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CHRISTIAN
LEADER

MBMSI WITNESS INSIDE

- 19** Friendly "invasion" targets teen girls
- 24** Boys march to manhood
- 26** MB congregations commended for contributions
- 28** Indian women celebrate



our global family

READERS SAY

The conflict between the ancient and the contemporary

While reading the March of the *Leader*, two articles highlight recent trends within American religious circles. One suggests the re-emergence of ancient disciplines that are energizing 21st century congregations. The other describes the tension between people within the Mennonite Brethren denomination, between those who find meaningful worship experience through traditional worship and those who enjoy a more contemporary atmosphere with praise and worship music.

George Barna's survey findings validate my suspicions. As MB congregations are moving further away from a historical connection with their Anabaptist heritage, they may be hindering their ability to present the gospel to a postmodern world.

In *Church Next, Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*, Eddie Gibbs, professor of church growth at the School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary, writes about the post-boomer population and gives a warning: "Their spiritual awareness is triggered by symbols and rituals both ancient and relevant. If the Christian church fails to rediscover its own rich heritage, created in preliterate societies, it will find it increasingly difficult to hold a generation shaped by a postliterate culture."

Though I belong to the baby boomer generation by birth, I feel a closer connection with the postmodern generation, derived largely through personal experiences. According to Gibbs, the postmodern generation (and I) are not interested in listening to people who presume to have all of the answers. Rather, they (and I) want to meet people who have a transforming relationship with God.

Rose Buschman's column, "Do I really need a heart transplant?" reflects our denomination's inner conflict between the ancient and contemporary. Her conversation with a conference leader reflects similar experiences of others and myself within my congregation. These experiences affirm the need for greater sensitivity by our leaders and the need to carefully consider the spiritual needs of our constituents, whether they are long-time believers in Christ or newcomers.

If meeting genuine people of faith and being available to spiritually hungry people in the postmodern world suggests a return to ancient spiritual practices, so be it. The heart of the matter is not the style of worship or ritual that we prefer, but rather a sensitivity to God's timing and plan to be effective witnesses within our community.

Paul D. Penner
Hillsboro, Kan.

The editors invite readers to share their thoughts and opinions on topics relevant to the Mennonite Brethren Church using letters to the editor. Letters should be on one topic, not exceed 300 words and include the writer's name and city. Letters will be edited for clarity, appropriateness and length.

Spreading truth in politics

I appreciate the comments Rose Buschman made about being politically correct (February "On the Journey"). Sometimes it seems that Christians are more concerned with having the right political views than having a Christ-like attitude to even their fellow believers. In this election year, Christians should not permit themselves to become part of the demonization that is sure to happen during the election. There are going to be many half-truths floating around that we need to be careful about repeating, making sure that they are true.

Alvin Dick
Mt. Lake, Minn.

Public worship services inadequate

I offer the following opinion in response to Rose Buschman's column "Do I need a heart transplant?" (March 2007). No, there's nothing wrong with your heart based on anything said here. However I believe it again brings up problems or inadequacies with public worship service in evangelical and Anabaptist settings these days. Unfortunately public worship is equated with the "song service" that generally is felt to be the worship and is supposed to bring the congregation into an emotion and spiritual readiness to receive the sermon, generally a teaching based on several verses of Scripture.

Absent are any formal Scripture reading programs or reading or recitation of formal doctrines, and communion is practiced infrequently. Prayer is generally one prayer offered by a leader. It is the providing of these elements (Scripture reading, personal and corporate prayer, music that is traditional and/or contemporary, the sermon/teaching, recitation of doctrine, frequent communion reminding us of the gospel and our identity in Christ) that to me provides for a truly spiritually nourishing experience in public worship for the believer.

It also deemphasizes the completely predominant dependence on worship music style and the importance of a super sermon as the criteria on how "good" the service was, all of which become sources of contention if they don't meet expectations.

It is for this reason that although I continue to attend an Anabaptist service, I also particularly enjoy attending another service where all of these elements of public worship are employed. I think addressing these issues in our public worship services is our responsibility in "feeding the sheep."

James Penrose
Bakersfield, Calif.