

# Editorial

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**I**n teaching catechism I first found the joy of teaching. Yet catechism was also a source of frustration and questioning. None of the Mennonite materials seemed adequate for all circumstances. I could not rely on a single resource for catechizing all comers: youth raised Mennonite, middle-aged and seniors transferring from other traditions, young unchurched adults newly come to faith, developmentally challenged and mentally ill young people. I often ended up modifying materials or writing my own. It was a lot of work, and it meant that our catechetical process was eclectic, not necessarily closely connected with that of other Mennonite congregations.

In February of this year Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary held a consultation, *For the Children's Children: A*

**In this issue we pursue questions I often asked as a pastor: What might the Bible teach about catechism? What can we learn from the early church and the Anabaptists? Should catechism be affected by age or life-stage?**

*Conversation about Catechism.* (Three articles printed here have been adapted from presentations there by Nelson Kraybill, Dale Shenk, and Mary Lehman Yoder.) It was a lively day, and interest was keen and passionate. Our astonishing attendance of more than a hundred people, not just from Indiana and Michigan but from as far as Ohio, Nebraska, Arkansas, and Manitoba, indicated that I am not the only pastor with concerns about catechism.

With this issue of *Vision*, we pursue questions I often asked as a pastor: Are there certain things Mennonites must confess? How

did sixteenth-century Anabaptists do catechism? Is catechism important, and if so, why? Can we learn from the early church about how to do catechism? Is catechism—or should it be—affected by age or life-stage? What might the Bible teach about catechism? What is good and what is missing in how we do it? Can

other traditions teach us about training new believers? Do we have reliable Mennonite resources? How do we work with those not raised Mennonite? And on and on.

I am delighted with the excellent articles that address these and a host of other issues. Predictably, not all authors agree with each other, but they do all reinforce the strong conviction that catechetical issues are vital.

One aspect of assembling this issue was disturbing. As I approached authors with assignments, almost everyone invited to submit an article agreed immediately, with one exception. I asked many preachers for a sermon on baptism, or one that encouraged people to consider baptism, or invited people to explore catechism. Preacher after preacher said they had never preached such a sermon and had nothing to offer. I put out an invitation at our catechism consultation, and not one preacher of nine dozen stepped forward! Does our reaction against the way we have seen invitations handled in other settings and in our history prevent us from explicitly inviting people to faith through our preaching? I was pleased when two submissions came through after all. Yet I feel unsettled by the idea that we are not using our pulpits more to invite folks on the journey with Jesus.

Sometimes when I talk with Mennonites, I find confusion, ambivalence, and even anger about baptism. Happily, it does not have to be this way. This past Easter our congregation celebrated the baptism of five committed young people. It was a day of great joy. The youths testified to their faith. Each made a distinct statement, reflecting individuality, but all showed deep theological reflection, biblical insight, and personal commitment to follow the costly way of Jesus.

Those new Christians will remember their baptism celebration with joy. The day's excitement was invitational to those not yet baptized. And the appropriately lengthy service touched more seasoned Christians among us as well. I was not the only one who felt drawn to recommit to Jesus, to remember my baptism, and to be grateful.

Although I knew frustrations when I tried to prepare others for baptism, the consultation, that recent service, and the good work of committed church people in this *Vision* issue hearten me. I trust you will be encouraged, too.