



Left: Sharon Wyse-Miller, Ambler Mennonite Church; Right: Julie Prey-Harbaugh leads a seminar at the 2006 Youth Leadership Retreat.

“Leadership and Authority” continued from page 1

- **Embrace the priority of equipping** – Can we acknowledge that affirming the gifts of every member of the church in no way reduces the importance of leadership, but refocuses the role of leaders toward guiding the church in fulfilling God’s vision and equipping members for their personal and corporate mission?

- **New approaches to corporate discernment** – Discernment is hard work. I fear that what too frequently passes as discernment is simply a convoluted and prolonged time of discussion that empowers a few strident voices and holds a church in stalemate from moving ahead in its mission. What will it take for us to truly learn to listen to the Spirit of God and to one another in addressing ethical and practical concerns?

- **Balance of inner and outer journeys** – Many congregations get caught up in the concerns of members at the neglect of the church’s engagement with the broader

society and world. A primary task of pastors and lay leaders is to maintain a healthy balance between the inward and outward challenges. More than likely it means leaders need to attend to some issues on behalf of the church and discern the agenda that truly needs the engagement of the whole body. Congregations need to be delivered from the myth that extensive discussion equates with action.

Growing Leaders is a publication of Franconia Mennonite Conference.

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ISSN#: 1536-030X

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- **Authority in “office” and “being”** – In Mennonite leadership polity, authority consists of three related but separate realities: task, office, and being. (See *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*.) Ironically enough the challenges of leaders with regard to authority very often relate more to “office” and “being” than to competent function. You might recall that people marveled at the authority with which Jesus taught. What does it take to lead with authority out of the integrity of our being as Christian leaders?

- **Structures that empower** – Too often church structures impede rather than empower others for ministry, and seek to maintain a careful balance of power among various leadership bodies (similar to the government). Can we discover and implement structures that authorize leaders to lead with freedom and to empower the church to meet its mission and goals?

- **Grace** – For some reason God choose to entrust the treasure to earthen vessels (II Corinthians 4:7). Leaders, like all members, are bound to make mistakes. Can there be enough grace for leaders to lead and members to follow, knowing it is more important that we learn from our mistakes than that we be perfect? I have the impression the bishops of years past repented for their excesses (at least I heard my father confess his regrets about the severity of their behavior). In the context of confession and forgiveness, grace can release leaders to function with authority and effectiveness.

Congregations will continue to experience crises from time to time. The challenges of leadership and authority will not go away any time soon. But as we explore fresh approaches to leadership and authority with prayer and with intentionality, I predict fewer crises, less pain, renewed growth, and more fulfilled leaders. What do you think? I am aware the above perspectives tend to assume an Anglo Mennonite audience and that people of color struggle less with some of these issues. Their perspectives are needed in this important conversation. I am eager to hear your questions and responses on this topic.

What can we learn and how do we tell our story too?

Commonalities and challenges from the Emergent church

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This past spring, I attended Emergent Village's 2007 Theological Conversation at Eastern University. The gathering was a mix of pastors, laypeople, professors, and students, including several Franconia Conference staff persons. I attended the "Conversation" as a member of New Start, which grew out of the process of redefining church life at Spruce Lake Retreat in the Pocono Mountains.

During the gathering I realized how much the Mennonite church as a whole has in common with the emerging church. There are at least three traits that I feel we share with the emerging church. One, like the emerging church, the Mennonites I have rubbed shoulders with are relational. They really enjoy being together. Second, Mennonites are incarnational. Evidence of their obedience and willingness to be Christ's hands and feet are all over the place! Even writing this reminds me of the conversational way the Mennonites share their beliefs with words. Third, I see a commonality in humility and a willingness to listen to the "other." I did not grow up a Mennonite; there were some "sticky" points about Anabaptism that I was helped through by excellent talks with loving people.

While we have things in common, the emerging church can challenge us in our relationships, in the areas of service and mission, and at engaging our neighbors and the culture. One bad habit I believe we need to emerge from is the prac-

tice of only being the church during the one or two hours on Sunday morning. The emergent church challenges us to have not only a life-giving weekly worship service, but also to explore ways of being a church that brings that life into any given hour of the week.

Shane Claiborne, founder of a New Monastic community in North Philadelphia called "The Simple Way", was one of the speakers at the Conversation. What can we learn from this emergent type movement called the "New Monastics?" Some of these men and women find the worst places to live and then move there, taking literally the idea that we are the body of Christ. I have to ask, is my church going to serve people without really getting involved, or are we willing to get messy and live alongside "the least of these?"

And I hope we'll continue to converse. When we share our faith, we grow. I am really encouraged by the stories I read of Mennonites engaging conversations with Muslims. Keep telling stories and parables. Write poetry. Make films – I have heard that filmmakers are the storytellers of the 21st century. Blog about what God is doing in your community. My wife is telling our family's story through scrap-booking; it's a good story. And remember to listen. Leaders, if we are the only ones talking, then we're probably not doing our job. Let's equip our people to tell more and better stories. I want to hear them!

Growth Events

Third Thursdays Pastors' Breakfasts:

January 17: Randy Nyce, Mennonite Mutual Aid
School for Leadership Formation
(slf.franconiaconference.org)

February 21: Faith and Life Advisory Council
School for Leadership Formation
(slf.franconiaconference.org)

January 21-24: School for Leadership Training
Embodying Sexual Wholeness in a Broken World
Eastern Mennonite University
(www.emu.edu/seminary/slt)

January 28: Leadership Clinics – Dealing With Dysfunctional Family Systems, Dressing for the Pastorate, Taking Our Stories to the Page
Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (www.ambs.edu)

January 28-31: Pastors Week – Risky and Risqué: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Testimony, But Were Afraid to Ask
Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary
(www.ambs.edu/pastorsweek)

April 4 - May 3: Gateway Course
Anabaptist Leadership, Polity, and Effectiveness
(www.emu.edu/lancaster)

Courses offered by Eastern Mennonite Seminary Lancaster:

January 18- May 10: Pastoral Care: Ministry to Persons Throughout the Life Cycle
Lancaster, PA (www.emu.edu/lancaster)

January 29- May 6: Biblical Interpretation: Rightly Dividing the Word
Lancaster, PA (www.emu.edu/lancaster)

January 29- May 6: Conversations in Contemporary Anabaptist Theology and Ethics
Dock Woods Community, Lansdale, PA
(www.emu.edu/lancaster)

How do you reach your neighbors?

Creating “small actions to produce far-reaching effects”

Tom Albright, traveltip80@hotmail.com

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We went up to the neighbors’ house, not for the yard sale that brought us there last time. This time we walked up their steep driveway on a mission. “We’re here to invite you to a brunch at our house,” we said. They smiled, so we continued, “We’d like to have some people get together to talk about following Jesus.” They stopped smiling and backed away. The visit ended.

The idea had its roots in a challenge from Franconia Conference to its churches to explore and brainstorm how we can connect in meaningful ways with our communities, to “experiment” with missional ideas. Whitehall Mennonite Church sent us out into the local community to meet with those people who never make it to church and, more importantly to find out how to reach out to them.

Our family had a plan. We would hand out invitations in our neighborhood to anyone without a church. We asked the members at church to hand out invitations to anyone who might be interested. The invitation was hand-delivered, mailed, and stuck underneath the doors of those that would not open up:

Come join us for a time of food, questions, and discussion. We will focus on your life experiences and how we can find and make space for God in everyday life. Is God relevant to you? What does following Jesus really mean? If you have questions like this about life, if you are feeling too busy and disconnected, come join us. No question is too simple, and all viewpoints are respected. We will not have all the answers, but, hopefully, we will get a better understanding of living life as if Jesus meant what he said. We call this gathering “Ripple Effects;” even small actions can produce far-reaching effects.

We asked for prayers and wondered what would happen. We were hoping it would be like Mark 6:7-13 where Jesus sends out the 12 in pairs. He sends them with authority and power over evil, tells them they don’t need lots of special equipment or a lot of money, and that they are everything they’ll need, that life can be radically different. That was our prayer, the verse we read before each meeting.

A few people came to the first brunch, and more wanted to talk on a one-on-one basis. We continue to meet on Sundays leaving lots of room for people to share their stories. Sometimes we share stories from ourselves and from God. We met in New York City as a part of a trip planned by one of the members. We have been invited to meet at the home of another member. No one has said they want to make a change in their life to follow Jesus, but perhaps the Spirit’s work is happening at a level we do not see. People continue to come and I sometimes ask, “Why?”

I am changing and God is teaching us. Some of those lessons have begun to raise questions; about long-held concepts of “church,” about comfort zones, and about loving neighbors. How much are we willing to do in order to be Christ’s disciples? Will we go back and apologize for scaring people off? Will we trust the Spirit to move in lives where our motion has seemed to muddy the waters?

Jesus sends us out to the places where we live and work. He commissions us to be Saints of the Shopping Mall and Fast Food Joint. He says, “Don’t get caught up in the training series and watch out for the books; read The Book.” Many have proposed new ways to bring people into the church, but we hear him saying, “Don’t just invite them to church. Be the church and go to them.”

Ripple Effects is small. Our insights are new and incomplete, and often confusing, but there is a new excitement in our ministry. Ultimately, ripples happen when we are open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. This new kind of action-through-obedience takes time and a change of mind. It takes a love that comes from God. The father of the boy in Mark 9 asks Jesus if he can do anything to help his hurting child. Jesus replies, perhaps with a joyful laugh, “If?”

There are no “ifs” among believers. Anything can happen. Our family believes more and more in the power of God’s “anything.” Anything can happen when one is willing to be sent; not with a lot of equipment, but with a freeing, healing message that life can be radically different. We went back to the home up the hill. “Without an agenda,” we told them. I don’t know if they believed it, but a few weeks ago they called asking if we could get together sometime. Anything can and seems to happen.

Tom Albright watches a train go by at the 42nd Street Station during Ripple Effects’ New York City trip.



When pastoral leadership overwhelms life . . .

Finding overwhelming love in healthy sabbath

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As I anticipated the three months of sabbatical leave from my position and relationships at Souderton Mennonite Church, my biggest fear was that I wouldn't come back. I loved my work, and it had begun to consume all of me. Even when I did go home, all I could think to do was to check my church messages and emails or go to sleep, exhausted. Even my spiritual director was showing signs of frustration because everything I learned translated immediately into how I could use it in ministry, instead of spending time in my love relationship with God. When I expressed my fear of not returning to Souderton's lead pastor Gerry Clemmer, he encouraged me to not think about it for the first 2 months, and then begin praying about it in August, and we'd talk about the answer God was giving when I came back in September.

The first week in June, I had planned a three-day silent retreat, wondering if I could still do such a thing. I hadn't been alone with God for this long since becoming a mother. When I stepped into the little hermitage that had been prepared for my arrival, I fell onto the sofa and wept for hours, feeling completely empty. I felt God's overwhelming love holding me like the dependent child I let myself be.

The next day I met with the spiritual director at the retreat center and told her of my fear of not going back to Souderton Mennonite if I really let go. She gave me an empty bowl, instructing me to hold it like the beggar's bowl—open to God filling it, as He will with all I need, at the right time.

In June the gift God put into my bowl was the knowledge that whether or not I'm working at a church, on sabbatical, or get paid for it, I will always be a pastor. That is who I am and I love it! I spent much of June with my extended family, in the roles of daughter (taking care of my parents when my mother got very sick), sister (unhurried time with my siblings and their families), aunt (marrying my niece, with my Dad), and as a niece myself (having an anointing for my aunt and leading a worship service for the whole Keener clan). Even as I let go of my official pastor identity, I still knew myself to be a pastor, and it felt good. I also felt my role of wife and mother returning to our family in a renewed way, and that was good too.

God added to that gift, much earlier than I expected, the assurance that the perfect place to be a pastor right now, is Souderton Mennonite. I have been given freedom there to explore and use my gifts for worship and pastoral care in a way that feels empowering and allows me to pass that encouragement on to others. There has been enough challenge to not become complacent and enough affirmation to keep glowing! There is an appreciation for the kind of creative energy I like to share and an understanding that our goal is

to learn through our differences and affirm each other with them. Increasingly, it's a church without walls and I'm free to bless many kinds of people.

In July our family retraced, backwards, the route John and I did on bicycles 21 years ago, on the coastal road between San Francisco and Seattle. It was an unstructured time of reading, exploring beaches and tidal pools, solitude, discovering coffee shops, cooking leisurely dinners together, and being as spontaneous as one family can be! Psalm 8 was put into my bowl, many times during that trip.

Another gift God put into my bowl that month, was to address something I've struggled with my whole life. I often wrestle with how I can give thanks to God for all the blessings I have in my safe, nurturing, fairly healthy, and peaceful life, when so many in the world don't have that. It's a spiritual, emotional, and social dilemma that came back as my family planned to spend more money than we ever had before, on just us. One day I found this prayer that changed my life as I continued to ponder it:

May I enjoy safety.

May good things happen to me.

May I live in health.

May I rest in peace.

May you enjoy safety.

May good things happen to you.

May you live in health.

May you rest in peace.

May all creation enjoy safety.

May good things happen to all things.

May all live in health.

May all rest in peace.

It became clear to me that while I need to hold the tension of the injustices in the world, I'm not being blessed with anything God didn't intend for everyone. Withholding my appreciation adds one more dark blot on the earth instead of the burst of celebration and gratitude I could be emitting! I was given a huge gift with this realization.

August was full with solitude and relationship building with important people in my life that I haven't given enough time to in the busyness of my work. I visited churches where my favorite pastors serve and enjoyed the similarities and differences in how we love God and His people in the same community.

God filled my bowl to overflowing, with an eagerness to return to Souderton congregation, and a commitment to working hard and passionately, but not let it take over all of me again.

How do we respond? Words from the street, pulpit, and pew Pastoring in a historic conference in changing times

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We, the Mennonites of Franconia Conference, are a varied bunch. We are urban, suburban, and rural. We are Asian, African, Latino, and European Americans. We are immigrants seeking religious freedom. We are young and old and in between. We are rich beyond our ancestors' comprehensions and we are barely getting by from paycheck to paycheck. We are farmers, masons, automotive technicians, business owners, cashiers, writers, social workers, dentists, pastors, teachers, stock clerks, baristas, philosophers...the list goes on and on. And our ministries, our churches and organizations, cover all sorts of possibilities.

Amidst all this diversity we not only share a faith, we also share a country and a culture that is swiftly changing. And while some may believe that culture does not shape faith, those who take a deeper walk through our Biblical and Anabaptist history into our present context will see that as the culture around us, as people of faith, changes so do the ministry needs of ourselves and our neighbors. This then changes the way we minister, worship, preach, and teach. In times when cultural changes happen very quickly how do our ministries keep up with our changing needs? How do we continue to be missional? How do we pastor in these rapidly changing times?

In the hopes of finding answers to these questions I interviewed a handful of leaders from a variety of ministry contexts in our conference. My interviewees included Lora Steiner, a writer and seminarian; Mim Book, Associate Pastor of Salford Mennonite Church; Jon Moore, Pastor of New Beginnings Community; Sheldon Good, Franconia Conference summer intern, member of Salford Mennonite Church, and Goshen College student; Dawn Ruth Nelson, Pastor of Methacton Mennonite Church; Kirk Hanger, Pastor of Nueva Esperanza/New Hope Fellowship of Alexandria, VA, a Franconia Conference Partner in Mission; and Randy Heacock, Pastor of Doylestown Mennonite Church.

Change and Response

"I find myself spending a lot of time helping the church to see and understand the impact of change in our society," reflects Randy Heacock. "I try to provide biblical/theological foundations for understanding such changes. I sense there is a genuine desire from many in society at large to experience God in the midst of change. There is a genuine search for spiritual guidance beyond our materialistic world."

Dawn Ruth Nelson has noticed a change in the members of Methacton Mennonite towards reflecting the surrounding and international cultures. She notes that nearly half of her congregants are "folks who were not raised in a Mennonite sub-culture; in other words, they were not raised in a community where they went to school and church with other Mennonites." She goes on to reflect, "The cultural gap is not so much between Mennos and non-Mennos anymore; it is between races, cultures, socio-economic differences. We at Methacton are spending more thought and time on bridging these differences in culture; intentionally finding ways to meet folks we wouldn't have met otherwise." Dawn has also observed a change in the spiritual background of the people who attend Methacton making the small congregation a "more inter-religious faith community."

As Mennonites become more "acculturated," Lora Steiner has observed an increased awareness of issues that surround and affect us, "things like poverty, homelessness, a growing gap between rich and poor." She has especially noticed this among younger generations in the Mennonite church. "Mennonites are really good global citizens, but as a church, we haven't done a good job of looking at the issues in our own back yards," she reflects. "We as a church know that our faith has something to say to this, and we speak the language well, but when it comes down to it, we're rather lousy at actually engaging the world around

From left: Megan MahChung, Ambler Mennonite Church; Andrew Derstine, Jessica Sears, and Janelle Freed at the 2006 Youth Leadership Retreat; Ale Lopez, Emily Derstine, and Jacob Hanger during a trip to Washington, DC; David Kind and Royden Rittenhouse help place a peace pole at a river.



us. I dream of a day when we have something to offer the brokenness all around that doesn't say, 'We're here to help and know what you need,' but figures out what it means to enter each others' lives without our own agenda."

Mim Book has noticed a decrease in the number of "every Sunday" attendees countered by an increase in the desire for deep worship and teaching. "Even though attendance is not as regular, there is a greater desire for worship relevance and a yearning for relevance of faith and spirituality." Mim feels a heightened expectation for doing worship in a professional way from her congregation along with a "desire for more vulnerability and flexibility in worship."

Sheldon Good has observed "a boom of aficionados for Christian Education hour at Salford Mennonite Church." The young adult classes of Salford have increased in attendance. "Young adults are proving they prefer small group settings in church, where discussion and dialog take place very naturally. The challenge is how to turn this into something that spans generations, divisions, and differences."

Jon Moore and Kirk Hanger are experiencing much diversity in their congregations and communities and are allowing those diverse peoples to energize, shape, and lead their ministries. The neighborhood of Bristol, PA, where New Beginnings is located, has witnessed an increase in Liberian immigrants who are more friendly, helpful, and open. "I see our spiritual gifts from two different cultural backgrounds," says Jon. "We worship differently as well. When I see someone going through a life storm, I notice how we as a community come together to help that person. A little while ago we had a flood and a few young neighbors came to help us even though they did not attend here."

"Our community is diverse in many ways," notes Kirk. "When we started, New Hope's core group didn't include any Hispanics; now half the church is Hispanic. We mix Spanish songs, prayers, and Scripture reading into our worship time, and provide Spanish translation for the service and weekly small groups in Spanish. This growth is encouraging. Our Hispanic brothers and sisters are doing outreach and evangelism. They easily bring new people to church."

Evidence of God Amid the Change

As we navigate the changes in our congregations and communities we are given opportunities to witness God at work in the transition. The following are a few of the many examples Kirk shared of seeing God in his congregants: "I see God working in Esmeralda, 17, and her brother, Jose, 13, both children of Salvadorian immigrants. Prior to becoming part of New Hope, both were seriously thinking of going into the military as the only option for eventually paying for college. Now they've decided against that option. I see God working in George, a middle-aged Anglo man we met three years ago as we were handing out water bottles at a bus stop. Soon after he was picked up on a probation violation and sent to prison. We stayed in touch with him. Recently he was released and is now attending New Hope preparing for baptism. I see God at work in Tim and Melody, ethnic Mennos from Lancaster County and founding members of New Hope. Recently Melody, her 2 year old daughter, and I spent a morning with a Muslim family answering their questions about the local school system and talking about Jesus. I see God at work in Gonzalo from Bolivia and Grizelda from Mexico. We've watched them move from the edge to the heart of our church community as they have experienced God's love in a foreign land."

Yet even in the light of these examples it is sometimes hard to see God or to figure out where he is leading. "These times are a communal 'dark night of the soul' when God is perceived not so much in traditional communal structures (which are largely gone) but in a hidden way, a transformative way," reflects Dawn. "Times of darkness require new direct ways of accessing and relying on God. I find that every day of being a pastor requires me to pray the First Step of Alcoholics Anonymous: God I can't, but You can!"

God is indeed amid the change. The question is, are we? "Since God is the God of creation, I see a new community of faith being formed that is more authentic in its expression to our current world," notes Randy. "Though the church has every opportunity to be at the center of this new creation, I fear it will keep itself in the comfort of its own structure and buildings. I fully expect God will bring about something new in the next 25 years."

retreat; a cross in the Perkiomen Creek at a summer baptism for Blooming Glen; Sheldon Good, Josh Hanger, Jessica Walter, Tim Moyer, at Plains Mennonite Church; Vanessa Rodger and Bob Walden at the 2007 Winter Peace Retreat; Blooming Glen Mennonite Church.



Book Review

An Emergent Manifesto of Hope

Eds. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
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I'll begin this review with a proud confession. I've used Brian McLaren for pastoral guidance before he was either controversial or cool and I've worked within the movements of what is becoming known as the Emergent Church for awhile now. I've experimented with the ideas as a pastor and know that it's a perspective that readily commingles with Anabaptism and offers meaningful possibilities as well as challenging risks. What is the Emergent movement? Well, it's hard to explain but it's cutting across denominational and theological lines. It's becoming a perspective of cultural engagement and missional identity in our day. Check out www.emegentvillage.com for more information.

In this issue of *Growing Leaders*, we've set out to explore pastoral leadership in times of rapid change. These are certainly those times and I'd set out to find a book that would give a cue to the possibilities of pastoral leadership in the fast-lane. At first, I was drawn to more contemplative writers and perspectives, but we've committed to reviewing more recent releases. I'd assert that to pastor in these rapidly changing times it's pertinent to look into the past as well as into the writing of the moment. It's relevant to search the words of 20th Century heroes like Simone Weil and Bonhoeffer, to revisit early Anabaptist leaders who were in days of their own rapid change, to examine medieval writers like Hildegard and Meister Eckhart, or to go further back into the early church writers like those who came before Augustine and wondered how to situate themselves in an age of Empire.

In searching for a more recent publication, I'm ready to recommend engaging with Emergent perspectives as an

incarnation of faith in our historical moment. *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* provides a mix of perspectives from an array of writers who are addressing and portraying their own questions and strivings. This book includes over 20 Emergent writers in a good introductory format, surrounding the possibility of hope. It's a mixed anthology of memoir, teaching, essay, and homily.

The writers explore questions and issues like justice, racism, sexuality, and postmodernity. They are naming and framing a movement. It's a glimpse into a transformation that will likely impact the American church for the next decade. It's a book that's representative of the rapid changes within the church itself, not only in the culture. Dwight J. Friesen's chapter is particularly strong and has some good questions. There's a quote from Vaclav Havel at the end of his chapter on embracing differences that suggests something significant about the whole book's perspective and the pace of the church in our own time. . . .

Something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble . . . we are in a phase when one age is succeeding another, when everything is possible.

Havel's assertion permeates as an assumption in the book's writing and there's a sense of expectancy that nearly anything might be possible in these times of rapid and difficult change (sounds like Jesus' conceptualization, too). I'd suspect that we can expect the pace of change to not only be sustained, but to quicken. I'd suspect the authors here who are finding hope in the midst of the quick pace, in creative communities of believers, would predict the same and invite us into the possibilities with our histories, perspectives, and questions and to work toward that same hope.

Other writers featured include: Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Ryan Bolger, Sally Morgenthaler, and Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference-connected Rudy Carrasco from Pasadena, CA.

Left: Video equipment at San Jose 2007; Right: Prayer for the celebration of Esmerelda's (center) graduation at New Hope Fellowship.

