Volume #7, #1 January 2026

The Disciple

Anabaptist Disciples of Christ is an affiliation of Conservative Anabaptist churches seeking likeminded fellowship, instruction, and accountability in church administration and congregational life in the Biblical pattern of the Apostolic church.

Anchored in Historical Anabaptism

Part II

by James Yoder

Monument of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland.

3. They anchored their theology on the person of Jesus and His teaching —

The primacy the Anabaptists gave to the teachings of Jesus distinguished them from their Protestant cousins. The Anabaptists focused on what Jesus taught, and they then interpreted Paul's epistles in light of Jesus' teachings. They turned to the Sermon on the Mount as their guiding manifesto. They believed the words of Jesus were attainable and meant for our instruction.

In contrast, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, influenced heavily by Augustinian thought, made Paul the chief theologian of Christianity. The Protestants interpreted Jesus in light of Paul – or, at least in light of what they thought Paul was teaching. This was clearly reversing the logical and spiritual order that the whole New Testament was teaching.

In fact, Luther elevated the book of Romans above the rest of Scripture. He wrote, *"This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel."* Luther not only over-exalted Romans, but he denigrated any New Testament book that contradicted his reinterpretations of Romans. For instance, he wrote, *"St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw. …it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it."* Luther especially singled out Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation for particular criticism since they so clearly disproved his new interpretation of Romans. Even today, this clerical error has led some of his disciples to refuse to accept at face value numerous commands found in the New Testament. They explain away verse after verse not fitting with their gospel rhetoric.

But, not so with the Anabaptists. When they read the words of Jesus, *"Love your enemy,"* they took it at face value. When they read, *"Let your yea be yea and your nay, nay,"* or, *"Swear not at all,"* they believed that's what He meant. In fact, Dirk Phillips wrote, *"The Gospel of Jesus is the real truth, and the only foundation on which everything must be built* (I Corinthians 3:11). *Beside this truth and this foundation there is nothing that will stand before God."* All other scriptures were filtered through the lens of Jesus' teachings.

One might wonder at this distinction between the two camps. How could they arrive at such different persuasions? It has been suggested the foundational difference hinges on how the Old Testament was viewed in light of the New. The Protestants held to a "flat Bible" theology, believing that the two testaments held equal weight, thereby they missed the emphatic words of Jesus.

However, the Anabaptists believed in a "progressive revelation," which gave greater authority to the New Testament. In a public debate at Frankenthal they said, *"The Old Testament writings offer strong proof that Jesus is the true God and Savior of whom all the prophets testified… Moses points us forward to Christ our Savior… We believe that the New Testament surpasses the Old. The parts of the Old Testament that can be reconciled with the teachings of Christ we accept."* They went on to say, *"If teaching necessary for salvation and godly life was not taught by Christ and the Apostles, but is found only in the Old Testament, we would like to see it."* Dirk Philips expressed a similar vein - *"False prophets disguise their teachings by appealing to the letter of the Old Testament, which consists of figures for things to come. Whatever they cannot defend by the New Testament, they try to establish with the Old. This has given rise to many sects and many false religious forms."*

There was also a core agreement concerning the essential biblical texts defining them as a reformed church. While in some sense there was not a theology of belief due to the birth of the movement, there was widespread agreement on doctrines such as salvation, baptism, the ban, the Lord's Table, and mutual aid that eventually formed a "theology."

". . . true faith leads to discipleship."

Another core belief that surfaced repeatedly in much of their writings and practice was *"gelassenheit,"* sometimes described today as *yieldedness*. The call to *"gelassenheit"* was directed primarily to the inner struggle of faith that human beings undergo when faced by the call to die to self and rise in Christ. *Christ in us* meant death to self. *"It is no longer I, but Christ in me"* (Galatians 2:20) became their *modus operandi*.

They also pushed against Luther's belief that the righteousness of God was imputed on the believer. They believed, instead, that God's righteousness was imparted to the sinner and that being saved meant *"becoming righteous"* through the power and grace of the risen Christ! In other words, true faith leads to discipleship.

4. They valued the law of love over the sword —

One of the gravest of errors Luther and his cohorts promoted was keeping the church tied to the state. He simply could not conceive of a Church without governmental backing. As word spread of Luther's reformative actions in northern Germany, Zwingli began to preach his own reformative ideas against the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland. While criticizing the common corruption among her leaders, he also asked the bishops to change the law forbidding ministers to marry. This was a personal issue since he had secretly married a widow earlier that year.

His revolt eventually led to the Battle of Kappel that culminated on October 26, 1531. The Catholic cantons fielded an army and marched toward Zurich. The Zurich army, led by none other than their preacher, Ulrich Zwingli, met them. Badly outnumbered, Zwingli's army suffered defeat. In the aftermath of the battle, it was realized that Zwingli himself had been killed, along with twenty-four other reform-minded pastors. Though many of the Protestant leaders lost their lives that day, Zwingli's position of church and state bred a new trend that continues in many mainline and evangelical churches today.

Today, several hundred yards from the *Grossmünster* church where Zwingli had been a minister, stands a monument of the Zurich reformer. The statute is attired in the typical scholarly dress for the time, representing him to be a preacher primarily. But also of significance is the Bible found in the crook of his right arm, balanced by the left hand that is on the hilt of a massive sword planted in front of his feet. This image of Bible and sword is a stark reminder that the Protestant reformers could not imagine a situation where church and state were not in close union. Today, we still see the ill effects of this teaching where many, in the name of Christ, promote a "Just War theory," and appeal to governmental vitality and sustainability to leverage economic and social reform.

But the Anabaptists saw it differently. They leveraged a different sword; they promoted the law of love. "Suffering love," as some call it, is the "fight" between good and evil rather than between their fellow man. Rather than donning their belts with

sword, halberd, or dagger, they walked or rode on horseback from town to town, carrying the "sword of the Spirit" and calling people to repentance.

In the book published by Philipp Ulhart on *Why Christians Don't Fight* it states, *"Luther and his men use the Scriptures to persuade the common people to take up arms and to defend themselves. They get the people to trust, body and soul, in the force of arms, and they cause lords and cities to rise up against the emperor. What a terrible shedding of blood when false prophets and their followers begin to fight in the name of God!"* It further states, *"Jesus Christ, however, does not rule or judge in earthly matters or in earthly kingdoms. No matter whether his followers get treated good or evil, they pay back nothing but patience and love. They are willing to submit everything they have, even their bodies and their lives, to earthly powers, that is, everything which has to do with what they believe. No man may use force or rule over others in matters of faith in Christ, for it is not earthly lives but eternal life which is at stake."*

They believed that complete love in Christ reaches out to friends and enemies alike. They saw these responses being the result of freedom in Christ and spiritual union with Him. They believed that those in Christ are so dedicated to help others that they would be ready to die for them. In the Augsburg booklet mentioned above, it also stated, *"No sword nor worldly force was used by the first Christians until the days of the emperor Constantine. Christians did not believe in using the sword and Christ had not given permission to anything more than the sword of the Word. Whoever went beyond that, in the days of the early church, was considered a heathen or an infidel."* This is a historical tenant of Anabaptist belief and practice.

They also did not use the negative term "nonresistance," as is common today. Rather they spoke only of "*Wehlosigkeit,*" which meant "being without defense." It was this defenseless posture that frequently struck the hearts of the knights and military men at times of execution. It's reported that often the executioner needed to turn away from those who were put to death through extreme persecution. Rather than retaliate, they believed in "heaping coals of fire" on the heads of their enemies. They often prayed out loud for God to forgive their executioners and show mercy on them. Adrian Henckel's words may best describe their posture - *"A lamb does not bite a wolf."*

Menno Simons expressed a more fundamental Anabaptist sentiment when he wrote, *"Antichrist wants to defend and assert his cause with the Sword, but Christ Jesus has no sword or weapon other than suffering with his Holy Word. …How far, how far, have we departed from the teachings and example of our Master who taught and sought only peace, saying: 'Peace, I leave you, my peace I give unto you.'"* In the same document Menno summed up the Anabaptist position of suffering love: *"Our wagon fortress is Christ; our weapon of defense is patience. Our sword is the Word of God and our victory is free, firm and undisguised faith in Christ Jesus. Iron, metal, spears and swords we leave to those who (alas) consider men's and pig's blood of about the same worth."*

"Suffering love not only bears and forgives the weight of wrong; it responds in kindness to the offender."

Being without defense was one level of suffering love that they offered. But this principle was taken to a whole new level when they taught and lived the need to *"return good for evil."* This kind of response took love to a whole new level. After all, to only refrain from taking up the sword in retaliation, whether in thought or deed, is much easier than doing good to a brother, (or enemy, for that matter,) who had done wrong. Suffering love not only bears and forgives the weight of wrong; it responds in kindness to the offender. This takes a grace outside of our doing.

Suffering love was unpopular back in the day and is equally so today. The margins of those in modern Christianity who hold to this position seems to be lessening. In fact, the push to continue merging church and state seems to be increasing. The unhealthy enmeshment being touted today in catch phrases like *"For God and country"* and the *"MAGA"* rhetoric is shaping innocent minds who are not able to discern the far-reaching implications this position produces. We must remain vigilant!

Used with permission.

James Yoder serves as lead pastor of Berea Christian Fellowship in Nappanee, Indiana. He and his wife, Gladys, have six children.

PASTOR SPOTLIGHT

Dean and Joyce Miller serve at Woodlawn Church, Goshen, Indiana.

Dean and Joyce have three children – Kristen, married to Carl Hochstetler (currently serving in Jamaica); Kyle (Middlebury, IN); and Lindsey, married to Lyndon Byers (Stanardsville, VA). They also have six grandchildren.

Dean was ordained as a minister September 10, 2006 and works as a furniture deliverer.

Dean reflects on his pastoral journey – "I accepted the Lord as my Savior at a young age. I have been blessed to grow up in a home where my parents were interested in providing a positive Christian environment. The process of Christian growth has been an ongoing chiseling and shaping by the Master, who is such a gracious and merciful Father. He has led me to be married to a wonderful wife and blessed me with children and grandchildren. A tremendous blessing has been my wife and children's support of me being a Pastor. Our congregation has been so gracious and generous in many ways. My experience of serving in this capacity has been overwhelmingly rich with a few side servings of challenges along the way. God is faithful! I have also been greatly blessed with a wonderful leadership team with all of us in our differences working together for the betterment of the body here at Woodlawn. I am encouraged to see our younger generation with their energy and desire to serve Christ and using their gifts to carry on the work of the Church."

Dean has served on the board of Woodlawn Christian School and also the church's mission board.

Dean recommends the following books – *The Prodigal God* and *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim Keller; and *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch. He also recommends the Daily Audio Bible (the One Year Bible).

Thank you Dean and Joyce for your service to the Church of Christ!

Missions Update

I have always enjoyed the turning of the year. It's a good time to pause, reflect on all that God has done, and look ahead with anticipation to what He will do in the year to come. God has been good to us at Impact International, and we are grateful as we look forward to 2026.

One of the highlights of this past year was the privilege of leading a vision trip to Albania. I was blessed to take six others and it was great to once again spend time there and dream of what could be and to seek God's face as we anticipate sending workers this country of great need.

A particularly meaningful part of the trip was hearing from the church over there about their vision for their church in evangelism and also their vision to start a Christian school both to serve their young families and as a ministry to the community. Their desire to invest in their children while using the school as a bridge for outreach is inspiring, and is something we would love to support and explore alongside them.

As we look forward to the new year, we continue to recruit for Albania. Our prayer is to send a minimum of two couples to serve there. One of these couples would ideally be more pioneering and visionary, helping us discern what "boots on the ground" ministry could look like in this context. We are also seeking individuals with a heart for education who would be interested in supporting the development of the Christian school the church hopes to launch.

Impact International was also blessed this past December to send a family along with a group of youth to India. They joined Tim and Gina Kuepfer in Dehradun and partnered alongside *We Like To Help*, a local NGO that Tim and Gina do ministry with. This experience created meaningful opportunities for service, relationship-building, and discipleship, while giving our youth and families a firsthand glimpse of how God is at work through faithful, long-term partnerships in India.

I am deeply grateful for the faithful support Impact International receives from so many of our ADC churches. It is truly a privilege to serve alongside you. If you have ideas, input, or would like to explore new ways of partnering with Impact, I would love to hear from you. May God bless you richly, and may He guide and strengthen you as we step into 2026 together in faith.

In Christ,
Tim Byler, Director

Mission Trip to India

Dorcas Stoltzfus

On November 30th, our group of nine youth, along with a family from Bethel Christian Fellowship in Narvon PA arrived in Dehradun, India for a ten day missions trip. We partnered with *We Like to Help*, a nonprofit organization that educates and supports underprivileged and slum children in Rajpur, India. The first two mornings we held open community services that included worship, testimonies, preaching, and prayer. In the afternoons and evenings, we prepared the children for their activities in their upcoming Christmas program through action songs, Christmas carols, dance, and skits.

From December 3rd-5th we hosted a winter camp for the children. Each day started with actions songs and then we shared a Bible story with them. Our theme was the life of Christ, so we shared the story of His birth, His miracles, and His death and resurrection. The rest of the day was spent with crafts (which tied to the story that day), games, lunch, Bible memory, and prayer. Evenings were spent getting to know the *We Like to Help* staff better, playing games with the teens, and hosting a service for the community.

On December 7th-8th, we hosted an overnight retreat with the teens from *We Like to Help*. We had several Bible studies and worship sessions throughout the day, as well as crafts, games, and small group times. One morning we spent an hour walking through the streets to pick up trash. Evenings were spent building relationships with the students…whether that was singing, teaching each other dances, or hanging out around the bonfire. Though it was stretching, this was a highlight for our group since we were able to build and strengthen relationships with the teenagers.

After a day of rest and final practice on December 9th, the Christmas program was held on December 10th. After the program we handed out gifts to the children and said our final goodbyes. Even though most of them could not speak English, we had built strong bonds with them, and it was sad to say goodbye. The next day was spent debriefing, packing, and beginning our journey home.

The ADC Disciple

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January 2026

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ADC Church Profile —

Redeemed Christian Fellowship, Brownstown, Pennsylvania was founded in September 2023.

The leadership team consists of Dean L. Zimmerman, Pastor; and Jay Martin and Jay Bomgardner, Deacons. Current membership is 85.

RCF began meeting in a conference room in Brownstown as a temporary location the first weekend of September 2023. As RCF considered a permanent location, a nearby Methodist church building came up for sale, and God graciously worked out every detail for members to purchase it. Exactly two years after RCF's first service, the church gathered for worship in their new building.

Brownstown is a small town of approximately 3500 with a close-knit community feel.

RCF participates in a monthly interaction with a local maternity home and often has individuals participating in prison ministry. RCF has multiple members working full-time and part-time for various non-profit ministries, as well as a camp chief serving at Bald Eagle Boys Camp. With RCF just moving into the building in September 2025, members are exploring ways to meet community needs, including providing food boxes, clothing, and Bible studies.

Interesting trivia - nearly 25% of RCF members are under age 20. The church is excited to see how God is going to change the world through these young people!

Thank you Pastor Dean and deacons for a glimpse into your church!