



---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 7, 2007

Moundridge youth swap churches for !Explore

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) - Sarah Pohl and Isaac Yoder-Schrock swapped churches this summer. In their hometown of Moundridge, Kan., they both participated in !Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth. !Explore is a program facilitated by Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary to help high school students explore aspects of ministry.

In addition to an 18-day group experience, participants normally work with their pastors for five weeks in their home congregations. However, Isaac was concerned about working at his home church because his parents, Marcia and John Yoder-Schrock, are pastors there at West Zion Mennonite.

Marcia said, "A couple of people had suggested to our son, Isaac, that he consider applying to the !Explore program. He was interested and yet had questions about serving with his parents as co-pastors. We tested the idea of Isaac working with Phil Waite, pastor of First Mennonite of Christian. We also knew Sarah Pohl, a gifted young woman from First Mennonite, and when Phil explored the possibility of participating in !Explore with her, she was ready to do that, including working with me at West Zion Mennonite Church."

So Sarah ended up at First Mennonite working with Marcia, and Isaac at West Zion with Phil.

After the 18 days in the whole group ended, Isaac and Sarah returned to the congregations energized and eager to engage pastoral work. Marcia said, "When Sarah and Isaac returned from the three-week intensive experience in Elkhart and Chicago, they both were very energized. Sarah walked through my office door with a new confidence, with a new sense

of purpose, with sheer delight at learning to know new people and joy and affirmation in her own growth in self-awareness.”

Isaac found working in a different church setting refreshing. He said, “For me it was a blessing to work at First Mennonite because it gave me a nearly clean slate. It worked well for me, because I would be considered the Pastor’s Kid (PK) at my home church, and have to deal with all the baggage that comes along with that.”

Phil said, “Sarah is special to First Mennonite, and I think vice versa, so there is some loss on our end, but we enjoyed getting to know Isaac. Sarah will preach here later, so we will get the chance to receive her gifts to us.”

Part of the congregational experience is to prepare and give the Sunday-morning message. The Sunday both Sarah and Isaac were both scheduled to preach, a large number of people from West Zion attended First Mennonite to hear Isaac. Immediately following the service, a large number of people from First Mennonite then made the short trek over to West Zion to hear Sarah preach in their later service.

Sarah said, “Before that Sunday I had no idea there would be such a turn-out from both churches. I was overwhelmed with happiness to see so much support.”

Phil said about the morning, “That was a holy Sunday. It is a rare treat indeed to hear two high school students give two fine, well-crafted and thoughtful sermons back to back. It was one of the most hope-filled days I have experienced in ministry.”

The mentoring relationship is one of the most significant aspects of the !Explore experience for the pastor and the participant. Isaac said, “I had met Phil before, and talked with him, and he and I are both PKs. There is a lot of shared perspective there that drew us closer, and gave us something in common. We also did a lot of discussion on the church and found we share a lot of the same views there as well. Overall it was a great thing to get to know Phil better.”

Marcia said about her relationship with Sarah, “We, of course, took time to talk about her involvement, commitments in school and to her family. It was a learning process about how much guidance Sarah would need in following through in each skill; for example, planning

worship, preaching and so on. As the summer unfolded, I was aware of a growing trust in our relationship.”

Even if the program does not end in all the participants committing to pastoral ministry, it is intended to help clarify vocational vision and call. “I don’t have a clear cut calling at this point but I know that helping people grow and learn is something I would like to look into,” said Sarah.

Isaac said, “I believe it helped clarify my path for the next ten to 20 years, which was most important to me. Obviously things can change, but it helped me to see what ministerial tasks I’m good at, and the ones which I am poor at. It helped me assess my strengths and weaknesses as well.”

Working at different churches ended up being a surprising opportunity for Isaac and Marcia in their mother-son relationship. Marcia said, “Actually, our relationship was strengthened. I needed to allow him the freedom to do things the way another pastor and church does them. The other side of that was a new set of questions and understanding on his part of my work as a pastor.”

All four of the participants recommend !Explore to other youth and pastors. Phil said, “!Explore satisfies hunger for intellectually curious youth who love the church. They certainly don’t get challenged theologically at public schools, and most local churches don’t have Sunday School/youth group discussions about Plato’s influence on Christian interpretation of the Bible. Yet we have youth interested in such depth.”

Sarah said, “I don’t know of one person who couldn’t benefit in this program. Whether it’s growing in faith, making friends with very different people, or being part of a new experience, there is something for everyone.”

Marcia said, “I would recommend the !Explore program to young people who have gifts in relating to other people, gifts in some academic areas, those who are self-motivated, those who have potential as church leaders and may not have thought of serving in a leadership capacity in the church and those who need to be encouraged to attend one of Mennonite colleges or universities.”

Isaac said, "I would recommend this program to anyone interested in ministry, or anyone desiring to follow Christ better, and wanting to gain a better knowledge of God, in all ways. Basically, for anyone who loves God, and the Mennonite church, and wishes to continue and grow with and in those two for life."

AMBS invites youth and pastors to apply for !Explore for the summers of 2008 and 2009. More information is available at [www.ambs.edu/!Explore](http://www.ambs.edu/!Explore).

- 30 -

Nathan Ramer



!Explore photos

Left: Isaac Yoder-Schrock

Right: Larissa Landis, Lauren Derstine, Sarah Pohl