

# BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT

*The Newsletter of the Bible & Religion Department at Eastern Mennonite University*

## SPRING 2015

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## Greetings, Haverim!

The Bible and Religion department spent the Spring semester department meetings working on a new mission and purpose statement which I want to share with alumni and other readers of this newsletter. The rewriting was prompted primarily by two things. First, like seminaries and like most of the humanities, we have seen a decline in enrollment in recent years. Second, the EMU student body is less Mennonite than it was just a decade ago. When I arrived 9 years ago, EMU was about half Mennonites. Today it is closer to one-third.



This raised a number of questions for us. First and most urgently, how do we attract more majors? But as we began to talk about that question, we started to ask, should attracting more majors be a primary goal? That started to seem like a narrow vision. We are, after all, just one part of EMU. We have our tasks, but they contribute to a mission that is larger than our department. Maybe there is nothing wrong with students pursuing majors that they think have more job security. Our mission has never just been to majors. It has also been providing a solid theological and spiritual foundation for all students. But how does that task continue to be accomplished well when we can no longer assume the kind of basic Biblical literacy and knowledge of Anabaptist history that we once took for granted?

So instead of piecemeal answers to these various questions, we decided to revisit our old mission statement and try to revise in light of changing demographics. Here are the results:

The Bible and Religion department inspires and accompanies students in embodying God's call to follow the way of Jesus, empowering them to discern and participate in the Spirit's activity in the church and the world.

To that end, students in Bible and Religion courses are formed in:

- Interpretation of scripture: to introduce all EMU students to the biblical narrative, inviting them to consider an Anabaptist-Mennonite reading, and to show how it informs and animates their lives and the life of the church.
- Service to the church: to deepen the spiritual formation of Christian leaders and scholars equipped to imagine innovative models of community, ministry and mission inspired by scripture, the sixteenth century Anabaptists and the study of the church's global past and present.
- Theological and philosophical reflection: to draw on the convictions about God and creation that have animated the Christian tradition in order to engage economic, inter-religious, cultural, philosophical, and social perspectives so as better to practice gospel imperatives such as healing, confronting the powers of evil, and loving enemies.

The biggest difference between this one and the [old one](#) is that it is more concise. The former one had seven points under the opening mission statement. This one has three. That number is not deliberately Trinitarian but the introduction statement is. We also tried to be clear that we as a faculty are in this together with our students. We are also on a journey, not just teaching them but learning with and from them.

The three bullet points are meant to be both descriptive and aspirational. First, the foundation of what we do is scripture. This first point acknowledges that nowadays we often find ourselves introducing students to the Bible. But we don't introduce them to just any reading of scripture. We explicitly privilege and teach an understanding of the Bible that is formed by the experience of the Anabaptists. Second, while the introductory statement acknowledges the Spirit's work both inside and outside the church, the formation of the church's future leaders is at the heart of our task. We know that our graduates will one day be pastors, elders, conference moderators, etc. But we also know that many of our best students are fascinated by the work of the Spirit in models of community that appear very different than the conventional congregations and are eager to collaborate in that work. Here we want to provide space for them to prepare to do so. Finally, in a world of globalization, internet, social media, etc., there is no way to escape the barrage of information, influence, and ideology. In our theology and philosophy classes, we hope to give students the tools to think both critically about all the idols that challenge God's reign in order to be able to discern what is and is not an ally in the practice of discipleship.

~ Peter Dula, department chair

## Graduation Brunch

On Saturday, April 25, we enjoyed brunch with and gave best wishes to six grads as they move on to new endeavors. L-R: Jacob Landis, Evan Knappenberger, Lindsay Mead, Thomas Millary, Jordan Luther and Matt Naugle.





## Students in Action

Two of the ten [Cords of Distinction](#) recipients this year were from our department...Jacob Landis and Jordan Luther.

## Faculty in Action

**Peter Dula** led a workshop on “Love in the Gospel of John” at the Kairos School of Spiritual Formation in February.

**Ted Grimsrud** will present the Peace Lecture at the Tennessee Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty annual meeting in Pleasant Hill, TN, on June 28. The fourth volume of his collected pacifist writings, *Embodying Peace: Historical and Social Ethical Essays*, has just been published by Peace Theology Press and is available through Amazon.

**Nancy Heisey** will be presenting a Bible study at the MWC assembly in Harrisburg, PA, on July 23, “Walking in Conflict and Reconciliation.” The young adult respondent will be Remilyn Mondez from the Philippines.

**Andrea Saner** presented a workshop entitled, “Inheriting, Interpreting, and Imagining Faith” at the School for Leadership Training held at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in January. Workshop participants explored resources in Deuteronomy for thinking about passing faith to future generations.

**Carmen Schrock-Hurst** – visited Grace (2010, CRAM), Yugo, and Jereme in Southeast Asia immediately following graduation.

## Haverim Awards

The generosity of Haverim members enables students to receive writing awards, debt-reduction scholarships as well as assistance with special trainings and speakers for our students.

### 2015 Haverim [Writing Awards](#)

- 1st Place: **Jordan Luther**, 2015 Biblical Studies, “The Hiphocrypha: The Theological Sensibilities of Rap Music”
- 2nd Place (tie):  
Andrea King, 2015 Elementary Education, “Women: Free to Speak or Silenced? 1 Corinthians 14:33-36”  
Jacob Landis, 2015 Congregational & Youth Ministries and Biblical Studies, “A Working Ministry when clergy and laity work together”

### Haverim Debt-Reduction [Scholarships](#)

# Ministry Inquiry Program

Four students will explore ministry in a variety of settings this summer. Read the [news release](#) for more details.

## Our Journeys with Scripture

Nancy R. Heisey

Over a decade ago, I participated in a gathering together with other churchly folks, where we shared our stories of how the Bible and our lives had intersected, which was then published in 2006 by Cascadia as *Telling Our Stories*, edited by Earl Zimmerman and Ray Gingerich, two EMU faculty colleagues. Keith Graber Miller and Malinda Berry followed up with a collection of similar accounts by young adults, *Wrestling with the Text* (Cascadia 2007).

Recognizing the power of these interactions for those of us who participated, I began to build a similar assignment/experience into my History of the Bible class. The class, as I always underline, is NOT the story IN the Bible, but the story OF the Bible. How did we get these books (or now, these electronic versions) in English, across the millennia and from long ago and far away cultures?

This spring, a class of 28 students listened to one another tell these stories. Here are some things I learned (not ranked them in any particular order):

- The significance of grandparents as persons who gave Bibles as gifts, took children to Sunday school, and prayed for them.
- How many of this group of students had repeatedly watched Veggie Tales and could quote from them by memory.
- The pleasure of Weekday Religious Education (especially in Virginia), both for the chance to learn the Bible and for the chance to get away from school for a time.
- The impact of travel athletic teams on children's and teenagers' church attendance and participation.
- How Fellowship of Christian Athletes encourages those who join to stay attached to Bible study and prayer.
- The deep changes (questions, behavior choices, understandings or questionings of God) that teenagers and young adults face at the death of close friends or loved ones.
- How discouraging it is for Mennonite young people to come home from Youth Convention and find that they cannot reproduce that "high" in their home churches.
- How often young people who get excited about reading the Bible start out in Genesis and get discouraged before the reach chapter 12.
- How much fun children and youth have when they act out Bible stories.

My students found it very useful to read stories of other young adults who had encountered the Bible in a variety of ways and with diverse responses. I finished up this class with a commitment to continue and deepen this conversation, with the conviction that stronger links can be forged to Scripture when see it as a book with its own story that is now enlarging to include them within.

## Alumni Update

**Christopher Friesen** (2002, Biblical Studies) is working as a paralegal with Bagia & Associates law firm, focusing on immigration issues.

What have **you** been doing since leaving EMU?

We'd enjoy hearing from you!

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