Editorial

Steven Schweitzer

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, . . . a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (3:1, 7b). This issue of *Vision* calls us to consider a time to speak—to tell what God has been doing among us. For various reasons—historical, cultural, sociological, and theological—individuals and congregations within the Anabaptist streams have done well in *living* the gospel while struggling at times to *proclaim* it.

Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) is a call to be witnesses, to give testimony to Jesus. We find it in the same Gospel with the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46), which equates Christian discipleship with acts of service. Following Jesus requires us to bring together Matthew 25 and Matthew 28. It is not either/or but both/and: testimony and service come together in the life of faith.

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Just when our culture is shifting toward valuing personal experience, narrative, and testimony as ways to communicate truth, we in the church seem resistant to offering our voices to the conversation happening around us. Some label this a shift from modernity to postmodernity or even hypermodernity, but whatever terminology we use, we should not miss the reality that personal testimony matters and that it is taken seriously by our contemporary North American culture. In many ways, this issue of *Vision* calls us not to miss this opportunity to speak our testimony to a world that may be willing to hear what we have to say.

We begin the issue with biblical reflection by Derek Suderman and Tim Kuepfer and then turn to poetry by Suella Gerber and Rosanna McFadden that evokes prayer and confession.

We explore various aspects of the practice of testifying, testimony in congregational and in pastoral formation, and testimony in various cultural and geographical settings. We are grateful for the diversity of authors represented by April Yamasaki, Tara Hornbacker, Joel Miller, Rebecca Osiro, Regina Shands Stolzfus, and Ryan Siemens. Samatha Lioi closes that section with a poem that speaks movingly of receiving and becoming witness.

Following the biblical, practical, and poetic reflection, we turn to pieces that assess where we have come from, where we are, where we need to go. Robert Suderman challenges us to consider the health and well-being of a spiritual imagination that understands the life of the church as its fuel for witness. Conrad Kanagy gives us a clear-eyed view of what the Mennonite Church USA 2006 member profile says with respect to mission. Frank Ramirez offers a helpful perspective from Brethren history, and Lois Barrett thinks with us about Anabatist-Mennonite theology.

We end the issue with Alan Kreider's passionate sermon and Arlo Frech's incomparable wisdom from the border—equally passionate in his own laconic way.

We hope these articles will stimulate more discussion, more testimony, more active engagement in celebrating the good news that is worth sharing. When he does not proclaim the message given to him by God, the prophet Jeremiah likens the Word of God to a "burning fire shut up in [his] bones" (Jer. 20:9). He cannot resist; he must speak before he is consumed by the presence and Spirit of God. Do we feel the same sense of urgency when we fail to speak, to proclaim the mighty acts of God, to bring testimony of God's reign, to witness to the wonder of following Jesus? In the words of the Psalmist: "Let the *words of my mouth* and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." Amen.

About the editor

In July 2009, Steven Schweitzer became academic dean and associate professor at Bethany Theological Seminary (Church of the Brethren) in Richmond, Indiana. From 2006 to 2009, he taught Old Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.