



a l u m n i n e w s

Pastoring in the context of disasters, Part II

Winter 2007
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The fall issue of *AMBS Alumni News* began a two-part series on pastoring in the context of disasters; this issue completes the series. Two very different situations are tied with a common thread: well-established relationships in the community helped the caregiving and ministry to be effective.

Echoing that emphasis on relationships are the images from Pastors Week and tributes to retired professor Roelf Kuitse who died in Amsterdam during Pastors Week. We trust this newsletter helps to foster connections among alumni—and between alumni and the seminary—that are fruitful. Please share your news notes to keep the connections strong.

— Mary E. Klassen, editor

Ron Guengerich
MDiv 1974

Hesston, Kansas; March 13, 1991, Tuesday, 5:00 p.m.—I watched and listened from an overpass on Interstate 135 just north of Hesston as a tornado moved through town.

“What do I do now?” was my question. How does a pastor respond to the effects of this disaster?

Immediate. After checking to see that our home was still standing and that family members were safe (they were), I had a long night of checking to see whose homes were destroyed or damaged (at least twenty homes of members in our congrega-

tion) and to make sure that there were no deaths or serious injuries in town (there were not). Moving on foot through town to check that all persons (especially members of our congregation) were accounted for and that those whose homes were destroyed had places to stay was the first and immediate concern.

Short term. The next morning the organizing and coordination of cleanup and relief swung into quick operation. A crucial part of the response to the tornado was the ministerial alliance within the town. Fortunately the ministers in town already had established relationships in which trust

was present and the understanding of each other’s gifts and skills was known. The ministers in Hesston worked together as a team without conflict, competition or suspicion. The approach of the ministers was crucial in helping the community function responsively, compassionately and sensitively to the needs and the losses, and to the terrifying memories of that event.

All the ministers gathered on the morning after the tornado to coordinate our efforts. The town government and police looked to the ministers to

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Nelson Kraybill, AMBS president, was honored by the AMBS board during Pastors Week for ten years of service to AMBS. Randall Miller Jacobs (left), Yvonne Diaz (right) and Janice Yordy Sutter (not pictured), the local members of the board, presented Nelson and Ellen, his wife, with several gifts including the piece called “Banana Jesus” by Caribbean artist Luis Luma, depicting Jesus harvesting bananas, a common part of life for Caribbean people.

Pastoring in the context of disasters

(continued)

provide crucial assistance in the relief effort. Volunteers flooded into Hesston, and Mennonite Disaster Service provided immediate coordination of the cleanup effort. Support from surrounding communities in the cleanup effort was incredible.

The cleanup operation was comparatively quick: within five days much of the debris was gone (as compared to the extended need for cleanup after flooding, tsunami or hurricane), but rebuilding and material relief were only beginning.

Families and individuals needed temporary housing. Ministers and church members helped in hosting those who could not stay in their own homes, in

providing temporary housing and in finding housing for those who needed new places to stay.

The individual worship services in the local churches the following Sunday were very significant times of expressing thanks to God that no lives had been lost in Hesston and gratitude for the quick assistance of neighbors far and near in responding to the mess, debris and loss.

Long term. In the days and months after the tornado the ministerial group coordinated the efforts to provide material assistance that was needed long after the cleanup was finished. Food, clothing, household items and appliances poured into town in quantities that were nearly unmanageable. Food was located in one church, and clothing at another, until space for a "relief

center" could be secured in a local business. The ministers coordinated the securing of a building and a supervisor to see that this "material relief" was handled in an orderly, humane and equitable way. The Red Cross and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) also used this space to process special needs. It was months before the relief effort of providing assistance, rebuilding and resettling could be considered completed and the office/coordinator to those who needed tornado relief could be disbanded.

Ron Guengerich was pastor of Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston at the time the tornado struck the town. Currently he is pastor of Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio, and serves on the AMBS board of directors.

Randy Klaassen
AMBS student 1997-1998

I was working at my desk when the hospital called indicating an industrial accident had occurred with multiple life-threatening victims.

In the midst of trauma, time becomes suspended. As the brain begins to register, prayer begins with, "Oh, God. Help them!" And then "them" becomes "us."

In succession three workers entered a railway tanker filled with nitrogen gas. The first man entered to fix a problem; the second and third workers, who were brothers, were attempting to rescue him. A subsequent Provincial Inquiry credited the third man's survival due to quick actions of other workers.

In a rural community I had prior involvement with the hospital and emergency response services. Participating with the chaplaincy program and "mock-accident" drills were practical training for crisis situations, and built relationships of trust with various service providers.

Arriving at the hospital, pastors gathered in a staff room and began praying. As families arrived, appropriate pastors went to "be with them." My particular role evolved into caring for the plant manager, Norman, who was traumatized from witnessing his workers receiving CPR, and then being pronounced "dead."

The rest of the day, and the next, most of my focus was to be a spiritual presence for Norman. The hospital ordeal was followed by facing a variety of

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Pastors Week, the last week of January, is the AMBS equivalent of homecoming. Participants renew friendships from their time of study at the seminary and make new contacts. Above, Wayne Spiegel, pastor of West Swamp Mennonite Church, Quakertown, Pa.; Daniel Hertzler, author, editor, overseer and instructor in AMBS's Pastoral Studies Distance Education program, talk with Willard M. Swartley, professor emeritus. See more Pastors Week photos on page 4.

Mary E. Klassen

Alumni News

David Groh (BD 1956, MDiv 1985) works as a guide in the Mennonite Museum in Kalona, Ia. He also works as a liaison with AMBS for the AMBS-Iowa extension site. In addition, David volunteers at Pleasantview Home, a Mennonite retirement community in Kalona.

Darrell Toews (MDiv 1989) has been pastor of Breslau (Ont.) Mennonite Church for three years after serving Tavistock Mennonite Church for 13 years. He reports that last year they had three graduations and a wedding in their family. **Juanita Laverty**, current AMBS student, is doing an internship with Darrell in the congregation.

Horst Heidebrecht (MRE 1967) is pastoring part-time at a small Mennonite church in southern Germany, where he has served since 1991. Previous to that he worked as an accountant at a social organization.

Cameron Kaufman-Frey (MDiv 1996) was installed as pastor at Community Mennonite Church, Stouffville, Ont., on September 24, 2006. Previously he was at Morgantown, W. Va., for eight years.

Bob Yoder (MDiv 2001) began August 1 as campus minister at Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. Previously he was minister of youth and young adults for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.

Mary Etta King (MACF 2006) and **Linford King** (MDiv 1982) became codirectors of Kairos School of Spiritual Formation, Lancaster, Pa., in October. Mary Etta is responsible for program planning, which includes offering classes focusing on spiritual formation, prayer and the contemplative life. Mary Etta also has a private practice of spiritual direction.

Linford continues as bishop of the Lancaster District of the Lancaster Mennonite Church.

Rachel Nafziger Hartzler (MACF 2004) has completed a book, *Grief and Sexuality: Life after losing a spouse*, published by Herald Press in 2006. The book is based on research she began as part of her program of study at AMBS. Rachel is pastor of Pleasant Oaks Mennonite Church, Middlebury, Ind.

James H. Waltner (BD 1958) is author of the Psalms commentary published in November by Herald Press. This is volume 20 in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series.

Melissa Miller (MDiv 2005) is interim pastor at Arnaud Mennonite Church, southeast of Winnipeg, Man.

Byron Remple (MACF 2001) and **Heather Klassen** (MATS 2001) are living in Calgary, Alb. Heather is working with MCC Alberta and Byron began a teaching position at Master's Academy and College this school year. Previously they served with Mennonite Central Committee in Indonesia.

Tim Schultz (MATS 2000) graduated with an MDiv from Colgate Rochester Divinity School last spring and began as pastor of Leetonia (Ohio) Mennonite Church in October.

Birth

Ken Beidler (MDiv 2000) and Elaine Shenk are parents of Ezra Lucas Beidler-Shenk, born October 24, 2006. ●

AMBS News

Lois Barrett (MDiv 1983) was reappointed as director of AMBS—Great Plains for another three-year term, 2007–2010. The AMBS board also awarded her continuing employment, promoted her to associate professor of theology and Anabaptist studies and approved her first sabbatical for the fall of 2007.

Jeffrey M. Miller (MDiv 2006) is serving part-time as admissions counselor, with primary responsibilities for recruitment travel. **Regina Shands Stoltzfus**, director of admissions has cut back to two days a week and will leave her position later this spring to pursue full-time doctoral studies. ●

In memoriam



Roelf Kuitse, Theol. drs. (1924–2007)
Professor of Mission and Theology; Director of Mission Training Center, 1978–1991

On January 24, 2007, Roelf Kuitse, living in retirement in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, died after a brief illness. Roelf taught theology and mission at AMBS and directed the Mission Training Center from 1978 to 1991, alternating with Robert Ramseyer between teaching and mission work during those years. Colleagues at AMBS give these tributes:

At AMBS Roelf regularly stressed taking theology seriously, placing *Missio Dei* at the center. As a good missionary, he did not place himself in the forefront, but did what he could to enable authentic witness to be taught and practiced.”

— Walter Sawatsky

Roelf lived and worked among us with devotion and understated brilliance. He could have taught, competently, in any of our three departments. He read Hebrew and Greek, and he could—he did—converse about Barth and his critics. He brought to our seminary, to our faculty, and to our students a breadth of learning and experience none of us could match. Roelf had deep and firsthand knowledge of Islam (he was fluent in Arabic), and he spoke with wisdom, to a public audience, when “Islamic fundamentalism” first become a phenomenon and a fear, long before 9/11.

Roelf Kuitse was an extraordinary gift to AMBS and to the church of Christ. Many in Indonesia know the name of Jesus because of Roelf. In every respect, Roelf was extraordinary, and in every respect a gift. We should celebrate him, to the glory of God.

— Ben C. Ollenburger

One of my memories of being very new on this faculty to those many years ago was the gentle courtesy with which Roelf welcomed me aboard and the serious attention he paid to what I said. The breadth not only of his mind but also of his heart has been an important model for me.

— Mary H. Schertz ●

AMBS concludes Next Generation campaign



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Mary E. Klassen

Within a cocoon of plastic and temporary heat on the coldest day of January, workers began laying bricks on the exterior of the new AMBS library and campus center. Three days earlier, on January 22, AMBS President Nelson Kraybill announced that funding for the new building was complete.

This project was the final component of the seminary's Next Generation campaign, which raised \$20.4 million to strengthen the seminary's work. Other components included scholarships, the Chapel of the Word (a small chapel devoted to teaching preaching and worship arts) and support for faculty and the Church Leadership Center.

"We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to God and to donors—friends from across Canada and the United States, alumni, employees, board members and students—for generous, even sacrificial giving," Nelson said.



Mary E. Klassen

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investigators, corporate executives and news media. Each interview was stressful. Having a "non-anxious presence" gave Norman opportunity to catch his breath before what felt like the next interrogation. The pastoral role with Norman and his supervisors became an "advocate in the shadows," making impartial observations and helping to process waves of guilt.

In the days afterward, grief sessions for the plant workers, and debriefing sessions with emergency response people were

important steps in grieving, and laid the foundation for healing. For these services assistance of the wider community was drawn upon.

Randy Klaassen was pastor at Berthaler Mennonite Church, Altona, Man., in 1996 at the time of this accident. He served that congregation for 14 years, prior to attending AMBS for one year as sabbatical and transition time. He and Renate, his wife, have been pastors with Bethany Mennonite Church, Virgil, Ont., since then. ●

Joining in the singing at Pastors Week above are Lisa Enns-Bogoya (MDiv 1999), associate pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba; David Bergen (MDiv 1987), executive secretary of Mennonite Church Canada Formation Ministries; and Chuck Neufeld, pastor of Community Mennonite Church, Markham, Ill.; in the background are Dianne Hildebrand Schlegel (MACF 2005), pastor of Christian Formation at Morden Mennonite Church, Morden, Man.; Marla Langelotz (MACF 2005), on the pastoral team of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.; and John Rempel, assistant professor of theology and Anabaptist studies, AMBS. Below Steve Schweitzer, new AMBS assistant professor of Old Testament and Nelson Kraybill, AMBS president, talk during a Pastors Week break with Randy Roth (MATS 1986), pastor of Des Moines Mennonite Church, Des Moines, Ia.