

MFM Sept. 2, 2014  
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Our topic assignment was given as follows: “Church was ... Church is ...” with not much more elaboration than the request to make it a personal reflection on our experience of church. Well, that’s a huge topic! Of my various church involvements in the past, three stand out:

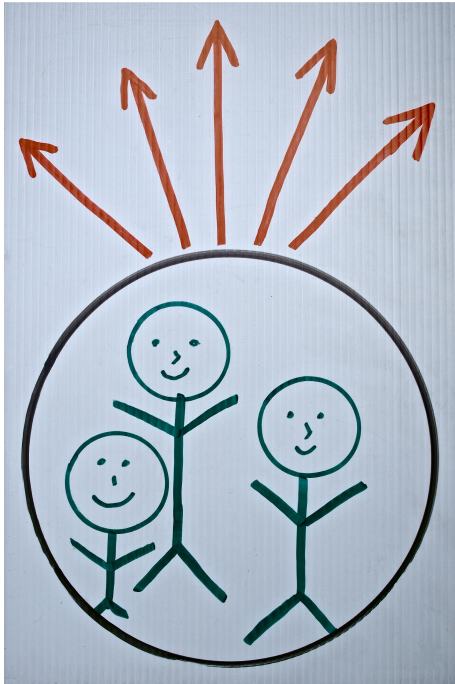
1. The first exposure was to my father, Peter Dyck. I grew up in Germany, where we didn’t have a regular church community because we were often travelling for his work or he was speaking or we were at Mennonite Central Committee functions, but what was regular was daily evening devotions in the family and just being around Daddy. This meant hearing all the stories of the Anabaptist martyrs and the Bible and the Early Church and MCC and Bonhoeffer and many more. To my father, there was no distinction between historical events and present reality – he saw them as a vital part of our thinking process as we decide how to live this day.



*Here we are, being church by being keenly attuned to these historical influences, trying to live our lives as much as possible in a manner that continues the best of all of these currents.*

IT SEEMED NORMAL that whenever you’re at the side of a river, you reflect on Felix Manz who in 1527 was bound up and rowed out and given one last chance to recant, to renounce his heretical anabaptist views. His mother on the shore, instead of pleading for his life, called out to him: “Felix, bleib standhaft! Felix, remain steadfast!” And he went overboard. What does that mean for our faith today and how does it direct our choices?  
**CHURCH WAS discipleship, costly discipleship.**

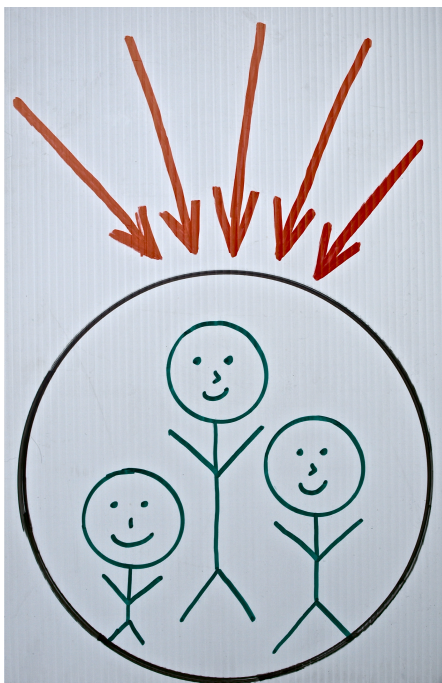
2. During my highschool years we moved to the MCC headquarters in the tiny town of Akron, Pennsylvania. The Akron Mennonite Church was composed almost exclusively of MCC workers, and this gave it a distinct flavour. Everybody was either on the way to or returning from service assignments, or administering projects in the U.S. and overseas. Here there was no differentiation between “us and them”.



*Doing church meant devoting ourselves to mission, compassion and connectedness with the world.*

Those were the Vietnam War years, and IT SEEMED NORMAL that whenever there was a protest in Washington DC, we'd have many carloads heading there to march together for peace. **CHURCH WAS the combined effort of living for others.**

3. After college I was a member of The Assembly in Goshen, Indiana, a group of students, grads and profs from Goshen College and the nearby AMBS seminary. It included novice seekers as well as published theologians and everybody in between. The tone tended to be intellectual and academic but in an applied manner, in that the focus was on identifying the big themes of our day, such as gender equality and wealth distribution and care of the environment, and trying to figure out what those meant for us as church. How should feminism affect our congregational discourse and power structures? How should pacifism orient our interactions?

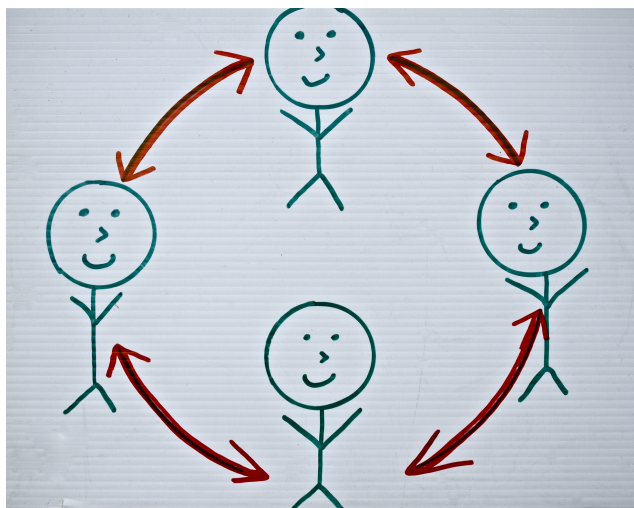


*Doing church meant testing broad concepts for application amongst us.*

IT SEEMED NORMAL to meet constantly, in small and large groups and various combinations, to hammer out guiding principles.

**CHURCH WAS the seeking for Truth as the body of Christ.**

4. My next significant involvement was the MFM, about which it is harder and more dangerous to make sweeping generalizations. A key aspect is the importance of interpersonal relationships. Over the 15 years I've been here, the ups and downs of the congregation have closely paralleled how well people were getting along, both as causation and as effect.



*My diagram for the MFM looks like this, with interpersonal relationships as key elements.*

There are pros and cons inherent in giving relationships such importance. It can create an incredibly strong foundation, a solid base of community from which the individuals can go forth and lead their daily lives, always knowing that they can get their batteries recharged on Sunday morning. Of course, it can also mean that those batteries get drained when there are strained relationships. It can help us focus on what matters or it can make the group insular, caught up more in its own small issues than in any larger role in the world. Our diversity of backgrounds and beliefs can mean a wonderfully rich mix of ideas or it can set us adrift, not anchored in shared history or theology and therefore prone to currents and stormy seas.

So, **CHURCH IS – for me, a challenge and an awareness of its potential to make a real difference in our lives as we learn to love each other.** But, what is it for you?