

Editorial

Mary H. Schertz

There is a certain luxury in goodbyes, so I ask you to indulge me when I say that this topic may be the most important theme *Vision* has addressed in the eighteen years that we have been publishing the journal. Since this is my last editorial for these pages, I will be so bold as to make that assertion. This work has been dear to my heart, and I look to the past with gratitude. I also look to the future with gratitude, curious and hopeful about what my beloved colleagues will bring to the work ahead. I am confident



In these pages you will not see anyone arguing that we need to tone down our proclamation of Christ in order to avoid offending our dialogue partners. Yes, in all cases, we must be respectful. Yes, in all cases, we must listen—even more than we speak. But we need not deny the strength of our convictions.

that those who carry on the work of publishing *Vision* will continue to address important questions for the church and those who love it to think about and discuss. But there may be no subject more important than the one that is the focus of this issue: why and how we proclaim Christ in a pluralist context. It is fundamental to who we are as Christians and what we do as Christians.

You will find in these pages a rich assortment of experiences and perspectives. You will find a diversity of opinion and a variety of answers and suggestions. There is also something, I am gratified to say, that you will not find. You will not see anyone arguing that we need to tone down our proclamation of Christ in order to avoid offending our ecumenical or interfaith dialogue partners. Yes, in all cases, we must be respectful. Yes, in all cases, we must listen—even more than we speak. But we need not deny the strength of our convictions. We must, as did the early Christians, speak boldly of Christ. Just as we would wish others to do to us, we must honor differences as well as commonalities. Both are significant.

The issue begins with four articles that set the stage for discussion and understanding. They also embody the four aspects of this topic—pastoral,

theological, missiological, sociological—that echo in the rest of the issue. April Yamasaki writes about engaging in interfaith and ecumenical conversation as being akin to conversing with a friend or co-worker or family member who does not share our faith. Such conversation nurtures the spirit, our own spirit and the spirit of our congregations. Karl Koop helpfully describes three views of the relationship between Christian faith and other religions, and then considers a variety of perspectives on the subject that are present in the biblical text. He closes with a challenge to see interfaith dialogue as a Christian imperative for all of us. Walter Sawatsky reflects on some of the pluralisms he has encountered in recent decades, in settings ranging from Mennonite World Conference assemblies to times of worship and fellowship in the Soviet Union and later in post-Communist Russia and Georgia. Juan Martinez describes and reflects on the demographic changes that offer challenges and opportunities for the church in the United States as it becomes majority nonwhite. He asks whether we are ready to follow Jesus together as the church becomes browner.

The next four articles are written by practitioners, people who have developed their perspectives on pluralism and multiculturalism from work in the field. With affection and insight, Brad Roth dispels the myth that rural communities are places of bucolic homogeneity. He notes that the small towns that are growing are becoming increasingly diverse, ethnically and religiously. Roth encourages pastors and other church leaders to recognize the special identity of rural places and to embrace the particular challenges of rural life, and he reminds us that proclamation of the gospel in rural communities requires us to assume a stance of advocacy in their behalf.

Byron Pellecer, who works with and for Hispanic Mennonite congregations, invites us to think with him about what it means to proclaim Christ in the contexts he encounters. Taking account of recent developments in technology, he addresses the problem of keeping an open mind and a willingness to learn without renouncing one's theological identity. It is an age-old and ever-new dilemma for which Jesus gives light for the path. Donna Kampen Entz has spent her adult life living in relationship with Muslims, first in Burkina Faso and more recently in Edmonton, Alberta. She speaks forthrightly and sensitively to what such relationships offer: they can help break down stereotypes; they can develop into spiritual friendships through which people become better Muslims and better Christians; and they can create openings in which one can invite others to experience the power and love that following Jesus brings. Matthew

Cordella-Bontrager writes engagingly of the challenges of addressing difference when it gets up close and personal—in this case, on the campus of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He notes that our tendency is to keep the peace and minimize disagreement, especially when it involves friends. But is that really a healthy approach? Disagreements matter for relationships, and the grace to deal with them with honesty and integrity is a gift but also a skill that can be learned.

The last two articles are written by a team of retiring professors. My dear colleague Daniel Schipani and I shared many wonderful retirement festivities this spring, and it seems fitting that we should share the pages that occupy the end of this issue. Daniel's article is the fruit of important work he has been doing on spiritual caregiving across faith traditions. Spiritual health can be nurtured and toxic spirituality challenged across faiths. At the same time, Christian caregiving across faiths is done in the manner and with the spirit and faith of Jesus. My article contends that the early Christians in Acts, who proclaimed Christ in their pluralistic context, provide guidance for us in our witness to Christ in a multicultural world. I give particular attention to the way they used power in challenging abuses of power.

As we look to the past and the future mission of this journal, and to the past and future mission of the church—God's mission—no issue is more at the heart of the matter than proclaiming Christ in a pluralist world.