



Christian Community is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.  
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*

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Dear Mennonite Church Saskatchewan;

One of the most formational years of my life was when I did a year of voluntary service at Jubilee Partners, an intentional Christian Service Community in Comer, Georgia, 90 minutes northeast of Atlanta. Jubilee Partners began in 1979 as a Christian community to serve the “least of these” by visiting inmates on death row, providing English lessons and medical care to refugees and working for peace in conflict zones. Even though Jubilee isn’t “Mennonite” per se, the core convictions of Anabaptism came alive for me. Living in intentional Christian community, participating in daily communal worship, becoming friends with refugees, learning to live simply (we only received \$10/week for “spending” money) and peace building was all a part of our daily living.

My year at Jubilee Partners influenced my faith significantly. It was completely outside anything I had experienced and it gave me new lenses to engage questions of God, following Jesus, and what it means to be the church together. But when I returned home, I had difficulties adjusting. I had new ideals of what Christian community ought to look like and when those ideals did not match up with what I was now experiencing, I was frustrated and disappointed. Surely the church could do better, be better, and live up to the ideals I had for it.

So, what do we do when our expectations of what the church should look like are not met? I’m sure we have all had those moments. Do we take a stand? Suggest we know the true way? Do we call each other out or simply walk away?

In his book *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns against such lofty idealizing of the Christian community. He warns that when we make achieving our ideals as the measurement of Christian faithfulness, we will become disillusioned when the church community does not succeed. And for Bonhoeffer, and the community, that disillusionment cannot come soon enough. He writes, “The one who loves his or her dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his or her personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”

We are not called to love the ideals of what the church can be, though we should always be open to our own transformation. Rather, Christ calls us to love one another, as we are, simply because Jesus loved us first. The grace of God, as revealed to us through the person of Jesus Christ, is the Divine Reality into which we are invited to live together, warts and all. And in deepening our walk with each other as imperfect people, the divine reality of God’s grace is made known to each other and the watching world.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Siemens".

Ryan Siemens  
Executive Minister  
Mennonite Church Saskatchewan