



Western  
District  
Conference

## Joy Mennonite Newsletter February 2007

### Pastors Corner

This is an adaptation of a presentation we gave at a local Methodist Church on the subject of simple living. It seems many people think Mennonites have an edge on this subject. They wanted to know the difference between Mennonites and Amish. We explained that they both began with the principle that Christians must not seek to be like the rich and powerful but rather identify with the common people and not neglect their concern for the poor, much like what has been called, preference for the poor in Latin America in recent times. The most obvious application to this principle was expressed in the way they dressed. In time the principle was neglected, almost forgotten and the application became more important than the principle.

Whether we are Methodist, Mennonite or Amish we must seek meaningful applications to this principle of simplicity, if it is to become a meaningful expression of our faith.

We may think of faith inspiring simple living. It is also true that simple living inspires faith. The church at one time believed spiritual leaders must take a vow of voluntary poverty. From these simple people emerged great spiritual leaders whose teaching lives on in history. It is not that there is virtue in being poor, rather our concern is what wealth does to us. Obsession with the accumulation of wealth stifles the formation of conscience. Conscience is to be conscious, to be aware that we have neighbors in the world. Jesus said it best when he said, love your neighbor as yourself. To love your neighbor as yourself means we will share with a needy neighbor whatever we have, be it a little or be it much, for the well being of both of us. We are aware that the poor are more likely to share in this way than the rich.

We may think of conscience as a personal matter. The truth is we form our conscience in community with others. It may be our family, or our religious affiliation, or even as a nation. The tragedy we see in America is not just the possession of wealth but the way believers have linked themselves to the

rich and powerful in government. This identification with the powerful has prevented the formation of good conscience and without good conscience good people do evil deeds that cause great suffering and grief to our neighbors around the world.

What has our wealth done to our conscience as a nation? As our corporations and our nation in general gains more wealth so we tolerate more abusive measures to defend our wealth. We now debate the use of torture to defend our nation and our way of life. Supporting our troops has become like a sacred cow. I agree we do not want to hold our young soldiers responsible for the decisions of corporations and political leaders who ask them to go to war to protect their interests. But we have also failed to teach our youth to be accountable. The best advice from our president was, do not think you can say I was only obeying orders, you will be held accountable for your actions. This advice was given to Iraqi soldiers before the war.

We must not wait for our president to teach our youth to be accountable. In our homes, in our churches, in our schools, and at every opportunity we must teach accountability to everyone and become a people of conscience. Above all we must guard against permitting the love of money to rule.

Moses Mast

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OCCO Report  
by James Branum

I wanted to give a short report about the work of OCCO (Oklahoma Committee for Conscientious Objectors). Joy Mennonite is involved in this work in that our church provides some funding and an office, and also several of our members are active in the group. In the future I'll try to write up a report for our church newsletter at least once every quarter.

In the last few months OCCO has been active in two main areas: (1) Counter-Recruitment (educating

young people with information about some of the dangers of military service) and (2) Military Counseling (providing soldiers with information about military discharges and GI Rights).

Our Counter-recruitment campaign has included a visit by Susan Lee and Moses & Sadie Mast to Star Spencer High School to speak to a high school group about military recruiting. We also sent two of our members to a Mennonite Central Committee conference on Military Counter-Recruitment at San Antonio Mennonite Church.

Our military counseling work has been mostly done by myself. OCCO pays me a monthly stipend to help with my expenses, and provide up to one hour of free legal services to soldiers who call for assistance (and provide low-cost services for soldiers who need additional help). Since September, I have counseled 36 soldiers in this work. Clients have included three conscientious objector cases as well as many cases where soldiers are seeking discharges or other assistance for medical, psychological, and family hardship. Several of these soldiers are Iraq war veterans who are seeking to avoid a second deployment.

Future plans for OCCO include continued counter-recruitment work in the schools, and a regional military counselor training conference to be held in Oklahoma City on April 20-22. The speakers for this training will be Luke & Marti Hiken (from the Military Law Task Force in San Francisco) and myself. More details on the conference will soon be posted on our website: [www.okobjector.org](http://www.okobjector.org)

If you would like to support the work of OCCO, we are always looking for financial support and volunteers. I think

Joy Mennonite can also support us through your prayers and your concern for the issues we are concerned about.

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**News and Events:**

Dec. 10 Lupe Aguilar spoke at Joy Mennonite. Lupe works with undocumented immigrants. The church voted to take special offerings each month for this work.

Dec. 18 Ruth Miller died the day after we sang Christmas carols for her. Moses Mast conducted grave side services. It was an interesting experience with the family. The daughter and husband live in Russia, The grandsons live in Japan, Uganda, and Texas.

Feb. 2 Georgene Richardson, a neighbor in our church community will celebrate her 105th birthday. She is still quite active.

Feb. 4 The executive committee of the Oklahoma convention will meet at Joy Mennonite for their quarterly meeting.

Preaching schedule: Feb. 4 James Branum  
Feb. 11 Norman Berry  
Feb. 18 James Branum  
Feb. 25 Moses Mast

**JOY MENNONITE CHURCH**  
504 NE 16<sup>TH</sup> OKC OK 73104  
Sunday Services 10:00 am Sunday School 11:30  
All are welcome, please join us as you are able

Church website: [www.joymennonite.org](http://www.joymennonite.org)  
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