

**Mennonite Church Saskatchewan  
2004 Study Guide  
for  
FROM ANABAPTIST SEED  
By C. Arnold Snyder**

**About this booklet**

Please accept this copy of C. Arnold Snyder's From Anabaptist Seed, the resource we are encouraging all congregations to study in 2004. "We want to use this as a resource for reaffirming our common faith, for exploring further ways to apply this faith in our current contexts, and for opening ourselves to God's call for us as a people." (Recommendation presented Feb. 28, 2004)

Copies of this booklet can be ordered through the Conference office, through your local bookstore or directly from the publisher's bookstore, Pandora Press in Kitchener, Ontario (519-745-1560). We will attempt to put together a bulk order by April 1. Please let us know your orders before then. The retail cost is \$6.25 per copy (alas there is no significant discount available). Parts of this booklet (along with some graphics from Martyrs' Mirror) are also available online from the Third Way Café website ([www.thirdway.com](http://www.thirdway.com)). Click under Mennonite Beliefs, then under Anabaptist Seed.

**Ponder It Together**

We encourage you as a class or study group to read and ponder together this booklet. Several years ago, the Mennonite World Conference asked "What does it mean to believe and act as Anabaptist Christians today, not only in thousands of different local settings, but as a global family of faith?" They commissioned C. Arnold Snyder to respond with this summary of "a common core of conviction and practice" from the early Anabaptists.

Whether you trace your Anabaptist faith to some distant sixteenth century ancestor or to your personal choice this year, may this booklet remind you of important themes from this faith story we have chosen to share. May From Anabaptist Seed inform and enliven your discussions of what it might mean to be faithful to God's calling for us today.

Once you have completed your study, please send us your responses (especially to the four questions we pose) and your stories. These will help inform our search for God's vision for us as a people. These are also the questions we will be asking various individuals and groups across our conference in 2004. Your learnings can be an important part of our shared quest.

**Using the Booklet and This Guide**

This booklet has 12 "For Discussion" sets of questions, a possible outline for 12 sessions. Units can be recombined for shorter studies or adapted for other teaching and preaching series.

We have added our own Mennonite Church Saskatchewan "Study Guide." These four questions (with some sub questions) are intended to focus our attention on what God may be calling us toward as churches here in Saskatchewan. These may be used for each session, or you may choose to ponder them in greater depth once you have finished studying the booklet.

We have also collected a handful of "Anabaptist Stories" (Sharing Stories from Across the Centuries & Around the Globe). Use them to stimulate further reflection. We invite you to record your own stories about living out our shared faith.

## **From Anabaptist Seed** **Questions for Further Thought**

*As we seek God's vision for us as churches here in Saskatchewan, we keep asking ourselves four important questions. Whether as part of each session, or in an additional summary session, we invite you to consider these questions:*

1. **Who are we?** *What strengths, gifts, challenges and special calling do we bring as a people from this faith family?*

2. **Who are our neighbours?** *Are there particular neighbours or groups of neighbours for whom parts of this faith story may be especially helpful or troubling? What openings might our faith story suggest for connecting with our neighbours?*

3. **What is God up to?** *Where do we see God already at work in our community? (i.e. neighbourhood? workplace? congregation? province? larger world?) Reflect on the themes that have been important in our study. To what further actions of God might these themes help us pay attention?*

4. **How will we get on board?** *As we ponder these questions, we wonder "So what?" What do we need to do to join God in God's work?*

*We as an Envisioning Team invite your responses to these questions. Please send them by October 15, 2004 to MC Sask Envisioning Team, 116 LaRonge Road, Saskatoon, SK S7K 8E5 or [ken@mcsask.ca](mailto:ken@mcsask.ca).*

*Thank you for your assistance.*

## **SHARING STORIES**

### **FROM ACROSS THE CENTURIES & AROUND THE GLOBE**

*We invite you to use these stories about Christians faithful to their Anabaptist insights. Use them for individual sessions, or spend some time in separate sessions pondering them. May this "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1-2) surround and inspire you. Even more importantly, may they inspire the recording of your own stories.*

*From 16th century Holland*

#### **A HEART UNDIVIDED**

In 1569, Dirk Willems was tried, convicted as an Anabaptist, and thrown into the palace prison to await his execution. One day, using a rope made of knotted rags, he managed to escape.

Before he got very far, he was spotted by one of the palace guards who set off in hot pursuit. There had been some frost, and the pond was covered with thin ice. With some perilous moments, the prisoner was able to scurry across. But when he reached the other side, he heard the guard's cries. The heavier guard had broken through and was sure to perish. Dirk turned back and rescued him. By this point, the burgomaster stood on the other bank. Sternly reminding the guard of his oath, he insisted that the guard arrest Dirk and return him to prison. Soon after, Dirk was executed for his faith.

Memories of this folk hero's example have persisted to this day. Recently the inhabitants of Asperen renamed a street in his honour. Both within the Anabaptist Mennonite family, and among his non-Mennonite neighbours, Dirk's example of love for the enemy continues to inspire to this day.

*from Bogota, Colombia*

#### **"DOGS AND CATS EAT OUT OF THE SAME PLATE"**

The 1200 member Mennonite Church of Columbia seeks to live out its faith in a violence ravaged country of 40 million. Birthed in the midst of war 50 years ago, this Colombian church boldly proclaims Christ's better way of peace, whether in national newspaper ads, through its peace organisation Justapaz, or in local initiatives. When a Canadian Learning Tour visited Bogota in November 2003, they found churches courageously and creatively responding to local opportunities.

Former combatants from rival paramilitary groups live in fear for their own lives, and for those of their families. Their former comrades consider them deserters, deserving only of death. The tour group spent time with one local Mennonite congregation which has opened its doors to these men and their families. There they met former enemies who had spent years trying to kill each other. Now they had given up their weapons, and were finding refuge together in the same church.

Citing an old proverb, Manitoba pastor Ferd Funk observed, "The greatest victory is that dogs and cats eat out of the same plate. The lives of men and women who were once enemies are being transformed by the power, the love, and the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. This is what happens when justice and peace embrace."

*Additional Note: The January 2004 Equipping includes a sampling from the Sunday bulletin of the Teusaquillo Mennonite Church in Bogota. Their weekly program includes an inspirational range of spiritual disciplines, peace initiatives, practical supports and teaching sessions. Find it on the Mennonite Church Canada web site [www.mennonitechurch.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca).*

*from 21st century Australia*

### **SCATTERED & FAITHFUL**

I recently had an interesting experience in a Christian Chat room on an IRC channel. Every once in a while I will enter a Christian Chat room online with the nickname Mennonite Pacifist. About a month ago, while in one of these chat rooms I encountered a young man who later let me know his name was John. John was curious about my nickname, and so he asked if I was Mennonite/Anabaptist. I learned that he too was an Anabaptist and that he lived in Australia.. After we introduced ourselves, he told me a bit about his journey in the Christian faith. John had become an Anabaptist after reading some books written by Anabaptist authors. He told me that he quickly sought to meet other Anabaptists in the area.

What he found was a group of Anabaptist minded Christians that were spread across Australia and New Zealand. The groups were so scattered that the most common form of church was the house-church style of meeting. He attended one of these groups regularly until his job required that he relocate to another city in Australia,. Currently he has not been able to attend any of these Anabaptist groups because there are none in the area and so he is looking into joining a group of other house churches that are similar in form and teaching to that of an Anabaptist group. All the while John remains in contact with those fellow believers that form Australia's Anabaptist witness.

John and his Anabaptist brothers and sisters are finding creative ways to gather and worship; they are creatively seeking to witness to God's gospel of peace and justice. The Anabaptists of Australia are a scattered group and yet they find ways of proclaiming the gospel as the body of Christ. How can we in Saskatchewan learn from our Australian brothers and sisters who like us are a scattered community, representing both urban and rural, north and south, east and west? How can we be a living foretaste of a kingdom in which God gathers us not necessarily into one big building, but rather into one heavenly citizenship?

Marco Funk

*from Manitoba*

### **WILMA DERKSEN: "We'll have to find it another way"**

Wilma Derksen's world turned upside down when her 13 year old daughter Candace was murdered in 1984. The night they found her daughter's body, the father of another murder victim appeared at their door. "I've come to tell you what to expect," he told them, as he began his bitter tale. That night Wilma said to Cliff, her husband, "I don't think we are ever going to find a justice that will satisfy us by trying to find the murderer or seeing that he gets what he deserves. I think we have to find it another way."

Over the last two decades Wilma and her family have sought "another way" toward healing and new life beyond their darkness. Through her work with Mennonite Central Committee, in her books *Have You Seen Candace?* (1991) and *Confronting the Horror: the Aftermath of Violence* (2003), and during her many engagements with both victims and offenders, Wilma has been discovering and sharing that healing path. She quotes 1 Corinthians 2:16 "We Christians actually do have within us a portion of the very thoughts and mind of Christ!" (Living Bible) "If we have God in us... the world needs what we know!"

*from 16th century Germany*

**BARBARA SCHLEIFFER: An early “sewing circle”**

Barbara Schleiffer fled the German city of Augsburg in late April of 1528, just ahead of her pursuers. On Easter Sunday, soldiers had surrounded the several hundred Anabaptists who had gathered before sunrise. They captured 88.

The tortures and interrogations that followed forced Barbara’s name from several lips. Since the earlier crackdown on Anabaptists in August 1527, she had been an important link for the persecuted Anabaptist fellowship in Augsburg. As a grocer, she often passed on word of the next secret gathering, and helped refugees in need. She and other Augsburg women pioneered what some came to call “Gunkel” (distaff) meetings, one of many effective ways of sharing their faith. These gatherings of professional seamstresses and private spinners of yarn drew little attention but proved an ideal setting for Scripture reading and commentary.

**OTHER STORIES THAT INSPIRE**

*You may come across yet further stories through the media, through the Canadian Mennonite or from your own further reading, stories about Christians courageously or creatively living out these Anabaptist convictions. Gather and share those with your group (and with us).*

*from 20th or 21st century Saskatchewan*

**YOUR STORY...**

*(We want to hear your stories. Please return these to the MC Sask Envisioning Team, 116 LaRonge Road, S7K 8E5 or [ken@mcsask.ca](mailto:ken@mcsask.ca) by October 15, 2004.)*