

A VISION FOR MENNONITE EDUCATION

The year 2012 marks the 25th anniversary of the first classes offered by Faith Builders. Previous newsletters have featured reprinted articles to commemorate this anniversary. In this issue, several long-term faculty reflect on the history of their involvement and cast a vision of the future.

The Supreme Court decision *Engel v. Vitale* of 1962 declared public prayer in public schools unconstitutional. This landmark decision was followed by another, *Abington School District v. Schempp* in 1963; public Bible reading was now declared unconstitutional as well. I was in third grade at Portico Elementary School when these decisions were made by our national leaders. These events along with the introduction of television in public education awakened the conservative Mennonite community to the corrosive effects of secular-based education. From small beginnings in the 1950's to a groundswell of activity in the 70's, Mennonite communities scrambled to build, fund, and staff schools for their children. One of the most persistent problems, though not the only one, has been staffing. Many communities simply did not know where to find teachers whose hearts were at the right place and who were academically prepared to teach.

Fast forward to 1978. I was married, had two children, and of all things found myself a teacher in the high school at Anchor Christian School, something that was not in my life plan at all. For eight years I taught under the guidance of two experienced principals who mentored me with love and care. I was fortunate. Many young teachers did not have such an opportunity. Then I found myself a principal for seven years at the same school. What did I learn in those 15 years? I learned that love for students is primary to outstanding teaching. I learned that the visionaries who provided the impetus toward a school in our community were true heroes of faith. I learned that heroic efforts are necessary to begin but not enough to sustain a vision over the long haul. I learned that the desire to teach is good; but alone, it is not enough to create outstanding teaching. A burden for teacher training tailored to the

Anabaptist community was born in my heart in those days.

I did not carry this burden in my heart alone. While I was "cutting my eye-teeth" as a young teacher, my mentor and fellow-teacher, John D. Martin, was meeting with several men on occasion in the interest of post high school education for conservative Anabaptists. I looked on with interest from the sidelines and then shrugged my shoulders when that vision

and I decided that perhaps this is a way we could serve the broader Anabaptist community, so we consented to the invitation. Along with David and Orpha Weaver, we were present when the sealed bid on an abandoned public school property was opened in Saegertown, home of the Penncrest School District of Crawford County, PA. We were amazed to discover that the bid of \$50,001.00 from the FBEP Board was the only bid submitted and would be accepted by

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seemed to die. Others gathered up a few glowing embers from that dying vision and coaxed them back to life. Faith Builders Educational Programs emerged as a summer enrichment school with no permanent location in the mid 80's. Again, I found myself a distant observer and occasional participant while continuing in the harness as principal and teacher at Anchor Christian School.

Fast forward to 1992. I received a phone call from a personal friend, David Weaver. He wondered if I would consider serving on the FBEP Board. Follow-up phone calls from Milo Zehr, one of the brothers who kept the vision for FBEP alive during the critical years in the 80's, urged us to consider this opportunity. After a month or two of deliberation, my wife Shelia

the school district. We left the district office at Saegertown and drove to see the property that would be the future permanent home of Faith Builders Educational Programs. Words cannot describe what Shelia and I saw when we arrived at the newly purchased property. Suffice it to say that the cost to resurrect the 80,000 square feet of abandoned property turned out to be over 15 years of blood, sweat, and tears and an investment of some 1.5 million dollars from the conservative community.

Fast forward to 2012. I am sitting in my office at FBEP trying to wrestle scattered thoughts from my head to this manuscript. Nineteen years have gone by since Shelia and I moved our family to Guys Mills in August of 1993. (We moved home to Chambersburg for one year

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