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A MONASTIC ANABAPTIST MANIFESTO:

PART FOUR



By Pastor Jerry Truex

A manifesto is a public declaration of intentions. As a manifesto, this article articulates our Anabaptist identity and our intention to identify with the new monasticism.

In this fourth part, I describe traditional monasticism and its connection with early Anabaptism. Then I argue that early Anabaptism was the *new monasticism* of the sixteenth century. Finally, like the early Anabaptists, I invite us to reinvent monasticism for our century.

TRADITIONAL MONASTICISM

Reaction to a Culture of Corruption

Monasticism arose as a reaction to the constantinization of the Church. When Constantine became emperor of the Roman world, Christianity became the official religion. If one wanted to be Roman, one had to be Christian. Millions flooded the church.

Some saw this as God’s triumph, but others saw it as the corruption of the church. Christians had been poor, powerless, and persecuted for three centuries, but now, with Constantine, the church shared in the luxuries, power, and decadence of Rome.

For this reason, Christians left the cities and went into the deserts to form communities dedicated to the way of Christ. These were the monastics. In the forgotten places of the Empire, in the desert, they faced their trials like Christ by practicing asceticism, a Spirit-training aimed at relinquishing attachments and realizing union with God.

At first, monks lived alone, but in time they realized the importance of living together. They became known as *cenobites*—a conflation of the word “common” (*koinos*) with “life” (*bios*)—sharing *communal life* under the rule of Christ with one another.

The Benedictines

Many monastic groups and traditions formed over time. One of the most famous groups was the Benedictines, who are named after Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-547). Benedict is famous for his community rule, *Benedict’s Rule*, which contains 73 short chapters on the principles and practices of monastic life. *Benedict’s Rule* calls monks to: (1) live in a *covenanted community*, (2) remain with one community or *stability*, (3) listen and respond to God’s call or *obedience*, (4) repent of wrong doing (continued on page 2)

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Spirit Life

Do you like to think outside the box? Then, this may be for you. You are invited to participate in a 2-yr process of spiritual formation sponsored by Heartland Center for Spirituality in Great Bend, KS. Classes are held one Saturday per month; the next one is Sept 17. See www.heartlandspirituality.org/spiritlife. See page 3 for an update.

(from page 1) or *conversion*, (5) *pray the divine office*, (6) practice *Lectio Divina*, (7) welcome the stranger or *hospitality*, (8) *keep holy*, (9) *work for a living*, and (10) *make peace*—Benedict said: “Let peace be your quest and your aim” (BR Prologue 17).

MONKS AND ANABAPTISTS

The monastic way of life influenced the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. Some of the founding Anabaptists were former monks, such as Michael Sattler and Leonard Schiemer. In fact, Sattler was a Benedictine monk and the primary author of the first Anabaptist manifesto, the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527).

The *Schleitheim Confession* expresses themes found among monastics, including (a) voluntary membership in community, (b) a common way of life, (c) the disciplined pursuit of holiness, (d) lay leadership, and (e) peace making. In this way, *Anabaptism was the new monasticism of the sixteenth century*. The Anabaptist movement was reinventing the monastery without walls.

REINVENTING MONASTICISM

Desert Places of the 21st Century

The emerging leaders of the new monastic movement think the future of monasticism is not in the desert, but in the cities. The forgotten places of the twenty-first century are *in* the slums, *among* the homeless, *alongside* the marginalized, and *with* immigrant populations. These forgotten “places” of today are equivalent to the desert of the past.

Can MCS reinvent monasticism for the twenty-first century as the early Anabaptists did during the sixteenth? Can our church adapt the monastic spirituality and impulse to address the desolate places of our world? Let me suggest that we are well on the way. Consider our identity statements.

Radical and Biblical Spirituality

When we say, “We commit ourselves to radical and biblical spirituality,” we express the monastic impulse in all of its forms throughout all the centuries. It is also Anabaptist to the core. It says, “We are going to follow Christ no matter what!” Give us the desert. Send us a demon. “We can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us” (Phil. 4:13). With our very first identity statement, you and I have already entered the desert. We have said we are taking the narrow path of costly discipleship.

Relational and Accountable Community

When we say, “We live in relational and accountable community,” we concur with the monastic insight that followers of Christ cannot be hermits, cannot be “lone rangers,” but rather, must live in community with one another. We see and serve Christ in each

other. Most importantly, we manifest Christ in the world as Christ’s Body.

Christ’s Peace Within and In the World

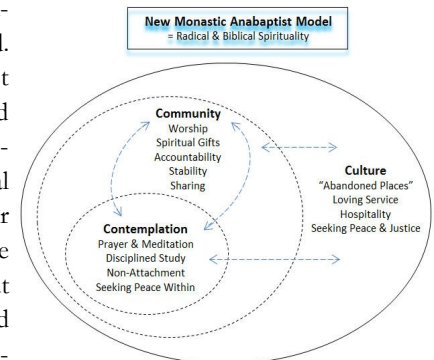
When we say, “We seek Christ’s peace within and in the world,” we agree with the monastics about the importance of centering our lives in contemplation, in cultivating the inner life of peace with God. They cultivated the inner life by praying the divine office, by practicing *Lectio Divina*, and silent listening to God.

From contemplation and study arose their desire to share Christ’s peace with the world. Monasteries became places of refuge for orphans, widows, and the homeless. The Benedictines were engaged the culture through the practice of welcoming the stranger. The mendicant orders, Franciscans and Dominicans, engaged culture by caring for the poor and homeless and through preaching and teaching the gospel.

NEW MONASTIC ANABAPTIST MODEL

We can see significant continuity between monasticism and Anabaptism, even with our own identity statements.

Both MCS and monasticism are committed to radical discipleship to Jesus. Both MCS and monasticism value community. Both MCS and monasticism nurture the inner spiritual life. Both MCS and monasticism realize the importance of cultural engagement, of bringing Christ to the abandoned places of the world. These continuities suggest that we can look at past and present forms of monasticism for guidance, spiritual resources, and vision for our church. However, we must not simply imitate, but adapt, reinvent, and find our own unique and contemporary expression of a new monastic Anabaptism.



Hands of Christ Mennonite Church - Manos de Cristo Iglesia Menonita

Jerry and Lori Acosta, with their 4 sons: Dyran, Jonathan, Nicholas, and Joshua, moved from Texas to Wichita mid-August to begin planting a Hispanic church in our area. They are staying at The Lorraine Center until they find a home. Together with Hope Mennonite and Lorraine Ave Mennonite Church, we are supporting them in their ministry. We will have an Installation Service October 9, 7 pm, at Hope Mennonite. Please pray for them and this venture—a venture in which our church played a significant role in birthing.

Worship in September

Theme

Beginning September 11, we will begin a series of select topics, including 9/11 Reflections, Spiritual Gifts, Prayer, Virtues and Vices.

Mission Focus

The Mission Focus in September will focus on the CROP walk and MCC's work in reducing hunger and poverty.

Worship Leaders/Teachers

Sept 4—Worship leader, Doug; teaching by Jerry (New Monasticism); Communion; potluck

Sept 11—Missions and Services Committee

Sept 18—Worship leader, Doug; teaching by Jerry (Spiritual Gifts)

Sept 25—Worship leader, Vangie; teaching by Lois (Prayer—Daniel 9-10), healing prayer

Psalm 100

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Mothers 4 Mothers



Mothers 4 Mothers will be participating in the next Alternative Christmas Gift Market November 12, from 9 am—4 pm. They will be hosting two tables, selling pins by Lucinda. The proceeds from one table will support a school in Nicaragua that receives books from Trees for Life; the other table will benefit our Mother 4 Mother program. Please come and support this venture.

October 15 is the City Wide Baby Shower at the County Extension on the corner of Ridge and 21st. Please donate gently used baby clothes.

Two of our youngest members, Jasmine and Brittini, will be participating in the Wichita Independent Neighborhood University in September. They will be learning leadership skills through creative writing, singing and poster making.

Please continue to pray for the ministry of Mothers 4 Mothers. Thank you, Sally and Belinda, for time, effort, and love you give to these women!

Spirit Life

Fri, Aug 26, Jerry & Vangie, Pat, Sally, Mike & Kellie all piled into a van and drove to the Heartland Center for Spirituality in Great Bend. John & Marcia joined us Sat morning. It was a wonderful time of worship, class instruction, and informal discussion with various people from other Christian spiritual traditions. The course on the history of Christian spirituality began with an overview of the Old Testament. Philip St Romain, Jerry's mentor, introduced a grid that can be used to evaluate spiritual development; a grid that examines the relationship between us and ourselves, God, creation, and others. Some spiritualities are more religious, some more personal, some more skills related, some more societal. We were also given information on listening to our calling from God and discerning our vocation. With each instruction, there was time to reflect in table groups on our own responses and journey. Each table had someone who had already completed the spiritual director track there to assist and guide the rest. All of us left that day with new insight into spiritual growth and formation.

Congratulations!

Doug vonEhrenkrook was recognized by the Sedgwick County Special Education Cooperative at their back-to-school in-service in August for 25 years of service.

On a related note, Doug & Joyce celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on August 9.

Way to go, Doug & Joyce!

New Sunday School!

Sally and Jennifer are beginning a new Sunday School for 2-4 year-olds. The curriculum is *God and Moses, Stories from Exodus*. Parents are welcome. Please donate play-dough, construction paper, drawing paper and snacks. Thank you, Sally and Jennifer!

Everence

We received two matching grants for the sharing fund in August and two more are pending next month. Thank you, Sally, for assisting us with this!

Servant Groups



A servant group is an intentional face-to-face group (3-12 people) who meet at a regular time (often twice a month) to grow in Christ and actualize God's reign. We have seven groups.

NT Greek Reading Group. This group focuses on reading and translating the Greek New Testament. Currently, we are working through Luke's Gospel. We meet on Wednesday from 1:30 to 3:00 pm at LAMC. Contact Jerry (263-0204).

Psychosynthesis Study Group. Currently, we're reading *Psychosynthesis*, by Will Partfitt and *Natural Spirituality* by Joyce Hudson. We meet on the 2nd the 4th Wednesday of each month. Contact Cindy (832-0050 or Jerry (263-0204).

Immigration Servant Group:

We meet for worship, study, sharing, prayer, and focus on its "outward" mission as well as bringing a religious perspective to immigration issues. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month, 7:30-9:00 p.m. In July, they will meet July 12 and July 28. They are currently studying the book: *Christians on the Border* by Daniel Carroll. For more information, contact Pat (371-8274).

Ladies Reading Group. This is a women's reading and discussion group that meets on alternate Saturday afternoons for about 90 minutes. Currently, we are studying *An Altar in the World* by Barbara Brown Taylor. We invite women who want to nurture their faith through intentional, focused discussion on faith issues to join us. Contact Vangie (263-0204).

Women's Discipleship Group.

This is a women's group focusing Bible Study, discussion, and pray-

er. We meet on the 4th Sunday of every month after church at Cindy's home. Contact Cindy (832-0050; cgswriter@aol.com).

The Path of Discipleship. We meet to encourage each other in the life of discipleship, learning about Jesus' transformative vision of the future for present action. Currently, we are reading *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard. We meet on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 pm. Contact Jerry (263-0204).

Hospitality Group. Although we are not technically a servant group, our purpose is to serve people by making people feel at home at MCS. We are responsible for greeting people on Sunday morning, organizing "coffee time," inviting newcomers, organizing potlucks, and providing meals on special occasions. Contact Geneva (262-2544), Doreene (265-3848), or Vangie (263-0204).

Childcare

Sept 18—Jenny/MC
Sept 25—Alex/Doreene
Sept 4—Jenny/Sally
Sept 11—Kierra/Geneva

Attendance in August

Aug 7 23
Aug 14 29
Aug 21 26
Aug 28 26

Prayer Requests

1. Please pray for Erna and Russell; for their health and their ability to cope with life as it is.
2. Please pray for MC and her children, Tavyn and Toby. MC's next court date is Sept 15.
3. Please pray for Jerry and Lori Acosta and their 4 children as they adjust to their new environment. May their ministry be fruitful!
4. Please pray for those in the path of storms: Tropical Storm Lee in Louisiana, Tropical Storm Katia in the east coast, earthquake in Alaska, fire in southern California.

MCS Sept 2011

www.mcswichita.net/calendar.htm

Verse of the Month: Psalm 100

Song of the month:

Sept 4 & 11: Jubilate Deo (WB 103)

Sept 18 & 25: All people that on earth do dwell (WB 42)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 10:00 am Worship Communion 12:00 noon Potluck	5	6 7 pm Path of Discipleship	7	8 <i>Happy Birthday, Sussanna</i>	9	10 9 am—12 am Welcoming the Stranger at The Magnificat Center
11 10:00 am Worship	12	13	14	15	16	17 <i>Happy Birthday, Eilysh</i> <i>Spirit Life in Great Bend</i>
18 10:00 am Worship	19	20 7 pm Path of Discipleship	21	22	23	24
25 10:00 am Worship 11:40 am Church Life <i>Happy Birthday, Russell</i>	26	27	28	29 <i>Happy Birthday, Jeffree</i>	30	



Mennonite Church Of the Servant

Our mission is to welcome all people into a community covenanted to follow the way of Jesus Christ through

- Practicing peace and reconciliation,
- Sharing our lives in love and accountability, and
- Bringing the good news of the reign of God to the world.

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