



w i n d o w

50 years in Elkhart

Serving and learning in the community

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- 2 **Serving and learning in the community (cont.)**
- 3 **Welcome and tensions**
- Outreach in downtown Elkhart**
- 4 **President's Window**
Panorama

Elkhart, Indiana, has been the context for Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary for 50 years. In 1958 Mennonite Biblical Seminary (MBS), a school of the previous General Conference Mennonite Church, moved from Chicago, Ill., to a new campus on the south edge of Elkhart. That fall, AMBS began as a cooperative venture between MBS and nearby Goshen Biblical Seminary (GBS), a school of the previous Mennonite Church. In 1969 GBS moved from the Goshen College campus to the Elkhart campus, and in 1993 the two schools were incorporated as one seminary.

This issue of AMBS Window explores the significance of Elkhart as home for the seminary. Through several vignettes, we will look at how experiences in Elkhart help prepare students for ministry and how the seminary makes contributions to the city where we live and work.

— editor

Mentoring: Doing something now

Moriah Hurst

In my second year of seminary I was chafing at the bit to have some kind of involvement in the community around me. I was not content to only train for ministry; I wanted to be doing something now. But as a student I had little time. From a forum on campus I heard about a program called CARES (Communities Actively Relating to Elkhart Schools) that places mentors alongside kids who need some help at school.

I am not good at spelling

or math but I like to hang out with people, so I signed up. For half an hour each week since then, I spend time getting to know my mentee. I have been matched with two girls, one in first grade and then one in second. Some weeks we work on their school work or play educational games. Other times we sit and draw, look through books or tell each other what we have been doing. There is a rush of joy as I enter each classroom and am greeted

(continued on p. 2)



AMBS student Moriah Hurst and Sharetta read a book together in the library at Roosevelt Elementary School, where Sharetta is a student.

Serving and learning in the community



Moriah Hurst and Sharetta, the student she mentors

Mentoring (continued from page 1)

by my mentee grabbing my hand and hugging my leg along with a chorus of “Hello, Miss Moriah” from the rest of the class.

I am not sure that the 30 to 40 minutes I spend at the school each week makes a huge difference. I do know that I can’t change the home environments of the kids in my neighborhood and yet am not content to just let it go at that. I am glad to be a helpful adult and a friend in the life of a little person who might not always get affirmation. Beyond my weekly trips up the street to Roosevelt, I have a picture of my mentee and me on my refrigerator. As I walk by it every day I say a prayer for that little smiling face and the life she represents.

Moriah Hurst, a Master of Divinity student, gives this glimpse into a program that began ten years ago. Michele Hershberger, now a Bible professor at Hesston (Kan.) College, Hesston, Kan., began a mentoring effort when she was an AMBS student and mentored a classmate of her daughter’s at another school near the campus.

Mentoring activities involve AMBS students and employees in spending time with elementary school students during class time and at lunch and playing games together before school begins in the mornings.

Assisting Habitat for Humanity

Hammers and saws—not only textbooks and computers—can be tools for seminary learning. The AMBS Student Peace and Justice Committee sponsored an effort to assist with a Habitat for Humanity house in the neighborhood a half mile north of the campus on November 19.

This effort was an addendum to another project in 2005, when the student committee took on the task of funding and organizing workers for a Habitat building blitz. The earlier home-building project was located between Goshen and Elkhart, so the fall 2007 effort gave students

and faculty an opportunity to work in their own neighborhood.



Ted Koontz, professor of peace studies and ethics, and Samantha Lioi, AMBS student, cut baseboard trim for a Habitat for Humanity construction project.



Part-time job becomes ministry

Joe and Cara Pfeiffer are first-year students at AMBS who have found that their part-time work of substitute teaching is a form of ministry.

Joe works two days a week and Cara three days a week, reporting where each has been called for the day—one of 19 schools in the Elkhart Community School district.

Joe says, “Doing this as a seminary student gives grounding. I’m asking, ‘How is what I’m learning going to affect these people?’ It helps me think about how I will minister in the future.”

Cara adds, “It’s definitely a stretching exercise.” Substitute teaching provides “a presence of love” for the students and the other teachers they encounter.



!Explore will serve in Elkhart

When 15 high school youth gather this summer for !Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth, the service component will involve them in the neighborhoods of Elkhart. Rather than going to another city, such as Chicago or Miami (as in previous years), !Explore now will work with Elkhart churches and organizations. Andy Brubacher Kaethler, !Explore director, says this will allow participants to more fully integrate service with their worship and theological exploration experiences. ●

1958–mid-1960s

Welcome and tensions

In the early years, the relationship between AMBS and Elkhart was an “interesting mix,” Erland Waltner says. Erland was president of Mennonite Biblical Seminary from the launch of AMBS in 1958 until 1978.

Some snapshots:

- When Erland met the president of Elkhart’s First National Bank, he had not said anything about funds when the bank president handed him a check for \$1,000. “It was a gesture of welcoming that was more than words.,” Erland said.
- The contractor, Henry Knuck, employed workers—many of whom were Mennonites—who were not members of the AFL Carpenters Union, and the union protested with pickets to prevent delivery of materials. “At points it looked like we would be done in,” Erland reported. In this conflict, the seminary received support from civic leaders but not necessarily from workers in Elkhart.
- In the early 1960s, the sale of a lot to an African-American family created tensions. “We knew the sale would incite opposition, but it was a witness on our part,” Erland said. The Ku Klux Klan symbolized the opposition by burning crosses on lawns of both the seminary and the home built on the lot.
- The 1968 establishment of Church Community Services is the result of efforts led by C.J. Dyck, AMBS administrator and professor, Erland notes. CCS now involves more than 50 churches in addressing needs for food and utilities and in helping to empower women with job skills. ●



The executive committee of the MBS board checks on the progress of construction on the Elkhart campus, May 28, 1958: R.L. Hartzler, Erland Waltner, J.N. Smucker, Henry Knuck (contractor), A.E. Kreider.

1966–mid-1970s

Outreach in downtown Elkhart



When Leland Harder, professor at MBS and AMBS, used *The Coffee House Ministry** for an evangelism course, his students said, “Let’s do it!”

So the coffee house called Partly Dave began in downtown Elkhart in 1966, a cooperative venture of AMBS, the Elkhart County Council of Churches and a number of congregations. Open on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings until at least 1974, Partly Dave offered disks, live music, drug abuse seminars, a Japanese tea ceremony and, most of all, a safe place for conversation for youth in the city.

A high school senior was quoted in an article in the May 1967 *Youth’s Christian Companion*, saying, “A lot of kids come in here that would normally be roaming the streets; here they have a place to express ideas and to hear other ideas.”

A sophomore said, “No one really comes out and says, ‘We’re going to talk about religion today.’ It just sort of sneaks up through programs.”

The first paid manager was AMBS student David Schmidt. Subsequent managers included Dale Sudermann, now a professional counselor in Chicago; Robert Charles, until recently with Mennonite Mission Network; John Kampen, college dean and professor formerly with Bluffton University; and Lauren Friesen, drama professor who has taught at Goshen College. The staff were all volunteers from churches in the community. One waiter was an Elkhart judge who served coffee and doughnuts to his parolees.

Leland, who taught at MBS and AMBS between 1955 and the mid 1980s, explained, “Partly Dave’s was one of the more successful seminary-related coffee houses and outlived most of them. I spent a fair amount of time at Partly Dave’s on weekends, trying to practice what I was teaching in the evangelism course.”

**The Coffee House Ministry* by John D. Perry, Jr. (John Knox Press 1966) ●

Former faculty and students have shared reflections and memories of AMBS 50 years ago. Read these at www.ambs.edu/ anniversary-dedication.

1958

Seminarians Aid In Work At YMCA

The Mennonite Biblical Seminary, which moved to Elkhart from Chicago last summer, is already an integral part of community life with both students and faculty participating in civic activities.

Walt Rinehart, acting general secretary of the YMCA, said today four seminary students have been helping in Y work since they came to Elkhart in September.

Miss Catherine Snyder and Peter Neufeld are instructors in the Christian Education school; John Friesen and Marvin Zehr are assisting Jack Hampson, youth director.

Archive photo

Reproduced from *The Elkhart Truth*

President's Window

As AMBS celebrates our fiftieth anniversary, we are rethinking the task of leadership formation. In the next half century, AMBS will prepare men and women for ministry and mission in a Western culture that increasingly looks like the setting into which Priscilla, Aquila and others first spoke the gospel: a multi-religious world in which Christians are a minority—sometimes a despised minority—with little political power. AMBS will be preparing leaders for witness from the margins, for evangelism from a minority position and for church as a community of alternative allegiance.

Being Anabaptist is a gift, because ours is a long tradition of functioning at the margins. Our spiritual



memory includes persecution, perseverance, bold testimony and resisting the Powers. Mennonites recently have learned much from Catholics, Pentecostals, Evangelicals and others. It is urgent that we also claim our spiritual inheritance and bring forth the treasures of Anabaptism for ourselves and the whole people of God.

We need leaders who cherish the riches of this stream of renewal, who have the courage to lead the church into counter-cultural ways of the Kingdom of God. Otherwise Mennonites will be swamped by the forces of

consumerism, militarism and individualism so pervasive in the West.

Even as AMBS welcomes students and faculty from beyond the Mennonite Church, we are committed to remaining Anabaptist. Our calling is to embody central aspects of an Anabaptist vision: a biblically-ground people who confess Christ as Lord, worship God three-in-one and follow Jesus in a ministry of reconciliation in the world. Anabaptists emphasize discipleship, evangelism, community, economic sharing, peace-making, service and hospitality. Mennonites will most productively engage other traditions, and best meet the needs of a suffering world, if we claim our own strengths.

— J. Nelson Kraybill

Panorama

When AMBS moved to Elkhart, it turned corn and soybean fields into a 43-acre campus. Now the city surrounds the campus, with cultural, retail and civic resources nearby. AMBS's setting now is reflected in these statistics and details:

Elkhart population: 51,874
Elkhart median household income: \$34,863
Languages spoken by students in Elkhart schools: 30

Within three miles of AMBS:

- Median income spans \$11,000 to \$69,000.
- 46% of the residents in some neighborhoods are African American.
- 31% of the residents in some neighborhoods are Hispanic or Latino.
- Eight Mennonite churches have meeting houses where seminary students worship and do internships.
- Elkhart hosts an annual jazz festival, an art museum, a symphony and a series of connecting city parks for recreation.

Within 20 miles of AMBS:

- The University of Notre Dame and Goshen College offer myriad music, sports and cultural events.
- A stable economy is based on manufacturing, educational institutions and service agencies.
- Diversity abounds, including Amish, Hispanic and Ukrainian communities.

Alumni News

In *The Way is Made by Walking* (InterVarsity 2007), **Arthur Paul Boers** (Master of Arts: Peace Studies 1983 and associate professor of pastoral theology) shares insights and experiences of walking the 500-mile Camino de Santiago. The book and Arthur's reflections on nurturing faith through pilgrimages like this have garnered attention from media, such as Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "100 Huntley Street" on a Canadian Christian television network and the *Toronto Star*.

Vern Rempel (Master of Divinity 1986) completed a Doctor of Ministry degree in preaching at Iliff School of Theology, June 2007.

Rachel Epp Miller (Master of Divinity 2004) was ordained on February 24. She serves the San Antonio (Texas) Mennonite Church.

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The purpose of *AMBS Window* is to invite readers to call people to leadership ministries, and to provide ways for readers to become involved with AMBS through financial support, prayer support and student recruiting.

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