

**Kern Road Mennonite Church**  
**Northeast area group**  
**Reading report #1**

**September 14, 2008**

Present: Ruth Herr, Lee Weldy, Sigrid Weldy, Cathy Henderson, Dan Scarsella, Vicki Smucker (leader), Mark Smucker (recorder)

V: We have a bowl of water. This is the visual center of our meeting. It is calling us to be transparent to one another and to God, as well as to our partner group who is yet to be assigned. This includes several in South Bend, as well some in Africa, a prison group, and so on. We are taking notes so that we can send our conversation to one of these partner groups. The center is also present because some may be more comfortable speaking to a center than to other persons. We encourage you to bring some symbol of some aspect of your personality that “seems to fit,” and to put it on the center table.

We want to pay attention to who we are, and want to create a profile of who we are. There are only 6 here today, so that we are a very small portion of our area group. Let’s also speak about those who are not able to be here today: Eric, the Bohlmans, Don and Marceil. Someone needs to write on the posterboard.

What do we want to know about the partner group? It may help us in our description of who we are.

Cathy, Lee: We are professional people. We are pretty well off. College educated. Urban. Middle aged. What is middle age? Eric says that 30-60 is middle aged. 60-90 is old.

Cathy: I will be having my 40th Birthday at Friedenswald and invite all of you to be here.

Vicki: We can call us middle aged—though some are retired. We range in age to 30s to 70s.

Cathy: We’re folksy.

We are married parents, having kids and grandkids. We are all white. We’re all Mennonite. We are urban, or sub-urban, rather than rural.

How are the partner groups being chosen? By Rachel. I think she is looking for diversity, but we know people who are intermediaries to these group.

Well off. Financially stable.

We are politically involved or concerned.

Our Religion: We are Protestant, not Catholic.

Dan Scarsella enters.

Does this work to describe us?

Dan: I came too late: nothing left to put up there.

V: Does this answer the type of questions we would want to know about our partner group?

Cathy: Can we make generalizations about this? I would want to know about another groups worship style, orientation. Have we given enough insight into us? I would have thought that Mennonites were not Amish, but not much else about them even though I grew up in South Bend. Historic Peace Church is important. That would have given me a clue.

V: The video came out of a Dutch professor's studies. It showed a woman and we followed her through her day. She ate her breakfast, lived in a nice little apartment. There was a woman from the El Salvador group. She was working as a social worker and wanted to go back to college, but couldn't. She looked out her window and saw the opposite busy crowded building opposite, connected by clothesline. There was a Ghana group. They acted out the Bible. I wasn't even sure that they had the Bible. The profiled woman was married to a Muslim. She went from village to village with a bundle of clothes on her head. Underwear, shirts, towels: She was selling and made an income for her family. I thought how relevant the scripture they were reading about going to the well for water. I think about the apartment in the Netherlands: We are all property owners in single family homes—though we still have mortgages.

Cathy: We are generally ecumenically minded. Dan grew up Catholic. I grew up Baptist. By us doing this as a congregation, we are interested in making connections to other Christians.

Dan: How many of us grew up Mennonite? In another setting, about half of the people in the congregation grew up Mennonite. There may be a lot of cross denominational history. We are ecumenical: Learning Center. Peace group was started as Mennonite, but is now multid denominational.

We are "green minded".

Dan: Coming from a Catholic background. We went to the Hively Church. Mennonites by and large don't use tobacco. There may be some closet smokers. I have not encountered people, for the most part, who consume tobacco.

Ruth: I chew. Didn't you know that? ( smiling) Drinking issue gets watered down. But if you bring in Eric, it gets boosted up again. (laughter)

There is a "Mennonite" bar in Goshen, Constant Spring: There is no smoking in that bar. Is it the law?

Smoking goes counter to the environment:

Cathy: Maybe we should say clean living.

There isn't much dancing in at least older persons. I think you are missing it if you don't know that Mennonites were brought up strongly opposed to smoking, drinking, and dancing.

Ruth: I think we need to say something about our work ethic.

Cathy: When we told Eric's dad that we were going to be Mennonites: he said it is a very serious denomination. Are you sure that is good for you? Is it ok for a joker and a goof off like you guys to be part of that congregation? We at times still sk whether we have a good enough work ethic for this congregation.

Ruth: Good at guilt. Catholics, Jewish, Baptists all do guilt.

Lee: We often ask each other “what is your occupation”?

Dan: That is part of society. That always comes up. We spend a third of our life working. We are rejected, accepted, or given status depending on what we do. A garbage man is looked down on; but in New Orleans he is a hero. He has these spotless trucks and sprays down Bourbon Street with a soap so that it actually smells nice. In Africa, they don't have this. Can we say defining quality? All of these are that.

Dan: I've noticed in Suzanne's family: We are getting away from this, but if Linda, her middle sister in Australia, were to come Herz would extend his hand to say “it's good to see you.” I used to have to push the hand aside and hug them, but you could feel them stiffen. Mennonites aren't comfortable with that close contact. Is this emotional restraint? Perhaps physical restraint? I'm not seeing it as much as I did 20 years ago.

V: I think we are less that way as we have been encountered in other cultures, for example going to Europe and seeing double hugging. Another thing, in Italy, hugging is the way. If you got to Germany, it's very “hand shake”. Perhaps this is an inherited cultural thing. It's now labeled Mennonite, but in fact may be European or Germanic.

The Video showed this: The Salvadorans were hugging each other, and the Dutch were just sitting there

Ruth: My husband would say “tight-assed Germans”.

C: Eric would say the same thing. For him it is a Northern Southern thing: Yankees are all cold.

Dan: Maybe that's where the term “Southern hospitality” comes from.

V: Let's look through it and see if anything needs clarification. We can look at it again next week in case other persons are here.

D: We didn't say anything about the youth.

C: They don't come to our area group.

V: This is to describe the group here now.

Ruth: Does professional describe this group? D: There are 2 doctors and 2 teachers here, as well as business people. Perhaps we should say “service professions.”

Vicki: We haven't read the scripture: Luke 23: 32-43 about the criminals and Christ on the cross. It was transcribed from the Greek by Rachel and Mary Schertz from the seminary. In Greek, the most important words are put first. They used that in the translation to English. Reading it may sound a lot different.

Cathy: (Reads Scripture)

V: We are invited to think on the text and share memories: what do we remember as children about this scripture? Because of the time, we will relegate this to next week.

**September 21, 2008**

**We read Luke 23:32-43**

Phrases that struck us during first reading

- Father forgive them
- Jesus remember me
- Jesus forgave evil doers
- You will be with me in paradise
- Jesus, King of the Jews

Questions text raised

- Why does the story say, “two other criminals were also crucified with him” as if he were a criminal?
- Why would an evildoer asked for forgiveness?
- Why did the soldiers offer him wine vinegar instead of something else?
- How did they draw lots?
- This sounds like heresy, but I have always wondered what would have happened if Jesus had just walked down off the cross to prove that he was the Son of God, and said something like, “O.K. is that enough for you?

Do you believe now?”

- Could there have been some other act that would have accomplished the same goal as the crucifixion?
- What were the specific charges brought against each of three who were crucified?

What might God be giving me through this text, some action, etc.?

- Things are not always what they seem. We see only the outside surface, but often there is much below the surface that we do not understand.
- He said he would remember the thief, but also that he would be with him in paradise. That means he remembers me and I will be with him in paradise.
- Everyone has a chance at the kingdom. This tells me not to judge.
- He sees them in paradise right after death, so that helps us in letting the dead go. With Mother dying this week, that has special significance for me.
- If you can see the light in your final hour before death in spite of all the trash that goes on before, what is the incentive to live as a Christian now? You could enjoy all the “pleasures” in life and still get a last chance at the end.
- Doing the right thing is its own reward even if it is mocked.
- I know a young person at work who is very negative and knows nothing about church. She was planning to be married and did not know where to get married because she had no church. I don't know why she wanted a church wedding since she never went to church anyway. She had no hope. Others at work have nurtured her since then and now I see some hope in her. It has made a real difference in her life.
- Hope is available and can help even in a miserable life.
- While I was teaching marriage and family life to teenagers at high school, something was mentioned in the textbook that allowed me to bring up my belief in God. I told the class that there is nothing I am longing to do that believing in God is keeping me from doing.
- A life in Christ is fulfilling even in midst of doubts.
- All our beliefs are held in faith that they are true.
- God is giving me a call to faith.

## September 28, 2008

These notes reflect responses that members of the class had to characters in the crucifixion story in Luke 23: 26-49.

The two “evildoers” crucified with Jesus:

- Matthew and Mark describe them as “rebels.”
- John merely describes them as “two other men.”
- Luke called them criminals.
- In other translations, they are referred to as “thieves” or “malefactors.”
- They were probably people whose offenses were against the Romans.
- Before his death one of the evildoers turned to Jesus and asked for forgiveness.

### Soldiers:

- Herod’s soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus and put him in an elegant robe before he was sent back to Pilate.
- Pilate’s soldiers carried out the crucifixion and then cast lots for his clothing.
- They gave him vinegar and put up a sign mocking him.
- After observing Jesus crucifixion one said, “this man must be the Christ.”
- The centurion, who was charged with carrying out the execution, declared, “surely this must have been a righteous man.”

### Rulers

- What might have been going on in their heads?
- They addressed him with sarcasm saying, “If you are who you say you are, come down off the cross.”
- They were probably relieved that he didn’t.
- There may have been others who hoped he would.
- Some of rulers did not want to take responsibility for what they did.
- Pilate did not find fault with Jesus.
- Was Nicodemus one of the rulers?
- One ruler, Joseph of Arimathea, asked for his body and took him away to bury him.
- Was he a believer or did he do this because he wanted to preclude a riot in support of Jesus?
- Caiaphas, the high priest, was probably one of the rulers.

### Jesus

- He was probably frightened.
- He was also resigned to his fate.
- He said to the one “evildoer” crucified with him “ today I will see you in Paradise.”
- He said of his executioners, “forgive them for they know not what they do.”

October 5, 2008

We began by reviewing some of what we did last week.

What is the quest? Salvation of humanity, seeking the help of Jesus' father.

What is the obstacle? How is it overcome?

What actions might this story call from us to do today? Ask for forgiveness, forgive others, put the words into action, make sacrifices, continue to pray and never give up, put others first,

If no evident call, how might it serve as a lens for evaluating our actions, etc?

We are forgiven when we forgive. Can we accept the sacrifice of others? Can accept help from those perceived as having less? (pride?)

How might it change our relationship with:

Evildoers –

Soldiers – WWJD?

Rulers –

Jesus -

