



EMC
Statement of Faith
AND Church
Practices
A 25-part series



The Board of Leadership and Outreach invited EMC pastors and writers to reflect on the meaning of our **Statement of Faith and Church Practices**. These writings are intended to inform and to invite conversation. The project was supported by the Board of Church Ministries.

Table of Contents

Statement of Faith articles

The Bible by Cameron McKenzie	3
God by Arden Thiessen.	4
The Creation by Gil and Renita Rempel	5
The Dignity of the Human Race by Adam Robinson	6
The Fall of the Human Race by Randall Krahn	7
Satan by Barry Plett	8
Salvation by Antonio Pitta	9
Discipleship and Nonconformity by Peter Doerksen	10
The Life of Peace by Glen Koop.	11
The Church by Richard Klassen	12
Ordinances by Menno Hamm	13
The Resurrection by Layton Friesen.	14
The Return and Final Triumph of Christ by Abe Bueckert.	15

Church Practices articles

The Lord's Day by Kim Stoesz	16
Christian Stewardship by Fred Buhler	17
The Christian Home by Ernest Funk	18
Interpersonal Relationships by Stephanie Unger	19
Devotional Life by Angel Infantes.	20
Commitment to Service by Evelyn Barkman.	21
Divine Healing by Flo Friesen	22
Societies and Associations by George Toews	23
The State by Ron Penner	24
Lawsuits by Peter Janzen	25
Jury Service by Menno Kroeker.	26
Swearing of Oaths by Harvey Plett	27

Statement of Faith Article 1: The Bible

by Cameron McKenzie

Inspired, infallible, authoritative. While words like these may confirm suspicions about the difficulties of understanding doctrine, they are quite simple.

Inspired means that the words of the biblical text have their origin with God, in the mind and will of God, if you prefer. The common use of the phrase “God-breathed” in English translations of 2 Timothy 3:16 really catches the idea well.

However, we should be careful not to confuse inspiration with some image of magical dictation. Inspiration suggests something more complex and astonishing than mere dictation.

It suggests that the “writers” of the Bible were so guided by the Spirit of God that the book which emerged from the end of that long and human process is nevertheless the Word of God, a human and divine document, not unlike the divine and human living Word, Jesus.

This process included the main characters who recorded the events of their lives through to the host of anonymous scribes and editors who arranged and preserved and transmitted the text of the Bible.

The result of this divine/human process that we call inspiration is an *infallible* scripture, by which we mean, a scripture that is reliable and without error in all that it teaches. This can, of course, be the tricky part, because not everything the Bible says is a part of what the Bible teaches.

The Bible is inspired and infallible whether or not we choose to accept it; those are the fundamental characteristics of the text. Authority, on the other hand, speaks to our relationship with the text.

The Bible teaches us its truths in many different forms each with its own rules for interpretation. For example, while the Old Testament books record the true account of Israel’s experience of God in history, they, nevertheless, record actions and words of many characters that, however much a part of the story, are nonetheless misguided, misinformed, and anything but an example for us to model our lives on.

Similarly, books like Job and the Psalms capture the truth about God in poetic metaphors and literary images that cannot and should not be subjected to the methods of scientific enquiry. The scriptures cannot be reduced to just a collection of god facts.

As inspiration leads us to a deeper understanding of God’s work in bringing us his word, infallibility points us to a richer and more profound understanding of the truth of God contained therein.

Finally, when we turn to the third major word—*authoritative*—we encounter an important shift in emphasis. The Bible is inspired and infallible whether or not we choose to accept it; those are the fundamental characteristics of the text. Authority, on the other hand, speaks to our relationship with the text.

The Word of God is, as Hebrews 4:12 says, “living, active, and powerful”, but only we can make it authoritative. When we recognize the scriptures as “God-breathed” and when we acknowledge that any word which comes from an eternal, all wise, all-powerful God must be infallible, we are still left with the choice of whether or not we will submit to this word.

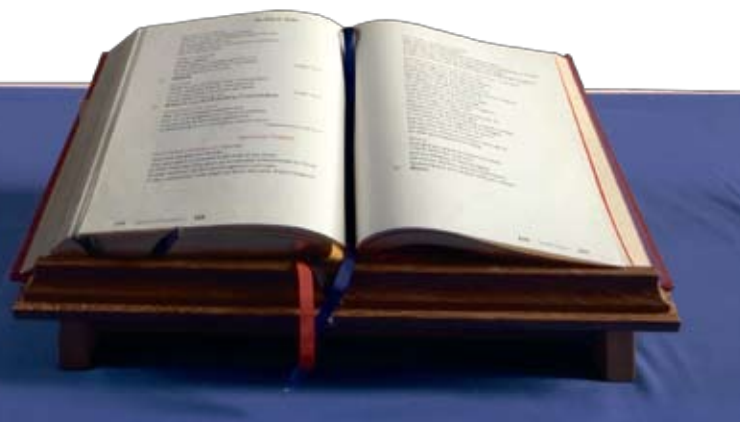
By saying that the Bible is authoritative, we as a conference agree that we will submit to the words of Scripture in all matters concerning or faith (belief) and conduct (ethics).

Inspired, infallible, and authoritative—we live in a relationship of submission to a true and reliable word that comes to us from God himself.

Cameron McKenzie is a minister at Fort Garry EMC and an Old Testament professor at Providence College.

1. THE BIBLE

We believe that the Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments are the inspired and infallible Word of God. They are the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct (Matthew 5:18; 24:25; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:16–21).



Statement of Faith Article 2: On Believing in God

by Arden Thiessen

Believing in God means embarking on a lifelong adventure of exploration.

We may notice God's influence in our lives, in the historical story of humankind, and in our natural environment. However, the primary witness to the being of God is the Bible. It is the book of God. It keeps on reminding us that God is there and teaches us to think of God, and to worship God, as Father, Son, and Spirit.

The triune being of God is a mystery. How can one God be three? Perhaps the most helpful approach for our time would be to return to the wisdom of the fourth-century thinkers and visualize the Trinity as a relationship of love.

In other words, God is not to be thought of as a mathematical formula but as a dynamic, eternal love relationship that we are invited to join.

**The triune being of
God is a mystery.
How can one God
be three?**

Each of the biblical metaphors that the Church has customarily used of the divine community says something about God's relationship to his people.

That we are to think of him as **Father** reminds us of his attentive care and his protective love.

The fact that God's human presence in this world is called the **Son** reminds us that the visitor from heaven is like the Father in all respects. If we want to know what God is like we have to look at Jesus.

The term **Spirit** reminds us that God is present like the air around us and is actively involved in all lives, like a wind that keeps on blowing.

God's loving interest in each of our lives is also a mystery. His steadfast love will never end. In his sovereign oversight he gives us the freedom to choose how we will live and hopes that we will acknowledge him and love him in return.

Without determining or controlling human decisions God foresees a future when all of creation will be in harmony with his will. He is the God of hope.

As we worship him, we can't help wondering how it is with those who say they believe in God but cannot accept the Trinitarian vision of God to which the Scriptures witness.

The question is not, do they believe in the same God? There is, according to our Christian definition, only one God. The question about them is: do they believe in God at all if they don't know him as Father, Son, and Spirit?

Arden Thiessen, D.Min., is a minister and a long-time educator within our conference.



(Designpics.com)

2. GOD

We believe in only one God, eternal, infinite and unchanging. He alone is the Creator, the Sustainer and Redeemer. He exists and reveals himself in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All persons in this triunity are fully and equally God (Genesis 1:26; 17:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 90:2; 139:7–12; 147:5; Isaiah 40:28; 44:6; 57:15; Malachi 3:6; Matthew 11:25; 28:19; Mark 12:29; John 6:27; 8:41–59; 15:26; 16:13–14; 17:1, 8, 18, 23; Acts 5:3–4; Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; 8:4; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:8, 12).

Statement of Faith Article 3: The Creation

by Gil and Renita Rempel

One of the privileges of living outside our Canadian borders is being able to enjoy more diversity in God's creation.

We especially enjoy photography here in Paraguay. Whether it is taking pictures of birds, flowers, glowing worms, toads five times the size of our Manitoba toads, or the majestic water falls of Yguazu, the list could go on and on.

God's creation is endlessly fascinating, and that speaks to the character of our God. The story of creation speaks foundationally to who we believe God is and who we believe we are in relation to Him.

What do we as a Conference believe about creation? Our *Statement of Faith* says: "We believe that God created everything as revealed in Scripture." The question then becomes, what do we believe the Scriptures to reveal about creation?

Although the Scriptures do not give a scientific account of creation, there are outstanding truths with deep ramifications. We understand Scripture to teach that God is the only author and giver of all life. He is sovereign and has ultimate authority over all His creation. The design of His creation brings glory to Himself as it gives visible testimony to His wisdom, power, and creativity.

The creation account also teaches that humankind is made in the image of God, therefore set apart from other living beings in creation. These, among others, are foundational truths that shape our faith and world

view, thus profoundly affecting every aspect of our lives.

There is no doubt that these core beliefs are constantly being challenged by other views. In secular society the creation story and science are often pitted against each other.

True science, however, and a proper interpretation of the scripture do not, and indeed cannot, contradict each other since both are authored by our omniscient God.

We affirm our *Statement of Faith* regarding creation. However, it seems to speak more to what we believe about scriptures, namely that "they are the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct," than

about God and creation itself.

Should we not consider expanding briefly our *Statement of Faith* regarding *what* we believe to be the fundamental truths that Scripture teaches regarding God's creation, as opposed to merely stating that the Scriptures *do* teach about creation?

Gil and Renita Rempel serve as EMC cross-cultural workers in Paraguay.

The design of creation brings glory to God as it gives visible testimony to His wisdom, power, and creativity.

3. THE CREATION

We believe that God created everything as revealed in Scripture (Genesis 1–2; Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Job 38–39; Psalm 8; Mark 10:6; John 1:3; Colossians 1:15–17; Romans 11:33–36; Hebrews 1:1–3).



Statement of Faith Article 4: The Dignity of the Human Race

by Adam Robinson

What would *you* label as undignified, or violent, or death-dealing beliefs or behaviours in our world? This article calls us to passionately come away from such beliefs or behaviours at every level, for the sake of our faith.

Here we have:

1. Our confessed Christian belief that “*God created the human race...*” God is affirmed as creator, which implies a divine-human relationship akin to ownership or parentage. So, then, what do offspring owe the parent?

What do creatures owe their Creator? Gratitude? Obedience? A desire to emulate the Creator’s nature?

Our ethics begin to take a new form when they are rooted in a belief that God has truly created all people equally.

The point here is that our ethics begin to take a new form when they are rooted in a belief that God has truly created all people equally.

2. “*Both male and female*”—this affirms that God is creator of both genders who equally bear the divine imprint, the divine image.

This implies that we are all—men and women of any age—equally capable of being connected to our Creator, and equally capable of being made complete as spiritual creatures, through God’s grace.

3. The application to “*sanctity of life*.” This calls us as humanity to pay special attention to our high value as God’s own children; so that we don’t turn on each other or against ourselves.

In our pacifist-Mennonite understanding, this leads us to a commitment to *shalom* or peace-making as the proper response in every situation, if indeed all are equally “of God.”

Our judgments as to who is more or less valuable in our world based on age

(from fetus to the grave), ability, or behaviour, and so on, are all called to account as mere human judgments that persistently fail to recognize the full worth of the other as God’s offspring.

This application speaks to the familiar issues of war, abortion, euthanasia, and disability, but it speaks equally to the less familiar issues of racism (personal and systemic), genocide, abuse (elder, child, spousal) as well.

We desperately need this article of faith to guide us in many situations, to help us see the full dignity of one another with “spiritual eyesight.”

We need it to help us to see ourselves as valuable and with the Creator’s full imprint to be discovered in our own lives. It will have everything to do with the quality of human relationships we seek to build as a result, as Christ’s Church.

Adam Robinson is the pastor of Aberdeen EMC (Winnipeg, Man.).

4. THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN RACE

We believe that God created the human race, both male and female, in his own image. We believe, therefore, in the sanctity of all human life, regardless of age, ability or stage of development (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:7, 16–17; Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13–16).



Statement of Faith Article 5: The Fall of the Human Race

by Randall Krahn

The brevity of this statement on *the fall of the human race* can lull us into missing the cataclysmic impact these few words intend. This is an excellent and complete statement, but it is not one that is meant to be quickly skimmed over.

I am sure the original authors weighed each word very carefully, and we too must consider the impact of each word if we are to have the life-changing deliverance they call us to seek.

We miss the point of the account of Adam and Eve if we use it as source material for humour and self congratulation. Far from giving us an opportunity to excuse our own failings, the biblical account of *The Fall* is a visual graphic of the destruction with which sin works in all our lives.

Unbelief results in wrong choices (disobedience), which leaves behind a broken relationship. The image of Adam and Eve separated from their former relationship by cherubim with flaming swords illustrates how seriously God takes the infraction of disobedience.

Disobedience is always a choice, and, as much as we like to blame others, including Adam and Eve, for our troubles, we cannot escape the fact that our separation from God comes as a result of our own personal unbelieving choices. Just as Adam and Eve were powerless to return to Eden, we come into this world with a barrier between us and God that we are powerless to overcome.

We live in a world that has difficulty with the concept of personal responsibility and would rather believe that God owes us. Instead, the biblical account of *The Fall* leaves us asking, “Is there any hope for humanity now that it has broken relationship with God?”

Without a recognition that the troubles this world experiences are a result of disobedience to a God who owes us nothing, the grace within the gospel story remains empty.

The Fall teaches us that sin is much more than simple action. Unlike contemporary thought, sin is not what adds spice to life. Sin is always relationship destroying.

The measure of sin is not so much in the act itself but in the extent to which it damages relationships. The act of eating forbidden fruit by itself seems small, but the relationship it damaged was huge.

To what extent do we believe that relationship is the measure by which we evaluate sin?

Randall Krahn is senior pastor of Cornerstone Community Church in Swift Current, Sask.

**The act of eating
forbidden fruit by itself
seems small, but
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5. THE FALL OF THE HUMAN RACE

We believe our first parents, in unbelief and disobedience, fell into sin by their free choice. This broke their fellowship with God and brought the whole human race into the same state of sin and separation (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:7, 16–17; 3:1–24; John 6:44; Romans 3:23; 5:12; Ephesians 2:1–10).



Statement of Faith Article 6: Satan

by Barry Plett

The atrocities presented through media reports, cruelties each one of us have experienced or witnessed, and the depravity we find within our own minds, leaves little doubt that evil exists everywhere in our world.

Similarly, most people accept the notion that Satan or some devilish being exists who heads up the propensity toward evil in our world.

Though the doctrine of Satan is generally accepted, and his destructive schemes are something we battle constantly, this is not often addressed in Sunday morning sermons, articles, or books.

Throughout history, the church has wavered between an overemphasis on the demonic and nearly complete denial of his existence or relevance. In giving Satan more “air time” than he deserves, the church has unnecessarily incited fear and angst in the lives of many young and immature believers. An equally spiritually debilitating emphasis is the notion that Satan, demons, and demonization are only relevant in animistic, uneducated, and backward tribal societies.

Not surprisingly, our medical and psychological experts have almost completely turned their back on the possibility of such things existing in our civilized western world.

What should be of concern to Bible-believing Christians is that even though Jesus and the disciples frequently encountered demonic possession in various forms, our colleges and seminaries are graduating “trained counseling experts”

who have never been introduced to demonic activity as one of the problems people need to be freed from in order to enjoy the abundant Christian life. We do not need counselors who cast demons out of everyone who is depressed or suffering from anxiety, but we do need pastors and counselors who understand the possibility of Satan’s work in people, at times manifesting itself through demonization.

These extremes will be kept in perspective when we clearly understand the answer to God’s rhetorical question to Isaiah: “‘To whom will you compare Me or who is my equal,’ says the Holy One.” God is sovereign and omnipotent in our world. Christ is the central figure in history and in the work of redeeming mankind to himself. Satan at his best can only oppose what God is already doing.

As Christ’s people, we need not focus on opposition to Satan and his work but rather walk forward confidently as members and representatives of the kingdom of God.

Barry Plett is senior pastor of Blumenort EM Church in Blumenort, Man.

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6. SATAN

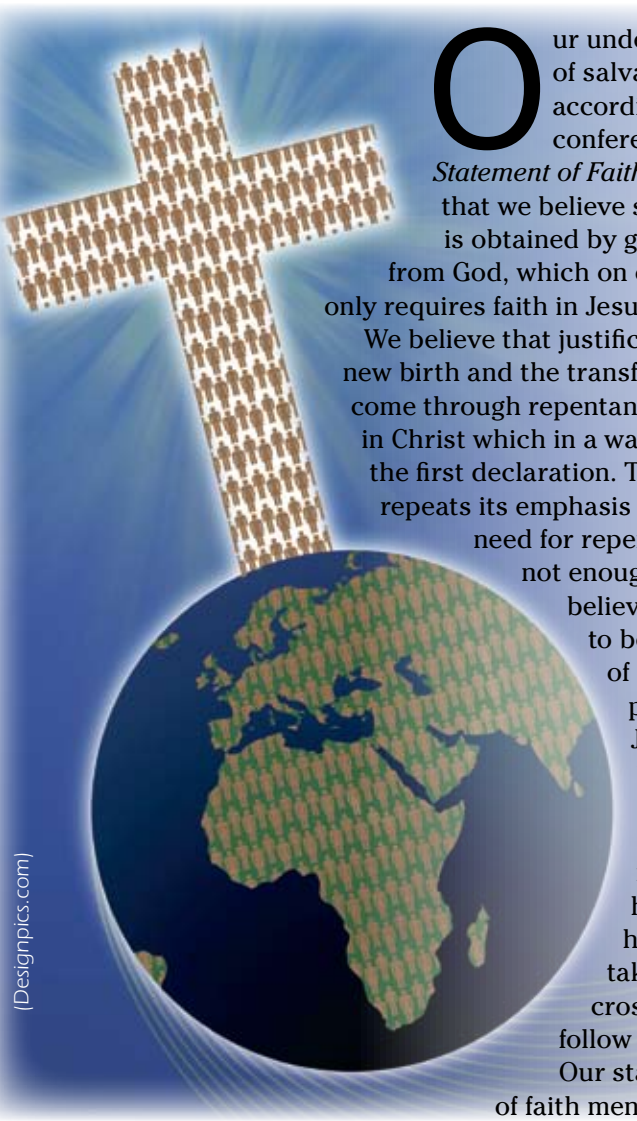
We believe Satan is a personal spirit being. He heads the kingdom of all evil and opposes God and all that is holy, pure and just (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 10:17–21; Ephesians 6:10–18; 1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 12).

The destiny of Satan will be the lake of fire, which God prepared for him and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Romans 8:38–39; Galatians 4:8; 1 Corinthians 2:8; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 1:19–23; 2:1–3; 3:10; 6:10–18; Colossians 1:13; 2:14–15; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 12; 20:7–10).



Statement of Faith Article 7: Salvation

by Antonio Pitta



Our understanding of salvation, according to the conference's *Statement of Faith*, tells us that we believe salvation is obtained by grace, a gift from God, which on our part, only requires faith in Jesus Christ.

We believe that justification, the new birth and the transformed life come through repentance and faith in Christ which in a way completes the first declaration. The Bible repeats its emphasis upon the need for repentance. It is not enough to simply believe, there has to be a change of the inner person.

Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Our statement of faith mentions that children are covered by

God's grace until they are old enough to be accountable before God. The Catholics and Protestants of the 16th century practiced infant baptism, and according to their belief that was a way to remit original sin inherited by their parents, and conveyed sanctifying grace into the

Our understanding of salvation was born with the Reformers, but it went further in practices and beliefs, displaying salvation as a change of life and not only a result of mere belief.

child's soul. Our understanding differs as we believe little children live in a state of innocence until they are old enough to understand God's offer of salvation.

The last declaration in the article is one that literally defines our understanding of salvation demonstrated by obedience. Although God saves us without any strings attached other than faith and repentance, once we have passed from death to life we have to respond by walking faithfully in obedience to Christ. Jesus tells us that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." With this, we are saying that our salvation is a process of life that will end in heaven.

Our understanding of salvation was born with the Reformers, but it went further in practices and beliefs, displaying salvation as a change of life and not only a result of mere belief. This article also assures that children are covered by the grace of God and paves the way for believer's baptism. It speaks of obedience as a necessary requirement to maintain the assurance of salvation.

There is no doubt that these doctrines are very important to maintain our identity and I believe that rather than making us different from other Christian denominations, our beliefs in salvation enrich the Christian spectrum offering a different perspective for others to consider.

Antonio Pitta has served as pastor at Ebenezer Christian Church in Brandon, Man. He is currently pursuing further education in Calgary, Alta.

7. SALVATION

We believe people are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The basis of this salvation is Christ's life, his atoning death and his resurrection. Justification, the new birth and the transformed life come about through repentance and faith in Christ. His atonement covers children until they reach the age of accountability (1 Samuel 12:22-23; Matthew 18:1-14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 24:47; John 1:9-13; 2:3-8, 15-18; Acts 4:12; 20:21; Ephesians 2:1-10; James 2:14-24).

We believe it is the privilege of all Christians to know that they have passed from death to life and that God can keep them from falling. Faith and obedience are essential in maintaining this assurance and growth in grace (John 8:31-32; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 1:5-11; 1 John 3:14; 5:13).

Statement of Faith Article 8: Discipleship and Nonconformity

by Peter Doerksen

What does it mean to be ‘a Christian’; ‘saved’; ‘born again’? Is it as simple as saying the sinner’s prayer? Yes. John says “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). The Apostle Paul writes “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38).

Yet the words of Jesus indicate that a relationship with Him affects all of life from that day forward. Large crowds loved following Him, seeing the miracles and listening to His teachings. At one point He taught them about the cost of being a disciple. He said, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33). Jesus Christ wants to be Saviour and Lord of all who come to Him.

The *EMC Statement of Faith* states that “We believe that our relationship to the Saviour is to be an unconditional commitment to discipleship. Discipleship is the total life of the believer patterned after the life and death of our Lord.”

Our understanding is that an individual who responds to the call of Christ responds to the whole gospel, including a call to discipleship, to follow the life and teachings of Christ.

**Discipleship leads to nonconformity. Why?
Discipleship is the opposite of the prevalent world
attitude that it’s all about me. Jesus takes the
pattern of this world and turns it upside-down.**

8. DISCIPLESHIP AND NONCONFORMITY

We believe that our relationship to the Saviour is to be an unconditional commitment to discipleship. Discipleship is the total life of the believer patterned after the life and death of our Lord (Matthew 4:16–22; Acts 11:26; 26:28; Romans 5:5; 12:1–2, 7–12; 13:8–14; 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1; Ephesians 1:1–10; 4:32–5:2; Colossians 3:1–17; Titus 2:11–14; 1 Peter 2:13–24; 4:16).

Following Him will always involve leaving our nets, putting a new priority on love for family. Believers connect with Paul’s words, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

Discipleship leads to nonconformity. Why? Discipleship is the opposite of the prevalent world attitude that it’s all about me. Jesus takes the pattern of this world and turns it upside-down. He says, “The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11–12) and “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

As our *Statement of Faith* says “Discipleship is the total life of the believer patterned after the life and death of our Lord.”

Peter Doerksen is senior pastor at La Crete Christian Fellowship in La Crete, Alta.



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Statement of Faith Article 9: The Life of Peace

by Glen Koop

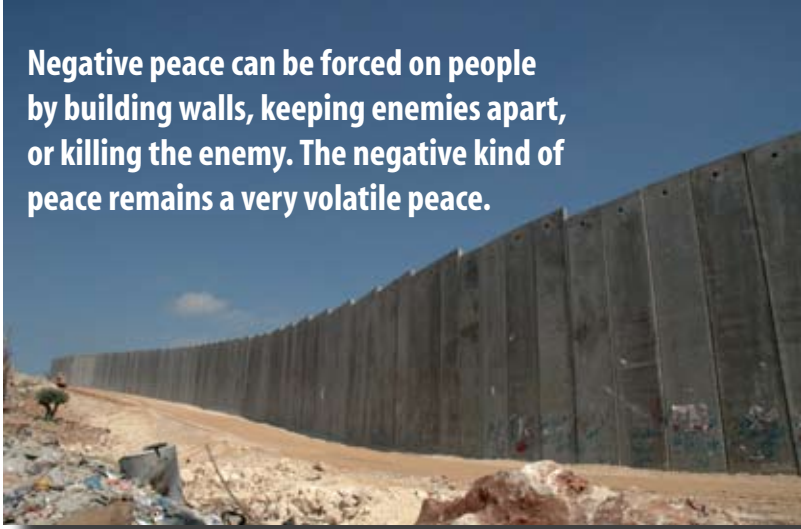
God incarnate—Jesus—lived a life of love and peace. (In the New Testament God’s peace is related to grace, life, love, joy, and mercy.) He was totally complete in relationship toward God and people. Jesus sacrificed his life for peace; in him we find peace with God and are empowered to live peacefully with our neighbours—but we still encounter failure in our relationships.

Jesus came into a world of turmoil; his people hated their Samaritan neighbours and the Romans who ruled them. In contrast, Jesus exemplified love to his family: mother and father, brothers, sisters, his disciples, the Samaritans, through the apostle Peter to the Romans, and through Paul to the Gentiles. Jesus’ spirit broadened family beyond race, colour, language and culture.

Following Jesus’ ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon *all* believers. Today he desires to exemplify God’s love and peace through those who hear God’s Word, sense his Spirit within it, burn it onto their hearts and minds and put it into practice so that God’s peace eventually reaches the whole world!

The Law cannot give us peace

However, negative peace can be forced on people by building walls, keeping enemies apart, or killing the enemy. The negative kind of peace remains a very



Negative peace can be forced on people by building walls, keeping enemies apart, or killing the enemy. The negative kind of peace remains a very volatile peace.

(Wikimedia commons image)

volatile peace. At any moment violence erupts, bringing destruction and death.

Positive peace is not forced but accepted voluntarily. It is a peace which works on God’s premise that His love is actually workable in the world. One cannot love God, self, or others unless one accepts God’s love. At birth we all receive God’s love. Parents responsible for the new life enjoy nurturing love in the new life.

Love grows

Love is maturing. God’s Spirit makes us loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. It beckons: to love the neighbour as oneself; to love and pray for our enemies; to bless people and give them joy; to obey, which means “listen to”; to submit to one another as Christians and to the government of whatever country we are citizens or expatriates; to do good to the unrighteous as well as to the righteous.

Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

If our belief in peace would fade within our conference what would be the result? Is it possible to live a life of peace in our daily contacts—in home, workplace, business, with pre-believers and believers?

Glen Koop is a long-time EMC pastor. He most recently served as interim pastor of Birch River (Man.) Christian Fellowship Church.

9. THE LIFE OF PEACE

We believe in the life of peace. We are called to walk in the steps of the Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace. Everything about his life, his teachings and his redemptive death on the cross, summons us to a life of nonviolence.

As nonresistant Christians, we cannot support war, whether as officers, soldiers, combatants or noncombatants, or direct financial contributors.

Instead of taking up arms, we should do whatever we can to lessen human distress and suffering, even at the risk of our own lives. In all circumstances, we should be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation (Isaiah 53:3–9; Matthew 5–7; 28:18–20; John 18:36; Romans 12–13; Philippians 2:3–4; Colossians 2:14–15; Hebrews 1:1–2; 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9, 20–23).

Statement of Faith Article 10: The Church

by Richard Klassen

For some years we have striven to be a church just like any other evangelical church. Is an EMC church in fact different than other churches?

Through various inter-denominational factors denominational distinctives have been blurred and erased. While Christ's body growing towards unity is a desirable achievement the negative effect of erasing distinctives is that often doctrines as a whole have also been given short shrift and, indeed, church itself is increasingly viewed as an undesirable option for Christians.

Our statement presents church, not as an option, nor even as a question, but as part and parcel of "new life in Christ."

While the statement does not define church, the understanding has always been that "belonging to His church" has both a universal and a local application. One is meaningless without the other. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the universal church at the time of new birth and water baptism unites us to the local church.

The idea that belonging to the universal church is all that really counts has always been foreign to EMC thinking. The universal church does not exist apart from the local church. In the setting of the local church believers worship, receive teaching, exercise their gifts and grow in the Lord.

Article 10 portrays a church obviously not in the liturgical, sacramental, or Pentecostal/Charismatic camps. Rather, the emphasis on holy living, relationships, and service puts us solidly in Anabaptist circles. We have been diligent in both physical and spiritual care of our congregations, our communities and beyond, reflecting our implicit belief in "whole body" involvement with servant leadership.

We have done well, by Canadian standards, in sending missionaries and donating money to the cause of Christ. These areas of strength set us apart from other evangelical churches, even if somewhat subtly in today's church scene.

A curious omission is that worship, considered by many to be the chief

A curious omission is that worship, considered by many to be the chief occupation of the church, receives no mention. Was this deliberate or just an oversight?

occupation of the church, receives no mention. Was this deliberate or just an oversight? Either way it probably does not reflect current EMC perception or practice. Surely we see worship as a major function of church life and it would be strengthening to see it have its rightful place in our *Statement of Faith*.

All in all, our practice of church, both written and unwritten, has many positive features and we do well to make the most of them rather than looking with envy outside our fold.

Richard Klassen is pastor of Straffordville EMC in Straffordville, Ontario.

10. THE CHURCH

We believe all who have experienced new life in Christ belong to his church. All who repent and make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord are united to his holy church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:18; 28:18–20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 16:31; 17:30; 20:21; Romans 8:20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:25; 4:19; Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:5; Colossians 1:18; 3:1–4; 1 Peter 3:21).

We believe God calls the church to conform to the image of Christ, to care for its members and to evangelize all people. Those who are a part of the church seek to: 1) live holy lives, 2) avoid entering into binding relationships with unbelievers, 3) exercise proper stewardship of their abilities, time and possessions.



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Statement of Faith Article 11: Ordinances

by Menno Hamm

Certain practices within the Christian church, instituted by Christ, are known as ordinances. They are not a means by which God bestows special grace upon the participant; nevertheless, they are symbols that portray a deep spiritual significance. Since its inception in 1812, our denomination has consistently observed three ordinances: water baptism, the Lord's Supper and footwashing.

A. Water baptism

In His final instructions to His disciples, Christ commanded them to preach the Gospel in all the world, baptizing those who responded in faith and obedience (Matt. 28:18–20). This they did, as the book of Acts records, beginning with 3,000 new believers on the day of Pentecost.

Water baptism is the rite by which believers identify with Christ, indicating their commitment to live for Him and serve Him. By this act they also identify with the church, as members of Christ's body.

B. The Lord's Supper

On the eve of His betrayal and arrest, Christ celebrated the Passover meal with His twelve disciples, followed by what has come to be known as the Lord's Supper or communion. They ate bread, signifying His body that would be broken in death on the cross. They also drank wine, a symbol of His blood that would be

shed for their redemption.

The Lord's Supper is a deep personal reflection on the meaning of Christ's death. Although it is a personal experience, involving self-examination, the Lord's Supper is also a communal event, where believers together commemorate Christ's death.

C. Footwashing

During the Passover meal before His death, Jesus girded Himself with a towel, took a basin of water, and began to wash His disciple's feet. He thus demonstrated true servanthood, a quality He wished to see in His followers. He said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

Footwashing is important in that it symbolizes how Christians should give and receive loving ministry among each other, demonstrating humility and equality. More than that, Christ also used footwashing to illustrate the need for daily cleansing.

Individual congregations decide the frequency of observing the ordinances. Baptism generally occurs once a year, the Lord's Supper three or four times, and footwashing perhaps once or twice or not at all.

Questions such as the following may be asked:

- "How can the significance of the ordinances be effectively communicated?"
- "Who is qualified to administer the ordinances?"
- "Is a member's participation in the ordinances optional?"
- "With the trend toward baptism by immersion, how can a two-tiered system be avoided?"
- "Should young children be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper conducted during a worship service?"

Menno Hamm is a long-time EMC minister. He lives in MacGregor, Man. He has also served as editor of *The Messenger*, 1987–1997.



Although it is a personal experience, involving self-examination, the Lord's Supper is also a communal event, where believers together commemorate Christ's death.

11. ORDINANCES

An ordinance is a symbolic observance, instituted according to Scripture, which is to be administered in and by the church as a visible sign of spiritual truth.

We believe Christ instituted three ordinances: water baptism, the Lord's Supper and footwashing (Matthew 28:18–20; John 13:1–17; 1 Corinthians 11:20–32).

Statement of Faith Article 12: The Resurrection

by Layton Friesen

The church, despite common parlance, does not hope in 'life after death.' 'Life after death' is finding some existence after death. Instead, our hope is in resurrection—the occasion of God's people being called back through death in reverse and together bursting into the new creation world with all death purged from us.

Resurrection will happen when our merciful Creator comes to us at the place where all our existence has finally ended up at zero. (Shoveling dirt onto a casket is a sobering way to bring this zero home). He comes and gives us back our life in a new way after all has been lost. Which is why to believe in the resurrection is to believe in grace.

The only evidence that this could happen is the resurrection of our brother Jesus. If Jesus is not risen, then our faith is an absurdity better forgotten. But his tomb was empty, and he was seen by witnesses. Let

the church live in such a way that unless the resurrection happened (and will happen) all is lost. If the church loses

If Jesus is not risen, then our faith is an absurdity better forgotten. Let the church live in such a way that unless the resurrection happened (and will happen) all is lost.

its nerve in this awesome gamble, it becomes a mere convener of clubs and parties.

This statement announces that the resurrection of Jesus (and therefore ours) is *bodily*. Why? If the whole person of our brother Jesus was not rescued from the grave our whole person will not be saved either, which is to say, we are not saved at all. It's like inviting a friend over and saying "please come but leave your left leg at home." Only the risen Christ can now promise that who we are as humans, em-bodied, en-spirited and en-souled, will some day be changed into everything God created us to be. That's a welcome word if you've suspected that eating farmer sausage (and the rest of bodily life) is for you a spiritual experience.

This statement also teaches the shadow of the good news. If our authentic appetite is for communion with Jesus, the resurrection is good news. But if our deepest longing has not been for Jesus, being raised from the dead will only awaken us in the starkest manner to the implications of the vapour we have chased. We will finally taste what we have always longed for which is alienation from God, separation from others, and removal from God's creation.

1. Can we have both an 'intermediate state' of *life* when we die and a last day resurrection from the *dead*?

2. Do our funerals (patterned after Princess Di's "celebration of a life"?) convey our conviction of grace alone by resurrection?

Layton Friesen is senior pastor of Fort Garry EMC in Winnipeg, Man.

12. THE RESURRECTION

We believe Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. All, believers and unbelievers, will be raised from the dead as well, the believers to the resurrection life and the unbelievers to the resurrection of condemnation. We also believe that people already enter the eternal state at the time of death. The righteous go into the presence of their Lord and the unrighteous into conscious suffering (Daniel 12:2; Luke 16:19–31; 23:43; John 5:28–29; 20:20, 24–29; Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 1:19–26; Revelation 20:11–15).

Statement of Faith Article 13: The Return and Final Triumph of Christ

by Abe Bueckert

As the EM Conference we believe in a glorious coming day when Jesus Christ will return for a second and final time to earth. At His first coming, He came as the Saviour of humankind. After His sacrificial death and resurrection, He ascended to heaven with the promise (via angels) that He would return in the same way He had just ascended.

Today, we who are His children through faith in His death and resurrection wait for the promised return of Christ, knowing that it will spell final victory, glory and joy. The reason it will do this is because we still live in bodies that are not redeemed. While our spirits are immortal, our bodies await the return of Christ and, with it, the arrival of immortal bodies (Rom. 8:18–23; 1 Cor. 15:51–58).

When Christ returns, death will be destroyed. We will have resurrected bodies. We will be without sin. This will be the final triumph of Christ when Satan, God's enemy and ours, will be totally destroyed. Christ will take His rightful place as Lord of all. He, the righteous One, will rule in righteousness. Justice will prevail. As His children and heirs, we will rule with Him forever.

We have here an article that is at the core of what it means to belong to God. Herein lies the assurance of paradise regained. It was at the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden that the pain of separation from God was experienced. Prior to this the bliss of perfect fellowship, untainted by sin, was present. One day, when Christ returns, we will once again bathe in this perfect

We serve a God who is victorious and who will lead us in victory. This glorious truth is something we want to continually keep before us. It gives us hope and encouragement. It spurs us on to right living.



13. THE RETURN AND FINAL TRIUMPH OF CHRIST

We believe in the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ. This is the blessed hope of believers. Christ's return will be the occasion of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal separation of the just and the unjust. Everything will be brought into the subjection of his authority and rule as his eternal kingdom is realized (Matthew 24:44; 25:31–46; John 14:1–6; Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:19–28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Titus 2:11–14; Hebrews 10:37; 2 Peter 3:3–13; Revelation 20–22).

At his return, Christ will judge all people. After the judgment, the righteous will be with God, the unrighteous in hell. Death will be destroyed, and Satan and his angels will be thrown into the lake of fire. Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying all dominion, authority and power. Then the righteous will reign with Christ forever (Matthew 25:31–46; John 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28).

fellowship we were created for and that our hearts yearn for.

This is, indeed, the blessed hope of believers. Without such a hope we would surely be a people to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19). As it is, we, much rather, are a people to be envied. We serve a God who is victorious and who will lead us in victory. This glorious truth is something we want to continually keep before us. It gives us hope and encouragement. It spurs us on to right living (1 John 3:3).

When will this glorious day come?

We do not know. Jesus highly emphasized that we should always be ready lest His coming catch us sleeping (Mark 13:32–37).

Abe Bueckert is pastor of Picture Butte Mennonite Church in Picture Butte, Alta.

Church Practices Article 1: The Lord's Day

by Kim Stoesz

When I was growing up there was a Christian Reformed family who lived on our street and on Sundays this family spent no money. You see, they believed that in order for them to spend money, someone else had to be working and so they would then be contributing to that person breaking the Sabbath. They prepared ahead of time to keep the Sabbath. There were no stops for milk, bread, or gas on Sundays and they participated in no activities that required any kind of cost, even if paid for ahead of time.

As a teenager it seemed like an overly strict rule and I often looked for ways around it for my friend! As an adult I waffle between feeling that it was legalistic and, yet at the same time, wondering if in many ways it was good. After all, setting boundaries can often help us accomplish our goals.

There is a fine line between healthy boundaries and legalism. Setting healthy boundaries in regards to keeping the Sabbath can enhance the day, in a sense giving us *permission* to have a day of leisure,

1. THE LORD'S DAY

We believe that in the fourth commandment we have the principle of one day of rest in seven. During the New Testament period, the first day of the week was designated as the Lord's Day. It commemorated the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On the Lord's Day, Christians worship the Lord, teach the Scriptures, have fellowship and refresh themselves in body and spirit (Deuteronomy 5:12–15; Exodus 20:8–11; Isaiah 58:13–14; Mark 2:23–27; 16:2; Hebrews 10:23–25; Revelation 1:10).

holy leisure. It may include rest, or reading, but most important is connecting with God who gave us the day.


We must be careful though, that we do not turn the Sabbath into a day full of do's and don'ts. If that happens we are no better than the Pharisees who were upset with the disciples for picking heads of grain to eat, or with Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath.

After six days of work, God took a day to rest. I doubt that God needed to rest after six days of work, but perhaps He chose to stop and reflect and to see that it was good.

We can go for a long time without a rest, but is it healthy physically, emotionally or spiritually? God saw fit to take a rest and see what He had done. We too, should take a rest and see what God has done, all around us and more importantly, for us and in us.

Exodus 2:8 says to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Webster defines holy as “set apart to the service or worship of God.” On the Lord's Day we need to “quit doing and simply be” in other words, *be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:1).

Kim Stoesz is senior pastor of Braeside EMC in Winnipeg, Man.



We can go for a long time without a rest, but is it healthy physically, emotionally or spiritually?

Church Practices Article 2: Christian Stewardship

by Fred Buhler

The wording of this statement reflects some of the tension we experience when living out the concept of stewardship. We believe that God owns all and entrusts gifts to us—life, possessions, gospel, time, responsibility—yet we see numerous references here to “our” things. We easily slip into the mindset of ownership!

A challenge related to this life of “managing for another” is its voluntary nature. Being faithful is a choice, rewarding to be sure, but a choice God leaves to us. An Old Testament biblical example of this is the Sabbath.

Honouring God’s instruction resulted in blessing, provision, health, vital community, and God’s glory being shown to the surrounding world. The result is “to seek first the reign of God and to cease from consumerism, unchecked competition, overburdened productivity, greed and possessiveness,” as another Mennonite confession states.

Traditionally the Mennonite sense of community has reflected a lifestyle of mutual aid, a solid work ethic, frugal living, careful investing and managing of resources, often coupled with a strong drive to share our faith and share generously with the less fortunate. At times these values have led to groups of Mennonites becoming wealthy in a world of need.

A tension has often been to know how to help without creating dependency; how to share the gospel without having it lead to the formation of “rice Christians.”

Part of giving generously is helping others to move ahead, not just giving a handout. It

The teaching to live faithfully and obediently is integral to who we are.



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2. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

We believe God owns and sustains his creation. He calls us, God’s people, to be trustworthy stewards of creation. Stewardship is demonstrated in our lifestyles, in our relations with the poor and the disadvantaged, in our view of possessions, in our concern for all of God’s creation and in our response to global economic injustice. Biblical stewardship includes faithful proclamation of the Gospel, careful exercise of our gifts and abilities and proper use of our powers, possessions and time, to accomplish God’s will “on earth as it is in heaven” (Genesis 1:1, 20–21, 28; 2:15, 19; Leviticus 25:23–24; Psalm 8:6–8; 24:1; 104:16–18; Micah 2:1–2; Haggai 2:8; Malachi 3:8–10; Matthew 25:14–30; 28:18–20; Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 4:1–3; 10:26; 2 Corinthians 8–9; Ephesians 4:7–16; 1 Peter 4:7–11).

requires more involvement and commitment on our part. But isn’t that what we are called to?

As a people we have been entrusted with much: material well being, access to education, freedom of religion and speech, awareness of the world situation, and especially the challenge of Jesus to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The teaching to live faithfully and obediently is integral to who we are. The issue is not merely lifestyle choice and preference. The issue is discerning God’s mind and then obeying.

How can we encourage one another to think as managers, not owners?

A common complaint we heard on the mission field during our service in Paraguay was that those who prospered wanted to forget their poor “cousins” and enjoy their wealth for themselves. Would that be a valid accusation against our church in Canada?

Fred Buhler is pastor of Pineridge Fellowship Chapel in Hudson Bay, Sask.

Church Practices Article 3: The Christian Home

by Ernest Funk

The article is made up of four short paragraphs. The first paragraph affirms that as a Conference we believe in Christian homes. It states that there are two types, namely: the single celibate and the heterosexual married. Both are equally acceptable and honourable.

It then describes or defines the home as a place in which Christians reside, where Jesus Christ is recognized as Lord, and where God is worshipped on a regular basis.

It is, further, a safe haven for each of its members where they learn to live and work and play together. The members of a home respect each other as equals and recognize each other's God-given roles. In going on to the following three paragraphs, it comes as somewhat of a surprise that they deal with marriage; only the first actually deals with the stated topic.

Now marriage and home by the article's own definition are not the same. You may have a perfectly respectable home as a single person.

For the home of a married couple, however, it is hard to imagine anything more problematic and harmful than a marriage breakup. Now this was written in a Canadian context in which marriage breakups were and are still on the increase. One would, therefore, see this as a statement of the importance of the Christian home, plus an attempt to shore up faltering marriages.

In doing this, another statement

This article seems to assume that the single celibate home unit has no problems and faces no threats. In a possible future revision, perhaps this should be treated in more detail.



3. THE CHRISTIAN HOME

We believe in the importance of Christian homes. A Christian home is where Christians reside. Both the celibate single and the heterosexual married life are honourable and respectable in the sight of God. In the Christian home, the lordship of Christ is recognized and people worship regularly. It is a place of security and peace; a place to learn to work, play and plan together. In the home, members are to regard one another as equals before the Lord, while recognizing God-given roles (Genesis 1:27; 2:18, 24; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:4-12; Mark 10:1-12; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:7-9; 32-38; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16; Ephesians 5:21-6:4).

of conviction is enunciated. In effect this article goes on to say, "We believe that marriage has been instituted by God. It is the union of one man and one woman. It is to be lifelong. Hence, care should be exercised in forming a marriage and, once formed, divorce should not be seen as a solution to marriage difficulties. If they do develop, the church as a community needs to play an active role in counseling, helping, and healing."

Some general observations about this statement of conviction: This article states patently that both the single celibate home unit and the heterosexual (one man, one woman) unit are honourable and respectable in the sight of God. Latently it states that heterosexual plurality of partners type units and homosexual units are not what is intended.

This article seems to assume that the single celibate home unit has no problems and faces no threats. In a possible future revision, perhaps this should be treated in more detail as well, especially in the face of the larger number of marriage failures and the resultant increasing number of single-parent homes.

Ernest Funk is an EMC minister and a long-time missionary.

Church Practices Article 4: Interpersonal Relationships

by Stephanie Unger

We are to pattern our relationships after Christ. That's a broad statement! Are we to gather a group of twelve to follow us as we wander the countryside, fishing for people (Matthew 4:16–22)? Possibly, but the next sentence clarifies what the writers of our *Church Practices* meant. It is Jesus' love for others and forgiveness of those who mistreated him that is to be the pattern for all our relationships.

This seems like something we hear all the time. Of course, we must love other people and forgive them rather than seeking revenge when we are mistreated. But then there's that little word *official*.

I wonder how conscious we are of loving those with whom we have only official connections. Do we expect a free meal if the restaurant gets our order wrong? Do we withdraw our business or support from an organization if they fail us in some way?

Sometimes we believe we are walking in forgiveness, when what we are actually doing is bottling things up.

Do we speak impatiently with telemarketers? Do we treat those who are on opposite sides of ethical/political disputes with coldness or ridicule (even just behind their backs)?

These behaviours are not loving or forgiving. In a world where fighting for our rights has become the norm, we have a glorious opportunity to share the love of Christ simply by treating those around us with mercy.

Offering mercy or forgiveness is usually difficult—and it was just as hard when our *Church Practices* were written. In response to this pain, the writers list a number of scriptures that basically say, “Aren't you glad you have been forgiven and given a new life through the suffering of Christ? Well, show your gratitude by doing

the same for others” (Romans 12, Ephesians 4:32–5:2, Colossians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:21–24).

Sometimes we believe we are walking in forgiveness, when what we are actually doing is bottling things up. Instead of addressing conflict, we “forgive”—meaning we do nothing. But when that person wrongs us again, the previous hurts resurface. The relationship cools and we drift apart. Although forgiveness is painful, the cost of avoidance is much higher, as it leaves us without intimacy.

Still, sometimes forgiveness is too hard. Perhaps that is why the writers draw our attention to Romans 5:5:

“He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” We are not called to work up love and forgiveness within ourselves, but to learn how to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's love.

Stephanie Unger is a house church leader within Many Rooms Church Community in Winnipeg, Man.



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4. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

We believe people should pattern all their relationships, personal and official, after Christ. He loved others and forgave those who mistreated him (Matthew 4:16–22; 5–7; Acts 11:26; 26:28; Romans 5:5; 12–13, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1; Ephesians 4:32–5:2; Colossians 3:1–17; Titus 2:11–14; 1 Peter 2:13–24; 4:16).

Church Practices Article 5: Devotional Life

by Angel Infantes

The devotional life of a Christian is more than a life that is consecrated to God. It is also having the desire to grow closer to God and having joy in being close to God. It is a life that glorifies God.

When a new life in Christ begins, it is dynamic and continues to grow every day until the coming of our Lord. This spiritual growth comes from God, our Father, who nurtures us every day.

There are different spiritual disciplines that help us grow closer to the source of our new life. This source is God, and God is Spirit, and our new life is a spiritual life.

Spiritual disciplines that help us grow include: the reading of scripture, prayer, fasting, and Christian service. These practices allow us to live out our new life and to learn more about it.

It is crucial that we participate in spiritual activities so that we will grow in our spiritual lives, learn about God's will for our lives, and then fulfill our purpose in this world.

It is amazing to see those who have begun their new lives in Christ and then continue to grow spiritually through these disciplines. The credit, however, cannot be given to spiritual disciplines, or to ourselves, but to God, who is willing to have an encounter with us through prayer, the scriptures, fasting, and service. No believer should miss out on this dynamic relationship with God.

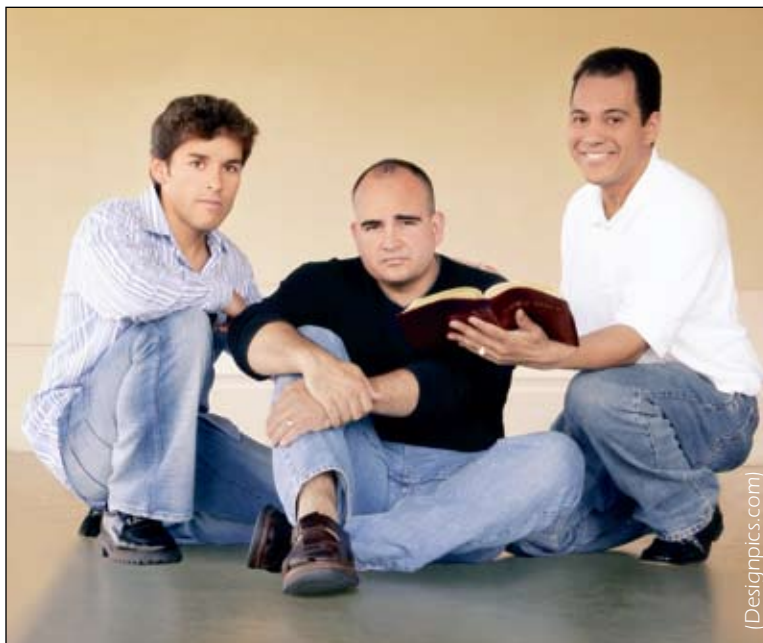
It is crucial that we participate in such spiritual activities so that we will grow in our spiritual lives, learn about God's will for our lives, and then fulfill our purpose in this world. God has called us to be a light in this world so that other people may find the way. We cannot do this apart from God.

In addition, these practices help us avoid offending God and one another. The Church is made up of believers; there are moral guidelines that should be kept through the passage of time.

When we participate in these spiritual disciplines, reading the Scriptures, prayer, fasting, and Christian service, we learn what we should do as well as what we should not do. We learn what will truly enrich our lives, and what will cause damage to it. With the passing of time, our lives will be transformed and filled with the fruits of the Spirit.

Blessed is our God, who has provided us with the means to grow closer to Him, and blessed are those who consecrate their lives to God.

Angel Infantes is the Associate Pastor of Spanish Ministries at Braeside EMC (Winnipeg, Man.).



5. DEVOTIONAL LIFE

We believe Christians should seek to know God better through studying the Scriptures, through prayer, fasting and Christian service. They should refrain from anything that would dishonour God, bring reproach to the church or exert a harmful influence on others or on themselves (Joshua 1:8; Matthew 4:2; Acts 17:11; 13:2-3; Romans 12:1-2, 9-21; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Colossians 3:1-14; 1 Timothy 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 3:17-18; 1 Peter 3:1-6; 1 John 3:1-3).

Church Practices Article 6: Commitment to Service

by Evelyn Barkman

Several selected verses show that this statement is solidly rooted in Scripture.

The *Kleine Gemeinde*, since its beginning in Russia in 1812, has tried to follow the teachings of Christ as stated in these verses. The peace position led many to leave Russia in 1874 and immigrate to North America where they would be freer to live out this faith.

Even though great emphasis was placed on obedience to Christ through lifestyle and service, it was mainly practiced within the church body with only minimal outreach beyond the *Kleine Gemeinde* boundaries.

The focus began to change in 1945 when the first foreign missionary from the *Kleine Gemeinde*, Suzanne Plett, left for service in Brazil, followed by the inception of the Western Gospel Mission, spearheaded by Ben D. Reimer. Both of these events were significant milestones of outreach beyond the church to Canadian towns and to the ends of the earth.

With growing interest in Canadian outreach and foreign missions, the Board of Missions was formed in 1953. Churches faithfully supported the growing work through training, prayer and finances.

Today, with an EMC membership of 7,750 in 61 congregations, this work has grown to 150 missionaries in 21 countries. Seventy-five percent of the conference budget is directed to this program. Project Builders, an arm of the conference, helps to finance many missions projects. These statistics validate the fact that service and witness are important aspects of EMC identity.

In addition to those formally under the Board of Missions, there are hundreds of other volunteers who exemplify Christ's command to love, serve, and

6. COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

We believe Christian disciples seek to serve rather than to be served. They work to relieve suffering and would rather personally suffer than inflict pain on others. Disciples of Christ commit themselves to righteousness, justice, peace and love, in their homeland and in the global community. Foundational to these commitments is the commitment to verbal proclamation of the Gospel (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 10:35–45; John 12:26; Acts 1:8; Galatians 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 9:14).

Our history shows that 1945 to 1955 was a pivotal and exciting time in the EMC. Are we still riding the wave of this exciting decade? Is the wave petering out?



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witness. I can safely say the EMC is a witnessing, caring conference.

The question remains, “Can we do more?”

Our history shows that 1945 to 1955 was a pivotal and exciting time in the EMC. Are we still riding the wave of this exciting decade? Is the wave petering out?

A recent article by Ward Parkinson (*Guess what, EMC? We're not growing!* April 16, 2008) showed that even though the EMC is planting new churches, it is not growing numerically, and that is certainly cause for concern.

We cannot remain on a plateau. We either grow or decline. Which way are we going?

Is it time to start a new wave? Are there those among us with passion, vision, and courage to lead us into a new era of innovative witness and service for Christ?

Evelyn Barkman (Prairie Rose) served as a missionary in Mali from 1968 to 2007.

Church Practices Article 7: Divine Healing

by Flo Friesen

What do we, as EMC, believe about divine healing? God heals. The Matthew 8 stories of Jesus healing the sick end with “he...healed all the sick.” We often say Jesus didn’t heal everyone in Judea, yet he did heal *all* who came to him. We believe he died for our sicknesses as well as our sins (Matthew 8:17).

We take very literally the command in James 5 to call for the elders to anoint and pray. I remember ministers coming to pray for my sick mother. She was healed (after a year).

This action may seem simplistic to those of a non-faith background. But they watch the results and are drawn to our faith.

If someone is healed, there is an awareness that a Higher Power (whom we call Jesus) has done the healing. Healing is a tremendous witness of faith in Jesus Christ, both in Christian and non-Christian communities.

EMC also believes that God often chooses not to heal. When healing does not take place, there’s still the witness of faith through the strength, grace, joy, and peace that results when people pray for those who are suffering.

7. DIVINE HEALING

We believe that the redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ is for the whole person. God may choose to bring healing and encouragement through medical care, through prayer or through the anointing of oil and prayer by the elders of the church.

However, God often achieves his purposes through permitting suffering. Believers who find help and hope in suffering by faith in a sufficient God are valuable witnesses. Through faithfully enduring suffering, believers may experience a healing of the spirit. We should leave to God the results of all prayers and the means used. Our attitude should be the same as that of Jesus when he said, “Not my will but thine be done” (Matthew 8:1–17; 26:39; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; James 5:13–18).



Some questions abound. I’ve heard a person say, “I don’t want prayer for healing because I’ll just be disappointed when God doesn’t heal.”

God is also glorified when he takes a person home to heaven, the ultimate healing.

This basic statement on our belief in healing is a comfort to us as a faith community when we become sick. Prayer chains abound in our churches, the majority of requests relating to illnesses.

Some questions also abound. I’ve heard a person say, “I don’t want prayer for healing because I’ll just be disappointed

when God doesn’t heal.”

Why does God not heal? How do we reconcile the teaching of purposeful suffering (Philippians 3:10) and the fact that Jesus healed *all* who asked for healing, but doesn’t seem to today? Are we perhaps more committed to suffering than we are to healing? Do we really believe “by his stripes we are healed”?

As well, why do we not see as much divine healing as believers in developing countries? Jesus said to several whom he healed (Matthew 8:13, 9:22) that their faith was part of the healing process.

Do we have less faith than Christians who have no medical recourse? When they cry to God, he hears and heals.

Does God have a different standard of faith on this side of the ocean? Do we have a full enough understanding of what really is God’s *will* in healing?

Flo Friesen (Kleefeld/St. Vital) is a long-time educator.

Church Practices Article 8: Societies and Associations

by George Toews

God has left us, as people who follow Christ, in a world which does not follow Him. That creates challenges which sometimes become serious tensions. In its title, this article identifies *Societies and Associations* as one area of potential tension.

Its text mentions “organizations where oaths or secret vows are required for membership,” “cults,” and “the occult” as areas where following Christ comes in conflict with participation in these organizations.

The key phrase in the article, which guides us in making decisions about that tension, is “intimate alliances.” This implies that we can have relationships with unbelievers because, as Paul says, “I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world... In that case you would have to leave this world” (1 Corinthians 5:9–10).

It also implies that we can have all kinds of associations which give us the opportunity to be the light of the world, because Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14).

However, as followers of Christ, we have made a commitment to Jesus, which is the primary allegiance in our life.

The phrase “intimate alliances” teaches that the close associations which we are called to avoid are those which could require us to turn away from our allegiance to Christ.

Paul affirms this covenant: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? ...For we are the temple of the living God.” (2 Corinthians 6:14–16).

The article may originally have been written to warn about alliances with lodges like the Masons, cults like Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the occult. However, we ought also to consider other situations in which we may be asked to enter into a covenant

8. SOCIETIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

We believe Christians are not to become part of any organizations where oaths or secret vows are required for membership or where such membership might foster the formation of intimate alliances with unbelievers.

Christians should not become involved in cults and in the occult (Matthew 7:15; John 3:21; Acts 19:17–20; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Ephesians 5:8–13; 1 Timothy 4:17; James 5:12; 1 John 4:1–2; 2 John 7).

relationship with people or groups whose first allegiance is not to Christ.

Could this article and its principle also apply to business partnerships? Marriages? Trade unions? The questions we need to ask are, “What level of covenant is required?” “Could this covenant conflict with my primary allegiance to Christ?”

In the early church, believers were asked to say, “Caesar is Lord,” and could not because they lived in a covenant relationship with Jesus as Lord. May we live by the same commitment!

George Toews is senior pastor of Rosenort EMC.

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Church Practices Article 9: The State

by Ron Penner

For us today, as also for the early Anabaptists, this issue separates us from some other Christians. In the 16th century, some reformers argued for a state-church society while the Anabaptists insisted on the separation of church and state. The position one adopts has implications for how one relates to the state today.

This article underscores the clear affirmation of the state as a divinely ordained institution. In Romans 13, the Bible states God's purpose for the state is to be his agent in maintaining law and order generally and the punishment of evildoers specifically. There are other passages that support this view.

Our *Church Practices* emphasizes that we are to be citizens who are law-abiding and submissive to the

laws of this land and to respect the state's God-given authority.

However, though our view of the state is generally positive, there are limits to our allegiance. Our primary allegiance is to Christ and his kingdom and when the state enters the realm that belongs to Christ, we are clear that the separation of church and state has been violated.

"My Kingdom is not of this world," Christ declared emphatically (John 18:36) and when Satan offered the world to him in his temptation in the wilderness from a high mountain (Matthew 4:8-10), Jesus rejected it totally.

Disciples of Christ adopt the same mindset, since we "have passed from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

This article is important because we do not always recognize the radical difference between these two kingdoms. In this world, the government's mandate is to protect its citizens, exact justice, punish evildoers, and maintain law and order by means of the power of the police force, the judicial system, and, in some cases, the military. Hallmarks of the Kingdom of God, on the other hand, are love, peace, gentleness, grace, and forgiveness.

The Church is the central agency of God to demonstrate and proclaim this alternative kingdom in this world.

- Where do the values of the two kingdoms clash most frequently?
- Can citizens in the kingdom of God participate in government? Vote? Become members of various levels of government? Pay all taxes?
 - Since the state uses force to enforce laws, can a pacifist Christian join the police force?
- How can we respect the state and yet be faithful to Christ?

Ron Penner (Braeside) recently served as EMC moderator.

9. THE STATE (abridged)

We believe that God has instituted human government.

We also believe this arrangement of government includes two basic functions: directing the interaction of society and serving as God's agent of wrath of punishment.

We should determine all matters concerning the Christian and the state by carefully interpreting the Scriptures with a deep sensitivity to the moral problems involved (Matthew 4:8-10; 5:39-48; Luke 4:5-8; John 12:31; 16:11; 18:36; Acts 4:19; 5:29; Romans 12-14; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 13).

Can citizens in the kingdom of God participate in government? Vote? Become members of various levels of government?



Church Practices Article 10: Lawsuits

by Peter Janzen

Based on the scriptures in this statement the understanding of the Mennonite community, by and large, has been that disputes need to be settled within the context of the church in a spirit of Christian love. This links the discussion to our doctrine of non-resistance and our belief in the separation of church and state.

The important questions that surface are: what does the New Testament mean when it says, “If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” “If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?” “It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.”

How are we to actually practice these principles in the complexities of being Christian Canadian citizens?

There was a time when we lived in primarily insulated agricultural communities and it was possible to avoid contact with the law. Mennonite groups have sought promises from the government to protect them from lawsuits because going into court and defending themselves would violate their religious teachings. There was a time when a *Mennonite lawyer* would have been an oxymoron.

Those times have changed. As we have moved into businesses and professions and urban settings, we are no longer able to deal primarily with each other. We rely on the system to help settle estates, transfer and give title to property, provide safety, security and personal

We need to accept the fact that our legal system is not very good at making things right between parties; it most often creates winners and losers.



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10. LAWSUITS

We believe Christians should take seriously what the Scriptures teach about lawsuits and strive to deal redemptively with victims and offenders, working for restitution and reconciliation. We believe Christians are not to initiate any lawsuits which would violate the principle of love (Matthew 5:38–48; Romans 12:17–21; 1 Corinthians 6:1–11; 1 Peter 2:19–21).

freedom. Even our own charitable and mutual aid organizations require the engagements of law firms.

We have generally accepted that church and state are not always easily separable. We have also accepted that the legal system has a positive role in society. This shift has made us less uncomfortable with having courts settle our disputes.

We need to accept the fact that our legal system is not very good at making things right between parties; it most often creates winners and losers. Litigation implies an adversarial approach to solving disputes. The New Testament approach is to seek reconciliation rather than winning a case.

The apostle Paul would say that “a legal victory might in fact be a spiritual defeat.” Paul’s big concern is the reputation of the church. David Ewert agrees that “in our day where everyone insists on rights, Christians need to relearn what it means to suffer wrongs.”

These teachings stand in stark contrast to our society’s hurry to seek personal rights and protection. If we think “rights” then we are at odds with the New Testament and our *Church Practices*.

Peter Janzen has previously served as pastor of Hillside Christian Fellowship.

Church Practices Article 11: Jury Service

by Menno Kroeker

This statement on jury service was substantially changed from the 1960 to 1994.

The earlier version simply states that jury service is inconsistent with our faith and practice for members; the 1994 edition says *regular* jury service is incompatible with our non-resistant position. There appears to be openness to certain kinds of jury duty when it acknowledges a difference between a coroner's jury and a regular court jury.

From an Anabaptist perspective it is understandable that we have been cautious in becoming involved in the judicial process when the justice system historically had often dispensed far more injustice on our forebears.

Mennonites were more inclined to feel most secure when governments would just leave them alone. No doubt our Kleine Gemeinde background in Europe has shaped our response to the justice system in North America.

Trial by jury was initially instituted to correct obvious injustices from trial by ordeal or by combat. Essentially it involves selecting 12 common citizens who are to establish the facts in the case.

Our interpretation of Jesus' words has led us to believe that we must return good for evil. This stance would be difficult for a person in a jury where the facts of the case would lead to punishment.



If the role of the jury is first and foremost to determine the truth in a trial, then would anyone be in a better position to do so than a Christian? Christians should be noted as being deeply committed to telling the truth and therefore having some discernment in determining it.

No doubt such considerations resulted in some accommodations in the later edition of our *Church Practices*.

However, we must consider that our system of justice is what is called a retributive system. This means that punishment is the accepted response to the wrong that has been done.

Our interpretation of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:38–48 has led us to believe that we must, rather, return good for evil. This stance would be difficult for a person in a jury where the facts of the case would lead to punishment for the crime committed.

While Canada does not currently practice capital punishment, it can result in incarceration that has proven to be unhelpful in rehabilitation.

While many in our EMC constituency would defend the principle of “do the crime, serve the time,” there are many situations where there are better alternatives that serve to bring about rehabilitation of the offender. I became convinced about that when I served as a translator in the court system.

One such alternative is Mediation Services, a program that brings together the offender and the victim with the aim of reconciliation. The anticipated outcome is long-term peace and even friendship between the parties, though there is no guarantee that this will always be the result.

As we become open to our members serving on a jury it would be advisable to also involve ourselves in alternatives to retributive justice where long-term relationships are built and where reconciliation between the victim and the offender are the objective.

Menno Kroeker is a minister in Rosenort EMC.

11. JURY SERVICE

We believe regular court duty to be incompatible with the non-resistant position. There is, however, a difference between an inquest (e.g., coroner's jury) and a regular court jury (Matthew 5:38–48; John 18:36; Romans 12–13).

Church Practices Article 12: Swearing of Oaths

by Harvey Plett

In February 1527, only two years after the origin of the Anabaptist movement, a group of Anabaptist leaders gathered at Schleithem to discuss issues of theology and practice.

Out of that meeting came *The Schleithem Confession of Faith*, a summary of their understanding of the teaching of the Bible on seven key issues. The seventh article is on the swearing of oaths.

Based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12, they said Scripture teaches: "Do not swear at all, but let your yes be yes, and no, no. Anything more comes from evil."

Not swearing an oath has been part of our Conference faith position since the inception of our church in Ukraine in 1812. Over the years this position has been accepted and there has been very little discussion or debate about it. We were and are committed to being a people of integrity and to speaking the truth at all times regardless of the consequences.

12. SWEARING OF OATHS

We believe that Christians should be people of integrity and truth. The Scriptures forbid the swearing of oaths and of anything beyond an affirmation (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12).

We may not have always been equally successful, but we have always subscribed to speaking the truth without validating the truthfulness of what we say by swearing an oath. We have affirmed that what we say is the truth with as much sincerity as if it were an oath.

The non-swearing of oaths has tested individuals who were asked to be a witness at court or in signing some government papers. In filling in the affidavits for wedding banns we used to be able to choose between swear or affirm. The courts and the government accepted and still accept a simple affirmation today.

Some have asked, "What is the difference between affirming and swearing to tell the truth?"

One writer suggests an oath is a solemn affirmation or declaration made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed, and imprecating his vengeance

and renouncing his favour if what is affirmed is false. Affirming, on the other hand, is simply saying, "I will tell the truth. I will be honest."

Failing to be truthful under oath makes one liable to the charge of perjury. Certainly the Kingdom of this World looks at an oath as more binding and the breaking of which results in serious consequences. We do not believe in invoking spiritual powers. We are people of truth because of who we are followers of Jesus, not because we have made an oath.

James 5:12 says, "Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No' no, or you will be condemned."

Let us continue to be people of integrity.

Harvey Plett is a minister, an educator, and has served as moderator.

**We have always
subscribed to
speaking the truth
without validating
the truthfulness
of what we say by
swearing an oath.**



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