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### **AMBS celebrates future and past in dedication and anniversary events**

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) – Marking both new and historic opportunities for learning, the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary community and friends from across the continent gathered for two days of celebration on the Elkhart campus.

“Our hope is in God” was the theme for the April 25 and 26 events which began with commemorating AMBS’s beginnings in 1958. Dedication of the seminary’s new library and renovated campus center culminated the celebration.

An overflow crowd of approximately 250 gathered in the seminary chapel for the start of the dedication service on Saturday afternoon. Ron Guengerich, pastor of Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen and member of the AMBS board, introduced the reading of Psalm 103 as the call to worship, “I hope in our service today we can bless the Lord and celebrate the miracle that is not ours but that God has given us to pass on.”

Nelson Kraybill, AMBS president, noted that before construction on the new building began, “the best theological collection of books anywhere in Anabaptist institutions was in a windowless underground basement, with no ground floor above it.” He went on to enumerate many goals that were met by the project as the new library and bookstore freed space for other uses: faculty offices, the Institute of Mennonite Studies, Church Leadership Center offices and a larger lounge. The library also answered the need for a computer lab because computers and easy access to electronic resources were included within the library.

Kraybill also acknowledged the contributions of Librarian Eileen Saner, who—after initial plans had been drawn up and fund-raising had begun—came to the seminary’s administrative team with a new proposal. “She asked how we could even think of building a library that’s not green,” Kraybill reported. She asked, “Isn’t this part of our theology? If we are going to talk about peace between nations and between peoples, why wouldn’t AMBS be committed to peace with God’s creation?”

As a result, the AMBS project became the first theological library to register with the United States Green Building Council, following LEED criteria (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Actual LEED certification will come in future after an assessment of the building’s green features.

To meet the goal of sustainability for the future, the building has a geothermal ground-source heating and cooling system; it uses no natural gas. Other features include triple-pane windows, efficient insulation, north-facing clerestory windows that allow natural light into the building and photocells that control lighting according to how much natural light is available. Building materials from the region were used as much as possible to reduce the need for transporting them. For example, the 7,041 feet of board trim were crafted by Don Steider, the seminary’s director of maintenance, using cherry trees harvested nearby. Rain gardens and prairie grasses around the building will help restore rain water to the underground aquifer and reduce the need for mowing parts of the 40-acre campus.

The dedication service included acknowledgement of donors who made the project possible. The building was one component of the larger Next Generation campaign, to which more than 4,000 donors contributed between January 1, 2001, and January 30, 2007. As the worshippers processed through the building for prayers of blessing, a bas relief sculpture of

bookshelves was revealed. In this sculpture and corresponding panels designed by Goshen artist John Mishler, all donors are recognized by name.

"Today our hearts are full of gratitude. AMBS and the church say 'Thank you,' to God who by his spirit makes all things new," Kraybill said.

To extend the celebration beyond AMBS, the seminary invited participants to make contributions to SEMILLA, the Latin American Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala. SEMILLA hopes to increase its own library and set up regional libraries in Honduras and Nicaragua.

This dedication service came just five months short of the 50-year anniversary of the dedication of AMBS campus buildings in September 1958. Over those 50 years, Goshen Biblical Seminary, initially located on the Goshen College campus, and Mennonite Biblical Seminary, relocated from Chicago, came together into one seminary on the Elkhart campus. Storytelling, photo displays, a hymn sing led by Mary K. Oyer and Rebecca Slough, a banquet and an evening worship service marked that history. In addition, the choirs of Canadian Mennonite University and Conrad Grebel University College provided a concert as part of the festivities.

At the anniversary worship service, alumni from each of the five decades of AMBS history shared briefly about their experiences and the importance of AMBS in their ministry. Leonard Wiebe, Gary and Lydia Harder, Janet Breneman, Karl Koop and Cyneatha Millsaps reflected on what campus life and study were like or what had been most meaningful to them.

Breneman, who earned a Master of Divinity in 1986, said, "The reverence for the Scriptures is the holy ground on which I walk. The saints with whom I learned still fill me."

Cyneatha Millsaps, who anticipates receiving a Master of Divinity degree in the May 2008 commencement service, said, "AMBS is the lighthouse that guided me home." Now on the pastoral team of Community Mennonite Church in Markham, Ill., Millsaps grew up in the neighborhood north of the campus in the community near Fellowship of Hope, a Mennonite congregation. She told about walking by the campus, not realizing "the very people who nurtured me spiritually came from this place. I thank God for helping me find my way home."

In conjunction with the anniversary and dedication celebrations, the Anabaptist Colloquium held its annual meetings on the AMBS campus. In one session, Loren Johns and Steve Schweitzer, AMBS Bible professors, invited participants to offer counsel for an upcoming conference on how sixteenth-century Anabaptists used the Bible. In another session, Walter Klaassen and William Klassen were honored for their life-long research and writing about Pilgram Marpeck and their biography of Marpeck scheduled to be released by Herald Press later this year.